

# WAKING UP: FREEING OURSELVES FROM WORK

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HUMMING WORDS



P R E S S

A HUMMING WORDS • NEW (NASCENCE TO END WORK) PRESS BOOK  
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA • 2009

Untold Accolades, Thanks and Praises To:  
My son Thandiwe and to Robert A. Wright, who opened  
the space in the universe that allowed me to write.



This book is to support the tenderness and the heart already  
within you, endorse the answers you already have, express  
what you already know – if only in your body – but in such a  
way that will hopefully help bridge knowledge to action.



THIS IS A HUMMING WORDS • NEW  
(NASCENCE TO END WORK) PRESS BOOK  
“My soul is like a singing bowl – it *hums*.”

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*Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –  
Success in Circuit lies...  
(The Oraculous Emily)*

## Preface

There was a certain symmetry about it. My friend and neighbor, A, had helped me break into the first level of the electrical trade, the apprenticeship, and here she was trying to help me break into the next: steady work. As we made our way, in her little truck, slowly, so I could follow and memorize the route, around the curves of the hills, past the Bevatron, past the Advanced Light Source, past the switching station, through the eucalyptus grove, and on to the dead-end at Building 69, I tried to summon the feelings of excitement and anticipation I could sense A was expecting me to have. Maybe even awe? Who knew? A and I have been cyphers to each other since just about always. Which never deterred her from wanting to shepherd me through, and over the humps, coursing along the general principle that women in the trades help their sisters.

We drove up and down the hill, twice. I assured her a third trip was unnecessary, and we exited the facility. It gave me the creeps, truth be told, this place, the trappings of privilege always have. It feels like this mountain of ego that must be leveled so we can reach hands across it and real life can resume. Someone pushed the ‘mute’ button some unknown millennia ago and we’ve been in suspended animation ever since.

But I would go to the interview on Monday. It was a ludicrous long shot, and I was ambivalent, but I would go. I had a dozen reasons why, and why not; but the ‘whys’ always win out – because the deck is stacked. At least, that’s my excuse. And like every incontrovertible truth, it’s also not.

“Things are not as they seem. Nor are they otherwise,” as the quote in Anne Lamott’s most recent book says.

Back in the flatlands, on the block where A used to live, and I live still, she pulled over and then got out with me. Walking around to my side of the car, she gave me a big smile and hug – her signature big smile and hug. A believes in projecting positive energy at all times, just to keep all of our flagging spirits up. It’s her particular gift.

So, on Monday around eleven, I tried to channel A as my guiding light as I turned onto Hearst Street and made my way up The Hill. Replicating all A's moves from the Friday before, with only a few missteps, I made it to Building 69 with ten minutes to spare.

It was immediately obvious I was not the star of the candidate pool. In a dark, cluttered conference room for cast-offs I waited – feeling as superfluous as all the excess furniture – for the hiring committee to assemble.

Twenty minutes later we were finally underway.

It didn't take long for the interview to begin skittering downhill.

"Tell us about your experience with switchgear."

"What would you do if you felt your boss was wrong?"

"How do you handle a difficult customer?"

A written test might have leveled things a bit. A had told me to prepare for a written test. I was ready for a written test. Ask me to draw the low voltage wiring connections for a 9-lead motor, I thought, come on, ask me. Or how about a three-way switch? Ask me to draw that.

No written test – just the relentless questions.

"What experience have you had leading a team?"

"Describe any transformer experience you've had."

Towards the end of the interview I learned that our Local's photovoltaics teacher, a real gizmo-geek and totally brilliant person, was also being 'considered.' I couldn't help but laugh when they told me that. What a no-brainer that was. You can bet he has a few motor / switchgear / transformer stories to tell, I thought. In contrast, my narrative to the group consisted of fairy tales and wish-lists.

"Well, clearly, I have no chance," I said, laughing. (I'm finding it harder and harder, as my experience with our present reality deepens, to remember to censor myself with polite nothings, or, with institutions, to use bureaucratese. What I'm actually thinking tends to just bust on out.)

On it went:

"Tell us about your strengths and weaknesses."

And then the inevitable: "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

By the time the grilling was over and I was headed back home I found myself inexplicably angry. Seething, in fact. I had no idea why. Until later, when I wrote in my journal:

*This has just gotten so old. Here I am, after all these years, still selling myself – and less and less successfully.*

Still selling myself, after all these years.

Once, I had a job where I went into the public schools, along with my co-‘workshop leaders,’ to deliver violence-prevention presentations to children and youth. We would tell them that they should never, ever, keep a bad secret, that if anyone hurts them, they should tell someone.

I have decided to break the silence.

How many nights of stomach-churning, head-burning anxiousness have I passed now in my life, anticipating the following day of work? How many times have I lain awake doubting my thin-skinnedness, beating myself up over my inability to wear the mask of invulnerability? And the worst part is, it gets molded despite myself. The skin hardens. But is that a good thing? Is that what we want for our children? For their tender souls?

Most of us don’t mind working, but we each of us know on some deep fundamental level that our little offering of work to the collectivity, to the general good, comes from only a very, very small part of us, we, whose spirits are so big and rambling and complex. To ask that some function we perform be allowed to overwhelm the ‘all’ of us, is inhuman. To require ‘the function’ to control us, rather than the other way around, is a form of abuse.

In the great scheme of things, what doesn’t tend toward joy and pleasure must surely be an aberration, a footnote in our long, circuitous human story. A thousand years hence (with the required added coda: “if we survive”), humans, once again a free species, will look back in horror upon the commercial imperative that briefly captured the energies of humankind, a brief but poignant aberration, the toll in human and other species life, and our quiescence in the face of it, awful to contemplate. Worldwide inequality deepens and we yawn. Poverty rates climb exponentially and we reach for the remote. Child homicide rates escalate and we but shake our heads in wonder.

My son once said that animals must find us odd in not being able to nurture our offspring. He said mothers of other species automatically know how to love their babies.

And I replied, yeah, well, except for the ones in zoos. They often turn on their own babies.

Our eyes met. We smiled grimly.

Is survival at a job the highest good? the goal, the objective? ... to endure? ...in a *job*? I don't think so. If not, we as human beings in a society that does not value its people are faced with a dilemma: how to hang onto ourselves, and pay the bills – and how infinitely more agonizing the dilemma when a child, or children, enter the picture. The trapdoor really slams shut then. So, of *course* those who enjoy the illusion of rule don't want parenting to be supported. Of *course* they don't want us free of the worry about our health. They *want* us trapped, cornered and lifeless. Gotcha! *Whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do?* Caged animals under stress – that's us, folks. Is there really any wonder there's so much violence?

That which makes the contribution that we currently call 'work' so unpleasant, that about it which makes us so unhappy – like those shallow symbols of status, like our total lack of agency in determining our conditions of work – will have to change. All the suffering of all our ancestors must *mean* something. Can we grow up now? Can we refuse to get drawn into those substance-reducing traps, refuse to be manipulated when they try to stuff our basic ideas for restoring health and spirit into pretend-Pandora-boxes with phony labels like "Socialist!" to disguise their contents?

The discussion that follows examines what holds us back, and why – and then suggests some possible ways out of the trap.

There's an earlier wholeness  
For which our souls long.  
Our interior compass tends toward it,  
And what's called 'reality' *feels* wrong.

## Being Bossed

Counting up the ways I used to get erased, or erased myself, at work, I came up with seven – but there's a lot of overlap. Because really they all boil down to being bossed.

Of course this training starts in childhood, long before we have to sit down to that first interview question. But it should cheer you to recall that submission to external authority is not 'natural,' and therefore must be reinstated and reinforced continually, with each new generation, with each new child. We never stop resisting, if only unconsciously. The hope of this book is to make our resistance conscious, to encourage it along, feed it – and, once linked with a clear plan, cause enough of its spawn to join hands and sing that the next social arrangement can be born before the chaos comes that resource-wars bring.

Chaos, of course, is what the pitiful-power-drunk-few hope will happen – so these counter-efforts on our part are critical, though hopefully in time.

I named the seven ways we're erased: the magic mirror, playing possum, single-phasing, the jog circuit, the dance of death (the black widow), the set-up (being the 'best'), and bird doggin' & baby-sittin' (the curse of the captive audience).

### *The Magic Mirror*

I used to spend a lot of time wondering about the vampires, the Bushney-roves of the world. I'm sure the same questions cross your mind: how do they sleep at night? – don't they care about their souls? – surely they have grandchildren? – don't they want a legacy beyond their astonishing greed? Mark Crispin Miller wrote a whole book (*Cruel and Unusual*) about the mental health issues of the pitiful-power-drunk-few (podrunks for short). The specific question he was bothered by was: "why are they so angry?" After all, they seem to run the show, so what's up?

Back in 1928 Virginia Woolf was pondering the very same question, but applied to 'the professors,' as she called them, all the men of letters determined to deny women access to the education the rich



boys got: “the most transient visitor to this planet, I thought, ...could not fail to be aware...that England is under the rule of a patriarchy.” So, what’s up?

Possibly when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority. That was what he was protecting rather hot-headedly and with too much emphasis, because it was a jewel to him of the rarest price. Life for both sexes – and I looked at them, shouldering their way along the pavement – is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle. It calls for gigantic courage and strength. More than anything, perhaps, creatures of illusion as we are, it calls for confidence in oneself. Without self-confidence we are as babes in the cradle...Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle. The glories of all our wars would be unknown.... (*A Room of One’s Own*, p. 34-36)<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who’s worked is familiar with this part of the job description. Most bosses are *extremely* threatened by the appearance of inattention on the part of their slaves.

I recall a boss regurgitating details of a grant that I actually wrote, while I sat there wondering and restive. Suddenly he became angry and, pinning me with a cold stare, said, “are you getting any of this Pam? I can’t tell from your expression.” He then added he’d noticed me glancing at the clock while he spoke.

If *we* don’t confirm their sense of themselves, who will?

### *Playing Possum*

By the time I took that job, one of my last paper-pushing ones, I’d already seen the lie and I was just going through the motions, trying to survive.

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<sup>1</sup> I would modify the above ‘men and women’ with the adjectives ‘middle-class Western.’ One of the irritating constants of the ‘letters’ of the West is their presumption of universal applicability to all humankind across all time. I’m gonna try real hard not to slip into that pool of crud here. What follows is about work in class society, given a global world economic system. The advice and advocacies herein apply to that bit of ‘reality.’

But faking-it's no easier than making-it. The mind, it wanders. The boss, he notes. The world intrudes. No matter how hard you try to just 'lay low,' 'keep your head down,' the world demands more – your complicity, implicit or otherwise.

You may think you can come up with an individual escape plan – save money, buy a few acres, move to Italy, form a commune, whatever – and then...some unwanted bit of news arrives from the front: the polar bears have begun to cannibalize each other; a twenty-three year-old woman has faced down a tractor and died; a pristine river, a rich habitat, has been despoiled; racial hate is roaring across the perfect place you escaped to; the redwood that saved your life has been cut down for a building we don't need; a bomb is dropped...and suddenly you're catapulted into the same old pain and rage.

### *Single-Phasing*

I believe in honoring the ancestors, this being one of our sources of power – meaning not just giving credit where it's due, but seeking them out and thanking them.

But how honor those about whom we're never told?

Perhaps by paying attention – which is only possible if we walk slowly enough to see the half-buried gems along our paths, sit quietly enough to hear the whispered songs swimming in our veins.

One gem along my path is Nikola Tesla, a true friend of the working-man and woman. His dream was to free us from toil so that we could join him in the heroic and glorious fun of creating stuff.

An inventor's endeavor is essentially life saving. Whether he harnesses forces, improves devices, or provides new comforts and conveniences, he is adding to the safety of our existence....The entire globe could be transformed and made a fitter abode for mankind....The scientific man does not aim at an immediate result. He does not expect that his advanced ideas will be readily taken up. His work is like that of the planter – for the future...

And once he'd fully conceived, in his mind, the three-phase induction motor he declared, "No more will men be slaves to hard tasks. My motor will set them free, *it* will do the work of the world!" His revelation came to him in 1882. He went on to design the system of electrical generation and distribution that we take for granted today, and conceived and patented methods for the wireless transmission of energy.

And even though Thomas Edison did everything he possibly could to bury Tesla's ideas, on which today we so rely, Edison was a household name and Tesla is unknown.

An armature is a cylinder-shaped core of iron wrapped round and round with wire. When electrons flow in the wire and the armature rotates it produces a rotating magnetic field, an alternating voltage. Do this three times and stagger the fields and you have the basics of a three-phase induction motor – it spins and spins and spins effortlessly.

Tesla believed that the forces of nature are the 'all of it'<sup>2</sup> and that *we* are no less enmeshed in, receptive to, part of, those forces than anything else.

So even if only as metaphor, let's imagine these three phases of power, working together to keep us humming along. If one of those phases fizzles the motor keeps running, but only just, not as happily and certainly not as efficiently. This sad state of things is called 'single-phasing,' and in the artificial world of work it occurs when you find that your full power is not required. In fact, not only is it *not* required but displaying it will cause you to be viewed with great suspicion, and to be whispered about behind your back.

Studs Terkel's *Working* is littered with such cautionary tales.

I'll run into one administrator and try to institute a change and then I'll go to someone else and connive to get the change. Gradually your effectiveness wears down. Pretty soon you no longer identify as the bright guy with the ideas. You become the fly in the ointment. You're criticized by your superiors and your subordinates. (Steve Carmichael)

We tried to get them to upgrade the secretaries. They're being underpaid for the jobs they're doing....After that, I was no longer assistant to the regional director. (Laughs). (Lilith Reynolds)

I came to East Kentucky with OEO. I got canned in a year. Their idea was the same a Daley's. You use the OEO to build an organization to support the right candidates. I didn't see that as my work. My job was to build an organization of put-down people, who can control the candidates once they're elected. (Bill Talcott)

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2 This is also the title of an altogether lovely novel by Jeannette Haien.

I tried to put my ‘all’ into every job too. I noted in my journal from that period:

I got the “dream job” in September and immediately proceeded to put in 60-70 hours a week to ‘make’ it all work. I tried to do it all – to make up for all the gaps in the model by plugging them myself. I designed a curriculum and began conducting it, did community education presentations, got photos, designed a newsletter, designed an evaluation, set up the FileMaker layouts to capture the data, did the staff training, attended all the community meetings, got new ones going, staffed them all! And on, and on! How exciting! The reward? A kick in the teeth.

Were all of us just naïve – or just lied to? A job that presents itself as ‘non-profit’ and “for the public good” naturally stirs the empathic into the competitive, so we may be forgiven for approaching such jobs with the same excitement to make the world a better place that Tesla felt. We front-liners, we shoulder-to-the-plough, heel-to-the-shovel, plain old working folk tend to take the word as true. If you tell us in civics classes that we can hold politicians accountable by voting them in and out, please don’t sneer at us and call us apathetic when the votes get rigged and we haven’t caught up.

We do learn. And if we could devote our entire day (life) to plotting and planning like the Roves of the world, perhaps we could counter their schemes to subvert democracy faster.

But we’re catching up. Trust me.

But single-phasing is not just about flying full thrusters into public service only to find your wings clipped. It’s also about working in a system that cares not a whit that you play a mean clarinet or have a black-belt or sing like Aretha or write like Baldwin or float like a butterfly and sting like a bee, so long as you can flip and serve that burger in under ten seconds. Maybe Nora Watson (in *Working*) said it best: “Jobs are not big enough for people.”

We are too big for jobs.

There’s a sense in which we’re all single-phasing here in America, despite Ehrenreich’s claim (in *Fear of Falling*) that “work, of the special kind that [the middle class] reserves to itself, is the secret hedonism of the middle class...a pleasure that cannot be commodified or marketed, that need not obsolesce or wane with time.” She may be confusing what she herself does for the work of the middle class as a whole. Having

worked manual, mental, meaningful, meaningless, marginal, mechanical and measurable, I agree with Bill Talcott: “the middle class is fighting powerlessness too. ...The white-collar guy is scared he may be replaced by the computer. The schoolteacher is asked not to teach but to baby-sit. God help you if you teach.”

Power has been captured by a few people. A very small top and a very big bottom. You don't see much in-between. Who do people on the bottom think are the powerful people? College professors and management types, the local managers of big corporations like General Motors. What kind of power do these guys really have? They have the kind of power Eichmann claimed for himself. They have the power to do bad and not question what they're told to do. (Bill Talcott in *Working*)

I've worked enough non-profit jobs to know that though they're glad to see you work yourself to death under the illusion that bureaucracies can change the world for the good, your bossed labor is a far cry from three-phase power: self-directed, self-motivated, moved by the earth and naught else.

### *The Jog Circuit*

When a motor is wired so that it can *only* move if someone in control holds down a button, this is called a jog circuit.

Control-freaks viscerally fear a flow – unless you're flipping burgers or assembling electronic components. Most recently I saw this listening to the 2008 House Judiciary Committee hearings on torture and the abuse of executive power – the “should-we-begin-thinking-about-maybe-saying-the-I-word?” hearings. At the most gripping moments, like when Vincent Bugliosi, author of *The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder*, got rolling, up go the hands of the Republicans on some “point of order.”

Well this happens in jobs too. If the bosses see you building up steam, expect a memo or a meeting or an emergency of some sort. Whatever it takes to break your flow:

If they would let me loose a little more, I could really do something. We've got plenty of statistics to show incredible sex discrimination. ...If women knew more about their rights, they'd have an easier time. ...There's no reason why we can't carry this to

the community action agencies. ...If we could get into the whole issue of lawsuits, we'd get real changes. My office is trying to stop us. ...Some of these jobs will appear meaningful on paper. The idea of the antipoverty program is exciting. But people are stifled by bureaucratic decisions and non-decisions...and an awful lot of my time was taken up with endless meetings. I spent easily twenty or more hours a week in meetings. Very, very nonproductive. ... At our office there's less and less talk about poor people. (Lilith Reynolds in *Working*)

Once a boss told me, "all the work of this organization originates with me – it all comes through me and is disbursed out to staff from me." I've never been in a job where this was true, but, as with commercials and other propaganda, the point is asserted not because it's true, but because they want you to believe it's true.

The lie comes from a boss' fear that he's not needed, that the plane might take off without him – or from a boss' need to please his own masters.

But there's also the masturbatory thrill of the puppeteer. This compulsion runs deep in class society, this longing to control the labor of others. It can be seen not just in workplaces, but heavily in the home as well: parent over child, wife over husband – and vice versa.

In Susan Faludi's *Stiffed*, she probes in one chapter the layoff of McDonnell Douglas workers. The company set up an outplacement center to ease the guys on out the door. Its director described "the wrath of the wife":

"He was so scared of his wife and what she would do when she found out he was laid off, he actually moved here in his motor home. 'She'll do bodily harm to me,' he told me. He showed me this picture of her and she was tiny. But he said, 'Rest assured, Mrs. Judd, she's vicious.'" One woman, upon hearing of her husband's firing, threatened to toss him in the street. "She said he had to get out unless he found a job," Judd recalled. The only job he could find was cleaning offices and bathrooms in the middle of the night. He took it. A few weeks later, Judd ran into him at the center and he said, "My wife loves me again. I'm working."

How easily can we obliterate this pattern as we build the next social arrangement? I'm as guilty as anyone. I've bossed and been bossed. I've been conditioned to try to control everything too.

When Randall Robinson, done with American racism, pulled up stakes and moved to St. Kitts, he found this society's utilitarian worldview had moved with him. I haven't heard any recent reports on how this problem was resolving itself, but I suspect the earth is working its magic on him – and that it will on us too.

*The Dance of Death (the Black Widow)*

*Journal entry of an office conversation from ten years ago, when Boss B breaks the news to G and P that he's decided to fire a co-worker D (not present):*

G: "I'm just trying to put myself in her position."

B: "But G, can you really imagine yourself in her position?"

G: "No."

P: (Thinking) – "Yeah but G you have some real advantages over D. You have a father who's just like B, so you know how to stroke the Black Widow just right to keep from being eaten."

And that is the perfect analogy for B, because he cannibalizes his staff as he mates them, and if you're careful you can simply allow yourself to be used but not eaten. This is the Dance of Death that most workers force their feet into. It's not pleasant.

Recently I came across a short piece in a magazine with the heading, "Toxic' bosses: Handle with care." It offered suggestions for surviving a "bad boss." If you contorted yourself just right, it burred, not only could you survive the experience, you could use it to forge a career ladder.

One way to cope with your boss' "quirks" is to attempt to turn them to your advantage. If the boss is a micromanager, provide updates until he tells you to stop. If the boss is incompetent, see it as a chance to "gain more responsibility." After landing my dream job, I realized that I had a "toxic boss," said an "understandably bashful" contributor in *BusinessWeek*. Instead of quitting, "I developed a formula." My strategy includes allotting time every morning to "cater to his needs," sending quick e-mails throughout the day, and over-responding to his pet peeves. (*The Week*, September 12, 2008)

I call this “the dance of death” because the price-tag for playing is your soul. These are dangerous games we play every day as a matter of course. Remember Orwell’s wasp, who was cut in half while he sucked the jam and learned too late what he’d lost?

And what is this jam, exactly? – processed food with an occasional treat, freedom from the use of your bothersome feet? Marx had the details of this deal down in 1848: “the less you *are*, the less you express your own life, the more you *have*, i.e., the greater is your *alienated* life, the greater is the store of your estranged being.”

If you think this will ever change while the podunks rule, think again.

### *The Set-Up (Being the ‘Best’)*

In one of Mark Doty’s three devastating memoirs,<sup>3</sup> he writes about the moment he realized that who he was wasn’t who his mother wanted. He was performing a song and dance number in his room with a neighbor boy. He is ten years old:

Now I’m in my full stride, my smile wide and glittering in the spot, my fingers spread wide in the air minstrel-style, then flying up to lift my top hat in rhythm. I am amphetamine bright and glittering on the inside, too, possessed by my song. I am entirely a Judy, right down to the prescriptions, in tight black stockings, the tuxedo jacket slicing across her thighs just below the waist, eyes huge with the force pouring out of her gaze now into the music. I begin to wave the long red scarf in the air, making it also dance to my song and the throb of my accompaniment. I toss my cane away and hold the scarf high over my head with both hands. I hold it behind my back and my behind, pull it back and forth in a kind of shimmy. (*Firebird*, p. 100-101)

His mother enters (“What would *you* say if you found your ten-year-old son performing a drag show?”) and ultimately tells him:

“Son, you’re a boy.”

Of course he *knows* he’s a boy...the fact that she feels she must tell him this means he has failed...

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3 The other two are *Heaven’s Coast* and *Dog Years*. I was drawn to Mark Doty by one sentence in a review of *Dog Years*: “Memory seems too slight a word, too evanescent.” It unexpectedly hit me in the gut.



Was there a moment you knew *you* had “failed”? While Mark Doty sees this inflicted shame through the lens of homophobia...

I existed in a special zone, no one felt what I did. Held at a distance from others: that was both the price and the reward... Well all right then – if I can't fit, I'll be an ozone boy, more rarefied, more peculiar. I'll breathe the atmosphere of my own elevation... That's the queer boy's dynamic, simultaneously debased and elevated.

...he also recognizes that in class society few escape starting out “failed.”

I have been ushered into the world where adults live; I have been warned, have been instructed to conceal my longing. And though I will understand, someday, that without longing there'd be nothing to carry us forward, that without longing we wouldn't be anyone at all, I can't see that now. I'm a child, or I was until she said, *You're a boy*. I am stunned and silent, caught in a shame that seems to have no place to come to rest. I have been initiated – whether because my mother wanted to punish or to protect me – into an adult world of limit and sorrow.

Of course this society has innumerable ways to “fail” us – stamp a great big “I” for “insufficient” on our foreheads and send us out obsessed with rubbing it off, disavowing it, achieving the right to remove it.

Here, stand still, receive your stamp, because you're a girl, you're black, you're skinny, you're fat, you're shy, you're a clown, you smile, you frown...and so on and so on and scooby dooby dooby.

There's nothing accidental about any of this. A system that requires “a very small top and a very big bottom” cannot exist if those at the bottom know they are whole, sufficient, entirely perfect beings.

You know that.

### *Bird-Doggin' & Baby-Sittin' – the Curse of the Captive Audience*

One of my favorite ‘games’ when I was a little girl had no name but let's call it “jungle.”

In this game I would cajole, damn near coerce, the brother one year older than me into pretending to be a lion while I pretended to be a black panther (no political reference intended).

While he *roared* I would silently stalk, lunge, and then stealthily retreat to plan my next attack.

He was large, loud and clumsy.

I was sleek and devastating.

My brother hated this game. I don't know how I persuaded him to play it.

After I learned to read I devoured books written from the perspective of wild animals – usually being chased – foxes, wolves, cougars. I identified with the chased, captured and beleaguered.

At night I would sneak out and visit all the dogs with backyards along our common alleyway, talking to them, climbing their fences and jumping into their yards to pet them. I didn't ask permission. This was *my* thing. No one ever knew about it.

Throughout time, across millennia, our survival has depended on our power to analyze situations, analyze all the complex, layered information we take in – visible and invisible, tangible and not. It's been a key source of joy and pride, and in it our *interest* in the world is rooted.

Yet through this artificial relation called “the job,” it's rendered absolutely irrelevant.

Hierarchy does this because no matter how keen our powers of analysis, we cannot act – we must be given permission.

We must be told what to do.

This runs against millennia of experience in the world.

In exchange we're given a word: “civilized.”

Not a fair trade.

Is it any wonder we dream of a time before hierarchy, a time of freedom and wholeness? Any wonder we love those moments in film, like in *Outbreak*, when the hero says to his boss, “with all due respect, *fuck you, sir.*”

When David Gordon and some fellow economists decided to do “some outreach educational work with local union officials and rank-and-file workers...[to engage them] about pressing economic issues... [they] expected conversations [about]...job security and inflation.”

Much to our surprise they were more interested in talking about problems...with their bosses on the job. They complained that their supervisors were always on their case, that bureaucratic harassment was a daily burden. They inveighed against speed-up, hostility, petty aggravations, capricious threats and punishments,

and – perhaps most bitterly – crude, arrogant and often gratuitous exercises of power. Their catalogues of complaints were both eloquent and acute. (*Fat and Mean*, p. 34)

Just as “submission to external authority” is not “natural,” nor is it “natural” to have a few doing the “thinking” for the majority.

But, instituted before we have a conscious choice about it, molded in us by those we must love, the manual-mental divide is extremely hard to challenge.

And yet...it is every day.

This notion that a few must do the ‘thinking’ for the majority, that ‘brain’ must be divorced from ‘hand’ – is a ‘divorce’ in aspiration only, heavily endorsed by the podunks, propagandized up the yin-yang, applied in toto in theory, but never fully implementable.

I was truly impressed when I entered the trades how fiercely it’s resisted by tradesmen/women, making them some of the most powerful people on the planet.

I remember as a new electrical apprentice overhearing a journeyman say to someone scrutinizing him, “What’s it to you? What do you care what I’m doing? Take care of your own business.”

Powerful people don’t want to be bird-dogged, and – guess what? – we’re *all* powerful people.

A friend who’d worked for many years as a GF (general foreman) told me he never would lay a journeyman out with *detailed* instructions, because there’s always infinite ways to do a thing. He’d just sketch the project broadly – “we’ve got to get these six circuits over to Panel B” – or hand him a print and let him have at it.

And when the engineering on the print is wrong, as it frequently is, construction workers tend to re-engineer it on the spot – they “make it work,” without the credit and certainly without the remuneration.

And of course this is true of *all* workers on the ground handed the plans of people with far less practical knowledge than they themselves possess.

So why do we put up with it?

We all hate this. Living has become existing – a diminishment of what we are as living things. It makes our skins crawl, our backs tense, our furies flame and our feet itch. We want to get away from it – but there’s nowhere to go...

...Now why do we think this?

Could it be the lies we tell ourselves...or the lies we're taught?

Wrapped raw with the layers of our constructed 'reality' – snug in our suit of razors – we mistake our 'comfort' in not moving for inevitability.

At some point (so why not now?), true reality must be faced: we don't need anyone else to tell us what to do. That a few gather this authority to themselves and jealously guard it is a problem for the next social arrangement – more in planning than in execution.

So, as we begin to plan and we face the manual-mental divide – the separation of conception from execution – several questions relevant to building the new world emerge.

The unnaturalness of this divide is disguised by its ubiquitousness. Embedded in all social institutions – families, schools, in the relationship between government and its citizens – it feels all-pervasive. And this all-pervasiveness disguises the fact that only a very, very few actually benefit from it – and they only materially.

As for the rest of us, if we're allowed a microscopic bit of "power" in the home, or workplace, then we must not be "powerless," right? As Marcuse pointed out, if you're already "free," then how can you be in need of liberation?

Moreover, its ubiquitousness suggests that *there's no other way*.

It suggests that bullyishness is inherent in the human animal – that if we get rid of one set of bullies it will rapidly be replaced by a new set. And if the sickness inevitably replicates, if all we get for our trouble to free ourselves is the same old shit in different suits, new faces watching us, why bother?

In "*The Two Winds*" we'll consider the possibility that we've been misled about this whole bully problem, that it's not true that humans inherently want to control the labor of others.

I sure don't. Do you?

Another factor inhibiting our ability to get full thrusters underway is the diminishment problem itself – or rather, its' flip side: "development."

We've been told that *we* must be less for "*civilization*" to be more – or even for it to exist at all.

Far be it from us to stand in the way of the greater good for... now *who* was it exactly we agreed to sacrifice our happiness for? I forget.

It can't be for our *own* comfort – we're suffering from cancer, heart disease, asthma, depression, violence, loneliness and isolation in record numbers. It can't be for the planet – it's in trouble. It can't be for our grandchildren – they won't have a healthy planet to live on.

Wow.

Could it be that all the suffering imposed on people and the planet wasn't necessary at all?

Something to think about – which we will in the chapter, “*Progress.*”

*And* – we've got some healing to do.

We're divided across...you know the laundry list as well as I do.

Without solidarity – and we've seen how work itself divides us – without trust, how you gonna build a mass movement?

We'll consider this problem in the chapter, “*Culture.*”

Lastly, we're inhibited by the lack of a plan.

This is a controversial issue.

Some progressives believe it's a mistake to have one, believe that having a plan leads to the bully problem.

I disagree. So the final chapter is called “*The Plan.*”

The way out of the trap is through “seeing reality,” as it *is*, not as we're *told* it is. Unless we see reality, we'll be hobbled in our planning, easily subverted and checked.

*Consciousness* is essential for building a mass movement. And it is, after all, only a *mass* movement that can unseat ‘Power.’

“The Two Winds,” “Progress,” and “Culture,” provide the theoretical underpinnings of “The Plan.” Though written conversationally, pretty much as I speak, the ideas in them are still relatively compact. If you're not in the mood for theory, if you already *know* we've been conned and don't want to look at how deep the brainwashing goes not a minute more, if you already see *our future based on freedom*, you might want to go directly to “The Plan.”

Everyone is dreaming in this country. Now it is time to wake up...

The storm is here. From the clash of these two winds the storm will be born, its time has arrived. Now the wind from above rules, but the wind from below is coming...

The prophecy is here. When the storm calms, when rain and fire again leave the country in peace, the world will no longer be the world but something better. (Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, The Lancandan Jungle, August 1992)

## The Two Winds

### *Alchemy – The World We Are Given Isn't Real*

The Zapatista movement casts a transfigurative light across the progressive spectrum in our present moment, illuminating the question of social transformation, translating problems previously thought intractable.

Its clandestine spokesperson, <sup>1</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, came to the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, Mexico, initially to “organize” them as workers, à la Marx’s injunction: “Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!”

...The Mayans just stared at him. They said they weren’t workers but people, and, besides, land wasn’t property but the heart of their communities. Having failed as a Marxist missionary, Marcos immersed himself in Mayan culture. The more he learned, the less he knew. (Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, p. 455)

We are *people*, not workers. Our bodies continue to know this, which is why our “world” – so “advanced,” so “modern,” – feels so unreal, so much like a dream.

As a teenager I had a job processing checks at night for a bank. There we were, this crew, all backgrounds, ages, skin tones – as varied in appearance as we were homogenized by function – a tribe united by our appendages, chained to our sorting machines – machines ourselves, really – appendages, truly. We offered up our brains, eyes, and hands

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1 ... we learn in Naomi Klein’s *No Logo*. She writes: “...[the Zapatistas’] goal was not to win control over the Mexican state but to seize and build autonomous spaces where ‘democracy, liberty, and justice’ could thrive. For the Zapatistas, these free spaces, created from reclaimed land, communal agriculture, and resistance to privatization are an attempt to create counter-powers to the state, not a bid to overthrow it and replace it with an alternate, centralized regime.”

so that the machine could complete its function and checks find their destinations.

At night I dreamed of numbers.

If “reality” is created in a transformative process of human vision made manifest through human agency, it is those free to plan who ‘make’ reality while the rest of us ‘simply’ implement their visions.

But what of *our* visions?

Deferred? Dead? Rotting away in the backs of our minds?

If we are always only ever realizing others’ dreams rather than our own, “reality” starts to feel very unreal. It’s tempting, in such circumstances, to retreat into our minds, into our personal dramas, into the Internet. But whatever parts we play in these venues reverberates little upon the built world around us. Our ancestors, and contemporary communal peoples, were, and are, much more intimately involved with creating their environments than we.

Our relative impotence has left us somewhat shell-shocked, unsure what to make of this inflexible “reality” that has nothing to do with us.

And if we have no transformative impact on the built, created world of ‘men’, what are we if not simply minimally animate objects, placed on various shelves, some higher, some lower, but only nominally-alive, waiting for our expiration dates, for our timers to time out?

Tapping away into our computers, or gathering on street corners, pretending by our very lives that we’re composing something, we dangle impotently above the keys, unable to strike even a single note, let alone write a layered, complex piece.

Yet – it could change in an instant because we *are* nature, no matter what ‘ideas’ get shoveled on top of *that* reality.

If you’re rushing around in your life right now, stop and consider the dust we will all one day be. Is the ‘knowledge’ you must ‘master’ for your job something you hope your grandchildren will be carrying forward? The hollowness of our lives is an aberration in earth-terms – an odd abomination.

One of the reasons I went into the trades was a longing for something *real* in the eight hours I contributed to serve my fellow. <sup>2</sup> I knew very well that all the minutes of all the useless, boring meetings I’d written up, all the kiss-ass or cover-ass memos, all the carefully crafted

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<sup>2</sup> Of course we know we give up way more than eight. Every job requires that non-work hours be oriented around those eight – but we’ll use that number for convenience.

or smell-the-bullshit grants I'd worked on or composed, had long since been tossed, shredded and hopefully composted.

But when I go to the movie theater I worked on – my very first job as a first bracket apprentice – and look up at the lighting fixtures in the entryways to each theater, people and stories swell up in a rush. I start thinking about...Bob who was facing his third brush with death, colon cancer, but could still notice me, dumb as a rock, and give me advice that would save *my* life. And Tom, who took his time with his work, an embodied reminder that there's no need to rush. And Robbie who looked at me with such exasperation when I asked him if I was using the right screw to secure a string across some studs, saying, "if I wasn't here, would you use that screw?" "Yes." "Then use it. Trust yourself." Later, he said, "Pamela, you know it has to be done, so just do it. Do whatever you have to do to get the job done."

Just get the job done. You have no idea how refreshing those words can sound after a lifetime of working in offices.

But then maybe you do.

The world we are given isn't real.

The earth, that's real. The ancestors, they're real.

And the spirit of the commons in us – our hands touching, our bodies straining to hear, the earth – that's real.

A big part of our problem working up the will to change things is that we don't have our own language and we don't speak podrunk. We're called simple and made to feel stupid for not grasping the convolutions of their reasoning which never touch down on anything *real* – like nightmarish vultures chewing on air, puffing themselves up on lies, and vomiting death. They specialize in creating unnecessary complexity to bludgeon us back into boxes marked "dim," whenever we dare challenge them. They steal the work – the blood, sweat, tears, and love, of our ancestors and our earth – both cultural and tangible – commodify what they can translate into podrunk, and delete the rest from "History."

All of which, we're told, means they're "smart."

The insanity erected around us, and the jobs they give us to do, aren't *real*. They're somebody else's wet dream.

The work of our time is for all of us to begin to distinguish *ourselves* from "the system," so we can begin to be *people* again.

### *The Role of the State as Enforcer*

So how did we go from being *people* to being *workers*?



Just as the manual-mental divide and submission to external authority are not ‘natural,’ nor is it natural for human beings to treat themselves as commodities. What Karl Polanyi showed us is that such a perverse result required the intervention of the state.

When all work is shared together, when we are all ‘One,’ there’s no meddling with the books, because the oversight is open, transparent, and available to all.

No one is exempted from the work of feeding the group. No one is exalted as “the brains of the operation,” possessed of magical powers of prediction – so special that he or she must be excused from the mere grunt work of the majority.

I’m a fan of director Brad Bird (particularly *The Iron Giant*) so don’t get me wrong. But in his recent films he seems to be polishing the message that the conventionality of the hoard smothers, makes it impossible to recognize, the truly special few.

This is one of those scams perpetrated on the essential goodness of the many intended to invert truth. It’s exactly backwards. In reality it’s the *few* who need to believe they are masters of the universe that impose on the *many* the dream of conventionality. We sleepwalk through life for no reason at all. We collectively live this dream, which explains the punch of a film like *The Matrix*. The shock of essential truth can bowl you over. We so rarely see it.

‘Politics’ begins with the first ‘priest’ able to convince his tribe to let him advocate on their behalf with the spirit world – whether for rain or game or fertility. Perhaps that priest was the metaphorical serpent in the garden, convincing us that knowledge was something that lay outside ourselves.

*Political power* is the ability to induce others to labor (while exempting yourself) – which means it is effectively limitless. And the more labor you can compel, the more political power you have.

The wage is only one way to compel labor. However you can get others to work for you – whether through love, violence, or simply confusion – if their work preserves, or ensures the continuance of, things as they are (that is to say, your exemption), and you have compelled it, it counts for you as political power.

Though it may be a tiny amount, most of us have some. Most of us *are* complicit in this system, and given in exchange for our complicity some infinitesimal portion of political power.

The wife who withholds her ‘love’ until the husband finds work wields her tiny bit, and the husband who demands and receives his wife’s unpaid work at home – likewise.

Compelled labor in class society is qualitatively different from the freedom of *uncoerced* labor – premised on the ‘tribe’ – typical of non-class societies, the type of labor which, if we continue on the planet, will one day return to fashion – but with a very different technological backdrop.

‘Modern’ class society ushered in the commodity form, a neat trick I definitely recommend you explore further.<sup>3</sup> The trick of it lies in its appearance as one thing while being another; hence its victims (as it was first being imposed in England of the 16<sup>th</sup> century) said it presented a “counterfeit countenance [face]” to the world.

“Oh what a goodly outside falsehood hath.”

Look at any bought object you rely on, a cell-phone say,<sup>4</sup> and quite invisible are the relations of exploitation necessary for it to have been painfully assembled and shipped to some outlet for you to discover as if it blossomed there on that shelf as naturally as wildflowers on warm hills (I accept the possible existence of wild things as an act of faith, trapped as I am in tightly-packed urban America.)

In order for objects to be produced and sold as commodities, including human labor, we have to be stripped of all means of providing for ourselves independent of those who want us to work for them.

And given how unnatural the ‘request,’ I’m sure you appreciate it took some time, and a lot of violence.

Imagine asking it of any other *undomesticated* animal:

“Dear Mr. Wolf, would you mind very much if we removed your teeth? In exchange we’ll give you this lovely harness and allow you to pull for us. We’ll also give you food, shelter, and perhaps health care (if you agree to work extra for it), but only while we need you. Of course when we don’t, you’ll be cut loose and *on your own*... The fact that you no longer have teeth is your problem.”

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3 A fun trip best shepherded by Marx using his *Capital Vol. I*. But also highly recommended are Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* and Peter Linebaugh’s *The Magna Carta Manifesto*.

4 Coltan is the mineral found in almost every electronic device. The struggle to obtain it and other minerals in the resource-rich Congo has resulted in the killings of nearly six *million* people since 1996. “*Forty-five thousand continue to die each month.*” A stiff price for a cell phone. (Friendsofthecongo.org)

The commodity form leads to the rigid imposition of fixed divisions in society: the separation of conception from execution, the manual-mental divide, and the submission to external authority – all of which are alien to our natures as living things. The only way podrunks could shove this monolith down our throats was through “extra-economic” means. Karl Polanyi explains this definitively in describing the *deus ex machina* of the state.

The new law provided that in the future no outdoor relief should be given. Its administration was national and differentiated. In this respect also it was a thoroughgoing reform. Aid-in-wages was, of course, discontinued. The workhouse test was reintroduced, but in a new sense. It was now left to the applicant to decide whether he was so utterly destitute of all means that he would voluntarily repair to a shelter which was deliberately made into a place of horror. The workhouse was invested with a stigma; and staying in it was made a psychological and moral torture... It was at the behest of these laws that compassion was removed from the hearts, and a stoic determination to renounce human solidarity in the name of the greatest happiness of the greatest number gained the dignity of secular religion. The mechanism of the market was asserting itself and clamoring for its completion: human labor had to be made a commodity. (*The Great Transformation*, p. 101-2)

We were forced into this deal. The common lands, the use of which had been guaranteed since the inception of class society, were enclosed and privatized. Podrunks – *across time, space, and nation* – go mad when you talk about preserving or extending the commons. Privatization is their mania. They are the big, wide-open mouths that Erich Fromm wrote about so compellingly in *The Art of Loving*.

In Joel Bakan’s *The Corporation*:

Michael Walker, an economist who heads the Fraser Institute... responded with an enthusiastic “Absolutely!” when asked whether he believed every square inch of the planet should be under private control. (p. 114)

They can never be sated. They are never full. They can never have enough. *None* of us commoners, either of Europe or anywhere else – signed up willingly for slavery. We were forced off the land, our commons enclosed or destroyed, for the express purpose of turning us into “workers.”

No, the tense is wrong. This 'past' is not 'past.' The only way the current system can continue is if privatization and dispossession continue, without cessation. Podrunks can never be 'done' with land grabs and slum-building; else, whence their 'profits'?

Barack Obama describes beautifully what this process does to *people*, and our cultures:

Yet for all that poverty [in Djakarta], there remained in their lives a discernible order, a tapestry of trading routes and middlemen, bribes to pay and customs to observe, the habits of a generation played out every day beneath the bargaining and the noise and the swirling dust.

It was the absence of such coherence that made a place like Altgeld [housing project in Chicago] so desperate. ...How could we go about stitching a culture back together once it was torn? How long might it take in this land of dollars?

Longer than it took a culture to unravel, I suspected. I tried to imagine the Indonesian workers who were now making their way to the sorts of factories that had once sat along the banks of the Calumet River [in Chicago], joining the ranks of wage labor to assemble the radios and sneakers that sold on Michigan Avenue. I imagined those same Indonesian workers ten, twenty years from now, when their factories would have closed down, a consequence of new technology or lower wages in some other part of the globe. And then the bitter discovery that their markets have vanished; that they no longer remember how to weave their own baskets or carve their own furniture or grow their own food; that even if they remember such craft, the forests that gave them wood are now owned by timber interests, the baskets they once wove have been replaced by more durable plastics. The very existence of the factories, the timber interests, the plastics manufacturer, will have rendered their culture obsolete; the values of hard work and individual initiative turn out to have depended on a system of belief that's been scrambled by migration and urbanization and imported TV reruns. Some of them would prosper in this new order. Some would move to America. And the others, the millions left behind in Djakarta, or Lagos, or the West Bank, they would settle into their own Altgeld Gardens, into a deeper despair. (*Dreams From My Father*, p. 183-4)

What was astonishing to me as I read Barack Obama's memoir was not the broad *sweep* of what he knew – an ease of grasp I'm still struggling to attain – but the *heart* with which he 'knew.'

Immanuel Wallerstein, Senior Research Scholar at Yale University, explains the podrunks' impoverishment imperative this way:

The issue is not whether capitalism will continue to exist or not. It's doomed. The issue is what will replace it. It's no longer possible to have serious accumulation of capital because the costs are too high in terms of purchasing power...Capitalism as a system depends on lots of people working to produce surplus value that ends up in a few hands. This results in polarization. If thirty percent of Indians or the Chinese are middle class...a lot more money has to go into their hands. So the world level of profits declines with the growth of the middle class globally. And they consume an enormous amount of goods – food and energy – so you see prices go way up because there are more people who can afford to buy those products. Now there could be a substitution – Americans consume less as the Chinese consume more – but there's resistance to that...One way is to reduce labor costs...bring in rural populations at lower wages, but we're running out of them. Within the next twenty-five years they'll be wiped out. (Interview on *Against the Grain*, KPFA Radio, April 28 and 29, 2008)

As capitalism runs out of sixteen year-old girls in Djakarta, Cavite, Lagos, Sao Paulo, Tijuana, with their dexterous fingers and endurance, fresh from the farmlands their governments grab, the families their governments impoverish, with their good hearts and heroic shoulders, whatever will capitalism do?

In that interview Wallerstein added that when production – making things – can no longer return the rate of profit podrunks want, provide their *raison d'être*, they redirect their 'capital' to finance, "which is simply speculation, which leads to high unemployment, wider disparities, and debt."

Our dilemma today is an interesting one – we're confronted by a "mystery" to which the solution is known, and has been known for centuries.

The solution is "a mass movement to end wage work."

Think about all the energy the podrunks expend to convince us *we* are nothing and *they* are all.

Hungry? A corporation will give you food.

Cold? Some company must provide your coat – or fuel your humble abode.

Want a house? Prostrate yourself before a bank.

It's impossible to maintain the illusion of freedom. When was the last time you saw an *undomesticated* animal waiting in line to be seen, to speak, for permission to think?

“Can I...? Is it possible to... Um... I'd really like to... Why not? *Please?* But I've been waiting...”

The more desperate our dependence, the more bloated with self-importance they grow.

Remember Bush at the \$800-a-plate fundraising dinner: “This is an impressive crowd – the haves and the have-mores. Some people call you the elites, I call you my base.”

And check out the photo essay Vincent Bugliosi put together in *The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder*. Now that we're in the final months of his abominable romp over the dead, dying and exhausted he's finally not grinning so much. Maybe he feels the wind from below breathing down his neck. *I hope so.*

In the Introduction to his 1972 book *Working*, Studs Terkel wrote:

Perhaps it is time the 'work ethic' was redefined and its idea reclaimed from the banal men who invoke it. In a world of... an almost runaway technology, things are increasingly making things. It is for our species, it would seem, to go on to other matters. Human matters. (p. xxii)

In the margin I wrote: “Indeed! And so *why haven't we?* It may seem a silly question, but it's long past time for us to ask it.”

In the “political preface” to *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse summarized the main difficulty we have in the West envisioning and then working for our non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical future without bosses. He said:

No philosophy, no theory can undo *the democratic introjection of the masters into their subjects...*[Still...] protest will continue because it is a biological necessity...But in the administered society, the biological necessity does not immediately issue in action; organization demands counter-organization. Today the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is *the political fight.*

Most of us are complicit in this system, and given in return some infinitesimal portion of political power, a restricted realm to ‘rule,’ an illusion of control – which we fiercely defend in proportion to its absence in ‘reality,’ in the wider realm of ‘work.’

When we stop and consider why ‘being in control’ matters so much to us from our ‘superior’ Western perch atop the world, why we demand such obedience from our children, regiment their lives, teach them the rule of the clock before they even know their numbers, why we screechingly insist on having the last word – it doesn’t take much effort to tree that bear. We know “shit runs downhill.” But we blame ourselves nonetheless. After all, shouldn’t we be more *controlled* than that?

I love Michael Moore. When he asked the question, “why are we so violent?” – his answer was, essentially, “because they *want* us to be,” *want* us to stay caught in, as Stanley Tookie Williams wrote, our “personal dramas called ‘survival’” – and not just because it takes the focus off the pitiful-power-drunk-few.

More important even than this is the side effect of *our demoralization*. When you humiliate your child it can spiritually paralyze you for days or weeks afterward. If it happens often enough you may never get over it. And there’s of course the bonus for the podunks that you could be passing the destabilization on to future generations.

Once as a student I visited New York with a friend. We drove down in his car and crashed in his buddy’s apartment. Friend and I stretched out on the floor and we all stayed up late talking politics and whatever. Buddy had a pregnant wife and two small children, a boy about six and a girl about five, and the following morning when Buddy drove us around in his car, I was in the front seat, and his children were in the back. The window was down and the wind streamed around the little girl’s exhilarated face. She was so infectiously vibrant, so happy to be riding in a car with her daddy. Her love was a palpable thing, her wanting to please almost painful to watch.

Her brother did something, violated some rule, and the little girl dutifully ‘told’ on him. Far from appreciating the offering, her father scathingly called her “an agent of the state,” and launched into a long lecture intended, I’m sure, to politically educate her.

The effect on the little girl was electric. Crestfallen, ashamed, her entire body said, “‘failure’, I didn’t please him after all.”

When my son was a toddler and I a welfare mom, we sometimes hung out with two other single moms and their toddlers on a patch of grass, an oversized divider, alongside a busy street. Walking back to our apartments one of the children toddled ahead off the curb and his mother unceremoniously snatched him back and began hitting his legs. He instantly began crying. I asked why she didn't simply talk to him.

Her response was one I'm sure you've heard often, the essence of it being: "violence works." "The heavy hand sends a lasting message."

But it's never the message we tell ourselves that it is.

There was a PBS television show once, hosted by a married couple, called "Say It With Sign." Its purpose was to help viewers learn sign language. During the course of one season the woman got pregnant and the couple became proud parents, thereafter sharing stories about the baby on the show.

One story stuck with me. They said it surprised them to discover that, only months old, their child not only recognized signs but could communicate using them, signing "bottle," for example, when she wanted her bottle.

Babies understand language long before their vocal cords allow them to speak it. Our children (we) are brilliant, and so much more sensitive than we know.

When I first read Alice Miller's *For Your Own Good*, I found her book – which microscopically analyzed familial dynamics even to the point of attributing Hitler's rise to them – very useful personally but limited politically. Her response to that reaction was to say that:

It would be an easy matter to misunderstand my claim that the untold deep humiliation and mistreatment Hitler suffered at his father's hands without being allowed to respond was responsible for his insatiable hatred. Someone may object by saying that an individual human being cannot destroy an entire people on such a scale, that the economic crisis and the humiliation suffered by the Weimar Republic contributed to producing the catastrophe. There can be no doubt that this is true, but it was not "crises" and "systems" that did the killing, it was human beings – human beings whose fathers were able to point with pride to the obedience instilled in their little ones at a very early age. (p. 264)

Miller is examining the same underlying reality that Marcuse is describing when he writes about "the democratic introjection of the



masters into their subjects” – but from the perspective of the child who will become an adult:

It is easy for those who have never become aware of having been victims, since they grew up believing in the principles of being brave and self-controlled, to succumb to the danger of taking revenge on the next generation because they themselves have been unconsciously victimized. But if their anger is followed by grief over having been a victim, then they can also mourn the fact that their parents were victims too, and they will no longer have to persecute their children. The ability to grieve will bring them closer to their children. (p. 273-4)

Marcuse, in explicating this same phenomenon, writes:

But the very scope and effectiveness of the democratic introjection have suppressed the historical subject, the agent of revolution: free people are not in need of liberation, and the oppressed are not strong enough to liberate themselves. These conditions redefine the concept of Utopia: liberation is the most realistic, the most concrete of all historical possibilities and at the same time the most rationally and effectively repressed – the most abstract and remote possibility. (*Eros and Civilization*, p. xv) <sup>5</sup>

Our bodies know the truth, which is why “liberation is the most realistic... of all historical possibilities.” But because our bodies’ truth is “at the same time the most rationally and effectively repressed,” liberation seems to retreat from view proportionally as we approach it.

In Miller’s terms, there is a built-in emotional check – in our allegiance to our parents – that stops the child from becoming aware of and therefore feeling that healing anger that could liberate her from unconscious patterns.

The “historical subject” – aware, conscious – in Miller’s case is the angry child, understanding that he or she has been treated abominably. That child can liberate herself from the mental chains forged in the abusive environment of early childhood. *That* child can become a subject, an active participant in shaping her own destiny. *That* child has consciousness.

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<sup>5</sup> The dilemma Marcuse identified has ripened and is being tackled full-heartedly (and full-mindedly) today all over the world. We’ll look at it more closely in the next chapter when we talk about “Progress.”

The “historical subject” – aware, conscious – in Marcuse’s case is the angry worker, understanding that he or she has been treated abominably. That worker can liberate herself from the mental chains forged in the abusive environment of class society. *That* worker can become a subject, an active participant in shaping her own destiny. *That* “worker” has consciousness.

But Marcuse is not convinced that the relatively privileged Western worker can ever become angry that she or he is caged, ever become *aware* that we are not free. The stories we tell ourselves – or are conditioned to believe – are everything. *Consciousness* is everything – “command exists but with obedience.”

But as obedience is systematically sown and harvested in each one of us, first by loving hands and then by the dispassionate hands of bosses and government officials, none of which are beneficiaries of this system, all of which are just like you and me: unconscious functionaries of a system that abuses us, *how are we ever to escape it?*

We’ve all been infected by the state. Subliminally we know it, feel like Sigourney Weaver in James Cameron’s *Aliens* waking from her implantation nightmare, or like the revolutionaries in *Matrix Revolutions* trying to stop the Mr. Smith virus, or like Ed Tom in *No Country For Old Men* when he says, “I feel outmatched.” Whenever solidarity is broken, it takes a toll on spirit, leaving a fog of hopelessness in its wake, the feeling that it’s everywhere and there’s no escape. Or, most demoralizing of all, that “it’s in *me* and I don’t know how to get it *out* of me” – when we hurt our children, boss our ‘subordinates,’ hound the homeless – even when we close our gates and don’t come out, even then.

This system is structured to wear us down, make us complicit, and force us against our will to merge with what we find abhorrent.

This upside-down world is policed subtly by the wage relation – wolves with no teeth can’t even feed themselves, let alone bite – and blatantly by the state. And while it may seem, when we’re children, that the state exists to provide services like education and fire suppression, or protection from “the bad guys,” its primary function is to keep us separated, to make sure we don’t assert our right to our sources of power: the ancestors, the earth, and each other – and in the case of the first, to ensure that we make no claim on our collective inheritance from the ancestors without the state’s prior approval.

You may go to school and learn that the *Declaration of Independence*

says, “that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it.” But if you take it upon yourself to make self-directed use of that legacy, you will be punished.

The kids were delightful, intelligent, passionate, and defiant. One told me she had asked the school’s administration for permission to put up posters containing [those] words from the *Declaration*... Far from rewarding her interest in history and politics, ... administrators not only denied her request, but threatened her with “forced transfer” to another school should she post them anyway. (Derrick Jenson, *Endgame, I*, p. 179)

Think too of the enormous energy the so-called masters devoted to preventing the so-called American slaves from learning to read, in order to circumvent access to one of our few remaining routes to the work of the ancestors – to our collective inheritance from the ancestors (which is what “knowledge” is.)

Blocking access to the collective history and heritage of working people serves multiple purposes for the podrunks. The most essential, perhaps, is that it restricts the realm of the possible. ‘*What is*’ is made to seem ‘*all there is*.’ “Disparities’ must always have existed. ‘Poverty’ will always be with us.” The historical moment when: “compassion was removed from the hearts, and a stoic determination to renounce human solidarity in the name of the greatest happiness of the greatest number...” is made to stretch on infinitely into the future – to lend credence to the fanciful TINA <sup>6</sup> problem, as well as to capitalism’s favorite slogan, “you are on your own.”

As with so many underpinnings of class rule, separating us from ourselves locks us into demoralization. By atomizing us and then blocking access to our sources of power – sources that will fuel the alternative to ‘what is’ – we’re made to feel so much ‘less’ than what we are.

Resistance to this diminishment is not only with us *now*, it’s *always* been there. There’s a continuous stream of resistance, a continuous stream of ancestors, reaching out to us, inviting us in. We are not alone. But if we never learn that – if we never learn the names of the Indian peoples whose blood soaks the soil beneath our feet, or

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<sup>6</sup> An acronym attributed to Margaret Thatcher that stands for: “there is no alternative.”

the name of the humble Liverpool shipping clerk <sup>7</sup> who stood up to King Leopold's perpetration of genocide in the 'Congo,' or about the helicopter pilot (Hugh Thompson) who refused to cooperate with the massacre of Vietnamese people, or the Russian soldiers who turned their rifles on their own officers when ordered to shoot down women in the streets – if we never get to *think* about the courage of countless, nameless multitudes, to take them in, *become* them, become *large* like Walt Whitman – “*I am large, I contain multitudes*” – to ponder those who stood up to the politics of power-worship, greed and division... If we're denied access to the inheritance of our common courage, we feel more crazy, more alienated and alone.

The charade, by keeping us 'less,' keeps us easier to control. And the denial of our common stories (which would of course make us 'more,' bigger than our individual selves) helps to keep us at each other's throats and thoroughly confused – so that we're not only historically but currently *alone*. “No love no where, not a single soul who really cares” – aren't these the messages that beat endlessly in our heads?

And making certain we don't know whom we *really* owe for the creation of our world, presents us with a larger counterfeit countenance, the corporation itself, which conceals its thievery and parades our inventions and our earth as its personal creations and property.

Keeping our ancestors from us – their courage, beauty and sheer *goodness* (“fearful is the seductive power of goodness!” said Bertolt Brecht in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*) – damages both the 'targeted' and the 'privileged' of class society, in ways similar and dissimilar.

One of the reasons I needed Spike Lee's films was to receive proof that as a Black person I was indeed beautiful and brilliant. <sup>8</sup> There I was up on the big screen so it must be so.

When you consider the enormous effort of suppression applied to preventing us from seeing it, it can't be denied that ours is a powerful beauty indeed. “Ours” meaning working people of all hues and accents. Elvis, Janis, James, and Marlon electrified everyday folks because their

7 E. D. Morel. Sir H. H. Johnston wrote: “In the course of his work he became acquainted with some of the grisly facts of Congo maladministration. He drew his employers' attention to these stories and their verification. The result was his dismissal. Almost penniless, he set to work with pen and paper to enlighten the world through the British press and British publishers on the state of affairs on the Congo.”

8 And props to the Wachowski Brothers for this as well! Have you ever seen so many gorgeous black folk in one set of films outside of Spike Lee?

personas and portrayals showed the truth of everyday people, vital and potent.

Still, it remains true that it's the darker-skinned among us who are apparently the most threatening. "Long ago" ("when I was a green beginner") there was a television show called *The Green Hornet*. I was six or so at the time and, trust me, me and my brothers did not gather excitedly round the black and white to watch Van Williams. I had to travel to the Internet to even recollect that name. But nobody has *any* trouble remembering the name of Bruce Lee ("Kato").

Is there any *rational* reason why Bruce Lee should be anybody's "sidekick"? Come on.

And for an intense micro-to-macro story of how the state suppresses dark-skinned access to the power of the ancestors, read Stanley Tookie Williams' *Blue Rage, Black Redemption*.

In [Miss Atkins'] class, reading and writing seemed to be prohibited, but we were provided with mounds of clay, papier-mâché, puzzles, and all kinds of noneducational items. Pencils and erasers were nowhere to be found. There were shelves of books that the students did not read. They seemed to be there just to decorate the classroom. I got on Miss Atkins' nerves, bothering her each day about letting me read a book. The more she refused, the more determined I was to read the literature on those shelves... In my "reading world," there was no poverty, no discrimination, no violence, no racism, no pain... Thievery became necessary to allow me to pilfer a book off the school library shelf and avoid being busted by Miss Atkins... All I wanted to do was become educated, not to battle with a deranged teacher over my Constitutional right to read schoolbooks.

Certainly there's no doubt that members of "targeted groups" are given the steepest, rockiest roads to our ancestors' blood, sweat, tears, and love. But access is hindered for all.

I remember the awe I felt looking up at the bridgehead of the Bay Bridge where it's buttressed on the streets of San Francisco, considering how much sacrifice by so many working people was 'required' to make *that* work.

That same hour I walked further and found the following engraved words on the Sailors Union of the Pacific building:

You can put me in jail, but you cannot give me narrower quarters than as a seaman I have always had. You cannot give me coarser food than I have always eaten. You cannot make me lonelier than I have always been.

“Let ‘em come,” I found out later were his next words – Andrew Furuseth (1854 – 1938) – “let ‘em come” – so much history all around us, so unknown...

As Howard Zinn labored long to show us, we are not taught our own history. That’s not what school is for. Few among us know our laboring ancestors – or all our relations as living things. The state sets it up that way.

Derrick Jensen has said that it’s no surprise we don’t defend the land we live on, because we don’t really live there. We live in the Internet, in our cars, in personal dramas and public ones, in celebrity gossip, and private pain, around conference tables and construction sites, on our couches, and in our heads.

On the radio just now someone said, “You can’t fight for what you don’t love, and you can’t love what you don’t know.” (This of course has immediate personal implications as well.)

If we knew and loved *our ancestors* – the working people who built our world – we would know that James Boggs foretold a future of villages, in which we would “simply walk out on the streets and get milk and honey.” If we knew and loved our ancestors we would know that their legacy is a wisdom unbounded by *lies* about race, sex and nation; we would learn our true place in the world – among all life, across all time and false divisions; we would learn that our ancestors want more for us, and for our children, than to live out our lives as slaves.

“For human intelligence is like water, air, and fire – it cannot be bought or sold,” wrote Robert Crowley in 1550. <sup>9</sup> “...Reduce no human spirit to disgrace of price,” says Emily three hundred years later.

If it feels like we’ve been treading water for century upon long century, it’s because our ancestors, their works, cultural and physical, have been taken from us, leaving us horribly disfigured and diminished – and when I say “we,” I mean: “we who do the work,” *the wind from below*.

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<sup>9</sup> This quote comes from p. 56 of Peter Linebaugh’s *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, a lovely meditation on how *the past lives* in the refusal to relinquish the Commons.

This “we” means that our unity as working people, no matter what the nationality, gender or ethnicity stamped upon us by our various states, is exponentially more significant in charting our future than those arbitrary labels. The wind does not stop at “borders” writ in devil-dust, and root about in its pockets for passports. The wind is in us, in our hands, and in the earth that animates them.

### *Capital*

If we did have our own language, what is called “capital” in podrunk would be given a name in our language that meant: “our collective knowledge-base” – a meaning that merged “the ancestors” with *living* creativity.

The point is that knowledge belongs to us all indiscriminately – in *reality* – however conditioned we are to believe otherwise.

In this podrunk fantasy they hope we’ll stay stuck in forever, “... the production costs of a commodity consist of three elements: the rent for the piece of land required to produce the raw material; the capital with its profit, and the wages for the labour required for production and manufacture.”

But it becomes immediately evident that capital and labour are identical, since the economists themselves confess that capital is “stored-up labour”. We are therefore left with only two sides – the natural, objective side, land; and the human, subjective side, labour, which includes capital and, besides capital, a third factor which the economist does not think about – I mean the mental element of invention, of thought, alongside the physical element of sheer labour.

*What has the economist to do with inventiveness?* Have not all inventions fallen into his lap without any effort on his part? Has *one* of them cost him anything? Why then should he bother about them in the calculation of production costs?... Science is no concern of his. What does it matter to him that he has received its gifts through Berthollet, Davy, Liebig, Watt, Cartwright, etc. – gifts which have benefited him and his production immeasurably? (Frederick Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*)

What does it matter to the podrunk that he’s received its gifts through the immeasurable generosity of the earth, the sun, the oceans, and all the living things?

It matters not at all.

But it matters to *us*, we who do the work.

In one chapter in Faludi's *Stiffed* she describes the closure of the Long Beach Naval Shipyard. The love the 'workers' had for each other – across race, language and all other phony divisions – was epic.

She tells one story about its tallest crane, the Titan, "known affectionately to the men laboring in its shadow as Herman the German," because it was captured from the Germans in 1945.

In 1993, a Los Angeles television personality, Huell Howser, toured the Titan for a show on California history. He was baffled to find on the crane, untouched, its fifty-year-old German insignia. "So this was just like it was?" Howser asked his guides, two retired shipyard workers, and he sounded amazed. Why hadn't they expunged all signs of its previous operators, now that it was "ours"? The former workers just shrugged. (Susan Faludi, *Stiffed*, p. 55)

Faludi concluded that what mattered to the 'workers' "was not that they had conquered it, but that they knew how to make it work." I believe the reason goes well beyond that... to solidarity. They knew the work that went to make it, knew it was not "theirs" to take, the honor of having made it. Those who work with their hands know, as all of us will eventually, that '*workers*' have no nation.<sup>10</sup>

"Capital and labour are identical, since...capital is '*stored-up labour*.'"

And invention is a free gift of labor from those communing with the universe, like Nikola Tesla, moved by the earth and naught else.

When the wind from below has its own language the laughable categories podrunks have created to carve out a place for themselves, and to defend the indefensible, will fall apart like the dead husks they are.

As I write, with the "global financial system" in crisis, it's a constant irritant listening to the analysis in podrunks, quite crazy-making to be told it's the only game in town; and that to understand what's going on we must wrap our minds around the convolutions in reasoning that force us to treat insanity as valid, concede the implied 'truth' that it's

<sup>10</sup> Of course podrunks ("capitalists") never feel allegiance to their countries of nominal origin (continuously expanding "wealth" and 'Power' is their only concern) – states exist in their minds but to control the populace and facilitate the transfer of wealth from our pockets to theirs as speedily as possible.



quite a reasonable thing to transfer the blood, sweat, tears, and love of working people from the public coffers over to the thin diseased hands of these vampires in order to sustain them in the manner to which they've become accustomed.

Why?

Well, because... "Main Street" and "Wall Street" need each other.

How you figure that? What is it that podunks do that we cannot do for ourselves?

At which point the apologists for the capitalist system dredge up state power and talk about "political realities," say that the "political will" does not exist to expand the commons, to cut out the moneymen, the buyers and sellers of illusion, the traders in trash.

Consider, for example, the following from *The End of Work*:

The business community has long operated under the assumption that gains in productivity brought on by the introduction of new technologies rightfully belong to the stockholders and corporate management in the form of increased dividends and larger salaries and other benefits. Workers' claims on productivity advances, in the form of higher wages and reduced hours of work, have generally been regarded as illegitimate and even parasitic. Their contribution to the production process and the success of the company has always been viewed as of a lesser nature than those who provide the capital and take the risk of investing in new machinery. For that reason, any benefits that accrue to the workers from productivity advances are viewed not as a right, but rather as a gift bestowed by management... Put simply, does every member of society, even the poorest among us, have a right to participate in and benefit from increases in productivity brought on by the information and communication technology revolutions? If the answer is yes, then some form of compensation will have to be made to the increasing number of unemployed whose labor will no longer be needed in the new high-tech automated world of the twenty-first century. Since the advances in technology are going to mean fewer and fewer jobs in the market economy, the only effective way to ensure those permanently displaced by machinery the benefits of increased productivity is to provide some kind of government-guaranteed income. (Jeremy Rifkin, p. 227, 267)

This parroting of ‘common sense,’ this robotic repetition of received ‘wisdom,’ makes my stomach clench, my blood pressure rise, my head start to pounding and my words tongue-tie. Not out of shyness but fuckin’ flabbergastedness. How to begin translating this out of *podrunk* into *people*? (Remember the brave soldiers of Iraq Veterans Against the War: “I don’t speak *Arabic*, I speak *Human*.” Totally.)

Pardon the excess – and a slight digress. Let’s agree with Biden and not question motives. Jeremy Rifkin wrote *The End of Work* out of a concern I share: that coming (manufactured) resource shortages could result in our turning against each other. He recommends advance planning to avert coming chaos, and who could argue with that?

Residents of inner-city cores in industrial nations now have more in common with the slum dwellers of the developing countries that they do with the new cosmopolitan workers who live in suburbs and exurbs just a few miles away... “From the standpoint of the market,” says Gardels, “the ever swelling ranks of the [unemployed] face a fate worse than colonialism: economic irrelevance.” The bottom line, argues Gardels, is that “we don’t need what they have and they can’t buy what we sell.” Gardels foresees an increasingly lawless and foreboding future – a world populated by “patches of order and swaths of pandemonium.”... [T]he distinctions between war and crime are going to blur and even break down as marauding bands of outlaws [the outcasts of the global village], some with vague political goals, menace the global village... Shunned by the powers that be, and forced to languish at the periphery of earthly existence, they are the hordes whose collective temper is as unpredictable as the changing political winds – a mass of humanity whose fortunes and destiny increasingly tend toward social upheaval and rebellion against a system that has made them all but invisible.

On the eve of the third millennium, civilization finds itself precariously straddling two very different worlds, one utopian and full of promise, the other dystopian and rife with peril. At issue is the very concept of work itself. (p. 215-6)

But as he cannot even begin to imagine us as “historical subjects,”<sup>11</sup> freedom from work to him only means that we’ve slipped our leashes

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11 The racial sub-text is obvious. I wondered, reading it, who he was talking to – certainly not me. Here, as seemingly everywhere, the on-going problem: *we* have no voice.

and we're on the loose.

Look out, ya'll! Here they come! There be wolves in the woods, ya'll, and they growing teeth! Hurry up! Get the rope ready. Get 'em back on the leash!

Trapped in podrunk categories, in his analysis, we, the vitality and force from which all invention comes, have been transmuted into 'economic irrelevants.' As if *we* exist for "*the economy*" and not the other way around. Karl Polanyi warned about this:

To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in *the demolition of society*. For the alleged commodity "labor power" cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity. (*The Great Transformation*, p. 73)

Obviously I couldn't agree more with Jeremy Rifkin that "the very concept of work itself" is at issue, though from below the perspective on the problem is quite different.

Noting our common concern about the possibility of coming chaos here is an aside, just to acknowledge that we *do* share a similar motive. In the chapter "The Plan" we'll return to it. But I can't bring up this issue without an accompanying caution. In Naomi Klein's warning about the podrunks' "shock doctrine" there is this: some of these crazies *want* chaos. Never forget that. Never forget what they're capable of, or what's at stake. In "The Plan" we'll look at the peculiar logic of Reagan, Bush and McCain that terminates with this: "chaos will make totalitarianism attractive." *They* think; and that's the point, this is how they think.

Hopefully this digression has given us time to recover from the shock of Rifkin's doctrine and face it, translate it, explicate it, maybe annihilate it. "Productivity," this *magic* we make when we transform the earth's bounty into baggage and backrubs, the podrunks believe is *their* gift to *us* because they purchase the stuff we work on. The counterfeit again – always, always, the false face. "Disconnect them from their pasts, disconnect them from each other, keep shuffling the shells, don't let them look under." But we know what's under – us, always us. Just as water is continuous, indivisible, so are we, so are we. We flow through the streets of Cavite and the backrooms of cheats. We are everywhere. We do the work.

Remember Paris '68 when the owners asked the factory workers “what do you want?” and they replied: “we want the fucking factory, dude. That’s what we want.” That’s what we want, because that’s what we *are*. Every product, every physical and cultural creation we all use or consume every day is *our* blood, sweat and love made manifest – and the earth’s.

They are shadows, these podunks, and they know it. They know that they contribute absolutely nothing but theft to the whole dynamic of reproducing our world, day after day, year after piled-on year.

Or they don’t know it, and they’ve bought their own myth and are as duped by the false face of the commodity as anyone else, simply not caring how the thing they require to streamline their production process came to be available on that shelf for purchase.

Disney spokesman Ken Green’s response when “taken to task for the desperate conditions in a Haitian factory that produces Disney clothes” was:

“We don’t employ anyone in Haiti,” he said, referring to the fact that the factory is owned by a contractor. “With the newsprint you use, do you have any idea of the labour conditions involved to produce it?” Green demanded of Cathy Majtenyi of the *Catholic Register*.

From El Paso to Beijing, San Francisco to Jakarta, Munich to Tijuana, the global brands are sloughing the responsibility of production onto their contractors; they just tell them to make the damn thing, and make it cheap, so there’s lots of money left over for branding [and stockholders, and buying politicians]. Make it *really* cheap. (Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, p. 198)

When “compassion was removed from the hearts” and human solidarity renounced, when we all stopped caring what was under the shell, we fell asleep and started to dream – and in the dream things got shifted around, shady deals faded to black, false heroism got grafted onto guilt and fear, unbearable bits were sweetened, made less heinous.

The podunks like to hide behind the gloss of “information technology,” and promote the lie that it’s their wizardry with gadgetry that gives us our products at such a “low cost,” and makes for them their “profits.” But there’s nothing marvelous or new about any of it – it’s just the same old bullying and violence and theft they’ve used from day one, from the first podunk bellow, “*More!*”

Every time we plug something into an outlet we should murmur a hymn of thanks to Nikola Tesla, but we don't. We don't even know his name. Why? Corporations want us to thank *them*.

The podunks, with their bought-and-paid-for state, steal our common legacies, our common knowledge-base, and present them back to us as *their* property, telling us we must work for a tiny share of it. They pick gems from our pockets and toss us a penny tip; no – they steal our common treasures and then infect us with their virus as compensation, much as the European colonizers infected the indigenous peoples of “America” with smallpox. Narcissists that they are, podunks even imagine they're doing us a favor by turning us into them.

But we are not them.

### *The Perversion of 'Science': Mind-Worship*

'Science' has been defined in various ways, but for our purposes it is 'thought,' 'study,' 'art,' 'invention' – *communion with the eternal*. This gift is inherent in all of us; some believe it's our defining quality.

It's our nature to study the world around us and create stories that explain it. Are the stories improving? There's a bit of the 'blind men and the elephant' about them – only picture a spinning globe instead of an elephant, and imagine some of the men not blind at all, just empty-handed, wanting to leap on the rotating sphere but instead being tackled and shackled and handcuffed; and others determined to stop the sphere from moving so they can study it; and then a third group surreptitiously trying to rope the ankles of the others while claiming intellectual property rights over the globe. What stories will they create? Perhaps we haven't seen *real* 'science' yet, or perhaps we await its second coming.

Time will tell.

If we are to reclaim our power to make our *own* 'reality,' we have to *trust* that we can.

The present moment finds us disorganized and demoralized. Capital loves to wow us with the 'wonders of science.' And doesn't it just boggle us all? these machines and robotics, computers and electronics, heart surgery and sonograms, satellites and seismographs – 'solutions' are being babbled at us from all sides for the climate crisis and the 'economic meltdown;' the world's a mess – a complex cacophony of twaddle – that says, “I just dare you to tackle me.” Is it any wonder we retreat to our rooms, to our humble but straightforward comforts and conveniences?

But these crises made by podunk, writ in podunk, crypt by podunk, will not go away, designed as they are to sink us. And the

‘correction,’ as they like to put it, could be a whirlpool sucking us in, or a grand steed we agree to mount.

I vote for the latter.

To prepare for this ride, to trust, it might be well to begin with first principles, with what as human beings we essentially are.

*Essentially*, we are beings that like to figure things out and to make things. These are two sides of the same reality – to *force* their separation is a heinous act.

And since our art is science and our science art, in our new language we must create a word worthy of our layered *longing* (as Mark Doty termed it.) I agree with Erich Fromm that fundamentally this longing is to be *one with the eternal*, and that the most useful art / science recognizes this longing.

Grace Paley has said: “though the world cannot be changed by talking to one child at a time, it may at least be known.”

I love listening to children “*figuring it out*.” What a gift that always is. It’s like a cat vibrating softly in your lap while your fingers touch either side of him, completing a circuit through his body. Sometimes cats seem to know when you need this treatment before you do. Don’t argue with the master electrician.

Tesla seemed destined only for electricity. All his life he recalled this formative episode at age three with his beloved cat, Macak. “It was dusk of the evening and I felt impelled to stroke Macak’s back. Macak’s back was a sheet of light and my hand produced a shower of sparks loud enough to be heard all over the place.” What was this? the young boy wondered to his father. “‘Well,’ [his father] finally remarked, ‘this is nothing but electricity, the same thing you see on the trees in a storm.’ My mother seemed alarmed. ‘Stop playing with the cat,’ she said, ‘he might start a fire.’ I was thinking abstractedly. Is nature a giant cat? If so, who strokes its back? It can only be God, I concluded. . . . Day after day I asked myself *what is electricity* and found no answer.” (Jill Jonnes, *Empires of Light*, p. 90)

Stop for a moment.

What are *your* questions? the ones that define *your* life, reveal your path, nudge you forward? the ones you can’t stop thinking about, that continually recur?

When I was a child, words themselves were often my questions. Words like “different” and “bad” and “good.” The idea of ‘ranking’ was an ongoing scientific study. And because children take you at your word, to use a word like “bad” to describe a child can have the effect of a bomb blast.

When my son was small we were addicted to a computer game called “Oids” which required traveling through the limitless immensity of space and freeing slaves, a very compelling mission, I recall. At certain points shots are fired and bloodless annihilation of tiny moving bits of light results. As we honed in on them I’d use the phrase “take care of them” to express the exact opposite of the literal meaning – very confusing.

Children are “figuring-things-out” made manifest, and they tend to be dogged in their determination to find (or create their own) answers – which means the worst puzzles to burden children with are the irresolvable ones, the ones that bury themselves like knife blades under the skin and bore down infinitely forward, like: “Why did he leave me?” Or “Why doesn’t she love me?”

Listen to the very different questions of these two scientists. In the first, the childhood longing of Alan Turing, one of the ancestors who brought us computers, and in the second an unburdened inquiry:

At a picnic in Scotland, to get his father’s approval for being suitably brave and adventurous, he found wild honey for the family by drawing the vector lines along which nearby honeybees were flying, and charting their intersection to find the hive. (David Bodanis, *Electric Universe*, p. 156)

(Clearly a child who didn’t get the honey.)

When Einstein was a little boy, he was fascinated with how magnets worked. But instead of being teased about it by his parents, they accepted his interest. How *did* magnets work? There had to be a reason, and that reason had to be based on another reason, and that reason had to be based on another reason, and maybe if you traced it all the way, you’d reach...what would you reach?... Einstein had great confidence that the answers were waiting to be found. (Bodanis,  $E=MC^2$ , p. 86-7)

(And clearly a child who *did*.)

Point being, it's important to follow your questions. To take them seriously, they're the earth moving in you. How could anything be more important than that?

I was part of the electrical crew that built the community college where I live. There was a platform erected adjacent to the sidewalk to serve the man-lift, a temporary external elevator that ferried workers and material up to the building's six floors. If the lift was aloft when we happened to climb onto the platform, we'd summon it and then lean on the handrail waiting for it to descend. Once, a mother and her small child – maybe four or five – passed by on the sidewalk below while I stood leaning, and I saw the boy, clearly fascinated by the noise and activity, pull his mother to a stop so they could watch.

“What are they doing?” he asked.

“They're making a building,” his mother answered. Skipping maybe half a beat, the child replied: “Why aren't we helping?”

Good question.

Earlier this year, on KPFA, I listened to an interview with the mother of Rachel Corrie, the young woman who gave her life at age twenty-three in Gaza trying to stop a Palestinian family's home from being demolished with a tractor. Quoting from the journal the mother kept when her children were small, she said that Rachel at two and a half had asked her, “Is ‘brave’ part of growing up?”

Questions open doors to paths. As a child, Barack Obama made a game of guessing the captions of photographs he saw. Waiting for his mother in an embassy library in Djakarta at age nine he came across a photo of a man with a “strange, unnatural pallor, as if blood had been drawn from the flesh.” He guessed the man was sick, “a radiation victim.” But, no, the man, he read, had actually paid for a chemical treatment to lighten his skin, in order “to pass himself off as a white man.”

I felt my face and neck get hot. My stomach knotted; the type began to blur on the page. Did my mother know about this? What about her boss – why was he so calm, reading through his reports a few feet down the hall? I had a desperate urge to jump out of my seat, to show them what I had learned, to demand some explanation or assurance. But something held me back. As in a dream, I had no voice for my newfound fear. By the time my mother came to take me home, my face wore a smile and the magazines were back in their proper place. The room, the air, was quiet as before. (*Dreams From My Father*, p. 30)



Later, back at home:

I went into the bathroom and stood in front of the mirror with all my senses and limbs seemingly intact, looking as I had always looked, and wondered if something was wrong with me. The alternative seemed no less frightening – that the adults around me lived in the midst of madness. (p. 51-2)

Think of your own explorations of science or art as a child – the first time you watched iron filings on paper align themselves with magnetic fields; the acrobatics of squirrels, the drift of clouds, the web-building of spiders, waves chasing each other to shore, new life sprouting. Or maybe you studied hummingbirds, or constellations of stars, or the minute striations of a leaf.

Did you ask yourself why a bubble flies, water boils or things die?

Or was your puzzle the world of humans? The man passed out on the street that nobody seemed to see; children taunting each other; parents screaming, a child too sad or lonely to speak?

Does swallowed injustice rise like bile?

Science is what we're about, dude! How have we been misled to believe otherwise? All the interlocking cons – what a muddle! Some enterprising housekeeper somewhere should do us all a favor and straighten it out, but I think the result would be a Medusa's head – best bury the odoriferous mess in the backyard and move on.

So what should we call *this* con? the “science-you're-not” con? How much does it hold us back? How quickly will it dissolve under pressure of biological necessity? We'll see.

What I *do* know is that it *is* a con. Disempowerment can also be like a wind that knows no borders. It can start in your work life and blow through your family life and school life and spiritual life and community life and artistic / scientific life. Being told you're a slave is a message that tends to pollute every part of you.

It's actually a fairly recent phenomenon, this generalized surrender of our power. One of my neighbors recalls that when she was six or seven, back in the rural Arkansas of 1930 or '31, she and her two brothers took it upon themselves to heal an ailing pig, Bessie.

Buddy [the brother two years older] was rubbing Bessie, feeling sorry for her. He said, “Let's get some poke salad root!” So we talked Leon [the brother four years older] into doing it. We made

a fire and dug up some poke salad root. Put it in the pot. Boiled it. Got it strong. When it was cool, we put a little black drawf [a powder that looks like pepper] in it and put it in the trough. No, it was “three sixes,” a bottle medicine, with the poke salad water. Put a little corn in it. Bessie drank it. Next week we cooked Bessie corn with a little bit of lye to clean her out. She was so slick and black! That was the prettiest pig. Talk about fat! Then Bessie started chewing on Mama’s dress and Mama said, “I thought Bessie was sick!” She was so glad that Bessie was OK cuz that was the only hog we had on the lot.

The tales Mrs. Trotter tells of roaming the woods as a six year-old with her brothers to catch rabbits, facing down rattlesnakes at age ten, making wagon-wheels from tree stumps, hiding an ice-pick in her bosoms as a young woman...well, it all makes me feel kinda thin, kinda pared down and minimalized. It’s like another planet, Mrs. Trotter’s mind.

But traveling there is a reminder of all we are, all that’s expressed through us, and is there still – nature in us – waiting to be attended to and embodied again.

Reducing our experience of the world to taking orders was not only a con to keep most of us slaves, it created a ladder and a legend to woo a few into complicity.

Podrunks need our ideas, but they also fear them.

Because they feed on our creativity while suppressing it, podrunks have to walk a fine line. How gather enough ideas from the populace, how create enough non-threatening ‘insider-outsiders,’ to inject a little life into a fundamentally death-defined system?

For a system that must always ‘grow’ – i.e. must present the *face* of ‘exponential increases in the rate of profit’ – ‘innovation,’ or the *appearance* of it, is critical.

How to generate ‘new’ toys, ‘new’ stuff, ‘new’ ‘products,’ fast enough to maintain the illusion of ‘growth?’ What quality education, and how much, to allow? How guarantee that enough ‘talent’ will be fatted to insure meat over the long, cold winters of stagnant wages and stupefying boredom for the vast majority?

Divisions within pod drunk ranks on this matter can never be fully resolved as they reflect different interests and fundamental disagreements on strategy. There are those within capital that believe their own

mythology about free markets and meritocracies; and, among these, others that insist on the compatibility of “free market” myths with the rhetoric of democracy.

But the podunks that have recently prevailed – at least in terms of controlling the state – are the “realists,” the hard-line neocons like Cheney and Rove, who dominate in these debates precisely because they have no principles, nothing to guide their actions other than the injunction: *Win!*

Theirs is a mentality locked in on itself. This mind is a room of mirrors, a worldview that divides what it sees into “me” and “not-me,” into “what benefits me” and “what doesn’t benefit me.” It cannot tend gardens – it can only raid. And though it may acknowledge the existence of the ones who do tend, those who innovate and create, it does not respect creation. Rather, the artistic spirit is seen as ‘weak’ to the degree that it is generous and inclusive.

And that which is ‘weak,’ in this way of seeing, may be legitimately victimized, its creations seized and consumed, as such usage – forcing the ‘weak’ to serve the greater glory of the ‘master architect,’ the ‘brains of the operation’ – by their lights, ‘redeems’ the victims.

But this piratic scavenger mindset (“let’s look around for what’s available to ‘make use of’”) is walled in by its own contempt. It imagines that, with the entire globe as its candy store, it can steal what it needs, and that *cultivation* is for the ‘lessers’ who must use their hands.

They will never hesitate (after all, hesitation itself is ‘weak’) to ruthlessly suppress general education levels, the speculative imagination. If it needs new stuff it can always find it, they tell themselves, out there somewhere. “Money can buy anything.” But the game, their game, the whole game, the *Big Con*, *depends* on our not waking up. This, then, is their most fundamental *sine qua non*.

Immanuel Wallerstein has argued that their crude lack of nuance has actually accelerated the demise of capitalism; and recent events – the financial meltdown – bear him out. This matter of what comes next and how to get there will be the main focus of the chapter “The Plan,” but the point for the purposes of this discussion is that “science,” “invention,” “art,” can never be fully embraced by the current system, because true innovation is inherently revolutionary; and that true innovation, in class societies, blossoms *despite* – despite ruthless repression in the majority. The podunks feel they *must* control it precisely *because* it can’t be controlled, will inevitably get “out of hand,”

escape established bounds and threaten *them*, the *status quo* – those folks with the privileged positions that free them from having to work while stroking their egos with the illusion of mastery.

So, feeding on *what it fears* (creativity / innovation) forces the more ‘liberal’ faction of capital into its own black widow dance: how stroke the great belly of the people without our noticing how vulnerable they are. Capital is by definition, by necessity, duplicitous. That big, wide open mouth that always wants *more* can never state plainly what it wants: slaves, resources, cannon fodder – can never admit that what it wants most is *obedience* and suppressed intelligence in the majority.

Modern capitalism needs men who co-operate smoothly and in large numbers; who want to consume more and more; and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated. It needs men who feel free and independent, not subject to any authority or principle or conscience – yet willing to be commanded, to do what is expected of them, to fit into the social machine without friction; who can be guided without force, led without leaders, prompted without aim – except the one to make good, to be on the move, to function, to go ahead. (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 77)

Clandestinely, because they can never be open about their true aims, they impose guidelines and boundaries – rules, regs, and rhetoric – that police / supervise, access to knowledge and information. They stir up the confused among the populace with the words charged according to the current conditioning we’re being programmed with (they hope): “Socialist!” “Terrorist!” “Liberal!” – whatever.

The media, mechanization and the military are the front lines.

We must be media-savvy to consume the toys, yet not so savvy that we can use them against the ‘masters.’ They need technicians and engineers to run the systems, but these techies and builders must accept control and be taught to renounce their *self-directed* power.

We must learn how to destabilize “enemy-nations,” but that applied intelligence must never be applied to the ‘puppeteers.’

We must be taught the ‘art’ of manipulation without our seeing that it is *we, the wind from below*, that are in fact the targets.

We’ve looked at these dynamics to a degree in talking about the role of the state, but in what follows we’ll examine the false face of philosophy and how it feeds the capitalist con, their counterfeit claim that *they* are the source of ‘science’ and ‘invention.’

Because equal access to the legacies of our ancestors would end poddrunk rule, they encourage philosophers and philosophies that elevate “Rational Thought” – which they equate with “science” – to the status of a god. They then do all they can to make communion with the ancestors a commodity priced beyond the reach of the majority, degrading the educational commons such that we can never believe ourselves capable of possessing “science” or “invention,” and then sit back and enjoy the confusion and demoralization that results.

Philosophy has always presented itself as a cool drink of water, an opportunity to escape the grunge and grime of earthy matters (the manual labor of reproducing our world day after day), and dip into the purifying waters of *pure*, that is to say, *abstract*, ‘Thought.’ That we like to play this game of ‘pure,’ *abstract ‘Thought,’* would be (and will be) fine if everyone could play and if it wasn’t used as a weapon against the majority. But if everyone played that would defeat the purpose, so it’s a bit of a counterfeit suggestion.

As we look into the face of this con, we find, as with everything promoted by the poddrunks to reinforce the illusion of rule, that the truth of it is the inverse of what we’re told. This pool isn’t clean or pure but rather poisoned. The more you drink of it the poorer you become.

Our ‘collective knowledge-base’ – the ancestors combined with *living* creativity – is wealth.

‘Rational Thought’ is the opposite of wealth. Yet to make matters confusing and keep us disempowered, it’s promoted as a *sine qua non*,<sup>12</sup> that from which all else comes. And since, in the story they like to tell us, the one they want us to believe, we commoners don’t possess this critical tool called ‘Rational Thought,’ we are, again, as usual, dependent on them if we want to receive the benefits of ‘their’ magic.

*“What has the economist to do with inventiveness? Have not all inventions fallen into his lap without any effort on his part? Has one of them cost him anything?”*

The “science-you’re-not” con is a compatriot of the “commodity-con,” which is a compatriot of the “master-slave” con, which is a compatriot of the “mastering-nature” con – and they’re all part of the “capitalist-con.” If you agree to objectify ‘nature’ and relegate whole groups of people to ‘nature,’ we’ll let you call yourself a master and let you pretend to rule.

12 Which literally means: “without which, not.”

In the “capitalist con,” you’re either ruler or ruled, master or slave, eater or eaten – and if you find yourself in the latter categories, it’s because you deserve it (this is the “meritocracy-con.”)

And, if you find yourself in the latter categories, you’re by definition *not* a “thinker,” you are the inert matter on which the thinker unleashes his “Thought.”

“Thought,” or “Abstract Thought,” as it’s more affectionately known, must be bowed down to and worshipped, or so the story goes, because it’s brought us all that cool stuff I mentioned earlier. So, obviously, we can’t rule ourselves because only the Thinkers have this critical capacity upon which our very lives depend. So, let’s do the best we can with our slave status, not complain, and let the Thinkers get on with making our world “safer,” our lives “better,” our brains emptier and our dreams for ourselves moot. But, like the others, it’s a tricky con to maintain and manage over the long term.

‘Abstract Thought’ is quite different from ‘thought.’ (Again, since we don’t yet have our own language we have to make do.) It’s important to be clear on this point because the first is created by the wind from above, while the second fuels the wind from below. One is a dream – the other, reality. One the West made a deity (“Logos”), after divorcing ‘it’ from nature; the other is communion with the eternal, the universe, the ancestors, the ‘One.’ One is deeply hierarchical and coercive, the other, anti-authoritarian and generous. One is the rationalization for class society, and the other our bankroll for funding the future.

In essence, one is the negation of nature, while the other is nature expressing itself.

Erich Fromm has said that to achieve mastery in an art (the broad category within which “science” resides) one must practice “discipline, concentration and patience throughout every phase of [your] life.”<sup>13</sup> *And since “art” is what distinguishes our species, to become a fully inducted, card-carrying member, it’s important that we not forsake our innate gifts, and that we demand the right to develop them in ourselves.*

So, taking Fromm’s advice, we each must become a disciple, listen or attend deeply, and we must suspend the urge to impose external timetables so that the lesson or insight that we’re listening for can reveal itself however it must, on its own terms.

Let’s think about that for a second, and about our lives as workers.

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13 *The Art of Loving*, p. 100.

OK, then. Right. These are obviously *not* liberties allowed the vast majority of us in our *jobs*. To even suggest trying to claim them is either laughable or malicious. But, just for a laugh, try to imagine it, try to imagine practicing self-development, or the development of our collective knowledge-base, at work.

There was a period in Tesla's life, of about a year, after he'd indignantly quit his job at Thomas Edison's company because Edison royally fucked him – treatment he never got used to despite the frequency of its occurrence – when he had to dig ditches to survive. Imagine our hero, convincing one of his comrades to set aside his shovel for a lesson in electricity. Or, picture him pulling out a text on his break (assuming he was allowed a break, which is doubtful), and getting so engrossed time just slipped away.

Or imagine yourself, a student of the comedic arts, reduced by circumstance to performing your stand-up comedy routines for the customers in a supermarket checkout line as you total their bills. Or perhaps you love computer-generated special effects and you're a manager at the post office, is there a way you could bring your love to work with you? Or what if you're a jazz pianist, forced to repair copying machines? Or you love words and a sentence occurs, fleetingly, while you're above the ceiling under pressure to finish that conduit run before the boss comes back to check on you?

Well that comic is gone, I was sorry to see, though his co-workers said they found his constant riffing annoying. The CG-aficionado was passing around fantasies of doing contract work for Pixar when I encountered him on a short-call. The jazz pianist might well be out there doing it, but if so, I'd bet he's bemoaning the lost time, the cost of his best years weighing on him. And as for me, if my body hadn't 'failed' me, would I be writing these words?

I'd tried many times to write while doing wage work and it just never happened. Somehow our dreams slip away from us, our art dissolves. Usually, by the time our bodies give out our art has long since been abandoned.

Let's stop pretending that this deal is OK. It's not – not for ourselves, not for our children. We need a better deal, or rather, an end to deals.

I believe Nikola Tesla is a spiritual guide for this effort – an important one among many <sup>14</sup> – important because he's a bridge

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14 To those who resist with love, my gratitude is offered on the last page.

between the dead-end of capitalism and the open vistas of what comes next. Saying this is not to minimize the importance of indigenous spiritual guides like Rolling Thunder and Black Elk – their power and wisdom are incontestable. But we need Nikola because the deeply bored misconceptions about invention have been deeply paralyzing – the “mind-worship” fetish is a voracious tic – and it’s gonna take some serious digging from an unimpeachable source to get them out.

I am credited with being one of the hardest workers and perhaps I am, if thought is the equivalent of labour, for I have devoted to it almost all of my waking hours. But if work is interpreted to be a definite performance in a specified time according to a rigid rule, then I may be the worst of idlers.

*Every effort under compulsion demands a sacrifice of life-energy. I never paid such a price. On the contrary, I have thrived on my thoughts. (Autobiography, p. 9)*

The essence of science / art / invention – is *freedom*. But he’s not restrictive in his injunction against force; “*every effort*”, he says, “under compulsion, demands a sacrifice of life-energy.” But the ‘science’ he inherited was nothing if not fundamentally about force – forcing submission, isolation, separation, reduction, “controlled conditions,” categorization.

Nikola Tesla’s method was quite different.

In my boyhood I suffered from a peculiar affliction due to the appearance of images, often accompanied by strong flashes of light, which marred the sight of real objects and interfered with my thoughts and action. They were pictures of things and scenes which I had really seen, never of those imagined. When a word was spoken to me the image of the object it designated would present itself vividly to my vision and sometimes I was quite unable to distinguish whether what I saw was tangible or not...I soon discovered that my best comfort was attained if I simply went on in my vision further and further, getting new impressions all the time, and so I began to travel; when alone, I would start on my journeys – see new places, cities and countries; live there, meet people and make friendships and acquaintances and, however unbelievable, it is a fact that they were just as dear to me as those in actual life, and not a bit less intense in their manifestations.



This I did constantly until I was about seventeen, when my thoughts turned seriously to invention. Then I observed to my delight that I could visualize with the greatest facility. I needed no models, drawings or experiments. I could picture them all as real in my mind. Thus I have been led unconsciously to evolve what I consider a new method of materializing inventive concepts and ideas, which is radially opposite to the purely experimental and is in my opinion ever so much more expeditious and efficient. (*Autobiography*)

Many apparently inexplicable things happened to Nikola Tesla, and because he is a true scientist, a true artist, a true lover of life, he made no attempt to edit them out of his story. On the contrary, his science deepened precisely *because* he owned / honored ‘mystery.’

Probably such experiences are commoner than we know because we’ve been kept so divided from each other. I’ve experienced floating up to the ceiling and looking down on my body lying on the bed. In reading *Firebird*, I discovered that this had happened to Mark Doty as a child as well. One such incident occurred after he was forced to get a haircut:

I take off my clothes and under the covers I am a big shorn baby, a naked ugly boy, and I try to do what I do sometimes, a kind of spiritual exercise. I pay attention to each part of my body starting at my toes, and I tell it to relax, to let go. By the time I’m up to my chest I am moving into some other state of mind, dreamy, loosened. ...I am relinquishing, am nothing but relinquishment... if I’m lucky I can begin to leave my body altogether...now I can cut free of it altogether, and I feel myself lift from myself, start to float up out of the confines of my skin, unmoored, buoyant. I am moving toward the bedroom ceiling, and soon I am face-to-face with it, not my flesh-and-blood face but my soul-face. I’m weightless, a shadow, uncapturable in my phantom form. And then I turn, spirit-body that I am, to look back at my bed, at that abandoned boy empty there, his pale scalp glowing in the twilight (p. 143)

But I think we can agree that *Nikola’s* ability to *see from above* was astonishing. I think these gifts come from the ancestors, *the great communal mind, in us*. When Nikola Tesla was a child:

In the school room there were a few mechanical models which interested me and turned my attention to water turbines. I constructed many of these and found great pleasure in operating them. How extraordinary was my life an incident may illustrate. My uncle had no use for this kind of pastime and more than once rebuked me. I was fascinated by a description of Niagara Falls I had perused, and pictured in my imagination a big wheel run by the falls. I told my uncle that I would go to America and carry out this scheme. Thirty years later I carried my ideas out at Niagara and marveled at the unfathomable mystery of the mind. (*Autobiography*, p. 22)

You can see photos of his accomplishment in *Empires of Light* by Jill Jonnes. She writes:

In fact, Tesla had devised something far more original than a water wheel...Finally, on August 26, 1895, almost a year later than predicted by the engineering journals, Niagara power was harnessed for full-time commercial use...*The New York Times* noted in its small story buried back on the ninth page, "The power from the power house is sent over copper cables laid in a conduit to the aluminum works [the first customer of Niagara power.] The current sent is an alternating one, and before it can be used in the making of aluminum it must be transformed to a direct current. This is done by passing through four of the largest rotary transformers ever built. These are 2,100 horsepower each, and three of them are running. Everything was found to work perfectly and great satisfaction was expressed by the officers." (*Empires of Light*, p. 295, 319-320)

Science fiction writer H.G. Wells wrote at the time:

These dynamos and turbines of the Niagara Falls Power Company impressed me far more profoundly than the Cave of the Winds; are indeed, to my mind, greater and more beautiful than accidental eddying of air beside a downpour. They are will made visible, thought translated into easy and commanding things. They are clean, noiseless, starkly powerful. All the clatter and tumult of the early age of machinery is past and gone here; there is no smoke, no coal grit, no dirt at all. The wheel pit into which one descends has an almost cloistered quiet about its softly humming turbines.

These are altogether noble masses of machinery, huge black slumbering monsters, great sleeping tops that engineer irresistible forces in their sleep...A man goes to and fro quietly in the long, clean hall of the dynamos. There is no clangor, no racket...All these great things are as silent, as wonderfully made, as the heart in a living body, and stouter and stronger than that...I fell into a daydream of the coming power of men, and how that power may be used by them. (quoted in *Empires of Light*, p. 323)

But Tesla's daydreams were not about "the coming *power* of men." He dreamed about the coming *unity* of men:

...The earth was found to be, literally, alive with electrical vibrations...this planet despite its vast extent, behaved like a conductor of limited dimensions... The results attained by me have made my scheme of intelligence transmission, for which the name of "World Telegraphy" has been suggested, easily realizable. It constitutes...a radical and fruitful departure from what have been done heretofore...it will add materially to general safety, comfort and convenience, and maintenance of peaceful relations. It involves the employment of a number of plants, all of which are capable of transmitting individualized signals to the uttermost confines of the earth. Each of them will be preferably located near some important center of civilization and the news it receives through any channel will be flashed to all points of the globe. A cheap and simple device, which might be carried in ones pocket, may then be set up somewhere on sea or land, and it will record the world's news or such special messages as may be intended for it. Thus the entire earth will be converted into a huge brain, as it were, capable of response in every one of its parts. Since a single plant of but one hundred horsepower can operate hundreds of millions of instruments, the system will have a virtually infinite working capacity, and it must needs immensely facilitate and cheapen the transmission of intelligence. (*Vol. 2*, p. A-153 – A-158)

Tesla had devised a means for the wireless transmission of power, not to enrich a few, but to bring the world together.

With its full development and a perfect system of wireless transmission of the energy to any distance man will be able to solve all the problems of material existence. Distance, which is the chief

impediment to human progress, will be completely annihilated in thought, word and action. Humanity will be united, wars will be made impossible and peace will reign supreme. (Nikola Tesla, *Collected Papers, Vol. 2, A-184*)

Reading Tesla from the perspective of an elapsed hundred years – a hundred years down a very dreary and dangerous road that the podunks pitted and landmined for us – makes me cry. What a rare jewel he is, so of course he died penniless, that goes without saying. He was mocked, often, in his day, for his absence of avarice. He gave away his patents to George Westinghouse because he believed Westinghouse would make sure the wider public benefited. (Pause while all sigh and emit a grim chuckle.) He moved lightly among the world of things and was never confused about what “wealth” was and what it wasn’t. I think his mother made sure he got the “honey.” Erich Fromm explains ‘honey’:

Affirmation of the child’s life has two aspects; one is the care and responsibility absolutely necessary for the preservation of the child’s life and his growth. The other aspect goes further than mere preservation. It is the attitude which instills in the child a love for living, which gives him *the feeling: it is good to be alive, it is good to be a little boy or girl, it is good to be on this earth!* ... Milk is the symbol of the first aspect of love, that of care and affirmation. Honey symbolizes the sweetness of life, the love for it and the happiness in being alive. Most mothers are capable of giving “milk,” but only a minority of giving “honey” too. In order to be able to give honey, a mother must not only be a “good mother,” but a happy person – and this aim is not achieved by many. The effect on the child can hardly be exaggerated. Mother’s love for life is as infectious as her anxiety is. Both attitudes have a deep effect on the child’s whole personality; one can distinguish, indeed, among children – and adults – those who got only “milk” and those who got “milk and honey.” (*The Art of Loving*, p. 45)

If the essence of science / art / invention – is freedom, might not “a love for living” be an asset? Would not a feeling of “happiness in being alive” pull you more immediately into the ‘all of it’ that reveals the synergies and interconnections on which innovation feeds?

And wouldn’t an exuberant sense “that it is good to be on this earth!” further an imaginative ability to see from above, to see phenomena and forces not in isolation but in interdependency?

Every living thing is an engine geared to the wheelwork of the universe. Though seemingly affected only by its immediate surrounding, the sphere of external influence extends to infinite distance. There is no constellation or nebula, no sun or planet, in all the depths of limitless space, no passing wanderer of the starry heavens, that does not exercise some control over its destiny – not in the vague and delusive sense of astrology, but in the rigid and positive meaning of physical science.

More than this can be said. There is no thing endowed with life – from man, who is enslaving the elements, to the numblest creature – in all this world that does not sway it in turn. Whatever action is born from force, though it be infinitesimal, the cosmic balance is upset and universal motion results. (*Vol. 2*, p. A-172)

Tesla believed that the walls between disciplines would eventually fall, because nature is a whole that encourages wholes. He once said that it was a great day when:

The artist felt the desire of becoming a physician, an electrician, an engineer or mechanic or – whatnot – a mathematician or a financier; for it was he who wrought all these wonders and grandeur we are witnessing. It was he who abolished that small, pedantic, narrow-grooved school teaching which made of an aspiring student a galley-slave, and he who allowed freedom in the choice of subject of study according to one's pleasure and inclination, and so facilitated development...men who look far above earthly things, whose banner is Excelsior! Gentlemen, let us honor the artist, let us thank him, let us drink his health! (Nikola Tesla, *Collected Papers*, *Vol. 2*, A-102-3)

Science is not the province of the few. If the white-jackets have learned a few things – bravo – but their true fulfillment will be when they *share* what they've learned – not just with each other, but with the newly-born babies and the slightly-worn elders, and when they listen to them, and learn from them, in turn.

“...*Our Own Values*”

...[T]he Mayans just stared at him. They said they weren't workers but people, and, besides, land wasn't property but the heart of their communities. Having failed as a Marxist missionary, Marcos immersed

himself in Mayan culture. The more he learned, the less he knew. (Naomi Klein, *No Logo*)

Perhaps it is time the ‘work ethic’ was redefined and its idea reclaimed from the banal men who invoke it. In a world of... an almost runaway technology, things are increasingly making things. It is for our species, it would seem, to go on to other matters. Human matters. (Studs Terkel, *Working*, p. xxii)

But it’s not just about *sharing*. It’s about developing a consciousness tuned to an alternative vision of the world.

As a young woman back in Detroit I once attended a lecture by writer Ntozake Shange. She said her name meant “she who comes with her own things.” That phrase dug its nails into my psyche and never let go – I think because it was a clue, and that I’ve been collecting clues my whole life, clues to the puzzle of our unhappiness here in the West.

We no longer have our own things.

I had a conversation recently with one of my son’s friends. He couldn’t even imagine a world with no market. His economic categories were entirely given to him by a system that views him, essentially, as worthless, and yet he defended them as if they were his own children being slandered. This system is what we have, he intoned. And it can change. It can rebound and become better. It all depends on what we bring to it, the thoughts we have. If we believe, in our minds, that we’re free, then we can do anything. It’s what we *think* that counts.

It was disorienting talking to him. Did we inhabit the same planet? What about the forty-five thousand people a month dying in the Congo so that we may continue to worship our cool electronics? I asked him. He shrugged. “You sound so pessimistic,” he said.

That silenced me.

I puzzled and puzzled over this way of seeing things – this belief in open horizons and endless possibilities within the current system. Was I just getting old and jaded? Was I projecting my personal, restricted views onto a wider global reality, coming to unwarranted conclusions that the system was dying, when it was really just my own exhausted spirit sputtering out?

And then I recalled a book I read last year about the Internet. I was attracted by the title because it evoked qualities I associate with our future: *Small Pieces Loosely Joined*. But the more I read – the more I sat in this author’s plush, ergonomically-correct height and angle-adjustable

chair, taking in the view from his computer station, the gloomier I got.

Web conversations can be hyperthreaded because the Web, free of the drag of space and free of a permission-based social structure, unsticks our interests. The threads of our attention come unglued and are rejoined with a much thinner paste. We flit from site to site, topic to topic, according to no beat but that of our hearts. ...It is not an accident that the Web is distracting. It is the Web's hyperlinked nature to pull our attention here and there. But it is not at all clear that our new distractedness represents a weakening of our culture's intellectual powers, a lack of focus, a diversion from the important work that needs to be done, a disruption of our very important schedule. Distraction may instead represent our interest finally finding the type of time that suits it best. Maybe when set free in a field of abundance, our hunger moves us from three meals a day to day-long grazing. Our experience of time on the Web, its ungluing and regluing of threads, may be less an artifact of the Web than the Web's enabling our interest to find its own rhythm. Perhaps the Web isn't shortening our attention span. Perhaps the world is just getting more interesting. ...Ultimately, matter doesn't matter. If we can be together so successfully in a world that has no atoms, no space, no uniform time, no management, and no control, then maybe we've been wrong about what matters in the real world in the first place. ...The Web is different enough from the real world that the mistakes we've made about the real world don't distract us there. Thus, our experience of the Web is closer to the truth of our lived experience than are our ideas about our lived experience. ...The Web...creates a new, persistent public world that accumulates value with every interaction. It's a world that we build simply by using it, and what is of worth stays and adds to the Web's overall worth. (David Weinberger, p. 68-9, 174, 180, 195)

There are echoes of that young man in this. *"Don't you know that we are free? Well at least in our minds if we want to be."* Except, this isn't Sly telling us to "Stand!" Not by a long shot.

And this whole notion of "creating value with every click" that seems to have swept judgment off its feet and suckered sanity broadscale across the nation – what are they thinking, these advocates of the brave new world of bits and bytes and itty bitty brains?

OK, that's excessive – the alliteration carried me away.

But, greed aside for a moment, there's something about these new toys that makes the consumers of them *feel* 'smarter' just because they're using them. It's like a "get-out-of-study-free" card, providing cover for indolence, freedom from facing the emptiness of our lives – granting the 'user' an illusory exemption from Fromm's prerequisites for mastery: "discipline, concentration and patience throughout every phase of [your] life." "Flitting from site to site, topic to topic," is the opposite of discipline, concentration and patience. It *is* diversion, it *does* distract "from the important work that needs to be done."

And while this restless urge to be diverted and entertained that haunts our present era *seems* novel, it's really just the latest version of the "mind-worship" paradigm that's been thinning us out for centuries. Virginia Woolf commented on it, George Orwell also. Lots of our ancestors wrote about it. Erich Fromm:

Yet, even more than self-discipline, concentration is rare in our culture. On the contrary, our culture leads to an unconcentrated and diffused mode of life, hardly paralleled anywhere else. You do many things at once; you read, listen to the radio, talk, smoke, eat, drink. You are the consumer with the open mouth, eager and ready to swallow everything – pictures, liquor, knowledge. This lack of concentration is clearly shown in our difficulty in being alone with ourselves. (*The Art of Loving*, p. 99)

As Marx said, "the less you *are*, the less you express your own life, the more you *have*, i.e., the greater is your *alienated* life, the greater is the store of your estranged being."

It sounds contradictory to call the diminishment of our minds "mind-worship," so let me clarify.

When we say that 'products' are 'stored labor,' we're also saying that they are 'concentrated invention,' brought to us by those Grand Wizards of the Mighty Con, concentrated 'wealth.' And we bought it. We bought their prettily packaged lie that not only are they themselves really, really smart, but through their 'magic,' their *system*, they've graciously identified for us all the other really, really smart people out there (none of whom, of course, are *us*), and together they've kept us safe, made our lives easy, etc. etc.

But buying this lie requires us to be amazed and impressed with the awesomeness of all these really smart people (who are 'not us'). And *their* distinctiveness in the brains department must stand in stark



contrast with *our own* leveled-out conventionality.

“Mind-worship” means ‘people-diminishment.’

Flitting site to site, marveling at the miracle of weightlessness and instant access to ‘information,’ is the twenty-first century version of praying at the altar, or paying tribute to the king. But unlike what is true in the realm of love, in politics: “the more (of my soul) I give to thee, the less I have.”

As I write these words, Barack Obama is rolling through his first week as President-Elect. The *San Francisco Chronicle* not only now allows him to be above the fold (it was a constant irritation during the campaign to witness their graceless gyrations to deny him this ‘honor’), but the day after the election the entire front page was just a photo of him. Acknowledging that the man is gold right now, every business that can is trying to cash in.

All to say, that on November fifth I bought myself a copy. In the entertainment section there was a “Letters” column in response to an article about the candidates’ favorite books. A reader wrote in to say that he doubted very much that the candidates had actually read these books. Curious as to which books raised his doubts, I went to the Internet. In Barack’s<sup>15</sup> case it was *Moby Dick* by the great Herman Melville. The reader wrote, “I am very skeptical. They are obviously made to impress; they are pretentious.”

“Pretentious.” I mulled the word for a moment. The very same gloom I felt reading *Small Pieces* descended. I cried a little for Melville. There it is, the terror of every writer – irrelevance, oblivion. You read Virginia Woolf’s diaries and you find it: “*what difference does a book make?*” I asked myself that question, obviously, as I started writing this.

As a youth Tesla contracted cholera and was bedridden for nine months. Barely able to move, all he could do was read. He recounts:

One day I was handed a few volumes of new literature unlike anything I had ever read before and so captivating as to make me utterly forget my hopeless state. They were the earlier works of Mark Twain and to them might have been due the miraculous recovery which followed. Twenty-five years later, when I met Mr. Clemens and we formed a friendship between us, I told him of the experience and was amazed to see that great man of laughter burst into tears... (*Autobiography*, p. 26)

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<sup>15</sup> It’s impossible to read *Dreams From My Father* without embracing him as family.

Hello?! Melville wrote *to be read*. And like all writers he was essentially an inventor. His work, as Tesla said, “is like that of the planter – for the future...” He was writing *for us*. “*Camerado, this is no book, Who touches this touches a man.*”

*Full of life now, compact, visible,  
I, forty years old the eighty-third year of the States,  
To one a century hence or any number of centuries hence,  
To you yet unborn these, seeking you.*

*When you read these I that was visible am become invisible,  
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me,  
Fancying how happy you were if I could be with you and become your  
comrade;  
Be it as if I were with you. (Be not too certain but I am now with  
you.)*

Walt Whitman wrote *for us*. When we commune with the ancestors, when we absorb their *thought*, we become bigger: “I am large, I contain multitudes.” We *need* them. Like water. Like food. Soul-death is as real as physical death. “*Whoever you are! Claim your own at any hazard!*” *Exclamation point*. This is not a casual matter, this handing over to the podunks of our access to the ancestors, to invention, to *our right* to be *large*.

The ‘fact’ that we “don’t have the time” to read and think about what our ancestors desperately want us to know should be sufficient indictment of this mad, upside-down world to warrant our calling for an immediate ‘time-out!’ to re-think things; for us to say, “whoa! Wait a minute. Slow this sucker down! We are definitely off-track.” But we “don’t have the time” to even notice the track, or that we’re being railroaded. Herded.

(And, by the way, *of course* Barack has read, and loves, *Moby Dick*. I mean, come on dude! Are you *blind*? To say that Barack is *large* is stingy understatement. And, just so you know, for a person of color in the belly of the beast, I have to tell you, Melville is good news.)

Being large, in terms of “our own values” means resisting the values that *require* our diminishment, that say: leave it to the experts; accept style over substance; wear the false face; consume but do not act; acquiesce in the commodification of everything; abandon your fellow and think only of yourself, in the narrowest possible sense; be as little as possible

and ask for as little as possible, so that power is not threatened; co-sign the belief that a thinned-out existence is an acceptable compromise to be 'safe' or 'secure.'

Thinning us out is the only way we can be controlled. If we refused to relinquish the fullness of nature, in us and all else, if we demanded it for ourselves and for our children, then these values derived from the manual-mental divide could never be imposed.

Podrunks must sow, in us, the seeds of contempt for the natural world, and for the natural world in us, to keep us separated from our sources of power: the ancestors, the earth, and each other.

This impulse is also partly what drives the 'branding'-mania of the big corporations, <sup>16</sup> "hollowing 'things' out" in order to fill them with the 'thoughts,' the meanings, of those who see themselves as Reified Mind ("the brains of the operation," the prime mover behind the created world of 'men.')

Their propagandist machinery promotes 'hollowness' in all things. The material world, materiality, nature, doesn't matter. It doesn't 'count.' Corporations are proud to produce 'nothing.'

What these companies produced primarily were not things, they said, but *images* of their brands. Their real work lay not in manufacturing but in marketing. This formula, needless to say, has proved enormously profitable, and its success has companies competing in a race toward weightlessness: whoever owns the least, has the fewest employees on the payroll and produces the most powerful images, as opposed to products, wins the race. (Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, p. 4)

Of course, this is only 'profitable' because they can shunt responsibility for the physical bodies of the human beings who *do* produce things onto sub-contractors who will work those human beings ruthlessly, with a brutality in some ways worse than slavery.

"Before the war we owned the negroes. If a man had a good nigger, he could afford to take care of him; if he was sick get a doctor. He might even put gold plugs in his teeth. But these convicts: we don't own 'em. One dies, get another." (A Southern employer explaining the benefits of convict leasing to reformer George Washington Cable in 1883, cited in *Worse Than Slavery* by David M. Oshinsky, p. 55)

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<sup>16</sup> Naomi Klein writes about this in *No Logo*.

“What has the economist to do with inventiveness? Have not all inventions fallen into his lap without any effort on his part? Has *one* of them cost him anything?”

“I’ve always thought that underpopulated countries in Africa are vastly underpolluted.”<sup>17</sup>

“One dies, get another.”

Contempt for the actual sources of wealth – human invention, the earth, and human labor – is at the hub of their propaganda. And while, superficially, Orwellian ‘branding’ seems like bluster or bravado or arrogance only, a way of saying: “I can put whatever meaning I want on anything, and by so doing I define it, I own it, *I* make it what it is.” And though certainly it *is* Orwellian (i.e., the opposite of what it pretends to be), and carries an intent to conceal, to con: ‘War’ is ‘Peace,’ ‘*Scorched Earth*’ is ‘Green Trees,’ ‘Environmental Destruction’ is ‘Environmental Protection,’ the brutality of slave labor is casually dismissed with a ‘swoosh’ logo – there’s a deadly seriousness behind this game, a very heavy hand behind the ‘weightlessness.’ For if we ever shake off the propaganda and wake up, it’s “game over” for all their cons.

Grandmother is not impressed with all these cons. She’s growing tired of us, I fear, and I, for one, would hasten to reassure: “We hear you. Some of us aren’t deaf. Give us but a little more time, and we will find the rhyme that rights this gross imbalance, dissolve this dissonance that dominance makes. *We will.*”

Their goal has been to shape us to fit effortlessly into their dreams of dollar signs dancing merrily across spreadsheets. And to a great degree we have complied.

Towards the end of his life, the great labor leader Eugene V. Debs, when asked to name his greatest regret replied, “under our Constitution, the American people can have almost anything they want, but it just seems they don’t want much of anything at all.”<sup>18</sup>

We have subsumed our interests to those of capital, bought the lie that our interests coincide.

Now some may argue that we quite reasonably made a deal. The social contract. In exchange for a job, we agreed not to “want much of anything at all.” They wanted consumers. We became consumers. They wanted us to accept the cool electronics without asking how we got them

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17 Lawrence Summers wrote this in a memo when he was at the World Bank.

18 Ralph Nader reminded us of Debs’ words recently on *Democracy Now!*

so cheap. We didn't ask. And as they became 'lighter,' as they got out of the business of actually making things and into the business of "thinking about what things 'mean,'" in order to sell them to us, we happily joined their metaphysical project – at least those among us who could afford to. Of course now, at this juncture, fewer and fewer of us can afford to. But we are left with this legacy of 'lightness,' with an endless search for hollowed out 'meaning' and shallow symbolism. "What does the 'swoosh' *mean*?" – like it matters.

*Enough with this living in our heads!* We need different standards, a different set of values. We cannot claim *ourselves and* continue to be *them*. As capital – estranged labor – has gotten lighter, so have we. We have grafted onto our faces the big, open mouth of the podunks. We have become, we embody, their dream of limitless acquisition with every descent into the bottomless hunger of "hyperthreaded" "day-long grazing" through an abstract "field of abundance." We mimic their greed, their inability to be sated. A capitalist wet dream scaled to fit the pauper. This is the cartoon version of H.G. Wells' thinned-out, 'brain-in-a-bottle' existence. The privileged few click through their days completely oblivious to the many hands making their lives light. And, make no mistake, their lives, the clickers, those "inconvenienced by space," their lives are light, as insubstantial as avatars.

We are only ever reflecting capital. It's time to start reflecting *ourselves*. We want falsehood to remove its fucking mask! We're tired of lies and illusion and deconstructing crimes. We have way better things to do with our lives.

...like... how 'bout actually *living*? – not in cyberspace, but in *physical space*. There are ancestors with answers, just waiting for us to glance their way:

All that matters is that the opportunity for *genuine activity* be restored to the individual; that the purposes of society and of his own become identical, *not ideologically but in reality*; and that he apply his effort and reason actively to the work he is doing, as something for which he can feel responsible because it has meaning and purpose in terms of his human ends. We must replace manipulation of men by active and intelligent co-operation, and expand the principle of government of the people, by the people, for the people, from the formal political to the economic sphere. (Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, p. 271)

A lot of us know that this is what we want: to engage in *genuine activity* that has “meaning and purpose in terms of human ends.” But those who descend into the bottomless abyss of the Internet, never to be seen again (at least in terms of being intact souls), have in many ways given up on the dream of making their own physical environments in favor of ‘creating’ a personal realm of threaded thoughts. This ‘solution’ has a short shelf life, however. Eventually even the most dedicated ‘surfer,’ the most addicted ‘virtual liver’ will collapse into the boredom, the living-death, which awaits those of us too battered or lost to begin rebuilding souls left in limbo.

But in this ‘threaded’ business there is this: we are becoming one world, in *reality*, not as an abstraction – one world in the sense Tesla saw: we are sharing thoughts simultaneously. And that’s not nothing. It certainly was critical to us getting Barack elected. Once the expanded human power and agency is out there, you can’t stuff it back in.

### *Confidence is Everything – The Need for Theory*

There’s a moment in the memoir of a computer programmer when she meditates on where wealth comes from:

If wealth could not arise like life out of the primordial soup, where else did it come from? How had the efforts of fifteen people [the author and fourteen other programmers] gone on to become (according to the company’s publicity department) “the sixth-largest independent software company in the world?” (Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine*, p. 158)

She’s a good person. Like Utah Phillips, she wants to make a living, not a killing. She continues:

And what was I doing to spread around the wealth? With my little virtual company expanding and contracting, never paying a salary – what was I doing? I looked back at my rebellious [younger] self who had hated the venture capitalists. Though it’s difficult to like people with extraordinary amounts of money, still I had to admit: they weren’t just sitting on their yachts. (p. 158)

There is deep confusion – intended, of course – in America about what wealth is and where it comes from. Given the Promethean work of our ancestors to keep holding the light steady on this matter, it’s rather disheartening to find ourselves, after literally thousands of years of their efforts, still boggled.

The dictionary in this computer gives us this fragment on “Prometheus”:

“Prometheus”: a demigod, one of the Titans, who was worshiped by craftsmen. When Zeus hid fire from man, Prometheus stole it by trickery and returned it to earth. As punishment, Zeus chained him to a rock where an eagle fed each day on his liver, which grew again each night; he was rescued by Hercules.

Probing further we find:

“Hercules”: in Roman mythology, the son of Jupiter and a mortal woman, Alcmene. He was noted for his courage and great strength and was required to perform twelve near-impossible tasks, called the labors of Hercules. *Greek equivalent Heracles.*

“Jupiter”: Roman Mythology the chief god of the Roman state religion, originally a sky god associated with thunder and lightning. His wife was Juno. Also called Jove. Greek equivalent Zeus. [ORIGIN: Latin, from *Jovis pater*, literally ‘Father Jove.’]

“Alcmene”: in Greek mythology, wife of Amphitryon. While her husband was away at war, Zeus visited Alcmene disguised as Amphitryon. She later gave birth to two sons, Hercules and Iphicles.

So, “the chief god of the Roman state religion” essentially raped a commoner, out of which union Hercules was born who grew up to defend the common people.

Using the above as metaphor, “fire” is the great communal mind – “knowledge,” “invention,” the wisdom of the ancestors – that the state continually attempts to usurp, to steal from the people.

I like to think of myself as a member of the Tribe of Hercules – not card-carrying yet, but maybe one day – that seeks to keep Prometheus alive. Among us walks Eduardo Galeano, who has some insights for Ellen:

Today, utterly bloated, finance capital has put the productive system to work for it, while it plays with the real economy like a cat with a mouse.

Every crash on the stock exchange is a catastrophe for small investors who swallowed the line and bet their savings on the financial lottery. And it’s a catastrophe for the poorest barrios of

the global village, whose residents suffer the consequences without ever knowing what caused them: in a single blow each “market correction” empties their plates and wipes out their jobs. But rarely do crises on the stock exchange fatally wound the suffering millionaires who, day after day, backs bent over their computers, fingertips calloused from the keyboards, redistribute the world’s wealth by moving money, setting interest rates, and deciding the value of labor, commodities, and currencies. They are the only workers who could refute the anonymous scribe who wrote on a wall in Montevideo: “He who works has no time to make money.” (*Upside Down*, p. 158-9)

“Though it’s difficult to like people with extraordinary amounts of money, still I had to admit: they weren’t just sitting on their yachts.”

It’s bizarre when you think about it, this reverence for “hard work” irrespective of what the work is. By this logic – and the current governor of the state where I live has admitted he’s bought into it <sup>19</sup> – Hitler is admirable because he “worked hard.”

No, those who obsessively seek ‘opportunities’ for their venture capital; those who slice and dice fictitious funds, dilute and pollute pooled mortgages into toxic brews they call ‘derivatives;’ those who ‘ingeniously’ invent ways to manipulate the energy supply to sow bottlenecks and reap ‘profits;’ those with a flair for dropping workers down shafts – it’s true, they aren’t laying about on yachts. Would they were. <sup>20</sup>

The ancestors did not steadfastly procure and package their ‘figuring out’ for it to molder on shelves and dissolve into dust. They wrote *for us*. They worked *for us*. They are rooting *for us*. It’s incumbent on us, therefore, to pay attention; but beyond this, to synthesize and advance their gift – to use it, shape it to fit our particular challenges.

The vast vault of waiting communal wisdom, the ancestors’ collective ‘longing,’ can only be realized if we tap into it.

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19 When Arnold Schwarzenegger first ran for governor of California we learned that he “admires Hitler,” and that he groped women with less power than he on movie sets. Those two facts told me all I needed to know about this man.

20 One can’t help but think of the ‘industriousness’ of the restless Europeans who scoured the world for ‘free stuff’ they could steal from all those ‘lazy’ folks who wanted only to live and love and honor the ancestors well, all the colonizers who justified their theft of others’ lands with the reasoning, “but they were doing nothing with it.”



The *discriminator* in any nugget we may happen upon that allows us to distinguish gold from not-gold is a solid core of love and solidarity with the “*yet unborn these.*”

But I propose another discriminator: a set of values, a theory. It could be argued (I am arguing) that it is for want of a theory that synthesizes and advances the *longing* of the ancestors for our freedom – for generalized human freedom – that we are held back.

Now of course we already have a quite excellent theory – the labor theory of value – given us by a giant figure for working people, Karl Marx. Its’ power to explain is unparalleled along our circuitous path towards freedom. So why hasn’t it become the practical, popular tool he intended it to be?

But that’s like asking why my well-built boat won’t float when it’s sitting in the backyard, when it can’t reach the sea and the sea can’t reach it; shit – the sea don’t even know it’s there.

And why doesn’t it? Why don’t *we*? There’s the reasons we’ve already discussed: the blinders the mass media and the state install on every noble cranium, the tunnel vision of the job, the slash-and-burn on worker solidarity done by all of the above. But rotating the question a good quarter turn produces another vantage, another lens to look through.

While we can use Marx’s designs to inform our own, we need to build our own boat, based on what we see around us, and where we find ourselves today.

Emily Dickinson has said:

To fill a Gap  
Insert the Thing that caused it –  
Block it up  
With Other – and ‘twill yawn the more –  
You cannot solder an Abyss  
With Air

There is a gap between the theories developed to advance our consciousness as powerful historical subjects, and our lived reality. There is a mismatch between the assumptions the theories make about our experience, and our experience.

The theory that we can seize in our hands and apply to the problem of the “democratic introjection of the masters,” must offer a closer correspondence between what’s in our heads and what’s in our

hands. The theory crafted to impact our present reality must recognize the extent of our investment in our present dilemmas as we live them, and the depth of our trauma. It must comprehend our constraints, complicity and pain, and see our rich cultures.

So what's missing in Marx's theory is what's missing in us: solid, intact souls.

Marx appealed to our reasoning, but it's our hearts that are broken.

Our theory must explain how we will restore our souls – it must show the way to *wholeness*.

We *are* the walking wounded. What has been insufficiently weighed and measured is our great grief at having been stripped bare and stood in the rain. Such treatment cannot happen to a soul without leaving its indelible mark. And what do we tell children to do, or any suffering spirit for that matter, if they experience abuse? To speak it.

Marlon Riggs devised a relevant formula: "Anger unvented becomes pain, unspoken becomes rage, released becomes violence, cha cha cha." (Repeat.)

Pain requires recognition, and a joining of hands, in order to heal.

In Ousmane Sembene's great novel about the struggle of Senegalese workers to unionize, one character says:

"Real misfortune is not just a matter of being hungry and thirsty; it is a matter of knowing that there are people who want you to be hungry and thirsty – and that is the way it is with us." (*God's Bits of Wood*, p. 101)

And that is the way it is with us.

When human solidarity is broken, a chasm opens in the soul, pain rushes in and sprays its seeds that lodge like thorns, they tear and chafe and wear away a resistance buried much too deep to reach.

And when we join with the masters in raping the earth and our fellows, it's not a comfortable thing to scrutinize our image in the mirror. Much more likely the mirror will be put away on a shelf to gather dust when it offers no way out.

In Marxist theory our spiritual imbalance is supposedly righted when we're handed the reins to the horse. But you look at the reins and they're slick with blood, you turn around and there's no seat to sit on, you look behind and... what *is* the horse pulling?

These are not small matters.

Or imagine being offered a seat at the head of the table but the room has no air, the chair hurts your back, the table wobbles, and the menu is sweetened greed poured over crushed ancestral dreams. Then you get up to leave and you find the house is on fire and you realize you should have paid better attention when James Baldwin warned against integrating into a burning house.

Illusion up to now has been a semi-comfortable thing here in America. At least for those with jobs that pay enough to cover the bills. And it does seem that a little ‘discomfort’ may be a necessary lens in order to ‘see’ reality, “creatures of illusion as we are.”

‘Fortunately’ crises are sprouting in abundance at present, providing us an extraordinarily rich opportunity for waking up.

There’s a scene in the film *Thelma and Louise* when a depressed Louise is sitting in the T-bird alone and notices two women, older versions of herself, watching her through a window, and we have one of those “is this all there is?” moments, when you see the trajectory of her life condensed into a second. In that moment it seems it will occur to her that the life she’d been living was not really living at all, and that the path opening up may actually be an affirmative one. We learn later that the same process has been happening with Thelma as well, when she says to Louise, “Are you awake? ...Me too. I feel awake – wide awake. I don’t remember ever feeling this awake. You know what I mean? Everything looks different. You ever feel like that too? Like you got something to look forward to?” And when she fears Louise is having second thoughts, and she tells her, “Something’s crossed over in me and I can’t go back. I mean, I just couldn’t live,” I felt a dull ache in my stomach at the uncomfortable truth that in this system, as it’s currently constituted, freedom is not an option.

But it’s hard to face that reality without the support of a theory that points to the door and illuminates the view.

How do we know what to make of anything without theory?

Theory’s not a crutch. It’s a lens that renders focus from distortion. And unless, and until, we get focused, we are but so much dust to the winds from above.

When the computer programmer went back to the corporate headquarters of the software company she helped found, she credited venture capitalists for ‘creating’ the very building she stood staring at, the incomes of the people who worked there, the ‘expansion’ of economies globally – for cranking out ‘jobs’ and ‘consumer products.’

Is hiring people “spreading the wealth around?” – if it’s the government doing the hiring, perhaps. But, climbing to a higher perch, if ‘wealth’ is the ancestors, the earth and each other, communing and fertilizing within us, then obviously, no, whoever does the hiring. If ‘wealth’ is human labor made manifest, then obviously, no. The notion that hiring people is ‘sharing the wealth’ with them’ is illusion, a myth, a con. And while I’m writing about global capitalism, this is no less true when the business is small and the market is local, though the smaller and more local the business, the less destructive of true wealth it is.

I believe we have three sources of power: *the ancestors*, *the earth*, and *each other* – roughly corresponding to *mind* (fire, past), *body* (earth, future), and *spirit* (wind, present), as well as capital, land, and labor; and that the podunks have subjugated us by dividing us from our sources of power.

In the case of the ancestors, this is done by denying us their plain language, rewriting history, and by creating laws and rules that allow the seizure of our common legacies, both physical and cultural.

I’m not saying anything new. Fifty years ago, Fromm wrote:

Modern capitalism needs men who co-operate smoothly and in large numbers...

What is the outcome? Modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow men, and from nature. He has been transformed into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions. Human relations are essentially those of alienated automatons, each basing his security on staying close to the herd, and not being different in thought, feeling or action. While everybody tries to be as close as possible to the rest, everybody remains utterly alone, pervaded by the deep sense of insecurity, anxiety and guilt which always results when human separateness cannot be overcome. Our civilization offers many palliatives which help people to be consciously unaware of this aloneness: first of all the strict routine of bureaucratized, mechanical work, which helps people to remain unaware of their most fundamental human desires, of the longing for transcendence and unity. Inasmuch as the routine alone does not succeed in this, man overcomes his unconscious despair by the routine of amusement, the passive consumption of sounds and sights offered

by the amusement industry; furthermore by the satisfaction of buying ever new things, and soon exchanging them for others. Modern man is actually close to the picture Huxley describes in his *Brave New World*: well fed, well clad, satisfied sexually, yet without self, without any except the most superficial contact with his fellow men, guided by the slogans which Huxley formulated so succinctly, such as “When the individual feels, the community reels”; or “Never put off till tomorrow the fun you can have today;” or, as the crowning statement: “Everybody is happy nowadays.” Man’s happiness today consists in “having fun.” Having fun lies in the satisfaction of consuming and “taking in” commodities, sights, food, drinks, cigarettes, people, lectures, books, movies – all are consumed, swallowed. The world is one great object for our appetite, a big apple, a big bottle, a big breast; we are the sucklers, the eternally expectant ones, the hopeful ones – and the eternally disappointed ones. Our character is geared to exchange and to receive, to barter and to consume; everything, spiritual as well as material objects, becomes an object of exchange and of consumption...Automatons cannot love; they can exchange their “personality packages” and hope for a fair bargain. (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 77-9)

Modern man has transformed himself into a commodity; he experiences his life energy as an investment with which he should make the highest profit, considering his position and the situation on the personality market. He is alienated from himself, from his fellow men and from nature. His main aim is profitable exchange of his skills, knowledge, and of himself, his “personality package” with others who are equally intent on a fair and profitable exchange. Life has no goal except the one to move, no principle except the one of fair exchange, no satisfaction except the one to consume. (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 95)

“Modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow men, and from nature.”

So what is needed beyond these insights that will move the elephant? – You know the cautionary tale about the elephant chained to a stake, year after year, until, when the stake is removed and the elephant *could* walk away, it doesn’t. Well, the question for our age, for where we are now, we representatives of global humanity, is: What will enable the

elephant to recall its power? The assumption must always be that it will, because it is our biological inheritance. The issue, then, is: when do we begin to trust it?

We have to confront the depth of our brainwashing – and the depth of our grief.

Kevin Danaher, promoting an upcoming “Green Festival” on the KPFA radio program *Living Room with Kris Welch*,<sup>21</sup> said that “the green economy is going to be the next economy,” that “[it] generates more jobs.” For him the key question is “how did you generate the surplus? Did you exploit people? Did you exploit nature?”

And just now I heard left economist Doug Henwood basically concur on his radio program *Behind the News*,<sup>22</sup> speaking hopefully about the potential of “green economics” to address our twin current crises, ecological and financial, because it promises, he believes, “just and sustainable economic growth.”

Both of these honorable men, unless I misconstrue, seem to be saying that we can ‘reform’ capitalism, make it “just and sustainable,” we need not abolish it. I think these statements emerge from the depths of the cons: because “nothing else seems possible,” “we must make do with what we have.” This is the wishful thinking of “mind-workers” who cannot truly believe common folk capable of seizing and shaping our own world. We need capitalism because it *organizes* production for us. How else will it get organized? they wonder. Yet the factory workers of Paris had no doubts about their ability to run the factory without masters. So why does Doug?

The key word in the above is ‘organize.’ As Marcuse said, “organization demands counter-organization.” Fromm suggests the same:

Today the vast majority of the people not only have no control over the whole of the economic machine, but they have little chance to develop genuine initiative and spontaneity at the particular job they are doing. They are “employed,” and nothing more is expected from them than that they do what they are told. *Only in a planned economy in which the whole nation has rationally mastered the economic and social forces can the individual share responsibility and use creative intelligence in his work.* All that matters is that the opportunity for genuine activity be restored to the individual;

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21 Of Thursday, November 13, 2008.

22 The *Behind the News* that aired on KPFA on November 15, 2008.

that the purposes of society and of his own become identical, not ideologically but in reality; and that he apply his effort and reason actively to the work he is doing, as something for which he can feel responsible because it has meaning and purpose in terms of his human ends. We must replace manipulation of men by active and intelligent co-operation, and expand the principle of government of the people, by the people, for the people, from the formal political to the economic sphere. (*Escape From Freedom*, p. 271)

Now does a “green economy” accomplish this? Obviously, “no.” So why do our good-hearted brothers and sisters, who care as passionately as I do about the ailing planet and our suffering fellows of all species, not cut to the heart of the problem, as Fromm does, and Marcuse does, and Marx does, and Polanyi does, and Dickinson, and Melville, and Woolf do? So many countless, unnamed, unheralded ancestors have told us, over and over and over, that “human intelligence is like water, air, and fire – it cannot be bought or sold.” So why do we persist in not believing them? And *if* we do, *if* we believe them, why do we not act?

The State (and the family and the workplace) is the means of transmission of the Mr. Smith virus – the host. To say this doesn’t mean that all efforts to govern ourselves non-hierarchically are doomed to failure, just as the abolition of wage-work doesn’t mean that no one will work. Abolishing wage work simply means returning to reality from our long dream. As Polanyi told us sixty-four years ago:

The crucial point is this: labor, land, and money are essential elements of industry; they also must be organized in markets; in fact, these markets form an absolutely vital part of the economic system. But labor, land, and money are obviously not commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them. In other words, according to the empirical definition of a commodity they are not commodities. (p. 72)

In other words, our economic system is erected on illusions.

To the suppression of this truth the full weight of the state has been concentrated.

But our bodies know the truth of it, which is why, once fully trapped or trained, we sleep-walk our way through life, waiting for it to be over.

Unless one awakes, at which point one of those *Thelma and Louise* moments occurs when you realize, “I can’t go back;” because, as Walter Lundquist says, in *Working*, “Once you wake up the human animal you can’t put it back to sleep again.”

So, to our sleeping elephant: “what do you require, my love?”

I suspect you require a few fellows with faith, who bring a few more, who bring a few more, until a veritable cascade of elephants makes sleep impossible. David Bodanis said, in  $E=MC^2$ , that, “the interesting thing is that almost anything that steadily accumulates will turn out to grow in terms of simple squared numbers.” Tesla puts it this way:

Let me tell you of another comforting feature. The progress in a measured time is nowadays more rapid and greater than it ever was before. This is quite in accordance with the fundamental law of motions, which commands acceleration and increase of momentum or accumulation of energy under the action of a continuously acting force and tendency, and is the more true as every advance weakens the elements tending to produce friction and retardation. For after all, what is progress, or – more correctly – development, or evolution, if not a movement, infinitely complex and often unscrutinizable, it is true, but nevertheless exactly determined in quantity as well as in quality of motion by the physical conditions and laws governing? (p. A-102)

Once we get going, and we are already going, and have been for centuries, we *will* get to where biology – the hand bending the moral arc – tends: to freedom. So those of us who see this course, and believe in it as our inheritance, and *feel* the restless responsibility to help “weaken the elements tending to produce friction and retardation” – i.e. the depth of our brainwashing and the depth of our grief – *are* becoming the critical mass.

But the majority lack confidence in the *possibility* of movement. Barack once observed (in *Dreams*): “the continuing struggle to align... our heartfelt desires with a workable plan – [doesn’t] self-esteem finally depend on just this?”

Just as the sickness self-reinforces – the family, the job, the state – so does our bend toward balance: the circle of ‘longing,’ leading to ‘theory,’ leading to certainty, leading to ‘a workable plan,’ leading to... ‘self-esteem’... leading to a wider circle of longing.



And as Barack has also told us: “in politics, like religion, power lay in certainty.”

Certainty.

You do the analysis, and then you *know* – or...sometimes, you just *know*.

Now ‘knowing’ doesn’t necessarily mean being ‘correct’ – correct analysis leading to correct conclusions – but it generally does cause others to take a closer look, giving ideas that are great, that are timely, that are for the moment they speak to, juice.

At *this* moment, the correctness of Barack’s analysis has borne magical fruit – we have sudden visible proof of the truth of alchemy.

In transitional moments truth has wings – things *are* abruptly, when they *seemed* not. And theory lightens the load for truth – it allows freer movement, it allows momentum to build faster.

What was it that made Thomas Paine such a force if not *certainty*?

The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. ‘Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent – of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe. ‘Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed time of continental union, faith and honor. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound will enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full-grown characters...

The independence of this country on Britain or any other...is now the main and only object worthy of contention, and...like all other truths discovered by necessity, will appear clearer and stronger every day.

First. Because it will come to that one time or other.

Secondly. Because, the longer it is delayed the harder it will be to accomplish. (Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*)

“The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth.” And – it *will* happen. Period.

So the only question is: how much pain? How much stress? How much fear and dislocation? How much confusion? How much grief, before goodness has the last word?

## *Honoring / Listening to the Ancestors (Paying Attention)*

It's important to remember that the ancestors have been working on the questions that absorb us for quite some time, and that their collective work is like a Great Commons of Creation, ever evolving, ever becoming itself. And while I'm certainly not suggesting that there's some 'end-point' the great communal mind is aiming for, I do believe that the ancestors' collective 'longing' for their work to be claimed, found 'good,' and then used and improved, is the 'source' of our questions, our dissatisfaction, and our probing of the world.

In the trades it's very frustrating when your work gets torn out and it all has to be redone. Guys may say, "hey, it all pays the same," but when you put love and attention into 'making it pretty,' getting the bend right, finding the perfect route, and then you're told to just tear it out and throw it on the bone-pile, well, it can feel like stormy weather.

On the other hand, if you're coming behind somebody, and you discover that they took time with their work, that they thought about you, who came after – and so the wires are long enough to make up, the boxes are set flush with the sheetrock, the connections are solid, the locknuts are tight – well, it feels good: human solidarity has been honored.

But human solidarity is more than a pact with the living – it's a pact with the dead and unborn as well. Their presence is with us, whether we know it or not, whether we care or not.

The more one tries to live in the present, it seems, the more one learns the inseparability of time, the artifice of our construction of the trinity of experience; yesterday, today, tomorrow meld into one another, blur in and out. We move between them at the speed of memory or of anticipation. Trying to remain in the moment is like living in three dimensions, in sheerly physical space; the mind doesn't seem to be whole unless it also occupies the dimension of time, which grants to things their depth and complexity, the inherent dignity and drama of their histories, the tragedy of their possibilities. What then can it mean to "be here now"? That discipline of paying attention to things-as-they-are in the present seems simply to reveal the way the nature of each thing is anchored to time's passage, cannot exist outside of time. (Mark Doty, *Heaven's Coast*, p. 7-8)

Yet we live in a system that does everything it can to rip us *out* of time. When you want to make slaves of a people, you must rob them of their pasts.

In every slave society, slave owners attempted to eradicate the slave's memory, that is, to erase all the evidence of an existence before slavery. This was as true in Africa as in the Americas. A slave without a past had no life to avenge. No time was wasted yearning for home, no recollections of a distant country slowed her down as she tilled the soil, no image of her mother came to mind when she looked into the face of her child. The pain of all she had lost did not rattle in her chest and make it feel tight. The absentminded posed no menace...*Manta uwa* made you forget your kin, lose sight of your country, and cease to think of freedom. It expunged all memories of a natal land, and it robbed the slave of spiritual protection. Ignorant of her lineage, to whom could the slave appeal? No longer able to recall the shrines or sacred groves or water deities or ancestor spirits or fetishes that could exact revenge on her behalf, she was defenseless. No longer anyone's child, the slave had no choice but to bear the visible marks of servitude and accept a new identity in the household of the owner.

It was one thing to be a stranger in a strange land, and an entirely worse state to be a stranger to yourself. (Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, p. 155, 157)

And while the formal slave system is foul food, recall it comes from the capitalist pot, and the point of a capitalist system is to make us *all* strangers to ourselves, to rob us *all* of memory, of meaning, and of all allegiance except to those who pretend to rule us.

Elaborate strategies to detach the captured and enslaved from their memories of home were necessary, from a podunk view, because 'home' – structures, customs, traditions – had been built *with their own hands*. What the enslaved are required to 'renounce,' to 'forget,' is their *power*, their ability to be self-determinative.

But once capital has made for itself a world in its own image, once we no longer have "our own things," our own *places, customs, and traditions, made with our own hands*, once disempowerment is *built into* the constructed environment itself, overt violence is no longer necessary.

Our diminishment, our reduction to single cells with the sole allegiance ‘work,’ means we’re not only stripped of our ancestors, we’re stripped of *our place* within the web of the human story. We aren’t cherished as children, honored as elders, *or sought* as ancestors.

My son’s favorite books as a small child and adolescent were a series by Liverpool writer Brian Jacques (pronounced ‘Jakes’). The heroes are brave mice along with their numerous woodland friends – otters, hares, moles, badgers, beavers, voles, squirrels, hedgehogs – that made, with their own hands, a village behind fortress walls called Redwall Abbey. Early on in *Redwall*, the tapestry is introduced:

This was the pride and joy of Redwall. The oldest part had been woven by the Founders of the Abbey, but each successive generation had added to it; thus the tapestry was not only a priceless treasure, it was also a magnificent chronicle of early Redwall history.

The Abbot studied the wonderment in Matthias’s eyes as he asked him a question, the answer to which the wise mouse already knew. “What are you looking at, my son?”

Matthias pointed to the figure woven into the tapestry. It was a heroic-looking mouse with a fearless smile on his handsome face. Clad in armor, he leaned casually on an impressive sword, while behind him foxes, wildcats and vermin fled in terror. The young mouse gazed in admiration.

“Oh, Father Abbot,” he sighed. “If only I could be like Martin the Warrior. He was the bravest, most courageous mouse that ever lived!” (Brian Jacques, *Redwall*, p. 14)

To put the warrior way into perspective, the Abbot explains:

“We are mice of peace. Oh, I know that Martin was a warrior mouse, but those were wild days when strength was needed...So fierce a fighter was Martin that he faced the enemy single-pawed, driving them mercilessly, far from Mossflower...Then something seemed to come over him. He was transformed by what could only be called a mouse miracle. Martin forsook the way of the warrior and hung up his sword...That was when our Order found its true vocation. All the mice took a solemn vow never to harm another living creature, unless it was an enemy that sought to harm our Order by violence. They vowed to heal the sick, care for the injured, and give aid to the wretched and impoverished. So was it written, and so has it been through all the ages of

mousekind since... Today, we are a deeply honored and highly respected Society. Anywhere we go, even far beyond Mossflower, we are treated with courtesy by all creatures. Even predators will not harm a mouse who wears the habit of our Order. They know he or she is one who will heal and give aid. It is an unwritten law that Redwall mice can go anywhere, through any territory, and pass unharmed. At all times we must live up to this. It is our way, our very life.” (Brian Jacques, *Redwall*, p. 15-6)

Later in the story, when the mice of the Abbey are forced to become warriors again, in order to resist enslavement, Matthias has a moment of uncertainty and returns to the tapestry to ask for guidance and restore his self-confidence:

Feeling at a loss, he wandered up into the Great Hall and stood in front of the tapestry. Without consciously realizing it, he found himself talking to Martin the Warrior.

“Oh Martin, what would you have done in my place? I know that I’m only a young mouse, a novice not even a proper Redwall member yet, but once you were young too. I know what you would have done... But alas, those days are gone. I have no magic sword to aid me, only the advice of my elders and betters, to which I must listen.”

Matthias sat down upon the cool stone floor. He gazed longingly up a Martin the Warrior, so proud, so brave... (p. 60)

The idea of being part of a living tapestry of yesterday, today and tomorrow, that life is a river, ever-flowing – rich, turgid, and radiant – deeply moved my son.

The idea of capturing the history of a community in cloth, caught in the web of *our* invention – in oral tradition, in song, dance, story and myth – in all our artistic creations – resonates particularly with children because they’ve come freshly from that river, its droplets still cling to their ankles, their feet long for the feel of it between their toes.

And when all of us lie on that beach and soak up that sun, we soak up memory too; we remember how it was, before masters made our life a misery, a mockery of real life.

The power of the ancestors isn’t only in their written or spoken words. It’s in the hymn they made of their lives when they loved.

When you linger in ancient places, touch the wood that long-dead

hands planed, drink their reverence for ancient forests or communal lands or traditional herbal remedies, you're absorbing their *thought* too. Their passion, love, and longing, brims in what they leave behind, is their legacy to us. That is what calls to us if we are to "claim [our] own at any hazard!"

When you *know* – and the ancestors can help you know – that the current system in all its manifestations is a dead-end, then options become visible you may not otherwise see.

*What the ancestors whisper in your ear is that no one else can tell you what work you're here to do.*

Was E.D. Morel's 'work' pushing paper in a shipping office? Or was it in the Congo, in putting pen to paper, in asking questions – in hearing screams four thousand miles away?

What if E.D. Morel had never asked *his* questions, the ones he was here to ask?

Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity. (Albert Einstein)

Questioning is *holy*.

It means full engagement with the world, with "the mysteries of eternity, of life."

When you engage fully, you become a hymn in praise of the universe. The more we probe our questions – ask them of all those who've worked on them before – the closer we get to our *true work*.

But full engagement is *structurally* impossible in a regimented culture. 'Jobs' have a way of narrowing us, making us small. But if we recognize that our true work is to honor our questions, seek answers, become *large*, then whatever we have to do for a wage (for now), whatever petty tasks the bosses impose, falls into its' proper place – in the corner with all the other dust. Sweep it out of your mind! It's an irrelevance on our long, circuitous path to freedom. If you *know* that,

if you know that your true job is to become large, and to seek out the ancestors that will assist you with that, it can help to erase the self-negation tapes that jobs iterate.

The job teaches us that we're expendable, that we're 'on our own,' *small*, minimized to the point of irrelevance. And the longer we're in a job, the smaller we get.

I'm sure we could make a formula of it:

*Size of the soul = the reciprocal of number of years worked times the ratio of total deferred dreams to the number of days of work-related depression.*

(I'm starting to feel depressed just thinking about it.)

But the ancestors remind us that we are *large and infinite*. They draw us to the depths and heights, beyond the reach of podrunke spite.

As we follow our questions out, picking up the breadcrumbs the ancestors drop for us, we begin to *feel* their presence, begin to be aware of their *longing* for us to become bigger...and bigger still – and the feeling iterates and reiterates: “we are far too big for jobs,” far too deep for the shallow categories of podrunke-think.

In Detroit, twenty-seven years ago, when I was twenty-seven, on the second anniversary of my father's death:

A man stopped me in the street as I came back from the store... He was wearing a red-checkered woolen coat and a hat. His face was youthful, though he talked as if he'd been living a while. A smiling, friendly, white face. He wondered if I might know where the old mortuary school was that used to be in this neighborhood years and years ago. He said he wanted to get hold of his records, but that he'd used another name then, a different social security number, because, well, those were the times, you had to eat, and an egg was more precious than money. (What times were these? Where did he come from, this man, with such a youthful face?) He said, well, he'd find it, and he went along, wishing me luck with my studies. (How did he know I studied?) He turned back to say to me: “Always keep studying. Take your time and keep at it, even if it takes a hundred years, at least you'll be moving with the times and you'll be able to understand them.”

So odd, this happening today. It was like receiving a gift from my father. Take your time, he said, as if he could see into my brain, into my soul. (Journal entry, 1981)

I recall the encounter as eerie, like an encounter with a ghost. I guess because most white men would not assume that a Black woman walking the streets of urban America, hauling her groceries home, studied anything more challenging than her nails.

It was a gift, though, ghost or no ghost. The *certainty* of his words rang true.

“Always keep studying,” he said.

But how do you do that, in a job?

Another way of asking the question is: “how do you keep studying when you’re a slave, a ‘worker,’ stuck in a box on an auction block?”

### *Listening to Our Bodies Is Sacrosanct*

Energy seeks its source. Electrons just wanna do that thing, it’s their nature fulfilling itself..But *we* are energy. We *also* seek our source. We’re like water finding its level.

As we left The Hill that day, after showing me the route to Building 69, A asked me, “Do you regret it? Going into the trades?”

As she waited for a response, I thought of my blown lungs, my sore back and my busted knees. And I thought about what Juan, a journeyman I’d worked with, had said to me once. We were walking back to the parking lot after work. He was actually my journeyman at the time, since I was an apprentice and I’d been assigned to him. He was the most tolerant of JWs any apprentice could hope for, very calm and grounded, very low-key, raw, and real.

He said to me, “You know Pam, a lot of guys point to buildings they worked on and say, ‘I put in those feeders. I put in those lights. I did the underground on that job.’ Me, when I look at buildings I worked on, I think, ‘*that’s* the one got my knees – *that one* took my shoulder. *That one* busted my elbow.”

He’s right of course. But the theft goes beyond that – though, believe me, I’m not making light of the sacrifice of our physical health to the god of profit.

But I’d lost track of my *whole* self before I went into the trades, and that’s a question to look at too. *When* did I lose myself, and how?

And wasn’t there a sense in which helping to install the electrical in various buildings helped me reclaim some lost bits? I’d tried before, with martial arts – why wasn’t that enough?



Because capital and labor are *the same*, as Engels said, when viewed from a high enough perch, and because capital has, politically, been successful in moving *us* over onto *their* side of the imbalance sheet, with the earth in resistance on the other side, our thoughts and preoccupations tend to mirror those of the podunks.

If we stop to think about it – and podunks hope you never do – we have seriously placed our bets on the wrong horse. This is Marcuse's point again. We have become them not just materially, but spiritually. Because everything is a commodity – water, oxygen, soil, the 'right' to pollute, sex, status, piety, pleasure, poetry, health, people, therapy, corporations, companionship – we all share a common *absence*, share in common *the void*. We are all united in being nothing.

And because *everything* gets hollowed out and thinned, it's more important than ever before that we embrace fully the earth when it speaks.

To fill a Gap  
Insert the Thing that caused it –  
Block it up  
With Other – and 'twill yawn the more –  
You cannot solder an Abyss  
With Air

Each generation is biologically predisposed to fill its gaps – to be connected...to those who've gone before, and to those who come after.

We are biologically predisposed to be diffuse as to 'time.' Our boundaries bend, and wrap around themselves.

But what we *cannot* be, and maintain any semblance of ourselves, is distinct, isolated atoms caught in an eternal present.

We are not only wired to be large, we're wired to seek, maintain and extend the tapestry. We *long* to be embedded in a web of relations, to know where we came from, where we are, and where we will go.

And when our parents freeze us out from answers to these questions, and the job likewise, and the mass media ditto, we fall asleep, fulfill the minimal roles required of us, and then slip quietly into eternity.

It *is* a conundrum. In order to become large – to weave our *place* in the tapestry – we need the ancestors. In order to claim the ancestors we need to study. In order to study we need...permission.

But permission is the one thing we cannot give ourselves, or our children.

When we're initiated "into an adult world of limit and sorrow," we're told that 'freedom' is not our birthright, but must be *achieved*. We must follow orders, follow the sequence of steps laid out for us, and, then, if we *work* really, really hard, we'll be placed above others and allowed to boss them. That this 'reward' is not 'freedom,' is never discussed. Generally we discover the fact too late to act upon it.

There's a very funny recent article in the "Back To School Edition" of the satirical newspaper, *the Onion*. The title is "6-Year-Old Stares Down Bottomless Abyss of Formal Schooling":

Local first-grader Connor Bolduc, 6, experienced the first inkling of a coming lifetime of existential dread Monday upon recognizing his cruel destiny to participate in compulsory education for the better part of the next two decades, sources reported.

"I don't want to go to school," Bolduc told his parents, the crushing reality of his situation having yet to fully dawn on his naïve consciousness. "I want to play outside with my friends."...

After learning that the first grade will continue for eight excruciating months beyond that date, it was only a matter of time before Bolduc inquired into what grade comes after first grade, and, when told, would probe further into how many grades he will have to complete before allowed to play with his friends.

The answer to that fatal question – 12, a number too large for Bolduc to count on the fingers of both hands – will be enough to nearly shatter the boy's still-forming psyche, said child psychology expert Eli Wasserbaum.

"When you consider that it doesn't include another four years of secondary education, plus five more years of medical school, if he wants to follow his previously stated goal to grow up to be a doctor like his daddy, this will come as an interminably deep chasm of drudgery and imprisonment to [Connor]," said Wasserbaum. "It's difficult to know the effect on his psychological well-being when he grasps the full truth: that his education will be followed by approximately four decades of work, bills, and taxes, during which he will also rear his own children to face the same fate, all of which will, of course, be followed by a brief, almost inconsequential retirement, and his inevitable death."

"Even a 50-year-old adult would have trouble processing such a monstrous notion," Wasserbaum added. "Oh my God, I'm 50 years old." (*the Onion*, Fall, 2008)

Gotta laugh to keep from crying, right?

But...what if...What if, when Connor said to his parents, “I don’t want to go to school,” they replied...

“...OK.”

?

Before the housing bubble, my son and I managed, with my mother’s help, to secure a loan for a tiny house in Berkeley. Because I’d promised to consider a dog if we ever got our own place, I was forced to craft some qualifications that no dog could possibly meet.

We didn’t have a lot of space, so it couldn’t be a big dog; my son and I both have allergies, so it would have to be hypoallergenic; our neighbors live practically within arm’s reach, so silence had to be an option; and given how over-worked and exhausted I was, like every other wage-slave, the dog really needed to be low-maintenance (i.e. not shed a lot).

I felt certain the hypoallergenic part would settle the question.

But then a television program around that time revealed the existence of a breed that sounded excellent for people with allergies, a “Mexican hairless.” One look at it and my son and I both fell deeply into doubt about my requirements.

“It looks like a rat,” my son said finally. He looked very glum. He hesitated. “Maybe I could love it.”

I took pity on him and admitted the truth – it was hideous.

He started pouring over dog books when we went to the bookstore. We’d look at them together, inserting first one photo, then another into our domestic fantasy of ‘dog.’ Suddenly an image of pure royalty appeared on the page. His carriage was erect. His eyes blazed with intelligence. Shorthaired, neat, very symmetrically square, a superior canine if there ever was. He was looking up at his owner with such an intense longing to please that my heart warmed. We scrolled down for the name of this miracle on four legs.

“A basenji,” it said.

The description it gave sounded like it was crafted to our specifications – perfect for tight quarters; hypoallergenic; and, amazingly, it didn’t bark!

That was about sixteen years ago. I tell myself, if only we’d just gone to the Pound and trusted the universe, if only we’d had the Internet...

But we didn't. The difficulties of sharing space with this breed are legion and I won't bore you with them here. Suffice to say that they seem to have been placed on the planet to show humans what control freaks we are. But writing this is forcing me to think about it all and I really don't want to do that. Let's just fast-forward through horror upon horror upon stress upon much mutual recrimination, culminating in the following scene: a mother and her twelve year-old son crouched on the kitchen floor with two basenjis, one very pregnant, the other a male, leashed to a table-leg. The female is pacing and making odd noises and the humans are following her around, even more nervous than she is.

The power goes out. Panic erupts. Where's the flashlight?

Omigod! It's happening! They're starting to come! *Where's the floss?!* I wrote about it in my journal:

T and I watched as the first slippery black bubble began to emerge. The first one fell in our hands and the placenta slipped cooperatively out with just a gentle pull. We broke the film at his face and watched – almost dazed – the determined squirming / instinctive searching of the baby. We were determined to help him get attached to a nipple. For T and I this first puppy was the whole world and he needed food. But 'mom' just sniffed him suspiciously and a little dance ensued as we chased her around the kitchen and attempted to connect baby with less-than-loving mother. ...But... 'baby' finally got his way.

He sucked mightily. And his powerful sucking had a transformative effect on his mother – she looked a bit drugged and dazed herself. Her eyes closed. It was as if everything clicked into place. I could be wrong, but I think bonding began here.

OK – enough with the dogs. Here's the point. My son and I got to see – up close and personal – how parenting is done by another species. Perhaps the defining quality we bore witness to was tolerance. As far as I could tell, mama and papa basenji didn't 'teach' their children anything. They didn't discipline, threaten, reprimand, cast harsh looks, withhold treats, scream or holler, send anyone to 'time-out.' And if the quality of this restraint doesn't sound like much to you, it's only because you didn't see those four puppies, heavier and heavier as they grew, vying for a chance to lock jaws on one or the other parent's bloody neck. Mama and Papa's necks were scraped-red raw for weeks. They cried out in pain to request release, boned up on their martial arts skills to avoid getting into this hold in the first place, but other than that, all Mama did was

provide food, wash faces, and clean-up poop.

And all Papa did was play – riotously.

Now you're free to interpret this behavior, or draw lessons, as you like. But what it showed *me* was that these parents did not question how the earth moved in their children. They trusted it. They had nothing invested in some 'idea' of 'dog' that their puppies were 'supposed' to comply with.

Waiting in line in a coffee shop recently, I watched a little dance a mother did with her four (?) -year old son. He chose a pastry, the barista picked it up with her tongs and extended it towards the child, the child reached up for it, and...mother stayed his hand.

"What do you say?"

The child's face set in a mask of grim refusal and he remained stubbornly silent. There was a standoff. The barista was left holding the bun, tension mounted – and the child won. If he mumbled anything I sure didn't hear it.

Nikola's life is again instructive. As we learned, all he ever wanted to study was electricity, from a very early age. But that's not what his father wanted for him.

From my childhood I had been intended for the clergy. This prospect hung like a dark cloud on my mind. After passing eleven years at a public school and a higher institution, I obtained my certificate of maturity and found myself at the critical point of my career. Should I disobey my father, ignore the fondest wishes of my mother, or should I resign myself to fate? The thought oppressed me, and I looked to the future with dread. (*Vol. 2, p. A-195*)

Nikola had to damn near die to get his father to release him from this 'idea' in his head.

...the cholera was raging in that district and...I contracted the dreadful disease...I was confined to bed for nine months with scarcely any ability to move. My energy was completely exhausted and for the second time I found myself at Death's door.

In one of the sinking spells which was thought to be the last, my father rushed into the room. I still see his pallid face as he tried to cheer me in tones belying his assurance. "Perhaps," I said, "I may get well if you will let me study engineering." "You will go to the best technical institution in the world," he solemnly replied, and I knew that he meant it. A heavy weight was lifted from my mind...

(*Autobiography, p. 27*)

If we are stern taskmasters with our children, we're no less so with ourselves. We drive ourselves mercilessly; take pride in never missing work, never going on vacation, working sixty for forty.

"Harder! Harder!" we tell ourselves, "work harder!"

"To be competitive you have to be twice as good as the next guy!"  
"You can't just give a hundred percent, you gotta give a hundred *ten!*"

"Be *the best!*" we tell ourselves, though we're fuzzy as to why, rushing around at breakneck pace, we never stop 'til we die.

But...what if...

? *What if we listened to the earth in us?*

The earth continually tries to reclaim its own – which is us. We *are* nature. We brim with energy fields and universes within us that align with those without. We tend magnetically to find complementarities in others – our energy fields are meant to attract and combine.

Not long ago on KPFA (a critical source for we who believe in freedom), I heard resident theoretical physicist Michio Kaku say that an atom is two strings vibrating at a specific harmony. Now that is very trippy, and a life in which you sit around pondering such things sounds like a total blast. I look forward to when we all get to do it.<sup>23</sup>

But, assuming I heard him correctly, imagine what a stirringly subtle symphony we are. As Whitman said, "the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery...And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels."

But we *don't* listen to the earth in us.

Towards the early middle of my electrical apprenticeship I developed fibroid tumors in my uterus, causing extremely heavy bleeding when I menstruated. I'll leave it to your imagination to picture how difficult this made working on job sites.

The first doctor I consulted about it advised, given that I was in my late forties and that menopause was not far off, that I take iron, live with the tumors, and let nature shrink them in due course.

Oh, *no*, I thought. That is *not* acceptable. How'm I gonna compete with the boys if I'm stuck in a porta-potty half the day? *Screw that.*

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23 I feel compelled to share that once, as a student, I attended an evening gathering to honor Walter Rodney, the writer and Guyanese activist, shortly thereafter murdered by his government. What he wanted to talk about, tightly bookended on that apartment couch, was quantum physics.

Next stop: surgery... and I've had abdominal twinges and discomfort, and back pain, ever since, to say nothing of the hideous pouch it made of my formerly flat stomach.

Now if I'd put my *body first*...instead of the job...

That never seems to be an option, though, does it?

But *if* we did, if we *listened* to our *longing*, wouldn't we take more time with our children, and with our gardens, and with ourselves, and with the ancestors...

Walter Lundquist, a commercial artist, tells this story:

The turning point in my life was the death of my father. It was a funny thing. Here you're watching a beautiful guy with white hair lying in his bed, dying of a heart attack. You hear him ramble and wander and talk about his life: "I was never anything. I didn't do a job even in raising my children. I didn't mean anything..." You watch death. Then you say, "Wait a minute. What's going on with him is going to hit me. What am I doing between now and my death? If you take actuarial tables of insurance companies, I'm running on borrowed time." You begin to assess yourself and that's a shock. I didn't come up smelling like a rose. "Am I going to go on forever being a goddamn pimp? What's the alternative? Is there another way of earning a living?" (in Studs Terkel's *Working*)

We sacrifice our minds, bodies and spirits to a system that views us as essentially worthless, and only when the earth comes to claim us, does truth become unavoidable.

But what if we woke up sooner? Not on our deathbeds, but under the tutelage of turbulent times tipping us toward...toward our freedom... toward the earth moving in us?

Do we really want to arrive at the moment of our deaths only to realize we never lived?

Is that a legacy we want to leave our children? ... a legacy of 'lightness' – of accommodation with our slave-status?

Our children want to help us recover ourselves, to help us recognize reality, to become 'large,' to honor nature in us. They are 'pre-dream' and reliable sources. Listening to them is one way we start to respect our wholeness.

And as we dissolve into dust, we become the promise in return, the promise to help our children *see*, to help *them* realize *their* dreams.

So this *longing* that is life is a compact, really, between the living and the dead, between generations, between birth and death, seed and decomposition, a circle always becoming itself, and then enlarging.

A conversation. An agreement. A compact. “We *seed* you.” “We *feed* you.” A compact, endlessly enlarging.

And what is this to do with wage work?

Nothing.

And that’s the point. But it has everything to do with our future, with getting to a future without bosses.

The circle is widening beyond the bounds that capital can contain, rising higher than the walls they erect.

The divisions are coming down.

### *Solidarity is All*

...Excuse me.

I’ve just returned from asking the same young man I’ve asked at least three times in two months to please not let his dog pee on my growing things. One dog’s pee is the next dog’s target and pretty soon you got pummeled earth, a urine-stink you could slice backwards, and not a bit of green.

I love green (so long as it’s not a lawn. I *hate* lawns <sup>24</sup>).

I planted my block’s traffic circle with melons, tomatoes, and zucchinis so that the children could see, *every day*, on their way to and from the bus stop, that food comes from the *earth* and not the fucking Safeway. Planting the traffic circle was a discomfiting exercise, an icebreaker of sorts that revealed the depths of my isolation from my neighbors.

I also planted the traffic circle because earlier this year a young man was shot within feet of it. I thought growing food there might...oh I don’t know what I thought.

This neighborhood is wearing me down. It’s an age thing. My son still has plenty of energy for the notion of community-building.

Or maybe it’s not an age thing – maybe it’s just me. As a child I recall putting a red, felt *Peanuts* banner on my wall that showed Linus, clutching his blanket, with a peeved expression on his face. It said: “I love mankind, it’s people I can’t stand.”

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24 I feel about lawns the way Les McCann feels about dogs: “I hate the human love for that stinkin’ mutt. I can’t use it. Tryin’ to keep it real, compared to what?” (“Compared to What?” in *Much Les*)



I don't have any illusions that it's gonna be easy – but we gotta heal this thing. Grandmother is waiting on us, and she is vexed.

Walking is risky and breathing a challenge in the great cities of the looking-glass world. Whoever is not a prisoner of necessity is a prisoner of fear, deprived of sleep by anxiety over the things he lacks or by terror of losing the things he has. The looking-glass world trains us to view our neighbor as a threat, not a promise. It condemns us to solitude and consoles us with chemical drugs and cybernetic friends. We are sentenced to die of hunger, fear, or boredom – that is, if a stray bullet doesn't do the job first.

Is the freedom to choose among these unfortunate ends the only freedom left to us? The looking-glass school teaches us to suffer reality, not change it; to forget the past, not learn from it; to accept the future, not invent it. (Eduardo Galeano, *Upside Down*, p. 7-8)

The divisions start with race and radiate out endlessly: folks in houses versus folks in apartments; college youth taking their shot and street youth getting shot; civil 'servants' using the phone like a knife-stab in the back; you call about a problem in California and you get Texas, or India; our lesbian homies glare cuz the media declare black folk are prepared to confute their conflux. It's tempting to throw up ones' hands and just say, "Fuck it."

I've had enough  
I'm sick of seeing and touching  
Both sides of things  
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody

Nobody  
Can talk to anybody  
Without me  
Right?

I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister  
My little sister to my brother my brother to the white feminists  
The white feminists to the Black church folks the Black church folks  
To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the Black separatists the  
Black separatists to the artists the artists to my friends' parents...

Then

I've got to explain myself  
To everybody

I do more translating  
Than the Gawdamn U.N.

Forget it

I'm sick of it...

(from Donna Kate Rushin's "The Bridge Poem" in *This Bridge Called my Back*)

Where do we start? And how? It seems that if "solidarity is all," we can hang it up right now, focus on being the bridge to our own power, and send righteous, supportive thoughts to the planet, pump our fists with the words "stay strong girlfriend!" on our lips.

A *society* that sows division, while its *people* are biologically disposed to connect, puts those bodies of those people in distress.

With whom or what do we connect? *Who* do we give our solidarity *to*? We make tentative connections at work, with neighbors, with friends. But these connections are as thin as everything else in this system, pasted together with gruel. They can't sustain us or be sustained ("come the wet-ass hour").

Our atomization is so dispiriting, this having to "fight" on all fronts – never knowing if we're really loved, who's 'with us' and who's against us...or *who cares*.

*Does anybody care about anybody else anymore?*

That is what ultimately saps our strength – makes us totter in our tracks and say "fuck it!" – the fear that we're all on our own, that nobody cares about us.

Does the government care? (A laughable question.) Patently it does not. Increasingly, in fact, we have to fight the government for the least little benefit out of it.

Do our neighbors care about us? No, they break into our homes, Leave their dogs' shit on our common walkways, and 'turn us in' to the government for 'crimes' that could be resolved with conversations.<sup>25</sup>

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25 One friend of mine is going through an indeterminate sentence of stress after a neighbor told the city she'd modified her garage into a living space. And I read of a woman who's neighbor called the city because she went out of town for two days, leaving her garbage container at the curb in the interim, resulting in a fine of over a thousand dollars.

Do our parents care? Our brothers and sisters? Our partners or spouses? Our children? Sometimes we don't feel they do either.

We're like a can kicked forever down the road. Or a dog passed home to home, trying in each one to construct a pack, only to have it pulled away behind his back. Ultimately, the dog probably realizes there is no pack, just some unknown force bedeviling him.

When a dog puts its 'all' into the *desideratum* 'pack,' or his dream of one, only to 'fail,' it's a sad thing.

But that's *our* generalized reality, the one we eat every day, without complaint.

Maybe we should cry a little for ourselves already. We need a good cry. We deserve it after all this system's put us through.

All the divisions – by race, class, sexual preference, gender... we're even divided parent against child, old against young – have left us utterly alone and *seriously damaged*.

So, like in AA, maybe the first step is recognizing the depth of the disease in us. Not in somebody else out there, but *in us*.

But when wage work – and its flip side, street crime – daily boosts our conditioned reinforced isolation, by injecting us with fear and alienation, *what good does our self-awareness do?*

Our inevitable resistance – inevitable because our bodies are geared for intersection, for communion – is pitifully unequal to the massive containment podrunks impose by inserting hierarchy and separation into every social institution.

I had a boss once who got nervous every time the black women in the office knotted together in a clump of idle talk. We all noticed, and though we pretended to be amused, I, for one, never understood it.

Young black males, of course, can't help but know that the country quakes collectively in fear of them, that they are, apparently, the stuff of nightmares. But couldn't even the most faint-hearted see how completely tame we three women were? I guess every 'other' seems innocuous to itself.

All the cons operating all at once must all be actively policed, not just passively provided – we must be watched for signs of waking up.

Did those people really think for themselves? Sound the sirens! Send in the compliance cops! The state watches. And *we* watch each other.

Most of us look at this hyper-attentiveness to what we do with, at first, tolerance, but, the longer we're subjected to it, growing irritation; and, finally, resignation, when we conclude that the only possible freedom is death.

This isn't living. Our mistake, as young people, because we don't know any better, is to not challenge it in the first place. We aren't taught that our bodies tell the truth, while *the system lies*.

Podunks fear goodness, and systematically sow distrust: "what's your game, what angle are you playing?" Which replicates when we decide to get ourselves an angle, to lie, if only to survive, present the false face of the commodity, and avoid the label 'chump.' So we keep selling ourselves and hardening our hearts, and pretending, and then get furious at each other at the blatant *phoniness* we all project, the *duplicity* of our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends.

And the question never leaves us, as we're wired for communion: *who* do we give our solidarity *to*?

Our children (when they're small) play an interesting role in this regard. Because they are so unconflicted as to this question, they bear the full weight of this system's *dis-ease*. They have to serve all of our psychic needs at once. They must be scapegoat *and* superhero, the fount of our failure as well as our *raison d'être*. They're our 'wonder-glue,' our 'all-purpose answer' to the multiple problems of psychic survival under capitalism, primary among them: our 'separateness.'

The deepest need of man, then, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The *absolute* failure to achieve this aim means insanity... (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 9)

They absorb our stress...and then hold our hands.

They interject their small, warm bodies between our anomie and the abyss. Children are the temporary fix for this system's dysfunction.

And as we watch our dreams dissolve like sugar in dirty dishwater, we can't help but turn, holding all our unwanted, unutilized power in our hands, to our children's crystalline goodness, and seek to commandeer, with all the best intentions in the world, the possibilities of our children's lives – to direct them, to '*our*' purposes. We project on them, without saying a word, our wishes for our unrealized lives, apply to their goodness, without saying a word – fettering them with the request that they try, with the traditional courage of children, to comply.

We are wired for allegiance, for loyalty, for becoming superheroes in the service of our parents' silences. We gravitate to the real sticklers: how to make them happy, smile, be whole again? This is also nature in us, we are made to be loyal to our parents, to attend to their unspoken dreams, longings and desires, the ones that ache to exist precisely because they have been so ruthlessly repressed – the deeply felt ones too precious to voice.

*But there are deeper allegiances – to our sources of power – that supercede loyalty to our parents. Or perhaps these are our parents' longings restated, taken to a higher power?*

The most fundamental kind of love, which underlies all types of love, is *brotherly love*. By this I mean the sense of responsibility, care respect, knowledge of any other human being, the wish to further his life...Brotherly love is love between equals: but, indeed, even as equals we are not always "equal"; inasmuch as we are human, we are all in need of help. *Today I, tomorrow you*. But this need of help does not mean that the one is helpless, the other powerful. Helplessness is a transitory condition; the ability to stand and walk on one's own feet is the permanent and common one. (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 42-4)

The realm of love, reason and justice exists as a reality only because, and inasmuch as, man has been able to develop these powers in himself throughout the process of his evolution. In this view there is no meaning to life, except the meaning man himself gives to it; *man is utterly alone except inasmuch as he helps another*. (p. 65)

We are *made* to coalesce – the commons are the reflection of this deeper reality – and it takes a lot of concerted energy to break down that tendency. The good news is that it can never be fully broken down – *we tend towards each other*. This is how we are at the start.

Free is how you is from the start, an' when it look different you got to move, just move, an' when you movin' say that is a natural freedom make you move. (George Lamming)

We come from the 'all' of it, we return to the 'all' of it, and in-between we'd like something better than a dance on hot coals. Are we asking for the stars here? I think it's time to stop settling.

We serve a *system* when we should be serving *each other* – that's what our bodies *want* to do. We thread thoughts on the Internet when

we should be threading our allegiances. We coax our children into cages when we should be handing them the keys.

We have to confront the depths of our complicity and the depths of our despair.

And if it weren't for my experience in the trades, I'm not sure I would have the *faith* that we could do either.

If we are to reclaim our power to make our *own* 'reality,' we have to *trust* that we can. But 'trust' can't just be an 'idea' in our heads, a figment of our imaginations, a picture of the future. Or rather, we can't *believe* in these figments, pictures and ideas unless they enter into our experience. 'Trust' has to be harbored in our *bodies* before it can be held firmly in our minds.

While all of us 'know,' intellectually, that we are all interdependent, that *I* eat because *you* labor in the fields, that *I* light my home because *you* descend into the mines, this 'knowing' is not rooted in inter-relationships in real time.

On a construction site, however, interdependency is up close and in your face. Your work is premised on it. You *see* the people on whom your *life* depends. This is a more powerful experience than words can adequately convey. But this experience has allowed me to *know*, when before I couldn't, that we *can* tackle the hardships, the confusion, the challenges and dislocations of the transition that *must* come, without descending into race wars and street chaos, despite the fact that the podunks will do all they can to seed destruction and reap their harvest of fear as a permanent state of *our* being.

Large, life-and-death decisions occur all the time on a job site, but what struck me most when I first starting working in construction was the everyday *fellowship*. Not to say that the backbiting and rumormongering of office work was altogether absent – unhappy people are everywhere under capitalism – but they were minority influences compared with the fellowship.

I'm a black woman in a racist world, so believe me, if *I* received its' warmth, it's a safe conclusion to say that the fellowship of working communally with one's hands is a *potent* force.

My first job-site as an electrical apprentice was a movie theater with high ceilings. There were lots of scissor-lifts on the job for obvious reasons. One journeyman, who took his responsibility to teach and shepherd apprentices very seriously, told me that when he saw one

apprentice try to sabotage another one, in order to make *himself* come off looking better, this journeyman waited until the end of the day and Hilted-shot the offender's tool bag to the ceiling pan-deck.

Another story: there had been a custom in the electrical trade, by now withered away I'm sure, of dividing the scrap wire called 'rabbit' among the newest, greenest apprentices. The most coveted scrap was the big wire, the feeders, maybe an inch in diameter, some of it. On one job, a journeyman told the story of a boss who'd started hoarding the rabbit to send back to the shop.<sup>26</sup> The guys dealt with him by shorting the measurement for a long pull by twenty feet. Whups! The boss got more rabbit than he wanted that time.

Solidarity is not just a word on a job site. When folks need a hand, you give them a hand. Pretty basic, you'd think. But when I first started out, the solidarity all around me made my own training in selfishness uncomfortably conspicuous. I had to unlearn a lot of total obliviousness to what other people were doing or needing. The 'me-first' attitude deeply embedded in capitalist values doesn't work on a job site. If someone's loading or unloading material from the man-lift, everybody in the man-lift helps. As one journeyman reminded me, "many hands make the work light."

When you're part of a group of people that functions like a hive – when you make things together with your hands, when you collectively work uncoerced – you not only *see* the power of concentrated human thought and action, you *feel* it in your body. It's a powerful lesson you never forget, the energy that results.

When people work together in the *real* world, put their shoulders to the same plow, it builds community, despite...despite differences of race, sex, etc. etc.

But until *the world* is whole, solidarity ekes out a diminished existence on isolated enclaves that are mere placeholders for *structurally-constituted* wholeness.

Realized wholeness requires the freedom to create each day anew.

In listening to our bodies, in working collectively uncoerced, we build solidarity and *we create ourselves* – our wholeness...and we make culture.

*This – freedom – is the domain, the essence, of culture.*

"Progress" is its antithesis.

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26 General foremen are pressured now to return the scrap copper for resale.

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. (*Isaiah 11:8*)

Milk is the symbol of the first aspect of love, that of care and affirmation. Honey symbolizes the sweetness of life, the love for it and the happiness in being alive. Most mothers are capable of giving "milk," but only a minority of giving "honey" too. In order to be able to give honey, a mother must not only be a "good mother," but a happy person – and this aim is not achieved by many. (Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 45)

By the thirteenth century [in Europe], the condemnations of dancing had grown in volume and intensity. The Lateran Council of 1215 instituted a new means of social control – the requirement of an annual confession of one's sins to a priest – and one of the sins was dancing...In Utrecht in the summer of 1278, two hundred people started dancing on the bridge over the Mosel and would not stop until it collapsed, at which point all the dancers drowned. A hundred years later, in the wake of the Black Death, a much larger outbreak of dance mania again struck Germany and spilled out into Belgium: "Peasants left their plows, mechanics their workshops, house-wives their domestic duties, to join the wild revels..."The Church calendar featured dozens of holy days...on which all work was forbidden...In fifteenth-century France, for example, one out of every four days of the year was an official holiday of some sort...So, despite the reputation of what are commonly called "the Middle Ages" as a time of misery and fear, the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century can be seen...as one long outdoor party, punctuated by bouts of hard labor. (Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, p. 81, 85, 91-2)

It will be remembered that Adam Smith expected the land-divorced laborer to lose all intellectual interest. And M'Farlane expected "that the knowledge of writing and accounts will every day become less frequent among the common people" (1782). A generation later Owen put down laborers' degradation to "neglect in infancy" and "overwork," thus rendering them "incompetent from ignorance to make a good use of high wages when they can procure them." He himself paid them low wages and raised their status by creating for them artificially an entirely new cultural environment. The vices developed by the mass of the people were on the whole the same as characterized colored populations debased by disintegrating



culture contact: dissipation, prostitution, thievishness, lack of thrift and providence, slovenliness, low productivity of labor, lack of self-respect and stamina. The spreading of market economy was destroying the traditional fabric of the rural society, the village community, the family, the old form of land tenure, the customs and standards that supported life within a cultural framework... By the 1830's the social catastrophe of the common people was as complete as that of the Kaffir is today. One and alone, an eminent Negro sociologist, Charles S. Johnson, reversed the analogy between racial debasement and class degradation, applying it this time to the latter: "In England, where, incidentally, the Industrial Revolution was more advanced than in the rest of Europe, the social chaos which followed the drastic economic reorganization converted impoverished children into the 'pieces' that the African slaves were, later, to become...The apologies for the child serf system were almost identical with those of the slave trade." (Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 293-4)

We were still some distance from the beach, and under slow headway, when we sailed right into the midst of these swimming nymphs, and they boarded us at every quarter; many seizing hold of the chain-plates and springing into the chains; others, at the peril of being run over by the vessel in her course, catching at the bob-stays, and wreathing their slender forms about the ropes, hung suspended in the air. All of them at length succeeded in getting up the ship's side, where they clung dripping with the brine and glowing from the bath, their jet-black tresses streaming over their shoulders, and half enveloping their otherwise naked forms. There they hung, sparkling with savage vivacity, laughing gaily at one another, and chattering away with infinite glee. Nor were they idle the while, for each one performed the simple offices of the toilette for the other. Their luxuriant locks, wound up and twisted into the smallest possible compass, were freed from the briny element; the whole person carefully dried, and from a little round shell that passed from hand to hand, anointed with a fragrant oil: their adornments were completed by passing a few loose folds of white tappa, in a modest cincture, around the waist. Thus arrayed they no longer hesitated, but flung themselves lightly over the bulwarks, and were quickly frolicking about the decks. Many

of them went forward, perching upon the head-rails or running out upon the bowsprit, while others seated themselves upon the taffrail, or reclined at full length upon the boats. What a sight for us bachelor sailors! How avoid so dire a temptation?...Not the feeblest barrier was interposed between the unholy passions of the crew and their unlimited gratification. The grossest licentiousness and the most shameful inebriety prevailed, with occasional and but short-lived interruptions, through the whole period of her stay. Alas for the poor savages when exposed to the influence of these polluting examples! Unsophisticated and confiding, they are easily led into every vice, and humanity weeps over the ruin thus remorselessly inflicted upon them by their European civilizers. Thrice happy are they who, inhabiting some yet undiscovered island in the midst of the ocean, have never been brought into contaminating contact with the white man. (Herman Melville, *Typee*, chap. 2)

“I hate to see subtlety showing through these affairs, Mr. Purbright. Murder is such a beastly business in the first place. It becomes positively crawly when you have to strain a decent intelligence to sort it out. And nowadays, I’m afraid, the better the address the more distasteful the crime turns out to be. Odd, that, isn’t it?” (The sensible Mr. Chubb in Colin Watson’s *Hopjoy Was Here*)

## Progress

There was a sick joke once among people of color that in disaster / horror films, dark-skinned characters were always the first to go.<sup>1</sup>

We were the ones seemingly superfluous to any plot. Expendable. (The appearance of this Western compulsion in the Mamet film *The Edge* ruined both the story and my opinion of the director at a single blow.)

When a plot device rises to the level of archetype, it represents not only the psychological preoccupations of a society, but how these preoccupations get reflected in propaganda. If a theme, pattern, formula, continually recurs, it’s worthwhile taking a look at why.

In a society rooted in the soil of inequity, in which a narrow ‘elite’ tries to control what messages are allowed to exist, it’s a safe bet that the dominant messages are not just lies, but *inverted truth* – that they tell the truth in reverse.

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<sup>1</sup> This pattern is wearing away, like the system itself.

So – we’re told the story, over and over, that the darker-skinned are expendable because, in *fact*, the *opposite* is true.

But I have to admit being grateful to Mamet for one thing, the film *House of Games* – because it offers a wonderful examination of the dynamics of the con, how you suck in the mark by *appearing* to offer them something of value while you surreptitiously ‘relieve’ them of whatever it is you want from them – in our case, our sense of ourselves as valuable human beings, as inherently ‘good,’ ‘smart,’ creative, powerful, competent, self-sufficient – i.e., *our happiness*...leaving us with a legacy of doubt, and a question of mammoth millennial proportions: *why did they want to steal our happiness?*

Despite centuries of Western schooling, this question still lives, still remains a puzzle, because each new generation *is* biologically gifted with the knowledge that we are inherently a cooperative, fun-loving, joyous, generous species.

Of course gradually, for those who advance in ‘the system,’ those who fully absorb their roles as the functionaries of Mind in its current manifestation, those who assiduously study the *Thought* which capitalism wraps itself in, those who bow down deeply and long, the question falls into shadow, is disappeared from allowable debate. It hardly bears thinking about, for these, this thing called “civilization.” But the question won’t – can’t – go away. It is our birthright.

...

Pity – the Pard – that left her Asia –  
Memories – of Palm –  
Cannot be stifled – with Narcotic –  
Nor suppressed – with Balm –  
(Emily Dickinson)

Let us never cease from thinking – what is this ‘civilization’ in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them? What are these professions and why should we make money out of them? Where in short is it leading us, the procession of the sons of educated men? (Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 63)

This World is not Conclusion.  
A Species stands beyond –  
Invisible, as Music –

But positive, as Sound –  
It beckons, and it baffles –  
Philosophy – don't know –  
And through a Riddle, at the last –  
Sagacity, must go – ...  
(Emily Dickinson)

The received wisdom that capitalism brought us The Good Life, that its' triumph was the triumph of 'civilization' over 'barbarism,' and so is the finest flower in the garden of *Reason*, which delivered up all the blessings of modern technology, blooms capable of solving any problem we can pose to it, and all the problems it creates – these sophisms paralyze many who might otherwise act to end podunk rule.

If you believe that the atomization of life supports all the modern 'comforts' and 'conveniences' that make men gods rather than animals, then where is there to go?

It's hard to envision a substantively different future if 'freedom' from working manually is your standard for a fully evolved existence.

Perhaps the greatest propagandist for the *Triumph of Reason* children's story is the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). I quote him at length here so as not to adulterate his pool, and to allow you a quiet moment to probe its crystalline depths. Enjoy it at your leisure, or ignore it, as you like.

The beginning of culture and of the struggle to pass out of the unbroken immediacy of naïve psychical life has always to be made by acquiring knowledge of universal principles...The systematic development of truth in scientific form can alone be the true shape in which truth exists...The force of mind is only as great as its expression; its depth only as deep as its power to expand and lose itself when spending and giving out its substance...When we want to see an oak with all its vigour of trunk, its spreading branches, and mass of foliage, we are not satisfied to be shown an acorn instead. In the same way science, the crowning glory of a spiritual world, is not found complete in its initial stages. The beginning of the new spirit is the outcome of a widespread revolution in manifold forms of spiritual culture; it is the reward which comes after a chequered and devious course of development, and after much struggle and effort...The truth is the whole. The whole,

however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development. Of the Absolute it must be said that is it essentially a result, that only at the end is it what it is in very truth; and just in that consists its nature, which is to be actual, subject, or self-becoming, self-development...man is explicitly man only in the form of developed and cultivated reason, which has made itself to be what it is implicitly...But this very unrest *is* the self...[K]nowledge is only real and can only be set forth fully in the form of science, in the form of system...That the truth is only realized in the form of system, that substance is essentially subject, is expressed in the idea which represents the Absolute as Spirit (Geist) – the grandest conception of all, and one which is due to modern times and its religion. Spirit is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is per se...and exists for self...Mind, which, when thus developed, knows itself to be mind, is science. Science is its realization, and the kingdom it sets up for itself in its own native element...The task of conducting the individual mind from its unscientific standpoint to that of science had to be taken in its general sense...The particular individual...has also to go through the stages through which the general mind has passed...as stages of a road which has been worked over and leveled out...The road to science, by the very movement of the notion itself, will compass the entire objective world of conscious life in its rational necessity...The goal...is fixed for knowledge just as necessarily as the succession in the process. The terminus is at that point where knowledge is no longer compelled to go beyond itself, where it finds its own self, and the notion corresponds to the object and the object to the notion. The progress towards this goal consequently is without a halt, and at no earlier stage is satisfaction to be found. That which is confined to a life of nature is unable of itself to go beyond its immediate existence; but by something other than itself it is forced beyond that; and to be thus wrenched out of its setting is its death. (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 70, 74, 75-6, 81-2, 83, 85-6, 89, 95, 137-8)

The inquiry into the *essential destiny* of Reason...is identical with the question, *what is the ultimate design of the World?* And the expression implies that that design is destined to be realized...

The destiny of the spiritual World, and – since this is the *substantial World*, while the physical remains subordinate to it... – *the final cause of the World at large*, we allege to be the *consciousness* of its own freedom on the part of Spirit, and *ipso facto*, the *reality* of that freedom... Itself is its own object of attainment, and the sole aim of Spirit. This result it is, at which the process of the World's History has been continually aiming; and to which the sacrifices that have ever and anon been laid on the vast altar of the earth, through the long lapse of ages, have been offered. This is the only aim that sees itself realized and fulfilled... The question of the *means* by which Freedom develops itself to a World, conducts us to the phenomenon of History itself... The first glance at History convinces us that the actions of men proceed from their needs, their passions, their characters and talents; and impresses us with the belief that such needs, passions and interests are the sole springs of action – the efficient agents in this scene of activity... Passions, private aims, and the satisfaction of selfish desires, are... the most effective springs of action. Their power lies in the fact that they respect none of the limitations which justice and morality would impose on them; and that these natural impulses have a more direct influence over man than the artificial and tedious discipline that tends to order and self-restraint, law and morality. When we look at this display of passions, and the consequences of their violence;... when we see the evil, the vice... we can scarce avoid being filled with sorrow at this universal taint of corruption... We endure in beholding it a mental torture, allowing no defense or escape but the consideration that what has happened could not be otherwise; that it is a fatality which no intervention could alter... But even regarding History as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples... have been victimized – the question involuntarily arises – to what principle, to what final aim these enormous sacrifices have been offered... *nothing great in the World* has been accomplished without *passion*... The History of the World is not the theatre of happiness. Periods of happiness are blank pages in it, for they are periods of harmony – periods when the antithesis is in abeyance... Society and the State are the very conditions in which Freedom is realized... The mutations which history presents have been long characterized... as an advance to something better, more perfect. The changes that take place in Nature... exhibit only a perpetually self-repeating

cycle; in Nature there happens “nothing new under the sun,” and the multiform play of its phenomena so far induces a feeling of *ennui*; only in those changes which take place in the region of Spirit does anything new arise. This peculiarity in the world of mind has indicated in the case of man...a *real* capacity for change, and that for the better – an impulse of *perfectibility*...In actual existence Progress appears as an advancing from the imperfect to the more perfect...[A] doubt has been suggested whether in the progress of history and of general culture mankind have become better; whether their morality has been increased...What the absolute aim of Spirit requires and accomplished...transcends the obligations, and the liability to imputation and the ascription of good or bad motives, which attach to individuality in virtue of its social relations. They who on moral grounds, and consequently with noble intention, have resisted that which the advance of the Spiritual Idea makes necessary, stand higher in moral worth than those whose crimes have been turned into the means – under the direction of a superior principle – of realizing the purposes of that principle...The deeds of great men, who are the Individuals of the World’s History, thus appear not only justified in view of that intrinsic result of which they were not conscious, but also from the point of view occupied by the secular moralist. But looked at from this point, moral claims that are irrelevant, must not be brought into collision with world-historical deeds and their accomplishment...what [the History of the World] has to record is the activity of the Spirit of Peoples, so that the individual forms which that spirit has assumed in the sphere of outward reality, might be left to the delineation of special histories...

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all *our* ideas – the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence – as for example, God, or Law – in which the interest of man’s volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, an

Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character...At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit... What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History. Having eliminated this introductory element, we find ourselves for the first time on the real theatre of History. (*The Philosophy of History*, p. 16, 19, 20-1, 23, 26-7, 41, 54, 57, 66, 67, 93, 99)

Pronouncements as from God, Hegel gives – and to the West of his day and beyond, what passed through his lips bore no questioning – except by us, ‘the Unhistorical.’

Those of us dismissed from the corporate headquarters of History have always questioned these assumptions of Western *Thought*; we had no choice – survival obliged us.

The edifice of this *Thought* was erected on cherished lies: the supposed “changelessness” of Nature; the formula “‘culture’ equals change, opposition, constant conflict, ruthless upheaval; a stern, restless, churning spirit of ‘working-against-itself;” the sad cloak of “Perfectibility” as a personal and species goal; a theater piece called “History” that *must*, of *necessity*, mind, unfold in ascending stages of “Developing Spirit.”

And then, of course, the insertion, as the prime mover of ‘History,’ of a self-actualizing ‘Mind’ that drives the whole thing pitilessly forward, and which *must* (nothing personal), of *necessity*, grind *you*, if you are “the Unhistorical,” underfoot (only after bleeding you dry of course – “no offense...sorry”).

Out of these lies – stories others made up – which he threaded and ‘systematized,’<sup>2</sup> Hegel made up a grand ‘theory of the World’ – and congealing capitalism ate it up like candy.

2 Another lie: The more *Thought* works on crap the more it increases in value – as opposed to: “garbage in, garbage out.”



But not capitalism alone – Marxism found Hegel’s philosophy of history equally manly and robust.

We should never forget that our whole economic, political and intellectual development has as its presupposition a state of things in which slavery was as necessary as it was universally recognized. In this sense we are entitled to say: Without the slavery of antiquity, no modern socialism...For it is a fact that man sprang from the beasts, and had consequently to use barbaric and almost bestial means to extricate himself from barbarism. The ancient communes, where they continued to exist, have for thousands of years formed the basis of the most barbarous form of state... It was only where these communities dissolved that the peoples made progress of themselves, and their first economic advance consisted in the increase and development of production by means of slave labor. It is clear that so long as human labor was still so little productive that it provided but a small surplus over and above the necessary means of subsistence, any increase of the productive forces, extension of trade, development of the state and of law, or beginning of art and science, was only possible by means of a greater division of labor. And the necessary basis for this was the great division of labor between the masses discharging simple manual labor and the few privileged persons directing labor, conducting trade and public affairs, and, at a latter stage occupying themselves with art and science. The simplest and most natural form of this division of labor was in fact slavery... This was an advance even for the slaves... We may add at this point that all historical antagonisms between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes to this very day find their explanation in this same relatively undeveloped productivity of human labor. So long as the really working population was so much occupied in their necessary labor that they had no time left for looking after the common affairs of society – the direction of labor, affairs of the state, legal matters, art, science, etc. – so long was it always necessary that there should exist a special class, freed from actual labor, to manage these affairs; and this special class never failed to impose a greater and greater burden of labor, for its own advantage, on the working masses. Only the immense increase of the productive forces attained through large-scale industry made it possible to distribute labor among all members of society without

exception, and thereby to limit the labor time of each individual member to such an extent that all have enough free time left to take part in the general – both theoretical and practical – affairs of society. It is only now, therefore, that any ruling and exploiting class has become superfluous and indeed a hindrance to social development, and it is only now, too, that it will be inexorably abolished, however much it may be in possession of the “direct force.” (Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dubring*, p. 200-1)

Translation: “Free people must be made slaves in order for their descendants to be made free again.”

If this makes sense to you, academe may be your oyster, but that mollusk is smothering you. (And how ‘bout that moving goal-post, “the productive forces,” that just never seem to get developed enough to justify our release from servitude?)

Podrunks – and all Rationalism’s kin – love the notion that the Anomie and Agony brought down upon the “Unhistorical” was ‘Necessary,’ because in this grand *System* sadism and greed get magically transmogrified into something ‘noble.’ It’s a sausage grinder for the soulless that takes all the assorted carnage of capital and turns it into a ‘mission.’ They’re doing it all for *us*, don’t you know. If we were only ‘smart’ enough to grasp essential *Truth* we might drown in our own blood with more grace.

Doesn’t this story sound familiar? Don’t you hear it when Madeleine Albright decrees the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children after the first Gulf ‘war’ ‘necessary’? Or when Bush the Lesser (as Arundhati Roy dubbed him) says the same about the current one?

In the podrunks’ ‘World,’ all the deaths of *other people’s children and parents and cherished* is ‘necessary,’ ‘acceptable,’ ‘worth it.’ They stare at us coldly, marveling at our ‘naïve emotionalism,’ our ‘stupidity,’ when we scream at them, “*What if it was your daughter, your son, being blown to bits?! What if it was you?*”

But at that last question they smile, because they know it will never be *them*, because different rules apply, to *them*, the ‘masters of the world,’ they who can proclaim themselves the ‘Idea’ becoming *Itself*, they who represent ‘*Reason*.’

The ‘concept’ is ‘pure,’ the living reality, sadly, ‘unpure,’ and so the striving to become one with The Concept becomes the driving force of History – and anything, any people, that gets in *Its* way must be relentlessly mowed down...

Whether you find this story gripping or a real yawner, what's indisputable is that it *is* a story – a story drenched in our ancestors' blood, and our own.

What if we changed it?

Of course if your past has its roots in Europe this fairy tale, far from causing you obvious psychic pain, may actually wrap you in a warm glow of unwarranted superiority.

But if your past resides in “The Unhistorical” it mires you in psychic muck – which it's best not to have, thank you very much.

I think we should stop telling ourselves this story.

Now one could argue that if humans did *not* find a way to make and mass a majority of humanity, leashed to large projects of questionable worth, like the excavation of rock, the hewing of wood, the mining of coal and the making of masters, then how could the inventive mind have unleashed its wonders that today allow us to send satellites into space that help unify the world? And this logic leads directly to legitimizing mass murder and successive genocides, as well as to the magic of wireless inanity while we wait for buses or for coffee in cafes.

Meanwhile, we're righteously and rightfully furious at Madeleine Albright for saying that the deaths of a half million Iraqi children is an acceptable price to pay for...what, exactly?

But *we* say the same thing every day with our consumer choices and with how we live our lives.

Just because a result – e.g. “computers” – happened a certain way, doesn't mean it could *only* have happened that way. Nor can we say for certain that this result we're living with was the best possible one. Perhaps it forestalled the development of a ‘science’ in harmony with the natural world.

But, moving along, irrespective of the elimination of other options, let's call this misappropriation of the title “Necessity,” applied to this story, the “Post hoc-con,” from the fallacy: *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*: “after this, therefore from this.” What if the story of class society was not “*the Idea becoming Itself*,” whether “the Idea” is “Man's Productive Capacity” or “the Triumph of Reason over Unreason,” but instead was a story of “*Abandonment on Steroids*”: the paroxysmal, pathological revenge of the abandoned child?

Once upon a time there was a deep, golden pool, ribbed by tall trees heavy-laden with fruit.

Footed on solid rock and brimming with endless fields, our warm pool promised to keep us forever. And on this soft, moist lap we swam and played. Laughter, ease and agility were our birthrights. And, of course, love.

Now to this sun-lit lap one day Disaster comes – who knows what or why or when – with a tumult rousing vampires from the dead.

Some called this bottomless hunger ‘Necessity’ – a hideous hydra from hell named *Nesucom*. Slimy, many-tentacled – its grasp could not be evaded and everything it touched became *It*.<sup>3</sup>

*Nesucom* ensnared children lost or left alone, splashing on the edge, and made them slaves. It forced them to devise a means to divide and drain the pool. And they did. The means they made, the tool, the wedge, the hammer, split the world, and the out-rush water swept people, happiness and harbor away.

*Nesucom* stretched its face into a smile, thrilled with the harvest in its’ hold, the harnessing of natural forces – the energy of water and people both. And in that tumult, unsettled and out-swept, without a home or means to make one, we wandered helpless into *Nesucom*’s net.

People who were unhappy descended on people who were happy, and the unhappy people made it their personal business to destroy the joy of the happy people, to make them *pay* for their crime of happiness.

Now most people of color have long suspected that these psychological dynamics are what lie beneath the catastrophe of capitalism, its brutal assault on Africa and the Middle East, Asia and Latin America – the global South, as we now say.

I remember a brother telling me years ago, making precisely this point, about his two cats. One had remained with its mother until weaned, had never known want or insecurity. The other, a stray, he found abandoned in the streets, a scrawny desperate thing, and he took it home and cared for it. The first cat accepted its regular meals as its’ due and between meals occupied himself with catly matters. He was an easy-going and pacific soul.

The second cat could think of nothing but food, and would mew and fret and beg for more. His sole preoccupation was the quest to insure itself against future want. He could never get enough. He was never full.

3 The Ojibwas have a similar fiend called “wendigo:” “a person who has been transformed into a monster by consuming or possessing people and turning them into cannibals.” And, after all, what are podunks if not people who eat other people?

In Herman Melville's autobiographical work, *Typee* – the story of his experience living with a valley people on one of the Marquesas Islands – he explains the process of Joy's eradication.

Frozen forever by his pen, he preserves for us a people still *free*, and so, still *happy*.

When you read Melville's description of these islanders, the dominant impression one is left with is, in a word, *Joy*.

Is it coincidence that these boisterous, buoyant, generous people who took Melville in, healed his infected leg, fed him, taught him how to bathe, literally bore him around on their backs until his leg and health were restored, for the most part did no work, at least not in any sense Melville could distinguish from 'play'?

"Altogether the whole existence of the inhabitants of the valley seemed to pass away exempt from toil..."

The hardest he saw anyone work was when he watched their process for starting a fire. "This operation appeared to me to be the most laborious species of work performed in *Typee*..."

What a striking evidence does this operation furnish of the wide difference between the extreme of savage and civilized life. A gentleman of *Typee* can bring up a numerous family of children and give them all a highly respectable cannibal education, with infinitely less toil and anxiety than he expends in the simple process of striking a light; whilst a poor European artisan, who through the instrumentality of a lucifer [match] performs the same operation in one second, is put to his wits' end to provide for his starving offspring that food which the children of a Polynesian father, without troubling their parent, pluck from the branches of every tree around them. (*Typee*, chap. 14)

It is a peculiarity among these people, that when engaged in any employment they always make a prodigious fuss about it. So seldom do they ever exert themselves, that when they do work they seem determined that so meritorious an action shall not escape the observation of those around. If, for example, they have occasion to remove a stone to a little distance, which perhaps might be carried by two able-bodied men, a whole swarm gather about it, and, after a vast deal of palavering, lift it up among them, every one struggling to get hold of it, and bear it off yelling and panting as if accomplishing some mighty achievement. (chap. 22)

In my various wanderings through the vale, and as I became better acquainted with the character of its inhabitants, I was more and more struck with the light-hearted joyousness that everywhere prevailed. The minds of these simple savages, unoccupied by matters of graver moment, were capable of deriving the utmost delight from circumstances which would have passed unnoticed in more intelligent communities. All their enjoyment, indeed, seemed to be made up of the little trifling incidents of the passing hour; but these diminutive items swelled altogether to an amount of happiness seldom experienced by more enlightened individuals, whose pleasures are drawn from more elevated but rarer sources.

What community, for instance, of refined and intellectual mortals would derive the least satisfaction from shooting pop-guns? The mere supposition of such a thing being possible would excite their indignation, and yet the whole population of Typee did little else for ten days but occupy themselves with that childish amusement, fairly screaming, too, with the delight it afforded them. (chap. 19)

When you live with a joyful, loving people, a people who feed you, who save your life by healing an infection you were clueless how to remedy, it's kinda hard to dismiss them as 'primitive.'

On the contrary, if you've any heart at all, you're forced to reevaluate the lies you were told about them, forced to consider that *people are people everywhere*, with differing cultural heritages, but all *just people*.

One day, in company with Kory-Kory, I had repaired to the stream for the purpose of bathing, when I observed a woman sitting upon a rock in the midst of the current, and watching with the liveliest interest the gambols of something, which at first I took to be an uncommonly large species of frog that was sporting in the water near her. Attracted by the novelty of the sight, I waded towards the spot where she sat, and could hardly credit the evidence of my senses when I beheld a little infant, the period of whose birth could not have extended back many days, paddling about as if it had just risen to the surface, after being hatched into existence at the bottom. Occasionally the delighted parent reached out her hands towards it, when the little thing, uttering a faint cry, and striking out its tiny limbs, would sidle for the rock, and the next moment be clasped to its mother's bosom. This was repeated again and again,

the baby remaining in the stream about a minute at a time. Once or twice it made wry faces at swallowing a mouthful of water, and choked and spluttered as if on the point of strangling. At such times, however, the mother snatched it up, and by a process scarcely to be mentioned obliged it to eject the fluid. For several weeks afterwards I observed this woman bringing her child down to the stream regularly every day, in the cool of the morning and evening, and treating it to a bath. No wonder that the South Sea Islanders are so amphibious a race, when they are thus launched into the water as soon as they see the light. I am convinced that it is as natural for a human being to swim as it is for a duck. And yet in civilized communities how many able-bodied individuals die, like so many drowning kittens, from the occurrence of the most trivial accidents! (chap. 31)

Civilization does not engross all the virtues of humanity: she has not even her full share of them. They flourish in greater abundance and attain greater strength among many barbarous people. The hospitality of the wild Arab, the courage of the North American Indian, and the faithful friendships of some of the Polynesian nations, far surpass any thing of a similar kind among the polished communities of Europe. If truth and justice, and the better principles of our nature, cannot exist unless enforced by the statute-book, how are we to account for the social condition of the Typees? So pure and upright were they in all the relations of life, that entering their valley, as I did, under the most erroneous impressions of their character, I was soon led to exclaim in amazement: "Are these the ferocious savages, the blood-thirsty cannibals of whom I have heard such frightful tales! They deal more kindly with each other, and are more humane, than many who study essays on virtue and benevolence, and who repeat every night that beautiful prayer breathed first by the lips of the divine and gentle Jesus." I will frankly declare, that after passing a few weeks in this valley of the Marquesas, I formed a higher estimate of human nature than I had ever before entertained. But alas! since then I have been one of the crew of a man-of-war, and the pent-up wickedness of five hundred men has nearly overturned all my previous theories.

There was one admirable trait in the general character of the Typees which, more than any thing else, secured my admiration: it was the unanimity of feeling they displayed on every occasion. With them there hardly appeared to be any difference of opinion upon any subject whatever. They all thought and acted alike. I do not conceive that they could support a debating society for a single night: there would be nothing to dispute about; and were they to call a convention to take into consideration the state of the tribe, its session would be a remarkably short one. They showed this spirit of unanimity in every action of life: every thing was done in concert and good fellowship. I will give an instance of this fraternal feeling.

One day, in returning with Kory-Kory from my accustomed visit to the Ti, we passed by a little opening in the grove; on one side of which, my attendant informed me, was that afternoon to be built a dwelling of bamboo. At least a hundred of the natives were bringing materials to the ground...Every one contributed something to the work; and by the united, but easy, and even indolent, labors of all, the entire work was completed before sunset. The islanders, while employed in erecting this tenement, reminded me of a colony of beavers at work. To be sure, they were hardly as silent and demure as those wonderful creatures, nor were they by any means as diligent. To tell the truth, they were somewhat inclined to be lazy, but a perfect tumult of hilarity prevailed; and they worked together so unitedly, and seemed actuated by such an instinct of friendliness, that it was truly beautiful to behold. (chap. 27)

The penalty of the Fall presses very lightly upon the valley of Typee; for, with the one solitary exception of striking a light, I scarcely saw any piece of work performed there which caused the sweat to stand upon a single brow. As for digging and delving for a livelihood, the thing is altogether unknown. Nature has planted the bread-fruit and the banana, and in her own good time she brings them to maturity, when the idle savage stretches forth his hand, and satisfies his appetite.

Ill-fated people! I shudder when I think of the change a few years will produce in their paradisiacal abode; and probably when the most destructive vices, and the worst attendances on civilization, shall have driven all peace and happiness from the valley, the magnanimous French will proclaim to the world that the Marquesas



Islands have been converted to Christianity! and this the Catholic world will doubtless consider as a glorious event. Heaven help the “Isles of the Sea!” – The sympathy which Christendom feels for them has, alas! in too many instances proved their bane...

Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into *nominal* Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance. The depopulated land is then recruited from the rapacious hordes of enlightened individuals who settle themselves within its borders, and clamorously announce the progress of the Truth. Neat villas, trim gardens, shaven lawns, spires, and cupolas arise, while the poor savage soon finds himself an interloper in the country of his fathers, and that too on the very site of the hut where he was born. The spontaneous fruits of the earth, which God in his wisdom had ordained for the support of the indolent natives, remorselessly seized upon and appropriated by the stranger, are devoured before the eyes of the starving inhabitants, or sent on board the numerous vessels which now touch at their shores.

When the famished wretches are cut off in this manner from their natural supplies, they are told by their benefactors to work and earn their support by the sweat of their brows! But to no fine gentleman born to hereditary opulence does manual labor come more unkindly than to the luxurious Indian when thus robbed of the bounty of Heaven. Habituated to a life of indolence, he cannot and will not exert himself; and want, disease, and vice, all evils of foreign growth, soon terminate his miserable existence.

But what matters all this? Behold the glorious result! – The abominations of Paganism have given way to the pure rites of the Christian worship, – the ignorant savage has been supplanted by the refined European! (chap. 26)

This will be a relatively short chapter. Either you buy Hegel’s pronouncements as gospel, buy the argument that no heartbreak, hell, hopelessness, suffering, sadness or sorrow is too great for *other people to bear* for some Idea to fulfill itself (or for your iPhone), in which case nothing I could say would alter that conviction – or you know that these are sophistries and lies, and admit the suffering, *acknowledge the debt*, without any pleading of the case from me.

Still – given that we’ve all been systematically lied to and hobbled, given that we’re all, to some degree, overwhelmed by the seeming authority of ‘what is’ and are nowhere encouraged to challenge the “zero-sum-con,” the lie that we, the human species, *had* (“of necessity”) to relinquish joy in order to claim allegiance with ‘Reason’, with ‘intelligence,’ and thereby earn the cool toys (and, after all, the toys are in our hands while the joy is smoke from that pipe we rely on to get through our dreary lives <sup>4</sup>) – let’s take a moment to draw out the implications of the “zero-sum-con.”

### *Us Vs. The Machine*

When the smoke from the trains no longer drifted above the savanna, they realized that an age had ended – an age their elders had told them about, when all of Africa was just a garden for food. Now the machine ruled over their lands, and when they forced every machine within a thousand miles to halt they became conscious of their strength, but conscious also of their dependence. They began to understand that the machine was making of them a whole new breed of men. It did not belong to them; it was they who belonged to it. When it stopped, it taught them that lesson. (Ousmane Sembene, *God’s Bits of Wood*, p. 74)

I felt conflicted, the whole time I worked in the trades, about my participation in the trashing of the planet. “Development,” capitalist-style, translates into great gaping holes in the earth, the production of noxious chemicals, the poisoning of our soil, the pollution of our air and bodies with all the toxic fumes and dust, the dumping of voluminous quantities of residual construction materials into landfills.

But the experience also allowed me to see – first-hand – how the distribution systems we depend on get installed, and the powerful people who install them. It certainly demonstrated to me conclusively, when before I couldn’t know this, that folks like you and me will easily take over the managing of these systems when the time comes, at least the ones that it still makes sense to maintain.

And I also know that it will be a blast, once all the cons stand bare and exposed and we decide we’re done with them, to disappear the bizarre notion ‘work’ into the body-friendly feeling ‘fun.’

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<sup>4</sup> The abandoned child is a practical animal – best to hold on to what one has, says the devil on its back, than risk losing it for an intangible dream.

Some of the most fun I had, during my brief run as a journeyman electrician, was the two months I worked in the auto plant, NUMMI. I wrote about it in my journal.

Me and a robot faced off yesterday. I got all up in its face.

“*Back off!* Yeah, yeah, that’s what I thought. You *best* to back off!”  
Coward.

It was one of those little choo-choos transporting car parts.

Ghoulish little monster, singing happily to itself while it takes our jobs!

Well, faced with a challenge it backed off – *quick*, let me tell you.  
Soulless.

Spineless.

No wonder they work so cheap.

*Zero* self-esteem, if you ask me...

Yesterday morning before they unlocked the gang-box I walked over to the sheeted-off area where the robots rule and, my goddess, it’s a fucking awesome sight!

The ceiling-to-floor transparent plastic wall protects on-lookers from the fireworks display and the smoke of the robots at work: huge steel arms with vise-grip appendages, lunging, grabbing, sealing, pivoting, rising, falling, withdrawing, surging, sealing, grabbing, dominating – at frightening speed.

There’s a conveyor the skeletal cars must walk, with a long line of robot pairs straddling it, waiting for them. I’m sure the helpless vehicles tremble at the sight.

The first robot works alone. Its single appendage a huge fork which it pivots to seize a hapless car-shell on an elevated conveyor, spinning it over to the line where the robot pairs do their work. Down it goes, and then on down the line, each robot pair moving in as it arrives, grabbing it, working on it, having its way with it, more fierce than a tom seizing a female in heat. I can’t tell what they’re doing there in the bowels of the naked, shivering Vibes. It could be anything. Who knows what goes on in the depraved minds of these metal monsters.

The smoke, the flying sparks, and the surreal monster-robots compose a vision of Hell – disturbing because it inspires such awe. After this, my own work seems sluggish and mundane.

I’m not sure what I think about this.

At break we trek up the long flight of stairs next to the inoperative escalator. They've posted a big sign explaining that to fix the escalator would cost \$120,000 and I'm sure we agree that their money would be better spent elsewhere.

It bugs me, the disrespect implied, – I mean, the fucking Christmas lights display on the front of the building costs more than that – but not P. P bounds up the stairs two at a time, claiming that if you have trouble running up these three flights, you shouldn't be working at NUMMI. He adds that, "the escalator's never worked, not even fifteen years ago, the first time I was out here."

Now, obviously, if you're an appendage of the line, working at NUMMI is not "fun." Being forced to serve a machine completely inverts truth, totally negates what we are as human beings.

But look around and tell me that machines don't rule us... everywhere. Sure pedestrians have the right of way – but we don't bet our lives on that do we? And don't you feel an ever so slight sense of power and superiority, because of that shell of metal surrounding you, as you zip past the immobiles waiting at the bus stop?

And if the number of machines you're an adjunct to didn't carry its own cachet, how could they keep selling them to us? Why would we keep buying them?

The large quantity of machines and devices in our lives may, along with wage work, be the chief means of keeping us docile.

It certainly institutes, with each new generation, with each new day, *structural* disempowerment.

Do we know how they work? Most of us don't have a clue. But aren't they marvelous? And aren't we just *so* amusingly ignorant of how just about everything in our lives is constructed?

Haven't we become structurally dependent beings? Like our pets?

Perhaps we're pets ourselves?

There's certainly no ice pick in my bosom.

So are those robots, and like 'stuff,' the fulfillment of Hegel's *Idea*? The productive forces unleashed, expanding exponentially, over-running the globe, to free us all from the dread manual labor?

Yet, if we are, *structurally* – i.e., *built into* our built environments – *made to feel stupid*, this system, for as long as it lasts, will continue to render us thus. That's what it's for.

It's not the machines themselves, it's how we're forced to relate to them that hobbles us.

If you work in construction at NUMMI, the machines wait on *you*. Believe me, that's as it should be. The machine is nothing but human invention made manifest. But the podunks quite consciously chose to alienate us from our own human invention, from our earth, and from our fellows. These relationships that formerly *defined us* were taken away from us.

So, while the machine has become the metaphor for our reduction in scope, it was never meant to tame us, to be our master – quite the contrary. Most innovators in 'science' did their work as an act of solidarity, faith and love, i.e. giving without expecting anything in return. It was capital that alienated us from our inventions, named our alienated inventiveness 'Science,' and then used it to purchase our complicity. Perhaps this con is the taproot of all the others, a deep and invasive one that produces the weeds Division, Diminishment, Disempowerment and Demoralization, which invade our psyches, our peace, misdirecting our gratitude away from our ancestors – all those who gave their lives – to capital.

But our ace in the hole, the one thing the podunks can never dangle in front of us like a carrot to a workhorse, is our *wholeness*.

Seeking wholeness, consciously or not, is built into the package called 'human' – and our wholeness – priceless beyond measure – only nature – or nature in us – can give.

Rest assured, the power of nature released in us dwarfs the grandest scheme of avarice run amok. "The narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery."

We *can* reclaim what's ours – *and* have fun doing it – that's the point.

Not only are fun and 'work' *not* mutually exclusive, but *fun* is what realizes the potential of whatever we do, it's the quickening of life, the sperm fertilizing the egg.

So, it's not – "the Idea' realizing itself." In our 'system,' the point of 'History,' if it must have a point, is *Fun realizing itself*. Fun is what makes every fucking thing worth doing. *That* is what will seal the deal, one day – once we've congealed (again).

## *We're All Afraid We're Not Smart Enough*

But rather than ‘fun,’ what we’re taught to covet is ‘intelligence,’ as if it were some very pricey gewgaw in the window, which we spy with nose pressed, fearing we can never claim its possession, knowing that it’s bestowed by the system upon only a select few, the ‘successful’ – accepting the propaganda that the ‘wealthy’ got that way because they’re ‘smart.’

And don’t we all (we’re so well trained) hunger to be given both appellations – “smart” and “successful” – applied with the stroke of a palm, received with bent heads.

There’s a demon to be exorcised.

Which is why the ‘pragmatic view’ won’t do.

To those who say: “Leave the past to the past. It doesn’t matter what stories we tell ourselves to explain the violence and the theft, the expropriation and the exploitation, the division;” who say: “however we got this mess, it’s here now and the important thing is to just deal with it;” who say: “Well, that’s just what happened then, isn’t it?” – I would argue, again, that *this* ‘past’ is not ‘past.’

Moving along prolongs the wrong. It just doesn’t serve.

I’m a practical person myself so I’m not insensible to the appeal of the pragmatic view. But there’s a problem with it: the nasty psychic residue that oozes out of *the wrong story*, that *continues* to undermine, damage and diminish, on multiple dimensions. *Daily* it keeps us separated from our sources of power and prevents us from giving our ancestors, our earth, and each other, their due.

The *Triumph of Reason* global nightmare is very much alive, well, and shitting on everybody. It’s the macro version of the same story told when General Electric interposes its face between us and Nikola Tesla.

The capitalist system, armed with the most powerful weaponry in its arsenal, which is also its prettiest false face, its most fanciful facade – ‘Philosophy,’ ‘Science,’ ‘Rationality,’ ‘Thought’ – *with our help and complicity*, sweeps the suffering, sacrifice, brilliance and goodness of our ancestors into a box called ‘the Unhistorical,’ which we all bury in some place of ignominy in the backyard of our story, and forthwith show it our backs.

As a child, Stanley Tookie Williams recalls:

My cultural awareness was zero. I needed a complete black history course and a thorough deprogramming. I had been duped into believing that all black people were inhuman and inferior, that we had made no contribution to the forward thrust of civilization. Negative black stereotypes were broadcast or implied by the news media, magazines, institutions, television, newspapers, books, and every other medium you can think of. Not to mention the countless delusional blacks I met who believed the myth of black inferiority. Their contempt for their own blackness was so dynamic, they had subconsciously stepped outside themselves to assimilate with any cultural group other than their own. Their dys-education was complete. The more I was indoctrinated by lies about my blackness, the more I grew to detest myself. (*Blue Rage, Black Redemption*, p. 39)

Studying slave routes in Africa, Saidiya Hartman searched for some residue of the kidnapped and stolen – the disappeared – among the descendants of the survivors in contemporary Ghana. She learned that it was considered shameful to be the descendant of a ‘slave,’ and that urban, coastal Ghanaians viewed their northern, rural kin as ‘backward:’

The land of barbarians was what southerners called it. Most of them had never been north of Kumasi, so a full day’s journey from Accra to Salaga was unthinkable, but this didn’t prevent them from sharing fanciful tales about air so thick with dust you could hardly breathe, or describing bare-breasted women with the kind of revulsion and fascination you would expect from an American provincial opening the pages of *National Geographic* for the first time, or mapping the north-south divide along the lines of brawn versus intelligence, or bemoaning a world without indoor toilets or electricity, or complaining of lazy and untrustworthy servants. Listening to them you would have imagined that northerners had stumbled out of their caves just yesterday and had yet to lose their scraggy feral manner. My landlady in Accra swore you could smell the stench of the untamed at the edge of the forest. Her daughter openly mocked primitives who had never set eyes on the sea, as if this alone were enough to damn them for eternity. The crudeness and poverty of northerners would send me running back to Accra, they warned. It was an inhospitable country. The north was the heartland of slavery. (*Lose Your Mother*, p. 178)

The story that human slavery, in any of its forms (including the one that tells us we're 'workers'), is justified by its service to Reason, or Progress, or the Productive Forces, or any other 'idea' you want to name, continues to harm, continues to damage psyches, continues to make people fear they're 'backward,' not smart enough – continues to diminish the suffering of our ancestors and our sense of ourselves.

We're all afraid that we're not 'smart enough.'

This is, of course, as already stated, a con, one that enropes us in a perfect circle of control – we that the podrunks fear almost as much as obscurity. It nullifies the moral argument, ripping from our hands *our* most potent weapon against *them*; it fosters division, disempowerment and demoralization; and it sows confusion and self-hate, as we endorse and then mimic their ruthlessness and greed.

Jim Weaknecht's sporting goods store in Hamburg, Pennsylvania (population 4,100) had provided him and his family with a good life:

His best year, the register rang up a mere \$1.3 million in sales. He kept enough as profit, however, that his wife, Julie, could stay home taking care of their three children, which to Weaknecht meant he enjoyed a very good life. (David Cay Johnston, *Free Lunch: How the Wealthiest Americans Enrich Themselves at Government Expense (and Stick You With the Bill)*, p. 95)

Until Cabela's, a corporate sporting goods behemoth, came to town, lobbied the town fathers to subsidize its mega-store to the tune of over \$30 million, and drove Weaknecht's out of business.

Since he closed his store, Weaknecht has worked as an assistant manager for a regional grocery store chain. Cabela's actually offered him a job – \$13.50 an hour to be a department manager, supervising people who make \$8 or \$9 an hour. Weaknecht holds a second job, too, working on his days off for his cousin's landscaping business. His wife, Julie, works, too, instead of devoting herself full time to their children. She holds down two jobs, as a teacher's aide and at a local department store...Weaknecht has a sort of grudging admiration for the Cabela family's Paris Hilton-level shamelessness in manipulating local governments for handouts instead of competing fair and square in the market. Weaknecht wants to believe any sensible citizen would reject welfare for the rich as both senseless and immoral. He believes that if he had



sought a subsidy, the Hamburg town fathers would have laughed at his audacity. Yet his own experience tells him that the reality of business and politics has morphed into something else, something beyond the pale and yet very real. So long as he can earn his own way he will, even if that means four jobs for one family and paying off the creditors of his business so everyone he deals with is made whole. But being rich and collecting welfare, hundreds of millions of dollars of welfare? “I tell everybody the Cabelas are the smartest business people in the world,” Weaknecht said, “because they pulled it off.” (*Free Lunch*, p. 108-9)

“A grudging admiration”? ... “because they pulled it off”? ... because they ‘won’?...because they successfully beat down other human beings? Which makes them “the smartest business people in the world”?

When Congressman Jay Inslee, as part of a bipartisan group meeting with then <sup>5</sup> Vice-President Dick Cheney to discuss the disastrous results of Enron’s rapaciousness, pleaded with Cheney on behalf of his constituents for “relief from Enron’s gouging,”

He looked straight at me, and his reply had all the subtlety of being slapped in the face with a flounder. He said, with a voice dripping with arrogance, “You know what your trouble is? You just don’t understand economics.” (Jay Inslee and Bracken Hendricks, *Apollo’s Fire*, p. 90)

For podunks everywhere, *across time, in every nation*, beating people into submission is its own justification. Their definition of ‘economics’ is simply “survival of the fittest,” which, according to their practice, means: “survival of the most vicious, the most heartless, the most selfish and self-centered, the most single-mindedly focused on greed.”

‘Reason’ didn’t triumph. ‘Greed,’ wearing a mask it called ‘Reason,’ triumphed.

And when we decide to face the fear that we’re not smart enough, to accept the truth that we’re *more than capable* of making and managing our own systems of production and distribution, when we shake off the meritocracy-con, and embrace our brilliance, that mask will go the way of all things insubstantial – to the four winds, and away.

5 *He’s gone! He’s gone! He’s gone!* ...I know, I know, not really – he and his kind are ever hovering in the background, waiting for their chance to do their next hideous thing. It’s critical we deny them that opportunity.

Human solidarity will easily trump the politics of ‘divide and conquer’ when we decide to look at our ancestors’ stories unvarnished, and with the love and solidarity we continue to harbor for each other, preserved for the day when they can once again be put to some use.

*The Conquest of Necessity: Force*

We’re also afraid we’re not ‘good’ enough, because everywhere we turn we’re told we must be *forced* to support broader social goals.

In Greek “necessity” (*anangke*) serves also as the word for “force,” “constraint,” “compulsion,” “violence,” and “duress.” ...Apparently the Greeks understood very well the connection between necessity and violence, and the requisite that a citizen be a man [sic] of leisure indicates that necessity had passed from his life, and he could avoid violence in his thought and behavior. Freedom to the Greeks could only exist after the conquest of necessity, which demeans man, causing him to have to live with force and violence, his very existence under duress. In that condition he could not be political. Under the pressure of necessity, he resorted to violence. (Earl Shorris)

*If truth and justice, and the better principles of our nature, cannot exist unless enforced by the statute-book, how are we to account for the social condition of the Typees? ... They deal more kindly with each other, and are more humane, than many who study essays on virtue and benevolence, and who repeat every night that beautiful prayer breathed first by the lips of the divine and gentle Jesus. I will frankly declare, that after passing a few weeks in this valley of the Marquesas, I formed a higher estimate of human nature than I had ever before entertained. But alas! since then I have been one of the crew of a man-of-war, and the pent-up wickedness of five hundred men has nearly overturned all my previous theories. (Herman Melville, *Typee*)*

Unless you’re black or a youth, or especially unless you’re both, you may never have had the unexhilarating and infuriating experience of being trailed around a store, or considered a leper as you walk down the street, or felt you should check yourself for tail and horns when you find yourself alone with that white woman in an elevator, or had the feeling of deep longing for “the freedom that comes from not feeling watched” that Barack experienced (as blissfully world-rocking) when he first visited Kenya.

But even if you aren't a young black male, you've probably felt, whether you're aware of it or not, the disquieting sensation that you must be 'bad' to warrant all the scrutiny and rigid insistence on compliance with so many towering and monolithic rules (that for some reason are more important than oneself) that *all* 'workers' and 'citizens' are subjected to from our first tottering steps in shady and shaky-edificed America.

Starting with our parents slapping our legs or smacking our bottoms, on to teachers grabbing and shoving us about,<sup>6</sup> onward again under our present boss' watchful eye to the investigation by the next one – coercion and surveillance dog our lives.

*That step down from the auction block may not be as long as we think.*

Subliminally and not so subliminally most of us get it that our goodness is continually in doubt, and that we cannot be trusted to 'do the right thing' – unless we are *forced*.

As working people our every move is drenched in the stench of podunk fear. Perhaps it's time to return the package unopened, with the words, "Wrong Address Sucka," written in big, bold, black ink all over it.

But before we can do that we have to be clear on the point that this bundle belongs to *them*, not us.

If I were hiring people to work, I'd try naturally to pay them a decent wage. I'd try to find out their first names, their last names, keep the company as small as possible, so I could personalize the whole thing. All I would ask a man is a handshake, see you in the morning. No applications, nothing. I wouldn't be interested in the guy's past. Nobody ever checks the pedigree on a mule, do they? But they do on a man. Can you picture walking up to a mule and saying, "I'd like to know who his granddaddy was?" (Mike Lefevre in Studs Terkel's *Working*, p. xxxvii)

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<sup>6</sup> One journeyman I worked with (a white man, if it matters) told me a story about how he and one of his teachers in high school did not get along. One day the teacher announced that his wife was going to have a baby, so Paul asked, "Have you figured out who the father is yet?" The teacher threw him against a wall and ordered him to the office, where the principal called Paul's father. When they told Paul's father an edited version Paul spoke up, "don't forget to tell my father how you threw me into the wall," and Paul's Dad exploded, "*You put your hands on my son?!*" Great Dad. Great story.

All the force and surveillance we're subjected to is not because of who *we* are, but because of who *they* are. As Saidiya Hartman points out in *Lose Your Mother*:

Like ruling men everywhere, they [dread] the hewers of wood, the rabble, the multitudes. They [fret] about the course of events that might place the bottom rail on top. They nervously [anticipate] the retribution of slaves. The lives sacrificed for clothe, guns, rum, and cowries [leave] their traces in the anxieties of the ruling class. (p. 160)

(This 'past' is not past – yet.)

I'm sure it's not news to you but I'll say it anyway: the entire global system that enwraps us is erected on *force*, on the lie that we must be coerced to contribute, *harnessed* before we'll help.

But *of course* it's a lie. We *know this* in our bodies. And once we're bludgeoned into doubting our bodies, each new child comes along to remind us (“*Why aren't we helping?*”) that we *want* to help each other out, to make a difference, to contribute.

But the system – with the weight of its concrete and glass, the tension of its cinches and grasp, the fanaticism of its insistence on conflict and command – projects the opposite message.

Is this “progress?”

Each of us starts out trying to work with these coercive structures, bringing our flexible, open, funny, generous selves to the table, and our *faith* that Goodness will work miracles on closed grinch-hearts and a Grinch-epiphany will occur – a heart will grow where none had been before.

But, instead, *our* hearts get broken – or hardened.

This system *cannot allow us* to be our best selves, which can only expand and be realized when *we* can *offer ourselves* – and our gifts – *freely*.

It's time to consider the possibility, even if only as an act of faith and solidarity with *all* our relations, that *the world could have been unified* – our energy concentrated and organized – *through cooperation rather than through force*.

It might have taken a hell of a lot longer, we'll never know, but, having absorbed in our bodies, if not in our consciousnesses, the results of the breakneck destruction of our planet and the grossest violations of our mutual trust and solidarity, I think we can agree: speed is overrated.

## *Survival and Complicity*

Powerful people share what they know willingly, because they understand the compact, the call and response, between all Life: “I *seed* you” – “I *feed* you;” an endless circle of mutuality, inter-dependency; a continuous cycle of promise fulfilled.

But when a weakened people – orphaned by disaster – who are the living dead, the walking wounded, who seek only to consume, to take, and to give nothing back, when such as these surveys the scene – the dance of inter-dependency – it sees not a circle, but a sword, not fellowship – but force. They are “Trouble,” writ large, who then *become* the Disaster.

And once disaster occurs, solidarity, and its living form, culture, is no more, or hopelessly compromised – and we have entered the era of “survival and complicity” – human beings are left to their *individual* devices.

Which is how the podunks want it.

The primitive level of human existence is that of want. There are imperative needs which have to be satisfied before anything else. Only when man has time and energy left beyond the satisfaction of the primary needs, can culture develop and with it those strivings that attend the phenomena of abundance. Free (or spontaneous) acts are always phenomena of abundance. Freud’s psychology is a psychology of want. He defines pleasure as the satisfaction resulting from the removal of painful tension. Phenomena of abundance, like love or tenderness, actually do not play any role in his system. (Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, p. 292)

We *are* capable of investigating the world from a stance of unity, without linking that inquiry to a bunch of fanciful notions about ‘Thought realizing Itself,’ and some people being ‘good’ because they help Thought realize itself and other peoples being ‘bad’ because they don’t represent ‘Thought,’ or some such bullshit.

Let’s start telling ourselves a different story – *if only out of solidarity*, out of a need to grow together rather than in opposition.

The alternative story can be summed up in three words: “misery loves company.” Some really, really unhappy people with big gaping holes in their souls, “under the pressure of necessity, resorted to violence.” They set out on an endless mission to try to fill these holes with material stuff.

The sight of happy people drove them mad and they set about trying to destroy their happiness as thoroughly as possible.

From Necessity in the human story the road led to Child Abandonment and Violence, and then onward to Hierarchy and Passive Obedience.

Now it's true that we can't elevate this story to the level of 'System,' and in it there are lots of incompletely answered questions like, "how did they get so unhappy?" But, still, it fits the facts way better than the tale Hegel tells.

Fear stalked the globe, stealing wherever it went – food, resources, happiness. And destroying the happiness of others was most satisfying of all: to smash as it had been smashed, wound as it had been wounded – to do to others what had been done to it: it made orphans. It's a common compulsion, a familiar vacancy – a death-fetish dynamic (Israel comes to mind.)

The lost child is the source of our troubles. And, for better or worse, we are *all* lost children now, here in America.

It's time for us to heal the hurt, complete the circuit – return home.

We have nothing now but our imaginations and our biological memory, but that's enough for the task at hand, which is *reunion*.

In our heads, in the stories we told ourselves, we saw 'rejection' writ large. But imagine if we changed the story, walked in and welcomed the alternate universe, the parallel world in which we get to play the hero's part, the one who prevails, *despite*. One who'd been lied to cruelly about our parents, our home, our harbors and friends – it wasn't 'abandonment' at all, but a gross contagion that overwhelmed everything in its path, the virus Fear.

And in *that* universe, *that* world, we forgive, we grant ourselves the love we never got, granting permission, invitation, to return to our sources and renew our relations, and discover them fresh, anew.

Most of us concerned about the wastefulness of the capitalist system in terms of its mammoth overproduction and the mountains of garbage and toxic waste it generates are simultaneously, painful though it is for us to think about, obsessed by the 'waste' of human beings. The podunks perpetuate the mythology that "Merit Rises" – that the best float to the top and the rest settle to the bottom like sludge. Like most capitalist mythologies this one is multiply useful for the less than honorable goal

of maintaining the status quo. It *demoralizes* us, first and foremost, and what could be better than that, if you want to rule the demoralized?

A friend of my son is a beautiful, exuberant, chatty, quick-witted black woman who loved to draw as a child but...stopped. The longing to make something with her hands survived, however, and she took a class in making books – lovely, hand-stitched things that she occasionally bestows on friends and relations during the holidays.

Restless, unhappy, unseen, unchallenged, and beginning to experience carpal tunnel syndrome at her present job – doing high-end massage for a pricey establishment – she’s recently started interviewing at another high-end establishment, only in management this time, in consideration of her wrists.

Hello, hello, hello. This is K calling, to say: I am the dopest person alive, almost in the history of the world. I got a phone call today from one of the owners that I did the interview with and he wants me to meet the other owner because, he said, and I quote: “I was *really* impressed with the answers you gave and the questions you asked.” Why? Because I’m dope! Because I’m awesome!

The exhilaration in her voice, captured on the answering machine, sickened me – the idea that some stranger’s opinion – worse, some *boss’s*, with intent only to ‘make-use-of’ – could matter so much to her sense of herself.

K has a sarcastic father who left when she was two but put in enough appearances thereafter to shackle her with a vicious insecurity about her own worth and her relationships with men. She was excited about a management job because she has no health insurance and the warnings from her carpal tunnels are getting louder. A few strokes of attention from the next boss and she was on cloud nine.

The next job has no health insurance either.

I swept into almost every job with exhilaration too.

I tried to make family, make tribe.

I wanted to gather the new crew round and wrap them in the protective bubble of my power and love.

I would give love and receive love.

I would be *seen*, finally, and *appreciated* – *valued* for my quite obvious and considerable gifts.

For some reason I can't stop thinking about those teen-age "nymphs" of Melville's, who swam out to greet the ambassador sailors of "civilization" –

...catching at the bob-stays, and wreathing their slender forms about the ropes, hung suspended in the air. All of them at length succeeded in getting up the ship's side, where they clung dripping with the brine and glowing from the bath, their jet-black tresses streaming over their shoulders, and half enveloping their otherwise naked forms. There they hung, sparkling with savage vivacity, laughing gaily at one another, and chattering away with infinite glee. Nor were they idle the while, for each one performed the simple offices of the toilette for the other. Their luxuriant locks, wound up and twisted into the smallest possible compass, were freed from the briny element; the whole person carefully dried, and from a little round shell that passed from hand to hand, anointed with a fragrant oil...

– how they dried each other off, coiled and perfumed each other's hair, anointing each other with oil, how with each of the "simple offices of the toilette" they confirmed *for each other*: "you are ineffably, exquisitely, delightfully, perfect."

Who among us retains *that* certainty?

*What Is 'Progress'?*

Whatever action is born from force, though it be infinitesimal, the cosmic balance is upset and universal motion results. (Nikola Tesla)

"Give me a man that is not passion's slave and I will wear him in my heart's core." (Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act III: Scene 2)

From the first day to this, sheer greed was the driving spirit of civilization." (Frederick Engels)

The crime itself, the manner of the crime – that was the immediately intriguing thing. It was bizarre, undoubtedly... That angle did not bother the inspector. His years on the local force had taught him never to be intimidated by eccentricity. What made him uneasy was the feeling of being confronted by uniquely resourceful and organized cleverness... His seeing through the arrangement of apparent accident... had pleased him at first. But he now realized he had merely chopped down a tree to disclose a forest. (The redoubtable Inspector Purbright in Colin Watson's *Coffin, Scarcely Used*)



‘Force,’ from day one, has been ‘civilization’s’ mantra, the worm at its core.

Its’ apologists dutifully taught us that violence served “History” by driving it all forward, that those mowed under were the collateral damage of an essentially worthy project.

No one asked those of us who did the manual labor that fueled this effort what *we* thought of the deal.

There has never been a discussion, just as there has never been a discussion about the meaning of America’s roots in racism.

We are never asked our opinion. We remain those mowed under, to this day.

The speed with which the agenda of the podrunks gets shoved down our throats is itself a form of violence, and one of their central strategies.

Speed, insecurity (desperation), and overwork (exhaustion) have prevented us from seeing that there *is* an agenda, that we are confronted with an extremely *organized* effort. They know, quite clearly, that they can only maintain the illusion of rule by staying well ahead of our ability to process who and what they are.

Speed, insecurity, and overwork are their essential weapons, for if we could stop long enough to look at our lives, we’d be devastated.

‘Force’ is the underlying value that structures every institution in our world. That it has been the dominant organizational model doesn’t mean that it *had* to be, or that it was the essential basis for invention to exist – far from it. Within the paradigm of ‘force,’ invention blooms *despite*.

So *what* is ‘Progress’? Who decides how to gauge its existence?

Just as we have to redefine ‘wealth’, this word ‘progress’ can’t be accepted on face value either. It’s time we put the question to ourselves, we on whose energy it’s all been fueled.

So, to *you* who do the work, what kind of ‘progress’ matters to *you*?

Have we made progress in loving our babies?

In being a fun-loving and happy species?

In mutual trust and security across cultures?

In preserving the biodiversity and health of the planet?

The history of ‘Progress’ is a history of violence, complicity, and confusion. Let’s stop calling this mess ‘Progress’ and call it what it is: ‘Disaster.’

There *is* “movement” – true. The disaster-traders are very busy, very ‘hard-working,’ very ‘successful’ in widening the gaping hole, the wound – extending the disaster ever forward, and marshalling the energy of our collective suffering.

And there’s “*progress*,” true, in Tesla’s sense of the word:

“...progress, or – more correctly – development, or evolution, if not a movement, infinitely complex and often unscrutinizable...”

– a movement toward unity, peace, and cooperation as a global community – *embedded in* the *disaster* of the last five hundred years.

But that Disaster which the West calls “Progress” is not “*progress*.”

The progress that *has* occurred, included in which is the labor of invention freely given to lighten the load for the “yet unborn these,” has occurred *despite* the “Progress” the podrunks celebrate, which is Progress in killing, in destroying, in raping, in exploiting, in division, in atomization – in annihilating, or suppressing, all that opposes obedience with freedom.

It’s time for a serious visit to this question of *what we want*.

What’s different today is that a global consciousness is emerging that is putting the earth / life *first* – and that it’s *our* turn now to answer this question.

“*Now* is the seed time of [*global*] union, faith, and honor” ... of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The rhythm of the earth is  
pulsing, pulsing,  
In each and every one of us.

*Be it.*

Holy Holy.

Take it in.

Keep it round.

When we look at the ‘cost’ in human and earth terms, in the erosion of healthy earth systems – *whether this loss was ‘worth it’ depends on whether it was you being slaughtered, you, conscious of your mutilated soul.*

Was it ‘worth’ it?

What must no longer be equivocated about is that *for those who were happy before*, obviously, *no, it was not worth it.*

We paid too high a price.

*And instead of denying that, it must be acknowledged – our ancestors’ suffering must be given its full weight.*

Instead, all the stuff is thrown in our faces, and we’re told we should be grateful that we were “compelled to come in.”

But now that we can recognize the enormous sacrifice of our ancestors who still love the earth, it is completely unacceptable to not restore their brilliance to the story.

This entire monolith that the podrunks call ‘civilization’ feeds on – *has always fed on – our energy.*

This imbalance is *not supportable physically or psychically.* Randall Robinson is right. There *is* a debt. Of course not one with dimensions that can be defined in terms podrunks can grasp. Unhappiness descended on happiness and set about annihilating it – what’s the price tag on that?

The enormous debt must be acknowledged as we go forward to what comes next.

When you *take* – and don’t acknowledge *what* you take, or even *that* you take – *that* is a crime beyond measure.

Parents do this to children, when we pretend that we give them ‘everything’ while we feed on their creativity, joy and spontaneity.

The white-skinned West, the ‘Core,’ the Pretenders to Mastery, do this to the darker-skinned South, the ‘Periphery,’ the placeholders for wholeness, when they pretend they give to the South ‘everything’ – the keys to the future, the ideas and innovation, the machines and other magic – while they feed on the labor power, creativity, joy and spontaneity, of the darker-skinned peoples.

As soon as we say, “but look what Progress has brought us!” we’re back into betraying our ancestors, back into complicity, again.

As long as we keep saying, “but look...look what we *have*...we have this and this and that...” then we are back into complicity, back into the arms of *Nesucom*, and its tentacles tighten around us – and we are lost.

It's time to redeem the suffering, the sacrifice, of our ancestors.  
It's time to say that we can't betray them anymore.

The restless hunger of the Europeans, their scouring the world for all the 'stuff' they could grab, was the form their 'longing' took – disaster though it was for the rest of us. That they did not, and for the most part do not, honor or consciously value all that they have received from us is a problem for our collective healing.

*Nesucom* is a monster that eats you whole, sucks you dry.

It is what we do *now* – with *consciousness* – that is our lasting legacy.

The one clear 'progress' I can see is that we *are* becoming, as Tesla saw, a global people / being.

It's wrong, and dishonors our ancestors' suffering, their *sacrifice*, to pretend this disaster is anything *but* disaster – yet here we are, and if pressed to find some meaning in this mess I'd give it this: disaster has forced us to unify – that's the most we can say.

But, no doubt, *earth-connected peoples were happier before accumulation* – absolutely.

It may be that a larger disaster awaits us that the ancestors know of, for which our accumulated energy will serve.

But it's a moot point for our current universe, which presents us with more than enough challenges to occupy our longing.

Our work is in the present: it's time to throw off our yokes, throw a mighty spur in Disaster's spokes. The only thing we can say definitively is that it *is our collective* legacy.

We are one world now.

What comes from One  
Is now Two  
But must be One again.

And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw with the ox. (*Isaiah 11:7*)

The problem is that White America has never solidly committed itself to the cause of racial justice... to constructive committed alliances... a willingness to go with us all the way... Black and White together we shall overcome. (The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King)

Lord, in the memory of all the saints who from their labors rest, and in the joy of a new beginning, we ask you to help us work for that day when black will not be asked to get back, when brown can stick around -- (laughter) -- when yellow will be mellow -- (laughter) -- when the red man can get ahead, man -- (laughter) -- and when white will embrace what is right. (The Reverend Joseph Lowery, Inauguration Day, 2009)

## Culture

### *The "Culture-Con"*

At the risk of boring you, I have to repeat – a big part of our difficulty planning the next social arrangement is that we don't have our own language and we don't speak podrunks.

But the problem's more insidious than that. Podrunks not only superimpose their face onto every social institution, they devotionally dedicate their lives to keeping us from creating anything that is all our own, and to subverting – by redefining, packaging and selling as a commodity – what we *do* create.

As the podrunks only allegiance is to 'Power' (the illusion of rule), culturally, they are adrift. Their primary skills are in the thievery and manipulation line, not creation, so 'culture' is quite beyond them. Moreover, precisely because 'culture' means the self-creation of a people, they perceive it, correctly, as a threat to their ability to 'create' *us*.

Their giggling seizure of Machiavelli's *The Prince* as their Bible is illustrative.

Vanity drives them to conceive of themselves as "princes," and their duplicity, joined with a bottle-fed vapidness, prevents them from creating their own self-adulatory treatises, so we, the people, the captive audience, are treated, in being forced to bear witness to their public arrhythmic writhings-about, to endless iterations of their interpretations of Machiavelli's advice.

... there are two ways of contending, one in accordance with the laws, the other by force; the first of which is proper to men, the second to beasts. But since the first method is often ineffectual, it becomes necessary to resort to the second. A Prince should, therefore, understand how to use well both the man and the beast,...and that the one without the other has no stability,... and that he who was best known to play the fox has had the best success...It is necessary, indeed,...to be skilful in simulating and dissembling. But men are so simple, and governed so absolutely by their present needs, that he who wishes to deceive will never fail in finding willing dupes. ...It is not essential...that a Prince should *have* all the good qualities which I have enumerated [mercy, good faith, integrity, humanity, and religion], ...but it is most essential that he should *seem* to have them; I will even venture to affirm that if he has and invariably practices them all, they are hurtful, whereas the *appearance* of having them is useful. Thus, it is well to seem merciful, faithful, humane, religious, and upright, and also to be so; but the mind should remain so balanced that were it needful not to be so, you should be able and know how to change to the contrary. ...And you are to understand that a Prince, and most of all a new Prince, cannot observe all those rules of conduct in respect whereof men are accounted good, being often forced, in order to preserve his Princesdom, to act in opposition to good faith, charity, humanity, and religion. *He must therefore keep his mind ready to shift as the winds and tides of Fortune turn*, and... ought not to quit good courses if he can help it, but should know how to follow evil courses if he must. A Prince should therefore be very careful that nothing ever escapes his lips which is not replete with the five qualities above named, so that to see and hear him, one would think him the embodiment of mercy, good faith, integrity, humanity, and religion. And there is no virtue which it is more necessary for him to seem to possess than this last; because men in general judge rather by the eye than by the hand, for every one can see but few can touch. *Every one sees what you seem, but few know what you are*, and these few dare not oppose themselves to the opinion of the many who have the majesty of the State to back them up. ...Wherefore if a Prince succeeds in establishing and maintaining his authority, the means will always be judged honourable and be approved by every one. For the vulgar are

always taken by appearances and by results, and the world is made up of the vulgar, the few only finding room when the many have no longer ground to stand on. A certain Prince of our own days, whose name it is as well not to mention, is always preaching peace and good faith, although the mortal enemy of both; and both, had he practiced them as he preaches them, would, oftener than once, have lost him his kingdom and authority. (Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, written in 1513)

‘Force,’ is not the only worm at the core of ‘civilization,’ a.k.a. ‘class society.’ Its partner in crime is ‘Duplicity’ – the false face.

Podrunks preoccupied with choosing the precise right mask to con us with haven’t the time, inclination, or inspiration to develop any substance behind the mask.

[The Prince] must therefore keep his mind ready to shift as the winds and tides of Fortune turn... Every one sees what you *seem*, but few know what you *are*...

The problem for our modern papier-mâché “princes,” having no substance themselves, schooled in the peculiar logic of “eat-or-be-eaten,” “kiss-up-and-kick-down,” “boss-or-be bossed,” is that Independent Judgment, Creation – which by definition requires authenticity – can find no purchase in barren souls.

As a result, no matter how many readings of *The Prince* they devotionally treat themselves to, they can never really ‘see’ us, the wind from below, or grasp, derivatively, “culture,” the self-creation of a people.

But they *do* know one thing for certain: that which will never grow in *their* gardens, they definitely don’t want growing in ours.

So, with “culture,” as with everything they don’t understand and fear, they try to redefine by dumbing-down, thinning-out, packaging, and commodifying. If they can *own* it, they reason, they can control it.

Obsessively, doggedly, they strive to discover and alter the content, and the avenues, of *our* discourse.

So, with “culture,” as with every powerful or loaded word or way, we, the people, encounter the same problem: we look for what we’ve lost and discover that the podrunks have seized it and inserted podrunk-friendly content, bleeding the life out of it, painting it bland – making it a challenge just to carry on a conversation, to know what we’re saying when we say it.

Authentic, critical content – whether its inner-city fury, or prison farm blues, green awareness, or organic food – will be trivialized and ridiculed (they will never admit that what’s going on is an attempt at *self-creation*) until they can catch up to what’s alive: grab it, commodify it (taking something alive and making it dead), and start selling it back to us.

So, rather than “culture” being *the tapestry, the river, the interweave of past, present and future*, we’re told it’s actually ‘styles of consumption,’ or having money, or symphony orchestras and extraneous paintings priced beyond our means – or “the systematic development of truth in scientific form.”

Podrunks fiercely police the intellectual terrain to ensure that all roads lead back to our being bossed.

There’s another way in which podrunks hope to confuse or demoralize us with the notion “culture.” They either equate it with words in service of class rule, like “civilization” and “democracy,” and “technology,” or it’s handed over to the “sciences” to further denude it of anything that frightens them, anything that *grows itself* – i.e. without asking for permission – and painted with the ‘primitive’ brush.

The primary purpose of the “disciplines,” specialization, academia, is to keep us dependent and separated from our pasts, from nature, and from each other – across time, place, and culture – so the podrunks can feel safer.

When you make a ‘study’ of our relations (with all living things), they cease to *be* our relations and become instead *objects* of an objectified ‘Mind.’ Now *that* is terrain podrunks can traverse comfortably.

When the servants of capital – wearing the academic mask, the priest’s robes, or the soldier’s uniform – fall upon peoples as they are, as they find them, and collect their frozen specimens, their snapshots of a whole people, they begin the process of halting, annihilating and cannibalizing culture.

Most of the cultures around the world today are in limbo, crippled or effectively (or actually) annulled, used to either fuel the commercial imperative or serve capital’s ideological war with “we the people.”

Once plugged into the commercial imperative ‘culture’ becomes a parody of itself. Cultural evolution halts under assault. A *living* culture, like any other living thing, takes in food, processes new information and ideas, and ejects what it doesn’t need.

But when it’s being fixed in place, these processes stop.



Podrunks of every nation participate in this con, this diminishment of the full complex of our possibilities.

No 'ruler,' or pretender to rule, wants commoners to embrace either this full complex or to embrace across cultural divides. So we're told lies about ourselves and about each other. We're taught, via the propaganda machinery that capital owns or controls, to *fear our own 'wildness,'* as well as the strange 'other' – the Arab, the Asian, the African, the American...the Woman... the Youth – who is reduced in 'Thought' to a caricature, i.e. distorted, frozen, and packaged as commodity, ideological and otherwise. And information that conflicts with the officially-promoted culture-cons is kept from public view (one of the reasons podrunks are so annoyed that Barack is president.)<sup>1</sup>

Capitalism tries to freeze and invalidate 'culture' to keep us separate – from each other in present time, and from our earlier selves. It likes this idea of hard and fast lines between us very much – and it *loves* the 'eternal "Now."'

A people-originated culture, a living culture, is a conversation, a negotiation – of the present with the past and the future, which are forever in flux. It poses a threat for this reason as well, because podrunks would have us believe that there is no past, no future – there is only '*Now.*' "Don't look ahead, don't look back, just watch for the pieces coming down the track (or piling up on your desk)."

Of course this is not what they tell themselves, oh no (hence the significance of the grandfather clock set ahead in one of their secretive little-boy-clubs). *They are always* ever studying the past, and preparing for, planning, the future *they* want (you know, the one where they stay on top, in perpetuity.)

People frozen into predictable packages are trapped, immobilized – and kept divided from their fellow commoners of other lands, stuck in the boxes made for them by *their* winds from above.

(Of course, reality remains, nonetheless, somewhere, underneath all the pretend – and it *will* rise, it's our biological inheritance. Our nature

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<sup>1</sup> One of my favorite examples of suppressed facts that challenge the official stereotype are those kick-ass ladies of the French Revolution who marched to Versailles chanting, "*Allons chercher le boulanger, la boulangere et le petit mitron!*" Translation: "Let's go and find the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker boy!" Kisses were not being blown along the way. No feminine mystique burdened *their* backs. There was a bread crisis on and they were *pissed*. This was not that long ago.

is open, creative, flexible, and generous. Our chief gift is malleability. I mean, if we can be *wolves* [at tremendous cost to our intestinal tracts and longevity, as our bodies are not designed for eating “meat,” raw or otherwise] we can be anything, right?)

If “force” is their mantra, “divide and conquer” is their guiding principle.

It seems odd sometimes, doesn't it, that a strategy so well known can still work so well? It's like *The Prince* itself. Most of us understand the meaning of “Machiavellian,” know that podrunks worship the ideas comprised by that term, particularly the ones that glorify rapacious acts and promote a utilitarian and contemptuous view of one's fellow humans:

It should be borne in mind that the temper of the multitude is fickle, and that while it is easy to persuade them of a thing, it is hard to fix them in that persuasion. Wherefore, matters should be so ordered that when men no longer believe of their own accord, they may be compelled to believe by force...It is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need [“want,” “necessity”] is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you...and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserved you by a dread of punishment which never fails. (*The Prince*)

But even though we know that the podrunks are “Machiavellian,” i.e., manipulative, to the core, we have yet to show them the door. Why is that?

Why is what Machiavelli observed five hundred years ago still true, that “...all [the people] ask is not to be oppressed.” Why is that all we ask? And it *is* mostly true – most of us just want to live, love and honor the ancestors well. Which to podrunks, across time, space and nation, will ever and always only mean that we are stupid, because we do not lust after ‘Power’ as they do.

Of course all it means in truth is that *we are not them*, not we, the earth-connected European tribal peoples – who still exist in biological memory – and not we, the earth-connected tribal peoples of the global South.

John Trudell has said:

What we all have in common is that we are the descendants of tribes. We are all the descendants of a spiritual reality. The faint ancestral memory is always there...The behavior here [Western colonialism] reflects what happened to the tribes of Europe. *They no longer had the perceptual reality of what it meant to be a human being. They were owned.*

Projection is a phenomenon with both macro and micro dimensions. (Israel comes to mind.)

Perhaps our story, restating “misery loves company,” is “pain resolving itself.” A gash in the human family, followed by festering, followed by scabbing and eventual healing – and the whole process stretched over millennia? While the ancestors turn our heads *en masse* to...what? – the way out? the wholeness, the light at the end of the tunnel, the path through the mountain of ego?... learning, eventually, at the end of specificity, that we *are* light, the secret we discover when we die, and the longing of our hearts while we live?

‘Light’ – a lovely word after all?

Across time, across millennia, the woundedness of podrunks is palpable. Little has changed. Despite their longing that we mirror their disconnection from true power, we can, and do, reaffirm our relations. How / why their disconnection happened is a matter of speculation, but the result – imbalance – proved self-reinforcing.

“Power is contagious,” Marilyn French said, but she added: “so is pleasure.”

If *Nesucom* walked in and made orphans of some of us, who then made orphans of all of us – because Power is a closed system, a self-reinforcing cycle – a unity that will one day make orphans of none of us (one way or another) – leaving us where we started (or extinct), only in accord as a global ‘thought’ – then what do we make of it all?

Is there only “oneness/split/oneness again” – as dispassionate as a bowl of water poured into two cups? Starting with Fellowship, breaking with Faith, using Fire to re-claim Fellowship, passing necessarily (if we

survive) through *Acknowledgment* – of all that was used, mocked, dismissed, and treated as object?

Towards the end of *Dreams From My Father*, when Barack is in Kenya, he urges his grandmother to tell him his grandfather Onyango's story. She tells Barack that Onyango learned to read and write, which "made him useful to the white man;" that he moved to town and was introduced to the grim, white, imperial way; and that he brought some of those ways back with him to the village.

It was a confusing story for Barack, who'd imagined his grandfather as strong, independent, "a man of his people, opposed to white rule." His grandmother tried to explain the complexity of her husband:

I also did not always understand what your grandfather thought. It was difficult, because he did not like people to know him so well. Even when he spoke to you, he would look away for fear that you would know his thoughts. So it was with his attitude towards the white man. One day he would say one thing, and the next day it was as if he was saying something else. I know that he respected the white man for his power, for his machines and weapons and the way he organized his life. He would say that the white man was always improving himself, whereas the African was suspicious of anything new. "The African was thick," he would sometimes say to me. "For him to do anything, he needs to be beaten." (*Dreams From My Father*, p. 407)

Later, when "people began to talk about independence," and Barack's father started bringing home these ideas, his grandfather said:

"How can the African defeat the white man...when he cannot even make his own bicycle?" And he would say that the African could never win against the white man because the black man only wanted to work with his own family or clan, while all white men worked to increase their power. "The white man alone is like an ant," Onyango would say. "He can be easily crushed. But like an ant, the white man works together. His nation, his business – these things are more important to him than himself. He will follow his leaders and not question orders. Black men are not like this. Even the most foolish black man thinks he knows better than the wise man. That is why the black man will always lose." (p. 417)

*Self-created* peoples' cultures produce people that think for themselves, and such cultures by definition become targets of a system that requires submission.

C.L.R. James has said that "passive obedience is precisely *the basis* of bourgeois society."

Inculcating this mental habit is only doable if you discredit a people's culture *in their own eyes*, and then destroy their ability to maintain their own culture.

"Divide and conquer" continues to work so well because they have undermined us from within, compromised our confidence in ourselves, our framing members – using 'Reason' – the Rationality-Con – as the battering ram.

What Barack's grandfather met when he went to town were representatives of the conquered peoples of Europe.

But freedom in dormancy crouches in the veins of the conquered too.

Capitalism in general, and America in particular, has been an experiment in the annihilation of culture. Podrunks have tried to create here human beings that *acquiesce* in being servants – both of markets, and of machines.

Many people have argued that the reason machines seem to be getting more human-like, more able to replace us, is not because they are becoming more like humans but because *we* are becoming more like machines of generic construction – complete with on/off switches, specialized functions, short shelf-lives, indistinguishable one from another, easily slotted in and out, easily replaced, readily disposable, no souls to placate or maintain.

We are so malleable we've allowed this disaster to happen to us because it's happened incrementally and we've been cut out of our tapestries. We're like those shell-shocked frogs wanting desperately to survive, turning off thought, trying to believe against all hope that the warming water that's about to destroy them is a gift. No one *wants* to believe something so devastating is being done to one, *especially* on purpose.

If this disaster was done to us by destroying our ability to create and maintain our own cultures, the only way to renounce our subject status and claim our inherent Freedom is to start rebuilding living cultures.

When, in a culture, the children feel isolated and alone, when they are bombarded with the clear message loudly resonating throughout the visible world that “you can’t trust nobody,” “it’s dog-eat-dog,” and “you’re on your own” – *that’s a dead culture folks*. I’m sure you already knew that, or had your suspicions, but sometimes you just have to have reality confirmed, said out loud, in order to start figuring out what to do.

And of course it’s much worse for our children today than it was for me. Conditions have deteriorated.

But almost fifty years ago James Baldwin told us the same thing – “conditions have deteriorated”:

I was born in Harlem, Harlem Hospital, and we grew up – first house I remember was on Park Avenue – which is not the American Park Avenue, or maybe it is the American Park Avenue – Uptown Park Avenue, where the railroad tracks are. We used to play on the roof and in the – I can’t call it an alley – but near the river – it was a kind of dump, garbage dump. Those were the first scenes I remember. I remember my father had trouble keeping us alive – there were nine of us. I was the oldest so I took care of the kids and dealt with Daddy. I understand him much better now. Part of his problem was he couldn’t feed his kids, but I was a kid and I didn’t know that. He was very religious, very rigid. He kept us together, I must say, and when I look back on it – that was over forty years ago that I was born – when I think back on my growing up and walk that same block today, because it’s still there, and think of the kids on that block now, I’m aware that something terrible has happened which is very hard to describe.

I am, in all but technical legal fact, a Southerner. My father was born in the South – no, my mother was born in the South, and if they had waited two more seconds I might have been born in the South. But that means I was raised by families whose roots were essentially rural – Southern rural, and whose relation to the church was very direct, because it was the only means they had of expressing their pain and their despair. *But twenty years later the moral authority which was present in the Negro Northern community when I was growing up has vanished, and people talk about progress,* and I look at Harlem which I really know – I know it like I know my hand – *and it is much worse there today than it was when I was growing up.* (James Baldwin in a 1963 interview with Dr. Kenneth Clark)

Barack recalled (in *Dreams*) that during a neighborhood meeting, a fellow activist named Will, urged the group to remember why they were doing community work. Emotion choked his voice:

“I don’t see kids smiling around here no more. You look at ‘em listen to ‘em...they seem worried all the time, mad about something. They got nothing they trust. Not their parents. Not God. Not themselves. And that’s not right. That just ain’t the way things supposed to be...kids not smiling.” (quoted in *Dreams From My Father*, p. 177)

Recently I re-watched the Akira Kurosawa film, *Seven Samurai*.

In it there’s a character played by Toshiro Mifune who’s a natural mimic and storyteller, a gifted entertainer, a Pied Piper for all the children in the small rural community where the story unfolds. They follow him around like a flock of baby ducks in mama’s wake, laughing delightedly at his antics. Listening to them laugh – such a delicious sound, like air, water, food, like a warm bed to lay on, a deep massage for the soul – I felt the truth of Will’s words. We never hear children laughing anymore, not with that laughter that bubbles up from sheer unreserved delight. I certainly don’t hear it in my low-income community.

How bad does it have to get, do you think, before we decide, like the farmers in *Seven Samurai*, that enough is enough? (Of course there are no samurai for *us* to hire, or plead our case to. There’s no messiah to wait for, no designated heroes to open the door, take our hands and lead us through. That’s the point. We either grow up, or go down. Do we value our earth, love our children, do we want freedom for them both, and for ourselves?)

When we buy into the way of being of mind-worship, and sacrifice our wholeness on the altar of Mind, it’s almost enraging to see wholeness in others – even in our own children – to be confronted, unconsciously, with what we’ve lost.

We are dangerous, brutal people without healthy cultures.

We’re only as good as our environments, as the forces and influences we surround ourselves with, or allow ourselves to be surrounded by. To say that our sources of power are the ancestors, the earth and each other, and therefore to be cut off from them diminishes us, requires a look at the *form* diminishment takes.

If we surround ourselves with commercials and electronic substitutes for real human interactions, what are we?

If we turn ourselves (and our children) over to *a market* (!) to define us, what are we? We become mere extensions of the technology and of the market, rather than the other way around.

Again: if this disaster was done to us by destroying our ability to create and maintain our own cultures, the only way to renounce our subject status and claim our inheritance, Freedom, is to start rebuilding our living cultures.

John Trudell has also said that, “we need to think in terms of *evolution*, not revolution. *If we have evolution, then we move*. But revolution means you only get back to where you started.”

Because Power is a closed system, a self-reinforcing cycle, the only way to negate it is to embrace what *it* has negated. We have to go *outside* that cycle.

As you’ve no doubt figured out I love the movies, from the masterpieces to your basic, silly entertainment. They all testify about the state of this system – all, then, have something to suggest about how to escape it.

But I do prefer the ones that were cared about, thought through and packed with what the writer, director, or both have learned and want to share. Great films compel usually because they intersect with our experience on multiple levels, and because they’re packed with ideas.

*The Godfather* is compulsive viewing, for example, because it forces you to think about issues of family, loyalty, culture, alchemy, inevitability, human nature, violence, and, of course, power.<sup>2</sup> As studies of ‘Power’ *The Godfather*, and DeNiro’s eventual sequel, *The Good Shepherd*, together with the work of the Coen brothers, have handed to us almost all we need to know about its circularity.

There’s a scene towards the end in which Don Corleone, played by Marlon Brando, talks about his life as he counsels his son Michael, played by Al Pacino.

Michael:           What’s the matter? What’s bothering you? I’ll handle it. I told you I can handle it, I’ll handle it.

Don Corleone:    I knew Santino was going to have to go through all this and Fredo... well, Fredo was... But I never wanted this for you. I live my life, I don’t apologize to take

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<sup>2</sup> We probably have Mario Puzo to thank for this density of thought but the cultural influence of the *film* has surpassed the book at this point, at least on my shelf.



care of my family. And I refused to be a fool dancing on the strings held by all of those big shots. That's my life I don't apologize for that. But I always thought that when it was your time that you would be the one to hold the strings. Senator Corleone. Governor Corleone. Something.

Michael: I'm not a *pezzonovante*.

Don Corleone: Well, there wasn't enough time, Michael. There just wasn't enough time.

Michael: We'll get there, Pop. We'll get there.

Don Corleone: [*kisses Michael*] Listen, whoever comes to you with this Barzini meeting he's the traitor. Don't forget that.

(Hearing those words takes you right into the film doesn't it?)

Well, I think the main reasons why the film resonated have to do with our longing for our long-gone cultures – the backup provided by the tribe – and our ache to escape the tentacles of the state. When Don Corleone says, “I refused to be a fool dancing on the strings held by all of those big shots,” in our hearts we know that he's right – not about our being fools, that's subject to debate, but that we are, all of us, dancing on those strings, and want to be free of them.

### *We Are All Tribal*

What we all have in common is that we are the descendants of tribes. We are all the descendants of a spiritual reality. The faint ancestral memory is always there... ..The behavior here [Western colonialism] reflects what happened to the tribes of Europe. *They no longer had the perceptual reality of what it meant to be a human being. They were owned.* (John Trudell)

We are not only wired to be large, we're wired to seek, maintain and extend the tapestry. We *long* to be embedded in a web of relations, to know where we came from, where we are, and where we will go. And when our parents freeze us out from answers to these questions, and the job likewise, and the mass media ditto, we fall asleep, fulfill the minimal roles required of us, and then slip quietly into eternity.

I swept into almost every job with exhilaration too. I tried to make family, make tribe. I wanted to gather the new crew round and wrap them in the protective bubble of my power and love. I would give love and receive love. I would be *seen*, finally, and *appreciated* – *valued* for my quite obvious and considerable gifts.

It's interesting to watch my fellow wage-slaves at work when I'm waiting with the other indigents for what masquerades as health care in this country <sup>3</sup> – their determined and courageous efforts to create something meaningful, some semblance of coherence in the knitting of relationships at this institution we call wage-work.

But despite our efforts, what we make still feels awkward and false – the sad, perfunctory Friday drinks or donuts; the bringing of photos and stories to share; the covering for each other on long breaks – a pale imitation of what we once had...a tribe.

Not that all tribes across all time have been nurturing, healthy and whole – promoting wholeness in its people – far from it; but a work in progress always starts out rough. Tribes, like other structures, stand only as strong as their framing members.

But even at its most ambiguous, the tribe addressed psychic needs that today are no longer even recognized, which doesn't make them go away – nor will they, nor *could* they.

When Barack visited Kenya for the first time:

We wandered into the old marketplace...I watched...nimble hands stitch and cut and weave, and listened to the old woman's voice roll over the sounds of work and barter, and for a moment the world seemed entirely transparent...where you saw how the things that you used had been made...And all of this while a steady procession of black faces passed before your eyes, the round faces of babies and chipped, worn faces of the old; beautiful faces that made me understand the transformation that Asante and other black Americans claimed to have undergone after their first visit to Africa. For a span of weeks or months, you could experience the freedom that comes from not feeling watched, the freedom of believing that your hair grows as it's supposed to grow and that your rump sways the way a rump is supposed to sway...Here the world was black, and so you were just you; you could discover all those things that were unique to your life without living a lie or committing betrayal. (*Dreams From My Father*, p. 309-11)

Podrunk propaganda notwithstanding, the needs once met by our tribes are *not* primordial. They remain as relevant and pressing as they ever were.

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3 Of course it's actually an *illness industry*.

All people need history, a story, a memory, that gives them past and future, that raises theirs from brief unremarkable, otherwise meaningless lives to indispensable links in the long chain of culture, its living bearers ever so exquisitely able to connect in their tribal consciousness the two ends of time. From memory comes, in a symmetrical arc, foresight. The length of the former governs the reach of the latter. Memory provides us the rich fuel of self-esteem. Foresight, borne of memory, provides us direction and a purpose for living. No worse crime can be committed against any people than to strip from them their memory of themselves. This is far and away the most egregious particular in the long bill against slavery, the long-running culture-destructive crime from which black people have yet to recover anywhere in the world. (Randall Robinson, *Quitting America*, p. 134)

What Robinson doesn't mention, in his righteous and legitimate fury, is that European 'rulers' committed this culture-stripping crime against their own earth-connected peoples before they turned all the brutality of their woundedness on *us*.

The scope of the disaster is much larger than his account admits.

Children are particularly devastated by the denial of tribe imposed by the domination of the market, because once they're here we force them to accept that not only are they not *needed* (by *us*, as opposed to '*the market*'), but all too often they're not *wanted* either (our states make sure that 'parenting' is a stressful and costly proposition.)

Children, more than anything, long to be wanted and needed – *and* they gravitate to where the apparent 'Power' is (they *are* wired for survival, after all.<sup>4</sup>) If we offer them nothing to define themselves by *except* the market, they *will* try to excel in the market (formal or informal, surface or underground). Far from finding coherent meaning once they arrive, children are told there's no meaning to anything – there is only being bought and sold, eating or being eaten – and, even worse, that they are *on their own*, not only in the search for meaning, but in the struggle for psychic and physical survival.

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4 On March 28, 2008, I listened to an interview on my local Pacifica radio station with a former Israeli defense force soldier who had formed an organization called "Breaking the Silence." He said that once, when he was a soldier, he stopped a father and his children at a checkpoint. The father was visibly afraid. The children noted this and looked at the soldier with awe *because* he could make their father feel afraid. They admired, and wanted, 'Power' – but only because they'd been taught to.

A living culture (present) is a negotiation with past (ancestors) and future (earth) – it’s a listening for, and a hearing of, the undeveloped (future) say what it needs – not by a group of designated ‘thinkers’ or ‘experts,’ but by *all* of that culture’s people. It’s the tools people create (language, art, traditions) for apprehending the wisdom (*intentions*) of our ancestors in discussion with what the future (the earth) needs, acknowledging that *the earth is promise* – pregnant with our children and our children’s survival.

The process of creating our living cultures is freedom moving in us, Understanding evolving. By definition, then, it’s dynamic...which means it’s the opposite of what we see around us under conditions of non-freedom: a way of living that is ineffably boring, and altogether outside our ability to impact with our judgment or powers of analysis.

Because of a ‘system’ that tells us we’re commodities – resources for ‘capital’ to use, or not, as ‘it’ sees fit – we’ve become passive observers of our own world, ‘outsiders’ on our own planet.

Designated “experts” make the decisions and *we* make the best of it. So a neighborhood filled with Mexicans must bear the insult of Lou Dobbs’ face blasted into it on the back of a billboard bombshell.

Places and spaces that serve as critical sites for gathering and building community are ripped out of our neighborhoods by more designated “experts” without our knowing such was even being discussed.

Our children (and we) are slotted in and out of ‘jobs’ with no thought given as to whether they serve our children’s growth, or benefit the earth in any way whatsoever.

I remember working as a fifteen-year-old for a movie theater that was showing a musical version of *Goodbye Mr. Chips* starring Peter O’Toole and Petula Clark. My best friend and I turned that job into a merry romp that featured us chasing each other around the empty balcony and mezzanine with our flashlights flashing, and then harmonizing, before the gaudy witness of an old cinema house gilded mirror, all the film’s big musical numbers as we checked the bathrooms every night for dawdling customers before closing up.

Without warning the chaste Mr. Chips surrendered the screen to *The Secret Sex Lives of Romeo and Juliet*, followed by *Camille 2000*, followed by *I Am Curious, Yellow*. Suddenly two teen-age girls were forced to cope with masturbating patrons and a grossly leering janitor. We had no tribal elders to issue an opinion, let alone a decision. We were on our own.

The very form our lives take under the dictated terms of this system – the constant slotting in and out, the restriction of concern to the narrow cell of ‘family,’ the compartmentalization of our lives, the stripping away of decision-making power over our environments – precludes the creation of culture, the making of tribe.

We find instead that our need to develop culture – that which had been the river of our survival – is used against us.

When the power to create living, healthy cultures is denied, when we’re divided up and slotted by ‘the market’ into jobs, unpaid work, or ‘crime,’ as the case may be, our natural tribal inclinations are easily manipulated and distorted into nationalistic or racist abominations of tribal consciousness. What had been our greatest strength is used to keep us down and divided.

And with the job, the “Mr. Smith virus,” ever reminding us of our dependent status – through bosses, hierarchy, authoritarianism, disciplining, the note in the personnel file wearing the phony face of scientific authority (so-called “management theory”) – and with our communities impervious to our influence, it’s no wonder, feeling trapped as we do, that we all too often abandon our longing for solidarity – our longing for allegiances interwoven through the whole of our life – and start to snipe. Unhappiness can be a very fertile force for more of the same.

Unless there’s an on-going conversation between earth, wind and fire – unless we (the present) are involved in this negotiation with the past and with the future...what are we?

In an interview on *Democracy Now!*,<sup>5</sup> Bernice Johnson Reagon said, “Culture names who you are.” The problem is that the market (and its agent, the state) wants to name us, which explains why they want us stripped of tribe and culture – and explains why, when the market no longer has any use for us, podunks want to strip the earth...of us.

If we don’t get to name *ourselves*, if we allow “the market” to name us, *what are we?*

There are parents in England who have allowed their seven to eleven-year-olds to become commercials that sell products to other children.

“It’s quite shocking,” said Ed Mayo, co-author of “Consumer Kids” and chief executive of the British government-backed Consumer Focus campaign group.

He is describing the story of Sarah, a bright and busy little girl, who at age seven has been recruited by the specialist youth marketing firm Dubit through an online children's chat room to work as a sales agent for the Barbie Girls MP3 player...Her down payment, unsurprisingly, is a Barbie Girls MP3 player – and the more she talks about it to her friends, and the more photos she posts across the Internet showing herself and her mates playing with it, the more bonus points she gets. (*Epoch Times*, February 5, 2009)

It is our children who most grievously suffer this disaster.

It is our children who most need a coherent explanation of *who* we are and *why* we are here.

It is our children who most need the tapestry.

The idea of capturing the history of a community in cloth, caught in the web of *our* invention – in oral tradition, in song, dance, story and myth – in all our artistic creations, resonates particularly with children because they've come freshly from that river, its droplets still cling to their ankles, their feet long for the feel of it between their toes. And when all of us lie on that beach and soak up the sun, we soak up memory too; we remember how it was, before masters made our life a misery, a mockery of real life.

We *know* that we're part of a larger whole, and that we *are* a larger whole. We can feel it. But we're systematically taught not to credit, but rather to distrust, what we feel. A tremendous amount of deflective force is required to keep us from coalescing on our own terms.

The only way to renounce our subject status and claim our right to *name ourselves*, is to start rebuilding our living cultures – which means rebuilding tribe. But this requires acknowledging our full power, our wholeness.

Although we are tribal, we are also wholes, we are One – across all time, space and culture. And it is only by claiming our wholeness, our art, that we can find the courage to claim each other.

Coalescing without wholeness is but following the herd.

Artists know this truth.

And we are *all* artists.

Once I had a job that required me to organize and deliver ‘parenting workshops.’ It was a fraudulent exercise, a practice of deceit and hypocrisy, that justified itself in only two ways: first, by occasioning our coming together, we could offer each other a bit of comfort; and, second, pursuing the little fish ‘parenting’ to open waters where we could all be eaten together, by the Great White, at least revealed the truth that the whole notion of ‘parenting’ under conditions of servitude is a con.

Each week together we pondered the irresolvables.

How do you cope with economic stress? What do you do with the stress of racism? How do you *not* take your stress out on your children?

How do you give children the attention they need when work consumes you? When you’re a single parent? When you work two jobs? When you have no job? How do you give love when you never got love?

Why is parenting not supported by the state?

Of course that last question we *can* answer just as Michael Moore answered the question “why are we so violent?” with: “because the state and its masters want us to be.”

The state refuses to support parenting because should we the people (“workers”), universally, begin to feel any degree of security about our lives and futures we might begin to question our lot in life. Because insecurity breeds passivity, compliance, acquiescence, fear – going along to get along, that sort of thing – the state *wants us* insecure.

One night I gave the parents a homework assignment to think about their secret passions, their dreams deferred – to *name themselves*, essentially – and to report back next class.

I found out they were, secretly, photographers and poets and filmmakers and chefs and actors and fashion designers and interior decorators and makeup artists. It stirred me greatly, that experience. I never forgot it.

Afterwards it put me in the habit of asking my fellow wage-slaves, whenever I got the chance, “what’s your art? What do you do really?” I never got a puzzled look. I never got a “Huh?”

I found this truth everywhere: the copying machine repairman / jazz pianist, the checkout clerks who are novelists and poets and singers and dancers and actors and comics; the journeymen in the trades who were simultaneously actors, singers, music producers, screenwriters...*lots* of musicians.

Among my neighbors there are filmmakers, visual artists, actors, poets, hip-hop producers, martial artists, singers, composers.

In a supermarket where I shop customers are ringed by bursts of colorful artwork from any point in the store. I asked about it and learned that a few of the clerks who like to draw are allowed by the company to be a “Sign Team” and design the displays.

How generous of the company to allow them.

This system is so wasteful of our talent that we start to become wasteful of our own talent. We begin to doubt we have any. A system that requires “a very small top and a very big bottom” could not function if most of us did *not* dismiss our power, our gifts, our art.

And because we’re wired to coalesce, and have no tribes to coalesce with, we adhere, despite ourselves, to what is unworthy of us.

We accept lives limited by the roles bestowed by the market.

Over three decades ago I took an English class called “City and Country in Literature.”

I recall only two things about the class. First, the patronizing attitude of the teacher when I challenged his dismissal of African music as “primitive,” and secondly my gut negative reaction at this observation of Thoreau’s from his *Walden*:

I have frequently seen a poet withdraw, having enjoyed the most valuable part of a farm, while the crusty farmer supposed that he had got a few wild apples only. Why, the owner does not know it for many years when a poet has put his farm in rhyme, the most admirable kind of invisible fence, has fairly impounded it, milked it, skimmed it, and got all the cream, and left the farmer only the skimmed milk.

I mean, really, how would *Thoreau* know? How could he possibly know how much or how little that “crusty farmer” received from the earth to which he was bound? Only the most unsuccessful farmer would learn nothing from the earth that sustained him.

The most hideous part of this system (excepting the damage to the planet and its living ecosystems, planets and other animals) is its erosion of our possibilities and of our solidarity. It has caused our value to be diminished *in our own eyes*, boxed us into roles whose corollary is a *contemptibly casual, everyday betrayal* – of each other and of ourselves.



According to Mom, I was born on a cotton sack out in the fields, 'cause she had no money to go to the hospital. When I was a child, we used to migrate from California to Arizona and back and forth. The things I saw shaped my life. I remember when we used to go out and pick carrots and onions, the whole family. We tried to scratch a livin' out of the ground. I saw my parents cry out in despair, even though we had the whole family working. At the time, they were paying sixty-two and a half cents an hour. The average income must have been fifteen hundred dollars, maybe two thousand.

This was supplemented by child labor. During those years, the growers used to have a Pick-Your-Harvest Week. They would get all the migrant kids out of school and have 'em out there pickin' the crops at peak harvest time. A child was off that week and when he went back to school, he got a little gold star. They would make it seem like something civic to do.

We'd pick everything: lettuce, carrots, onions, cucumbers, cauliflower, broccoli, tomatoes – all the salads you could make out of vegetables, we picked 'em. Citrus fruits, watermelons – you name it... We'd follow the seasons.

After my dad died, my mom would come home and she'd go into her tent and I would go into ours. We'd roughhouse and everything and then we'd go into the tent where Mom was sleeping and I'd see her crying. When I asked her why she was crying she never gave me an answer. All she said was things would get better. She retired a beaten old lady with a lot of dignity. That day she thought would be better never came for her.

...I never did want to go to town because it was a very bad thing for me. We used to go to the small stores, even though we got clipped more. If we went to the other stores, they would laugh at us. They would always point at us with a finger. We'd go to town maybe every two weeks to get what we needed. Everybody would walk in a bunch. We were afraid. (Laughs.) We sang to keep our spirits up. We joked about our poverty. This one guy would say, "When I get to be rich, I'm gonna marry an Anglo woman, so I can be accepted into society." The other guy would say, "When I get rich I'm gonna marry a Mexican woman, so I can go to that Anglo society of yours and see them hang you for marrying an Anglo." Our world was around the fields.

I started picking crops when I was eight. I couldn't do much, but every little bit counts. Every time I would get behind on my chores, I would get a carrot thrown at me by my parents. I would daydream: If I were a millionaire, I would buy all these ranches and give them back to the people. I would picture my mom living in one area all the time and being admired by all the people in the community. All of a sudden I'd be rudely awakened by a broken carrot in my back. That would bust your whole dream apart and you'd work for a while and come back to daydreaming...

*If people could see* – in the winter, ice on the field. We'd be on our knees all day long. We'd build fires and warm up real fast and go back onto the ice. We'd be picking watermelons in 105 degrees all day long. When people have melons or cucumber or carrots or lettuce, they don't know how they got on their table and *the consequences to the people who picked it*. If I had enough money, I would take busloads of people out to the fields and into the labor camps. Then they'd know how that fine salad got on their table. (Roberto Acuna in Studs Terkel's *Working*)

This college boy...saw a book in my back pocket one time and he was amazed. He walked up to me and he said, "You read?" I said, "What do you mean, I read?" He said, "All these dummies read the sports pages around here. What are you doing with a book?" I got pissed off at the kid right away. I said, "What do you mean, all these dummies? Don't knock a man who's paying somebody else's way through college." He was a nineteen-year-old effete snob.

*Yet you want your kid to be an effete snob?* [Studs Terkel asked.]

Yes. I want my kid to look at me and say, "Dad, you're a nice guy, but you're a fuckin' dummy." Hell yes, I want my kid to tell me that he's not gonna be like me...

...I'd like to run a combination bookstore and tavern. (Laughs.) I would like to have a place where college kids came and a steelworker could sit down and talk. Where a workingman could not be ashamed of Walt Whitman and where a college professor could not be ashamed that he painted his house over the weekend.

If a carpenter built a cabin for poets, I think the least the poets owe the carpenter is just three or four one-liners on the wall. A little plaque: Though we labor with our minds, this place we can relax in was built by someone who can work with his hands. And

his work is as noble as ours. I think the poet owes something to the guy who builds the cabin for him.

I don't think of Monday. You know what I'm thinking about on Sunday night? Next Sunday. If you work real hard, you think of a perpetual vacation. Not perpetual sleep... What do I think of on a Sunday night? Lord, I wish the fuck I could do something else for a living.

...This is gonna sound square, but my kid is my imprint. He's my freedom... The mystics call it the brass bowl. Continuum. You know what I mean? This is why I work. Every time I see a young guy walk by with a shirt and tie and dressed up real sharp, I'm lookin' at my kid, you know? That's it. (Mike Lefevre in Studs Terkel's *Working*)

We often believe, when we labor at the bidding of others, that these, the circumstances we were born into, the narrow fenced-in quarters where we stand, constitutes the sum of us, is all we are, despite our *knowing*, in our hearts, that we are more.

The only things that distinguish folks who claim their gifts from the majority of us is luck and taking oneself seriously. We can't control the luck but we *can* start to take ourselves seriously (granted there's a element of luck in that as well). And by 'serious' I don't mean 'grim' – no, I mean “following our longing.” I'm told Michael Moore took all he had and set off to make films because he *longed* to. When you follow your longing, you don't regret it.

Thoreau figured this out and shared it with these words:

I learned this, at least...that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him...In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them.

All being an artist means is to have the courage, and the luck, to look beneath the lies spun to ensnare us – and what a gift, the power to cut through illusion, propaganda – and reveal truth. The shock of essential truth is food for the soul.

Once you look at truth baldly, you feel blessed, because, really, what else is there? (And *unless* you do, how can we turn those ratios around?) Though it takes courage to stand apart, when all your fellows are ensnared, when you consciously embrace the wind from below, it blows stronger.

### *The Cauldron of Resistance*

*When we embrace our art fully we name ourselves.*

No matter how much the podrunks propagandize that we must atomize every fucking thing, nature is a whole that generates wholes, and *we are nature*.

This explains what as young people we puzzle over when presented with the state's obsession with issues like abortion, prostitution, marijuana, euthanasia – each new generation must be trained and retrained to accept the state's administration of our bodies.

But it really makes no sense to us, despite all the propaganda, because our bodies cannot, in actuality – in *reality* – belong to anyone but us. So as youth we ask, with wrinkled brow, "*why does the state care?*"

The state cares because controlling us starts with controlling our bodies. Because if we *listened* to our bodies, if we *loved* them, if we put them first and took care of them, if we fiercely defended our bodies as our own, would we pollute our lungs with car exhaust and concrete dust? Would we go down into the coal mines? Would we sit all day in front of computer terminals? Would we forfeit our dreams? Would we let them concrete over our earth and deny us the smell of forest, the sound of silence, the uncorrupted view of stars, the friendship of the other animals, the knowledge of their ways, and the ways of the plants?

Would we?

Would we put up with being divided from each other? With isolation? With the diminishment of our lives? Would we accept the boredom? Would we accept not starting and ending and punctuating each day with song and dance...and laughter?

What would it take to get back what's been stolen?

Wouldn't we have to have each others' backs? Have our own things?

*Make our own things? Name ourselves?*

But that's 'culture'. 'Culture' is having back-up, and 'honey,' and 'wholeness,' and 'freedom' – and continuity.

We develop culture to provide continuity and security to ourselves and to children – to pass on what we've learned, and to enable children to understand the world, and find their place in it.

Culture means children have sound, stable roots *of our own creation*. It *interprets* our link to the ancestors, the earth, and to each other. It provides answers to the basic questions that then free us up to ask the bigger questions. It allows us to pursue our biological destiny: freedom and joy.

Once you decide to reclaim the administration of your own body, and ignore the state, and organize with others who feel the same, you butt hard up against the reality that the state views you as subject, that your very existence is conditioned by the control and whim of the state, that the state views us as its personal administered property. Don't you see the tattoo on your balls? Don't you feel the burning there beneath your pubic hair?

Doesn't it sting when they pull our strings?

"Free is how you is from the start, an' when it look different you got to move, just move, an' when you movin' say that is a natural freedom make you move."

But if you join with others while you're movin', expect the full weight of the state on your ass.

I envisioned our being not a gang in the customary sense, but an unstoppable force that no gang in Los Angeles or the world could ever defeat. ...The reputation of a black gang was usually built on its use of pugilistic skills against its rivals. Toting a gun wasn't our style, but we were getting shot at too often. One day after we had left a Jackson Five concert at the Los Angeles Forum, we mobbed our opposition of more than forty leather coats, and then Crip-walked down Manchester Boulevard en masse, more than one hundred strong. (Stanley Tookie Williams, *Blue Rage, Black Redemption*, p. 86, 93)

Picture that for a minute.

Uh huh.

Any wonder the police never let up 'til they got him in a box he couldn't get out of?

(What difference does a book make? I expect we'll find out.)

Ironically enough, Stanley Toookie Williams joined with Raymond Washington to form the Crips because he wanted to protect his family and friends from gangs, and he was a natural leader:

"The moment I stepped to the forefront, it was a position I would not relinquish."

As many observers and students of 'Power' before him have noted, the mindset of 'Power' offers only two options:

As a member of the black male species living in a ghetto microcosm, circumstances dictated that I be either prey or predator. It didn't require deep reflection to determine which of the two I preferred. (p. 21)

No indeed – but *what an unfair choice to give to our children*. It was forced on Stanley when he was only a child – a brilliant student with no one to teach him what he was up against, and why.

The absolute brutality of this system – that we've given our children up to – has been disguised by keeping us atomized, separate from each other, divided against ourselves – seeing only the ladder but not the trapdoors (which we believe are for others, never for ourselves, until we fall through one). We are divided, not just race against race, or even male against female...but – worst of all to contemplate – parent against child. When we burden our children with a confusing, cruel 'love,' we shackle them for life. What a gift, so casually and unconsciously given, to a system for which we're not so much doormat as dirt.

My mother adhered religiously to the Judeo-Christian Bible, in particular Proverb 13:24: "He who spareth his rod hateth his son. But he that loveth him chastiseth him betimes (whips him quickly)." Yes, my mother loved me deeply, and I regularly felt her love's sting. But compared to the beatings some of my friends received from their parents, I got off easy. I will admit the biblically-inspired beatings did make me tougher. On the other hand, her punishments failed to derail my misbehavior.

The frequency of beatings aged me considerably. I became more unruly, distant, and indifferent to the predictable consequence of my actions...My mother...was in thrall to some handed-down black rendition of a Euro-American parenting philosophy that was

in total conflict with the environment I saw around me and its stringent requirements for survival...As a boy, I was incapable of articulating the contradictions I saw, or to dodge confrontations with the ominous influences outside my home. (p. 4, 14)

– and *in* it.

In *Beyond Power*, Marilyn French describes “the murder of children by fathers” as “the fundamental step in establishing patriarchy,” arguing that the worst consequence of sexism – using the colonizer / colonized analogy – is the internalization of patriarchal values on the part of women, the most basic, or original, one being the absolute right to dispose of children as one wishes; or, worse, an actual patriarchal imperative to annihilate the child.

When we internalize podrunks ‘values,’ unconsciously we’re doing the ‘Division Work’ that the podrunks depend on us to do. It’s the opposite of the ‘Culture Work’ that we must begin to do for ourselves.

We’re conditioned to both make too much and too little of ‘culture.’ After all, we make culture all the time, because our nature is tribal. Every time I went on a job site, culture-making was in progress. I’m sure you make culture at your jobs too.

Any group of people that works together long enough – especially if they’re working with their hands – naturally begins to make culture. It’s what we do. It’s spontaneous creativity, and as such extremely threatening to podrunks. It happens faster than they can control, so they fight the stability required to do it with every tool in their Machiavellian toolbox.

You know the tricks: they threaten our jobs, try to keep us scared, they tatter the safety-net, and resist its repair.

It’s all so, so old.

And then there’s always the racism ruse, when they play our strings with subterfuge – conning us back into those frozen ‘culture-boxes,’ to do the ‘division work’ that is the antithesis of ‘culture work.’

Although we ‘make culture’ almost as a matter of course, this is not the same as “developing a *living* culture.” The first means discrete, compartmentalized activities, in reaction to circumstances beyond our control. The second is making of one’s life an integrated whole, in interdependency with others, under circumstances *of our own creation*.

The first is making the best of a bad situation. The second is self-creation.

This system pretends its essential nature is ‘complexity.’ It markets itself as confusingly, but *necessarily*, complex – so complex it must be handed over to “experts” to operate ‘efficiently.’ But the essence of this system that we’ve accommodated ourselves to is *not* “complexity,” but *abusiveness*. This system, in its *essence*, in its *entirety*, is *abusive*.

And when such a ‘system’ has no use for you – wishes, in fact, that you didn’t exist – what’s the ‘right’ response?

The Crips was a vehicle to provide us with illusionary empowerment, payback, camaraderie, protection, thuggery, and a host of other benefits. We wanted to be exempt from being disenfranchised, dyseducated, disempowered, and destitute, but opportunities for us were scarce. We were seventeen-year-olds with minds polluted by misconceptions, and we wanted to be emancipated from the struggle against the conditions seeking our extinction or emasculation. But regardless of the hostile opposition or lack of social privilege, my vested interest, like everyone else’s, was simply to survive. The Crips became central to my self-destructive resolve.

This forgotten generation created a quasi-culture with its own mores, style of dress, hand symbols, vernacular, socioeconomic qualities, martyrs, rituals, blue color identification (for Crips), legends, myths, and codes of silence. There were coined words for our madness. Buddha called it “Crippling” or “Crippen.” The newly found pride in the alliance gave birth to Crip mottoes such as “Crippen night and day is the only way,” Craig’s phrase. Melvin’s favorite was “Can’t stop, won’t stop.” Buddha’s brainchild was “Crips don’t die, we multiply.” Raymond’s favorite was “Chitty chitty bang bang, ain’t nothin’ but a Crip thang.”

“Do or die” was a common expression among us, on both east side and west side. Crippen was our *raison d’être*, our reason for being. It grounded us in a way that nothing else had. It permitted us to lash out at gangs and at a world that despised our existence. This was an apocalyptic moment for countless black youths. Merely to survive each day was a personal victory. Our alliance was beginning to be noticed, and we were widely reviled.

Deprived by our color and class of access to the American dream, we began a Crip-walk toward self-destruction. (Stanley Tookie Williams, *Blue Rage, Black Redemption*, p. 100)



The essential abusiveness of this system is what's never mentioned in the ideological war on low-income, particularly black, communities. Racism is an easy scam to pull in an atomized society, where none of us knows how the other lives. But when you see a life *within* its circumstances, when you imagine yourself in those circumstances, when you realize that *in* those circumstances you would most likely do the very things you condemn when you're *outside* that life – when you accept that the choices made in response to an abusive system *make sense*, then your eyes naturally turn to the source of the abuse, the insanity: the system itself (and what a writhing mess of knots *it* is).

'Atomization' – separation, division – therefore, is the *crucial* underpinning of insanity.

Under the present way of things, we're separated from each other and we're separated from ourselves.

There's the obvious 'isms' that separate us: race, sex, income, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual preference, culture, nationality, education, immigration status. I'm sure we could iterate this endlessly. The present system has an obsession with taxonomy and we're fed the basics with mother's milk.

Once we're classified and taught the basics of classification – our division work – we're all sent out and told to compete. Inevitably in this toxemic brew, we tend to compete across all our categories. We rank and stereotype, dash about to their tune, and strive feverishly to insure our butts are in a comfortable seat when the music stops.

To question the race would invalidate all our years of creative accommodation to an invalid system.

Our creativity, therefore, serves either to enmesh us more deeply within what is clearly insane, or serves to fashion a way *out* of insanity.

Both things are happening as we speak, daily, by the second – minutely, massively.

As individuals we've done the best we can to meet our children's needs that once were met by our tribes ("Continuum"), but it's an impossible task, a set-up. We aren't meant to be isolated atoms. We are a fabric, a tapestry.

Because we have no tribes, no *living* cultures, our resistance up to now – even when we join with other like-minded folks – has mostly taken individual, idiosyncratic forms.

Our reference is our individual bodies when we protest dirty air, food that's actually garbage, water laced with pharmaceuticals, a state telling us what we can and cannot do with our own bodies.

Even when our resistance references larger groupings, as when our votes aren't counted, or when we aren't served at lunch counters, or when we're harassed as women or gays, we're not questioning the pie, just our slice.

Resistance without culture is easily contained, as is 'culture' under conditions of non-Freedom, i.e. when culture is not 'self-creation' but accommodation.

Culture as 'self-creation' is the only advocacy that references wholes, that represents for human beings *as wholes* and as a whole. It is the only advocacy that spirals up and away from the closed system of poddrunk 'Power.'

Our challenge here in America is to forge something new. The question is whether we're up to the challenge. Because a people cannot survive over the long term – over the millennia – without a *living* culture, i.e. a culture in sync with the earth, based on freedom and wholeness for its people. How we meet this challenge will be of interest to other parts of the world facing a similar challenge.

And though cultural diversity may seem an insuperable difficulty now – when we're barred from making living cultures – when you consider that by definition living cultures align with an inherent human nature that is joyous and free, reveres life, and respects freedom – align, therefore, with *values* rooted in the earth itself – I think we'll find that unity is easier than we ever dared hope.

There was one admirable trait in the general character of the Types which, more than any thing else, secured my admiration: it was the unanimity of feeling they displayed on every occasion. With them there hardly appeared to be any difference of opinion upon any subject whatever. They all thought and acted alike. I do not conceive that they could support a debating society for a single night: there would be nothing to dispute about; and were they to call a convention to take into consideration the

state of the tribe, its session would be a remarkably short one. They showed this spirit of unanimity in every action of life: every thing was done in concert and *good fellowship*. (Herman Melville, *Typee*, chap. 27)

“*Good fellowship*” – I’m struck by that term because I believe our future is nestled between those two words.

Of course it is. That’s the point of life, right? It certainly isn’t about ladders and masks and “pulling fast ones,” or “making out like bandits” – which is all the present system holds out to us as bait.

The above quote is really quite telling. It should be carefully pondered and given its due weight. What it tells us about the quality of life these islanders enjoyed should give us pause. Human beings had this once – which means it is but ours to claim again, when we’re ready to believe in it.

It’s not just debating societies that fall by the wayside in such a world, but police, and bosses, and psychiatrists, and...

Such a world is the polar opposite of what we have now.

Non-freedom can never produce its opposite, and non-freedom is the essence of class society.

Within *living* cultures freedom resides, within living cultures our future is fertilized.

Joy is our guide in these matters. What serves the cause of joy we keep.

What doesn’t is for the bone-pile.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. (*Isaiah 11:6*)

It is now possible to give every man, woman and child on Earth a standard of living comparable to that of a modern-day billionaire. This is not an opinion or a hope – it is an engineeringly demonstrable fact. This can be done using only the already proven technology, and with the already mined, refined, and recirculating physical resources. (R. Buckminster Fuller)

I learned this, at least...that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him... In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them. (Henry David Thoreau)

## The Plan

To begin organizing our *own* lives we have to have a picture of ‘freedom,’ some ideas for how to get there, a belief that we *can* get there – and then we have to head on down the road, never forgetting to put ‘consciousness’ in our pocket.

We begin by shaking off inertia and picking up ‘trust’ – one thing does indeed lead to another.

And we’ve already begun.

There are many movements under way that challenge the hoarding of ‘Power’ for the few – but we don’t yet have a *mass* movement; and it is only a mass movement that can supercede ‘Power’ and usher in a new world *based* on freedom, on freely-associating people – people who cooperate without coercion of any kind.

Tesla had given the matter considerable thought when he concluded that, “*every effort under compulsion demands a sacrifice of life-energy.*” Your own experience corroborates his observation I’m sure. But we have a system *based* on force, and every social institution within it is patterned on coercion. Stillness is forced on babies when they want to move. Silence is forced on children when they want to speak. Adolescents

are hammered in seats when their bodies itch for release. Adults are *told* what do to when they *hunger* to think. We *are* nature but we've stopped listening to nature speak in our bodies.

There's a mindset to exorcise, a commercial imperative that refuses to see, to recognize, *life*. Instead, everywhere it looks it sees a mirror: "How does this serve *ME*? What's in it for *ME*?"

But nature doesn't speak in individualisms – it speaks in relationships, in the call-and-response: "I *seed* you – I *feed* you" – because we are all in this together.

And though we knew this once, the commercial imperative, the abandoned child, intervened and changed all that. The narrow cell of the self became the only reference. As Polanyi pointed out, human solidarity was "stoically" renounced. He quotes here an 18<sup>th</sup> century Dick Cheney:

"Hunger will tame the fiercest animals, it will teach decency and civility, obedience and subjection, to the most perverse. In general it is only hunger which can spur and goad them [the poor] on to labor; yet our laws have said they shall never hunger. The laws, it must be confessed, have likewise said, they shall be compelled to work. But then legal constraint is attended with much trouble, violence and noise; creates ill will, and never can be productive of good and acceptable service: whereas hunger is not only peaceable, silent, unremitting pressure, but, as the most natural motive to industry and labor, it calls forth the most powerful exertions; and, when satisfied by the free bounty of another, lays lasting and sure foundations for good will and gratitude. The slave must be compelled to work but the free man should be left to his own judgment, and discretion; should be protected in the full enjoyment of his own, be it much or little; and punished when he invades his neighbor's property," (William Townsend, *Dissertation on the Poor Laws*, 1786, inveighing against the minimal support England offered the 'poor,' quoted in Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, p. 113-4)

Polanyi commented on this by adding, "Here was a new starting point for political science. By approaching human community from the animal side, Townsend by-passed the supposedly unavoidable question as to the foundations of government; and in doing so introduced a new concept of law into human affairs, that of the laws of Nature."

It's ironic that the subtitle of Townsend's dissertation was: "A Well-

Wisher of Mankind.” Methinks he dost protest too much. Interesting, though, that he felt the need to. I suppose, no one can be a demon in their own eyes, unless they take pride in being one (Cheney again comes to mind).

“Hunger is not only peaceable, silent, unremitting pressure, but, as the most natural motive to industry and labor, it calls forth the most powerful exertions...” – imagine forming that sentence in your mouth. Another discriminator.

Though no law constrained the laborer to serve the farmer, nor the farmer to keep the landlord in plenty, laborers and farmers acted as if such compulsion existed. By what law was the laborer ordained to obey a master, to whom he was bound by no legal bond? What force kept the classes of society apart as if they were different kinds of human beings? And what maintained balance and order in this human collective which neither invoked nor even tolerated the intervention of political government? ...The biological nature of man appeared as the given foundation of a society that was not of a political order. Thus it came to pass that economists presently relinquished Adam Smith’s humanistic foundations, and incorporated those of Townsend. ...Economic society had emerged as distinct form the political state. (*The Great Transformation*, p. 115)

The reality of ‘Power’ was disappeared into “the natural order of things.” “Force is ‘natural.’” Bullyishness was defended as a virtue, rapacity as sagacity – and this mess, this sugarcoated greed – yet another con (“Social Darwinism”) – became the central propaganda piece in the podunk “confuse and conquer” jigsaw.

“Greed is the ‘natural’ way.” “It is our human nature to be rapacious bullies.” This was what Cheney meant when he told Congressman Inslee, “You just don’t understand economics.”

Humanity must perforce prey on itself, like monsters of the deep.  
(William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act IV, Scene II)

This system forces human beings to treat other human beings and their own bodies as objects at the disposal of the economy, ‘Power’ being its own justification. Those who enforce it guide their actions by the principal: “if you grab ’em by the short hairs you can lead them anywhere.” “With fear, you can make them ignore nature” – i.e. our

natural inclinations and our reverence for the earth as a whole.

From this, the guiding principle of ‘force,’ sensitive minds recoil – as do their bodies...into early graves.

But it’s time to strip this mindset bare, the peculiar logic of the abandoned child, to see the gaping wound it conceals...and to move on.

However, as we begin, it’s essential that we don’t delude ourselves into thinking that the grasping hand will relax simply because we gently place within it the common sense that in destroying the planet we destroy ourselves. It’s time to stop wondering about the vampires, to stop asking, “*how do they sleep at night? Don’t they care about their souls?*” It’s time to stop expecting that, with better information – “*But it was perfectly predictable that unrestrained usury and investing in bloated credit default swaps and bubbling derivatives would sink the economy! Why would they destroy themselves?*” “*Surely they can see that it’s way more cost-effective to send the incarcerated to college for \$40,000 a year than to lockups!*” “*Why can’t they grasp that universal, single-payer healthcare benefits everybody, even business?*” – they will make more ‘rational’ decisions.

And it’s *definitely* time to stop taking what they say seriously – for example, all that crap about “bringing democracy to the Middle East” – I mean, Machiavelli’s *told* us how they think already, and *podrunks as a class don’t change*. They are as grasping and single-focused on greed, force and control today as they ever were. It simply doesn’t merit our *time*, this parsing of their official statements to figure out their intentions. Recall what Machiavelli said:

...It is necessary...to be skilful in simulating and dissembling. But men are so simple, and governed so absolutely by their present needs, that he who wishes to deceive will never fail in finding willing dupes. ...It is not essential...that a Prince should *have* all the good qualities which I have enumerated [mercy, good faith, integrity, humanity, and religion], ... but it is most essential that he should *seem* to have them...

To podrunks it is a virtue to be skillful in deception. This is one of the key ways they differ from the winds from below, for whom honesty is a virtue. So when Mark Crispin Miller, for example, analyzes Bush’s rhetoric for evidence of a persecution complex – “we’re tracking down terrorists who hate America one by one”<sup>1</sup> – he does not serve the cause of ‘waking up.’

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1 Bush the Lesser speaking in *Cruel and Unusual*, p. 291.

Rather than waste time with their *words*, we should thank Machiavelli for his ‘heads-up’ and focus on what podunks *do*, *always* assuming that the results you see around you are the results they *intended* (as they are *very* organized, and we are not – *yet*).

When we have no illusions about how they think – which is pretty straightforward and crude for the most part – we can better understand why the country is in such a shambles. They think “automation” and deduce: “we need less people.” And from “we need less people” it is easy to rationalize: “imperial adventures,” “prison-slave-labor,” “shortened life expectancies,” “inadequately funded public education” and the absence of “health care as a right.” They study the Great Depression, note that war ended labor militancy, and conclude that “perpetual war” (whether ‘foreign’ or ‘domestic’ is almost irrelevant) is essential to forestall the people’s ‘waking up.’ “Climate change? No problem. We need less people, chaos, and insecurity – it keeps us on top! Cool.” “High drop-out rates? Fine, that’s the point – we need cannon fodder and prison-slave-labor. And all the resulting crime keeps them turned against each other. A perfect storm!” “An illness industry that can’t provide health? Well, *dub* – it’s profitable and we need less people anyway.” I’m sure we could make a game of this, but it’s not in the least amusing.

And we must also have no illusions about what a President can do. I am immensely and forever grateful to Barack Obama for...it would be interesting to pause our discussion and finish this sentence – to examine the question of what it *is* he has precisely done. I find it irritating in the extreme the trivialization I hear from the left of what that is. But pursuing that fish would be a distraction from the present point: no President of the United States can bring us our future. His job will not allow it (not in the job description, folks, it really ain’t). He can save a few lives (and if it’s *your* life saved, that’s a huge deal), reduce the suffering, ameliorate the distress, he can buy time – but the future is up to us.

### *“Organization Demands Counter-Organization”*

The crime itself, the manner of the crime – that was the immediately intriguing thing. It was bizarre, undoubtedly...That angle did not bother the inspector. His years on the local force had taught him never to be intimidated by eccentricity. What made him uneasy was the feeling of being confronted by uniquely resourceful and *organized* cleverness...His seeing through the arrangement of apparent accident...had pleased him at first. But he now realized he had merely chopped down a tree to disclose a forest. (Colin Watson, *Coffin, Scarcely Used*)



In Mexicali they would pass out leaflets and I would throw ‘em away. I never participated. The grape boycott didn’t affect me much because I was in lettuce. It wasn’t until Chavez came to Salinas, where I was working in the fields, that I saw what a beautiful man he was. I went to this rally; I still intended to stay with the company. But something – I don’t know – I was close to the workers. They couldn’t speak English and wanted me to be their spokesman in favor of going on strike. I don’t know – I just got caught up with it all, *the beautiful feeling of solidarity*. ...You’d see the people on the picket lines at four in the morning, at the campfires, heating up beans and coffee and tortillas. It gave me a sense of belonging. These were my own people and they wanted change. I knew this is what I was looking for. I just didn’t know it before. (Roberto Acuna in Studs Terkel’s *Working*)

No philosophy, no theory can undo *the democratic introjection of the masters into their subjects*...[Still...] protest will continue because it is a biological necessity...But in the administered society, the biological necessity does not immediately issue in action; *organization demands counter-organization*. Today the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is *the political fight*. (Herbert Marcuse)

We’re talking about an exorcism – the uprooting of a mindset – *and* we’re talking about a reclamation, of our *whole* selves. Both objectives require conscious *intention* to accomplish.

We began this discussion by looking at the commodity form, peering into the false face, questioning the lies that roll off its many tongues. “Human intelligence is like water, air, and fire – it cannot be bought or sold,” Robert Crowley told us. But podunks, across time, space and nation, believe otherwise, and have, over the centuries, systematically, devotionally, applied whatever instruments they could seize to the goal of preventing us from reclaiming our own intelligence – from waking up.

So how do we get back what’s been taken? How do we exorcise, remove from our psyches, passive obedience? How do we confront ‘Power’ *successfully*? (three ways of asking one question.)

Only a unified consciousness – both as individuals and as cultures (or, initially, as communities) – can confront ‘Power.’ A unified consciousness, which is what a mass movement is, requires a *unifying* theory. And as the tapestry of our new world, our new lives, is whole cloth – no holes or tatters in the masterwork we weave – it might be helpful to think of our *real work* as seeking wholeness, and call it *wholism*.

The first step is to remove our psychic connection, our allegiance to, our unconscious *complicity* with, this system, and begin shifting our allegiance to the ancestors, the earth, and to each other – *especially* to our children (if the future is to be free it will happen sooner if our children get a taste of it) – keeping in mind that our goal is a future without bosses, and that “every effort under compulsion demands a sacrifice of life-energy...”

And what Tesla said next is suggestive: “I never paid such a price. On the contrary, I have thrived on my thoughts” – it suggests that the process of reclamation starts with *our bodies*, and our children’s bodies.

“*You can’t fight for what you don’t love, and you can’t love what you don’t know.*”

In the course of this book we’ve thought some about this question of who we are, essentially, as human beings. No doubt it’s an issue that’s received your attention before you ventured into these pathways. But now that you have, now that we’re talking the same language, so to speak, perhaps we can envisage a set of strategies that we can work on together, strategies that empower *the whole individual* simultaneously as they aim outward to building *culture*. Because as you stop to think about your individual wholeness, necessarily you’ll have to think about everything, the *entire* can of worms – you’ll have to ponder the packaged poison that this system presents to us as food.

We’ve all been given bad information. So one question is: at what point do you make the decision to seek good information? Is it when you stop idealizing your parents and begin seeing how they were unconscious functionaries of an abusive system, who hurt you without meaning to? Is it when you begin to grieve for the child that you were, who never got the absolute and unequivocal love, attention and security you needed? Is it when you begin to be the parent to *yourself*, or the friend to yourself, that you never had?

So, perhaps, for some of us, beginning to claim our wholeness will be about returning, writing and grieving: returning to home base (childhood), noticing what you didn’t get, and grieving. Do not, repeat, do not, make excuses for your mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandparent, cousin, guardian, brother, sister. Simply *take your own side*, this once. Think about it, write about it, talk about it, visualize it, draw it. Take your own side, this once. Remember every detail of each time, each moment, you felt alone, and grieve for that little girl, that little boy, who wanted so

much to be seen, smiled on, praised, held, hugged, loved. Who wanted someone to hold her hand and follow her lead, to be his special friend on a journey to wherever or whatever he wanted them to see; who wanted someone to talk to her unbounded by 'time'...to be her friend.

Remember it all. The loneliness you felt was wrong. The pain you felt was wrong. Think about it. Write about it. Write it down. Don't forget. Whoever hurt you was wrong. Whenever you doubt that, read these words again, and your own.

Only once you've grieved for yourself, can you think about grieving for them (or anyone else) – the father, mother, uncle, brother – who were hurt like you – just like Alice saw.

When I decided to go to college, after having worked for a year right out of high school, I studied sociology because I needed answers: why are people so unhappy and alone? Why do some people have so much, while others so little? Why have I been defined by race and gender and income? Where did these categories come from and why do they exert so much power over our lives?

Later, I went to the ancestors with this problem called "work." But I asked the question dispassionately, "objectively" with an academic air, a rational mind – not with love, passion, and a deep longing, an open willingness to do what was required – not with *certainty*. But I kept going back. Kept asking. Kept hoping.

I've always been a slow learner.

Each of us has spirit guides – ancestors, mentors – out there for us, inviting us into the stream of thought, suffering and struggle in which they flow; waiting for our questions, the questions that define our paths and *tribes*.<sup>2</sup>

We honor the ancestors by honoring our questions, the ones they want to help us figure out. Essentially, this means taking ourselves seriously, believing that we, *each one of us*, are *vastly* more important than this *system* of class rule we support every day of our lives with our participation, and by co-signing their illusions. We have to *believe* in our future without bosses. We have to *know* that honoring the ancestors, the earth, and each other is our *true* work. The other is just illusion. These jobs they give us to do aren't real. They're somebody else's wet dream.

We come from the 'all' of it, we return to the 'all' of it – the Great Commons of Creation – *that is true* reality.

2 Our tribe is made up of our spirit-guide ancestors conjoined with our living common questers – those who share our questions.

Keeping in mind our three sources of power: the ancestors, the earth, and each other, wholeness begins by defining *your* questions, the questions that define *you* – that reveal to you your path. They are the ancestors speaking.

If they've visited you, I hope you're paying attention, because those of us who understand this communion have a responsibility to create the conditions of general freedom. Because only then can *everyone* have access to the Great Commons of Creation.

We share a common beginning as we embark down our various paths to wholeness. Like Subcomandante Marcos, in order to begin seeing things *as they are* we must first admit that things are not what they seem.

'Seeing reality' and 'claiming wholeness' are two sides of the same coin. They mutually reinforce. In order to resurrect our wholeness, our freedom, our art, claim our right to name ourselves – in the process restoring the earth to health – we have to begin *seeing reality*, seeing things as they *are*, *not* as they *seem*. Never forget Machiavelli's advice to "princes" about how to control us:

...men in general judge rather by the eye than by the hand, for every one can see but few can touch. *Every one sees what you seem, but few know what you are*, and these few dare not oppose themselves to the opinion of the many who have the majesty of the State to back them up. ...Wherefore if a Prince succeeds in establishing and maintaining his authority, the means will always be judged honourable and be approved by every one. For the vulgar are always taken by appearances and by results, and the world is made up of the vulgar...

Machiavelli remains relevant because 'Power' hasn't changed. And if it's survived the fall of Rome, the end of mercantile capitalism, the drowning of feudalism, and the successive iterations of modern capitalism, it will not meekly dissipate or evolve under the influence of moral injunctions about preserving the planet, or swoon under the celebrity status granted so-called "green economic" models. The coasts will be afloat and we'll all drown before that happens.

No. This cat has nine lives and will only become past tense after it's been ruthlessly strangled, boxed in concrete and dropped in the middle of the Atlantic. And even then I'd recommend installing and monitoring some biomed sensors, and checking them regularly, just in case.

I perhaps overstress this matter of “*seeing things as they are*,” because we *are*, we *wind from below*, so good-hearted. We are like Edmund’s “credulous father” and “foolishly honest” brother:

A credulous father, and a brother noble, whose nature is so far from doing harms that he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty my practices ride easy! I see the business. Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit: all with me’s meet that I can fashion fit. (Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Act I, Scene II)

All’s fair to the nefarious.

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile; filths savour but themselves. (*King Lear*, Act IV, Scene II)

So I tend to despair when I hear the good-hearted tell us to emphasize the positive, downsize the negative – go with the festive, forget the restive – just live and let live – your flowers’ll bloom if you whistle that happy tune; because while I think it’s clear to anyone who’s hung in there this far that I *believe* in spreading joy to the maximum as much as anybody, we’re not gonna eliminate the negative *just* by accentuating the positive.

‘Power’ is *organized*. Podrunks flock round and endlessly circle their favorite texts like *The Prince* as maintenance rituals precisely *of that organization*. Marcuse was not pulling one out his bee-hind when he said “organization demands counter-organization.”

It does.

Podrunks are organized. So must we be. We have to gently, responsibly, stake this vampire. *We* have to control the economy, *not* the other way around. *We* have to control the polity, *not* the other way around. We have to issue our own particular version of Tatiana’s reality check.

From *my* front row seat in the Lecture Hall of the House of Feline, I’ve been educated to a degree in the ways of the cat. And from my studies I can definitively state that cats – and maybe all life – will plot and plan over a period of time when confronted with a problem. The four-year old Siberian tiger who leapt to freedom from her compound in the San Francisco Zoo had been thinking about that leap for a while.

We need to follow her example of pondering, but view the problem from a high enough perch to avoid her fate.

“Self-esteem begins with a workable plan.”

Our allegiance must be to *ourselves*. Rather than nurture corporations, we must come up with ways to support ourselves through the difficult times of transition – and codify those ways into basic precepts that will be there for us in times of uncertainty. Precepts like:

Live simply,  
Help each other,  
Don't buy anything  
but the least you have to.  
And whatever we use  
We get from friends.  
We'll be forming the crew  
that builds the NEW.  
No more settling  
for less than *what we want*.

If “organization demands counter-organization,” the critical question to keep on the front burner is, “*what is* the organized ‘Power’ we must counter?” Until we’re clear on what ‘Power’ *is*, as opposed to what it *seems to be*, we can’t form ourselves into an effective ‘counter.’

For instance...now, *I* might be talking out those bee hindquarters myself here as I haven’t studied the example I’m about to give, and... if I’m too ready to roll to climb this rock face, I apologize – feel free to prove me wrong, but...

Upon hearing some really good stuff about what’s called the “Transition Movement” spreading “virally” across the United Kingdom, I copied and read the following from Wikipedia:

Transition Towns (aka Transition Network, aka Transition Movement) is a movement that was created by Louise Rooney and popularized by Rob Hopkins. It was founded in Kinsale, Ireland and was then spread to Totnes, England by environmentalist Rob Hopkins during 2005 and 2006. The aim of the project is to equip communities for the dual challenges of climate change and peak oil. The movement currently has member communities in a number of countries worldwide. The Transition concept emerged from work permaculture designer Rob Hopkins had done with the students of Kinsale Further Education College in writing an “Energy Descent Action Plan”. This looked at across-

the-board creative adaptations in the realms of energy production, health, education, economy and agriculture as a “road map” to a sustainable future for the town. One of his students, Louise Rooney, set about developing the Transition Towns concept and presented it to Kinsale Town Council resulting in the historic decision by Councillors to adopt the plan and work towards energy independence.

The idea was adapted and expanded in September 2006 to Hopkins’ hometown of Totnes where he is now based. The initiative spread quickly, and as of September 2008, there were one hundred communities recognised as official Transition Towns in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Italy, and Chile. While referred to as ‘towns’, the communities involved range from villages (Kinsale), through council districts (Penwith) to cities and city boroughs (Brixton).

In the United States, state sites have been setup using the popular Open Social software, Ning. These states sites, under the umbrella of a Transition US site, were set up to help facilitate, network, inform, monitor, and house regional and organizational Transition Initiatives and ensure the rapid spread of the Transition Movement while networking related organizations, projects, ideas and activities.

The main aim of the project generally, and echoed by the Towns locally, is to raise awareness of sustainable living and build local resilience in the near future. Communities are encouraged to seek out methods for reducing energy usage as well as increasing their own self reliance—a slogan of the movement is “Food feet, not food miles!” Initiatives so far have included creating community gardens to grow food; business waste exchange, which seeks to match the waste of one industry with another industry that uses this waste; and even simply repairing old items rather than throwing them away.

While the focus and aims remain the same, the methods used to achieve these vary. For example, Totnes has introduced its own local currency, the Totnes pound, which is redeemable in local shops and businesses helping to reduce food miles while also supporting local firms. This idea is also planned to be introduced in three Welsh transition towns.

Central to the Transition Town movement is the idea that a life without oil could in fact be far more enjoyable and fulfilling than the present “by shifting our mind-set we can actually recognise the coming post-cheap oil era as an opportunity rather than a threat, and design the future low carbon age to be thriving, resilient and abundant – somewhere much better to live than our current alienated consumer culture based on greed, war and the myth of perpetual growth.” ([http://transitionculture.org/wp-content/uploads/who\\_we\\_are\\_high.pdf](http://transitionculture.org/wp-content/uploads/who_we_are_high.pdf))

The *Transition Primer* PDF, available free online, adds that:

The purpose of ‘transition’ [is] to support community-led responses to peak oil and climate change, building resilience and happiness. ...[The first of its’] seven principles of transition [is that] “power is shifting from institutions that have always been run top-down, hoarding information at the top, telling us how to run our lives, to a new paradigm of power that is democratically distributed and shared by us all.”

... Transition Initiatives are based on a dedication to the creation of tangible, clearly expressed and practical visions of the community in question beyond its present-day dependence on fossil fuels. Our primary focus is not campaigning against things, but rather on positive, empowering possibilities and opportunities.

... Successful Transition Initiatives need an unprecedented coming together of the broad diversity of society. They dedicate themselves to ensuring that their decision-making processes and their working groups embody principles of openness and inclusion.

This principle also refers to the principle of each initiative reaching the community in its entirety, and endeavouring, from an early stage, to engage their local business community, the diversity of community groups and local authorities. It makes explicit the principle that there is, in the challenge of energy descent, no room for ‘them and us’ thinking. (*Transition Primer*, [www.transitionnetwork.org/Primer/TransitionInitiativesPrimer.pdf](http://www.transitionnetwork.org/Primer/TransitionInitiativesPrimer.pdf))

The indisputable fact that human beings will have to “power down” or bow out has been lost on no one today. It is to their eternal credit that Louise Rooney and Rob Hopkins have seized the horns of our current ecological crisis and are pushing back for all they’re worth. I



would encourage anyone who reads the above quotes, and finds in them the solution they've been looking for, to contact Transition Network Ltd., download or copy their *Primer*, bring in at least ten other good-hearted folks, figure out how to use Ning, start meeting, recruit more, write your own Energy Descent Action Plan, get an article written about you in a community newspaper (or write your own), contact your city council, develop a dynamite presentation, get on the agenda, light a fire under their asses, start *doing* all the things you wrote about doing, keep high-stepping, and don't let nobody turn you around. You will have gotten yourself a Plan and you will have linked up. That is *so* in-the-right-direction I don't know why I don't just say "thank you" and quit while I'm ahead.

But I'm gonna trudge into the muck anyway.

What they're doing is awesome. They've decided they will get their town to "power down" *consciously*, with *intention and* with an alternative *value* system. My only concern is that it doesn't go far enough – and in today's world, what doesn't go far enough, isn't good enough; not good enough to turn this Titanic, not good enough to save our most solidly enslaved brothers and sisters in the Global South, and therefore not good enough to settle the podunks *permanently* (they are not called vampires for nothing.)

But this doesn't mean that there aren't tools in the Transitional Movement toolbox that we can use with our own 'transition' project: to build a mass movement to end wage work. There are. And we'll consider that possibility in the concluding section of this chapter.

When I say it doesn't go far enough I'm looking down several roads (environmental, politics, values) – that merge at the checkpoint 'Power.'

Its *values*, though oppositional in many respects, are not *essentially, wholly*, oppositional to the current system. With the podunks they say, "Don't look back – let's start with where we are now." (Remember the 'eternal "Now"?')

When you don't look back, you *turn* your back on the suffering of our ancestors and the suffering of all those who made "the myth of perpetual growth," the excess, the bombardment of commodities, possible – without so much as a "thank-you." It doesn't acknowledge the *source* of the existing accumulated 'wealth,' it doesn't acknowledge those to whom we *owe* the built world around us.

When we don't look back, we don't see those who've gone before, and those who are going under – the many hands making our lives light.

When we don't look back, we participate in the con that it doesn't matter how we made this sinkhole, so long as *we* can build *ourselves* a plank – never mind the dead bodies footing it, or the living enslaved left to the whim of the demons.

But it's that kind of tunnel vision that brought us the sinkhole in the first place.

And it's that kind of tunnel vision that gets directed right back into the avenues of 'Power.'

We can no longer claim ignorance. It just isn't good enough. It won't get us to our future and it won't save the planet.

We have to *start* with the understanding that things are not as they seem. When we face the reality that this global economic system *lies* – via its bought-and-paid-for: states, media, military, and academes (obviously incompletely) – then you can begin to conceive of the necessity of de-conditioning ourselves. "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

And that means relearning how to organize ourselves apart from the compulsion to categorize and package, rank and control. 'Hierarchy,' 'Ladders,' and 'Ascending Levels' are roads that all lead back to 'Power.'

The only scale we feels needs more than the "Guidelines" [given in the *Primer*] is the National scale initiatives starting to emerge in the US, New Zealand, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Japan and other places. The need is arising in countries for functioning replicas of Transition Network Ltd to provide its five functions in a way embedded in the language, culture and context of the host nation and/or culture, and also to provide a strategic national overview. The idea is that the handover is gradual, taking place over four stages, starting with inspiring, supporting and encouraging, then moving on to training, and finally taking on the networking functions as well as the development of adapted principles and offering support to newly emergent initiatives. They would also act as ambassadors for the Transition movement at Governmental and organizational levels. ...At the moment, applications for formal status are managed by Transition Network Ltd., but in time, the idea is that this function will most naturally be fulfilled by emerging national groups/networks, and also by regional initiatives. Some

people in the Transition movement have suggested that new initiatives should self-assess – or that there shouldn't be any criteria at all. Others strongly disagree with both these suggestions. On balance, and based on the feedback we have received from across the network, we feel that having clear guidelines which are assessed by supportive third parties creates a positive, meaningful process, but fully agree that they must remain open to debate and to ongoing review. (*Transition Primer*)

I had a dream once about a ladder that I described in my journal.

In it:

...the most greedy, materially-acquisitive of the world were told that there was more free stuff, "wealth," waiting for them at the top of an endless stairway, and they all got on it and started climbing, climbing, climbing, heading up, up, up, excited to get yet more, more, more, and the earth was rid of them, and they were never heard from again.

'Hierarchy,' 'levels' – those roads all lead back to 'Power.' So we have to stay off those roads – and trust. The linear thinking we've been schooled in is *propaganda* masquerading as "civilization," "Reason," "The Only Way." The challenge, given our conditioning, is to *name* ourselves without *packaging* ourselves.

So, for instance, once we're living our wholeness, cooperating across cultures, those of us in colder climes who want, say, bananas or mangoes or coffee, will have to figure out creative exchanges – high-tech, organized, cooperative projects – with those folks blessed in the sun, water and warmth department. This doesn't mean that a small Bay Area village will have to venture into discussions all on its lonesome with the climatically-blessed when there's no big, powerful state, with its big, powerful bosses, to figure out this 'problem' for it. All it means – this fact that there are differential bounties, distributed variously around the globe – is that we will – we free, independent villages of free, independent folks – we will have to clump together in perhaps ungainly groups. But, recall, *we have all the time in the world* – no deadlines, no bosses, no pressure. If we want to plan a "Coffee-Cruise" of folks willing, so their villages will receive the blessings of the coffee bean, to help with the harvest – that's what we'll do. (Of course we may also settle on other cooperative and individual ways to grow our own bananas.)

We have been ‘enjoying’ the benefits of the underpaid, soul-crushing toil of the working peoples of the global South (and our own low-income urban and rural communities) for centuries, without acknowledging the suffering and the sacrifice. Enough, already. Enough.

Coffee anyone?

During the massacre of East Timor’s civilians in September 1999 by Indonesian armed forces and militias, the conversations at coffee klatches at Starbucks around the country were predictable, considering the trendy clientele. Pointing to front-page stories in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post*, politically-correct Starbucks patrons voiced their *angst du jour*. “Isn’t it awful what the Indonesians are doing to those poor people in East Timor?” they groaned, as they sipped their tall latte made from organically-grown coffee beans. Little did they realize that the aromatic East Timorese coffee blend they were savoring may have actually prolonged the long-suffering of the same people whose fate they were bemoaning.

It turns out that Starbucks enjoyed a very cozy relationship with the Indonesian military-backed coffee-growing colonists who ran East Timor’s large plantations...

Behind every American foreign policy tilt you can usually find a bevy of political contributors. East Timor is no exception. The chief beneficiary of those delectable East Timor organic coffee beans that flow through the U.S. government-sponsored supply line was Howard Schultz, the Seattle-based Chief Executive Officer of Starbucks...Ironically, Schultz fancied himself as a progressive Democrat...he has championed health care reform, liberal employee benefits, and the environment by banning the doubling of coffee cups in his stores, [but] Schultz was much less concerned about the East Timorese, who have weathered one of the world’s most brutal military occupations while providing his corporate brew pots with the much desired East Timor coffee beans...

Starbucks’ support for unsavory regimes did not end with the Indonesian military occupiers of East Timor. After Rwandan President Paul Kagame transformed his country into a virtual one-party state, Starbucks announced it was interested in buying Rwandan coffee... (Wayne Madsen, *Jaded Tasks: Brass Plates, Black Ops, and Big Oil*, p. 77, 81-2, 83)

It's hard for the well-padded middle classes who've never suffered the kind of hardship experienced in the global South and in the low-income and rural communities of the North – suffering imposed by faceless functionaries of an impersonal system – to *see reality* – which is why essentially good-hearted people can tell us to just look forward, never back.

And this is also why those who *have* experienced that kind of hardship rightly view the good-hearted plans of good-hearted middle-class people with skepticism. Because they *know* that, come the wet-ass hour, those happy faces will turn on them so fast they're gonna need an exorcist, on top of their other troubles.

Which brings me to another model that seems to reflect an “alternative consciousness,” a way to transform our social arrangements in a more equitable direction. I heard about it from a listener who called in to the radio program *Sunday Sedition with Andrea Lewis*, on our local Pacifica station, KPFA. He encouraged us all to check out “the Zeitgeist Movement,” and its’ associated “Venus Project.”

So I did.

Here's a sufficient mouthful to give you a taste – from its online document “Designing the Future” (© 2007 by Jacque Fresco and Roxanne Meadows of The Venus Project, Inc., 78 pages):

Previous generations left a legacy of exploitation... [At] the heart of human progress – or destruction – is the rock-solid foundation of science...Armed conflict...to settle differences... is now totally unacceptable... Suppose you were called upon to redesign planetary civilization without any limitations based on how things are done today. The goal is to help rid the world of war, poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation, and to create the best world for all inhabitants, given the resources at hand, for the longest period of time. (p. 6)

Then it gives us “a little background before considering this challenge,” and tells us to think about how the current system addresses car accidents, transportation systems, food, clothing, shelter, and material goods, and concludes:

One would think that with our technology we could eliminate most social ills. Couldn't modern technology supply enough food, clothing, shelter, and material goods for all if used intelligently?

What is stopping us from achieving this? ...A majority of scientists think that the human race is on a “collision course” with nature... Worldwide more than one billion people currently live below the international poverty line... The gap between the rich and the poor is widening... With the advances of science and technology over the last two hundred years...does it have to be this way?

What is needed is...an alternative vision for a sustainable new world civilization, unlike any in the past.

...How are decisions arrived at in a cybernated resource-based society? ...To answer this question, we use the scientific method and have computers get direct feedback from the environment. Computers would have electrical sensors extended into all areas of the social complex around the globe...for example...monitoring the water table, insects, pests, plant diseases, soil nutrients, and so forth. Decisions are then arrived at using direct feedback from the environment... One can think of this as a global autonomic nervous system... As we transition to a fully cybernated process of governing human affairs, newer technologies can be installed that remove human error. These machines would provide information rather than opinions, thus considerably reducing the influence of bias and irrationality or purely emotional elements in how affairs are managed. This way people play less and less of a role in decision-making and the society is working toward AI and machine decision-making to manage all resources, serving the common good...With the scientific understanding that behavior is subject to the same natural laws that govern other processes, the education system in the resource-based economy can evolve...

The aim of this new social design is to encourage a new incentive, one that is no longer directed toward the shallow and self-centered goals of wealth, property, and power. These new incentives encourage people toward self-fulfillment and creativity... Unburdened by survival concerns, people would have time for individual interests such as continuing their education...theater, photography, painting, ballet, ...new horizons open up... (p. 9, 10, 11, 69-70, 72, 74, 75)

In a section entitled, “How Resources are Distributed Equitably,” we learn that there will be no money. Instead, we will be given “distribution centers:”

There would be 3-D flat-screen imaging in each home. If you desired an item, an order would be placed and the item automatically delivered...without a price tag, servitude, or debt of any kind. This would include whatever people need in the way of housing, clothing, education, health care, entertainment, etc.... Raw materials for production can be transported directly to manufacturing facilities by automated transport “sequences” using boats, monorails, mag-lev trains, pipelines, and pneumatic tubes... (p. 76)

Sounds great. Who builds all this glorious automated stuff?

Only in literally the very last paragraph (on page 78) we learn that: “Shorter workdays would provide greater opportunities for family members to pursue areas of personal interest.” So the workday will be “shorter” – but we will still be “workers.”

It’s impossible to know just by reading the document whether Jacque Fresco and Roxanne Meadows are naïve about ‘Power,’ or being used by ‘Power.’ You may rest assured, however, that it’s one or the other.

Using the lens of our theory of wholism, however, red lights are flashing all over the place, primarily because the sticky questions are not asked. Assuming the very best about Jacque Fresco and Roxanne Meadows, what they’re proposing is going in the exact wrong direction. We don’t need even further disconnection from our earth.

What’s really sad, and scary, is that it does hit all the right notes of our dissonance, of all our dissatisfaction and pain. It knows how unhappy we are, how exhausted and frustrated... And it knows how wowed we are by the electronic toys. They know that the world they dangle before our tired but yet endlessly hopeful spirits is tempting. They know how this futuristic tale of time and ease would sound to overworked people dominated by technology, and who feel, therefore, correspondingly powerless – unable to influence, let alone create, our own environments. In short, it’s very effective at deflecting dissent, which makes me suspicious of its intent.

Despite the title of one section being, “How are decisions arrived at in a cybernated resource-based society?” there is no mention of the problem of ‘Power.’ Jacque Fresco is a scientist, and for him all questions resolve themselves into questions of “logic.” But ‘Power’ is not about ‘logic.’ ‘Reason’ is just a con podunks found lying around and made use of, one of many tools (like ‘Race’) they picked up and used. But they would no more turn control over how the world is organized to

“the scientists,” than they would to “the people,” unless of course “the scientists” are just their paid stooges – or partners in crime.

And so his reply – “let the computers decide” – to the question “who makes the decisions?” is nonsensical, a non-answer that forces us to do a little circle dance with him while we try to pin him down, to force him to admit that he has no idea who will make the hard decisions, because ‘Power’ is not a factor in his calculations.

I remember the friendly argument I had with my son about the animated film *Wall•E*. I was put off by the propaganda that machines could, in theory, do everything. Huh? Machines pick the coffee beans, the cashews, assemble those ever tinier electronic components? Machines remove the coltan from the earth, and the people from their land?

The same questions arose when I looked at all the imagined massive structures that dominate Fresco’s document. Who builds this futuristic vision?

And what if I don’t want my turn at the oar? What if I want *out* of the galley altogether? What will you do with me? Banish me to a house with no “3-D flat-screen imaging?”

And who are “*you*” anyway? Who *are* the ‘bosses’ in this “redesigned planetary civilization?” If you avoid the sticky questions, on some level, it’s a con.

Been there, done that, sick of the masks, sick of the lies. *Poof*, be gone!

But I *so* understand the urge to ‘fix’ things. We good-hearted folks look at the mess the podrunks have made of our world, and we think, “there’s *gotta* be a better way.” And, depending on our backgrounds, our talents and gifts, we put on the table our best guess for a plausible fix. Me, too – “guilty as charged” – I admit it.

There’s a bit of Peterkin in this attempt, however, in the sincerity and naïveté of it – so I call it “The Peterkin Problem.”

We *do* have different values. We *are* good-hearted. It’s hard for many of us to believe the podrunks are as cold-blooded as they truly are because we tend to judge others by ourselves. So different groups among us apply their various talents to the problem of how to fix this system – resulting in a kind of piecemeal, patchwork application of bandages to a vampire that breathes again only to go for our throats.

We’re gonna need an awful penetrating perception to wash away all the Peterkin. Did you ever read *The Peterkin Papers*?



This was Mrs. Peterkin.

It was a mistake. She had poured out a delicious cup of coffee, and, just as she was helping herself to cream, she found she had put in salt instead of sugar! It tasted bad. What should she do? Of course she couldn't drink the coffee; so she called in the family, for she was sitting at a late breakfast all alone. The family came in; they all tasted, and looked, and wondered what should be done, and all sat down to think.

At last Agamemnon, who had been to college, said, "Why don't we go over and ask the advice of the chemist?" (For the chemist lived over the way, and was a very wise man.)

Mrs. Peterkin said, "Yes," and Mr. Peterkin said, "Very well," and all the children said they would go too. So the little boys put on their India-rubber boots, and over they went.

...[The chemist] listened as calmly as he could to the story... At first he said he couldn't do anything about it; but when Agamemnon said they would pay in gold if he would only go, he packed up his bottles in a leather case, and went back with them all.

First he looked at the coffee, and then stirred it. Then he put in a little chlorate of potassium, and the family tried it all round; but it tasted no better. Then he stirred in a little bichlorate of magnesia. But Mrs. Peterkin didn't like that. Then he added some tartaric acid and some hypersulphate of lime. But no, it was no better. "I have it!" exclaimed the chemist, — "a little ammonia is just the thing!" No, it wasn't the thing at all.

Then he tried each in turn some oxalic, cyanic, acetic, phosphoric, chloric, hyperchloric, sulphuric, boracic, silicic, nitric, formic, nitrous nitric, and carbonic acids. Mrs. Peterkin tasted each, and said the flavor was pleasant, but not precisely that of coffee. So then he tried a little calcium, aluminum, barium, and strontium, a little clear bitumen, and a half of a third of a sixteenth of a grain of arsenic. This gave rather a pretty color; but still Mrs. Peterkin ungratefully said it tasted of anything but coffee. The chemist was not discouraged. He put in a little belladonna and atropine, some granulated hydrogen, some potash, and a very little antimony, finishing off with a little pure carbon. But still Mrs. Peterkin was not satisfied.

The chemist said that all he had done ought to have taken out the salt. The theory remained the same, although the experiment had failed. Perhaps a little starch would have some effect. If not, that was all the time he could give. He should like to be paid, and go. They were all much obliged to him, and willing to give him \$1.37<sup>1/2</sup> in gold. . . . But there was the coffee! (Lucretia P. Hale, "The Lady Who Put Salt in Her Coffee," *The Peterkin Papers*)

For reasons already discussed, those who are *unconsciously* complicit generally end up trying to "save capitalism from itself." This pattern is set in early childhood, when we're conditioned to try to save our parents from themselves. Superheroes—all we serve diligently the cause of saving 'Power.' Children kept insecure cannot help but identify with those who wield power over their lives.

That it's understandable will be of little consolation when we're waving goodbye successively to one species after another, and to whole groups of people, one after the other.

Screw that. I'm for saving *ourselves* — all of us — and for making sure the podunks and the capitalist world-system are well and truly bound — to each other and to a boulder called (à la Randall) "The Reckoning" — and sinking them both together. But only a clear, fearlessly frank assessment of what these vampires *are* will enable us to form ourselves into an effective 'Counter.' The suffering of our brothers and sisters who bring us the toys and the coffee cheap can no longer be just passively repudiated. Because podunks think strategically and unequivocally, *we* can no longer afford not to.

The wholeness we had once was like that delicious cup of coffee. It allowed us to anticipate each day with relish, savor each taste. It warmed and stimulated us. And just as we were about to make it even better — sharing stories and knowledge across cultures, becoming more playful with our survival strategies, intensifying the pleasure and pregnancy of living fully — just as we were about to add that cream and sugar, the podunks stayed our hand and poured in salt instead.

If we weren't so good-hearted, if they hadn't slipped some sedatives into the pot, we would have realized sooner that our world had been hopelessly fouled, and our wholeness stolen.

But *we are* good-hearted and we *have been* sedated. So instead of saying, "screw this," and throwing out their toxic brew, we keep trying to fix it, to "make it work." We accepted their 'Reason' as our own, accepted their linear thinking as 'intelligence,' organized ourselves into the neat

boxes they wanted... and we worked, and we worked, and we worked, until soaring productivity levels, and a planet raped beyond belief, now threatens massive die-offs within our species, and whole species without.

Before we wake up, when we remain in the dream, we are Peterkins-all, trying one thing after another to try and enjoy our cup of coffee, what had once been our freedom. It's time to toss what they've been forcing down our throats, and start a fresh pot.

And only a truly oppositional set of values can brew up something fresh enough to shake off the death grip of this dying system.

Knowing that our impoverishment was accomplished by disconnecting us from our sources of power – the ancestors, the earth, and each other – means that reestablishing these connections is, in its barest bones, *The Plan*. Because of their subtle intertwinements, returning to one source eventually branches into the others...if we travel with consciousness, which we are.

Right now our lives are oriented around values we had no say in. To grow the future that our children deserve we must re-orient our lives around values that we *consciously choose*.

Two things must be very clear at the outset: the seriousness of the podunks, and the enormity of the threat they pose to all life. It's critical that we don't delude ourselves about reality – not about how they think, and not about how 'change' happens.

They look at automation and conclude we need less people. *We absolutely don't matter to them*. Cannon fodder, prison slave-labor, and early graves are the paths they've planned for us, we that 'Power' deems superfluous. And embracing a truly oppositional value system means we don't leave any of our brothers or sisters behind.

'Power' is *very* organized, with a *very* clear and simple aim: "stay ahead of the people, and stay on top." They are perfectly willing to let the "real economy" crash (what's left of it, after they took the money and ran <sup>3</sup>), sacrifice potential 'profits,' in order to secure greater *control* over... essentially, *us*.

*What they cannot sacrifice, therefore, is perpetual war, technological domination, and media control*. And they have who-knows-how-many almost-indefinitely-funded think-tanks devoted just to maintaining that control.

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3 ...after insuring they left in place the state mechanisms that will allow them to continue extracting ever more pounds of flesh from our hides, diminishing ever further our quality of life.

Now what is the *effective counter* to that – to their single-minded focus on keeping ‘the people’ under control?

Is it: “Power-down plans”? “Single-payer universal health care”? “A sixty-vote, filibuster-proof majority in the Senate”?

You see our problem. Our good hearts and our diversity in skills and talents, and our lack of unity, lead us to try to ‘fix’ *a system* (in ways as various as our gifts) *constituted to crush and control us*.

And though it *seems* that “our goodness” itself is the problem, that’s only because we’re still swimming in that same old polluted cup of coffee.

The *only* way to counter their fixed, determined, aim to ride our backs is, just as the Reverend Doctor told us, to straighten them, and go make ourselves a fresh pot. And the *only* way to make a fresh pot is to meet determination with determination. We must refuse. We must tell ‘Power’ in the clear script of our conduct, “our backs don’t exist for you anymore. They are for *us*, and *our* dreams.” Period.

From Day One they have used our ‘goodness’ against us, our good hearts, the fact that we care, our willingness to save capitalism from itself. I’m not suggesting we should stop having good hearts – just open eyes, and a re-conceived allegiance. It’s important that we not ignore Marcuse’s warnings about the tendency of ‘Power’ to turn everything into itself – the “Mr. Smith Virus.” Our ancestors figured out and packaged for us all we need to know to begin advocating for our future. Now is the time to pay attention. Unless the “alternative consciousness” we cleave to takes the “Mr. Smith Virus” problem seriously, it’s only a matter of time before that ‘alternative’ gets directed back into elitism (the division between the “thinkers” and the “manual labor,” the ladders, the competition, the looking to ‘Power’ for approval, the inevitable leaving of some of us behind to fend for ourselves).

A truly oppositional consciousness asks the hard questions: how will work will be organized differently? In the world you want, are there still bosses? Hierarchy? And if work *isn’t* organized differently, if there *is* still hierarchy, still bosses, what’s the point? How will we build a *mass* movement if we don’t address the concerns of the *masses* of people globally? The folks in the Transition Movement suggest that we start, just start, and work out the problems as we go. I agree that just starting is critical, but we can’t make a *leap* of consciousness without solid ground to stand on. You have to have sound footing if you’re gonna *jump*.

So how do we inoculate ourselves against cooptation? How do we

structure our opposition such that it *can't* be undermined or subverted? Those questions cannot be faced unless you understand 'Power.' Read *Jaded Tasks: Brass Plates, Black Ops, and Big Oil* by Wayne Madsen when you need a reality check. It reminds us again, as Machiavelli did, how the little boys pretending to be gods think and behave – which is without conscience or scruple.

As I write this, the journalist Seymour Hersh is reporting that his sources have revealed the existence of a hit squad responsible only to then Vice-President Dick Cheney. This revelation then made it safe for left economist Catherine Austin Fitts to admit that *she'd* been the target of an assassination plot.

Wayne Madsen writes about a series of questionable “suicides” in *Jaded Tasks*. And the recent “accidental death” of Mike Connell, described as “Karl Rove’s computer guru,” the man who designed the “man in the middle” computer architecture that allowed the right-wing crazies to rig voting machines and steal elections, just as he was being deposed to testify against Rove, is but one of the more high-profile examples of the ruthlessness of ‘Power.’<sup>4</sup> Only the very tip of their malice ever comes to light. One shudders to imagine the whole of it.

‘Power’ will not be concerned about the Transition Movement unless, against expectations, it touches some critical nerve – and then disaster will strike, sending folks scurrying, off-balance and backwards (*unless* they’ve tucked ‘consciousness’ in their pocket). When you tinker with the toenails of an economic system, that’s one thing, but when you dangle a stake over its heart – either its *raison d’être* or a key strategic location, a source of major profits or control – that’s something else again. And when you challenge the game itself...well...but we have to, what else is there?

The game itself, the system – the whole enchilada – rests on an *absence*, requiring a magician’s cunning to keep our eyes from seeing. The absence is *us*. We’ve gone into hiding. Our true selves linger in some Lost Lake of Limbo, waiting for the circumstances that will allow emergence into consciousness.

As I write these words, a tiny fruit-fly has come to his final rest on the edge of my computer, staring at me. The black of his little body is beginning to grow dull, but his wings, though folded close together in prayer, still glisten with iridescence.

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4 Catherine Austin Fitts’ website is <http://solari.com/> and more information about Michael Connell can be found at [www.rovecybergate.com](http://www.rovecybergate.com)

To all the other living beings of this planet we non-tribal humans are the greatest question of all. Barry Lopez, in his *Arctic Dreams*, recalls:

A Yup'ik hunter on Saint Lawrence Island once told me that what traditional Eskimos fear most about us is the extent of our power to alter the land, the scale of that power, and the fact that we can easily effect some of these changes electronically, from a distant city. Eskimos, who sometimes see themselves as still not quite separate from the animal world, regard us as a kind of people whose separation may have become too complete. They call us, with a mixture of incredulity and apprehension, “the people who change nature.” (p. 34)

But we *are* animals. To pretend otherwise, to suppress all that is nature in us, means that we live an insane illusion, staking out for ourselves an artificial, manufactured middle ground that cannot support souls. So we put on our false faces, our masks, and act as if souls are optional, or ‘primitive’ – that we are ‘smarter’ for having shed them, because, having shed them, there are no constraints on our behavior. The only god is ‘Mind’ and ‘Mind’ don’t mind if you rape the planet – *or* your fellow men and women. *Au contraire*.

We are only as good as the system we surround ourselves with. A system that can’t support souls is a system without values. A truly *oppositional* theory, therefore, is simultaneously, in its essence, a system of oppositional *values*, a *value* system – and a value *system self-reinforces*.

When you’re an electrical apprentice you have to study electrical theory. After eight hours of hard physical toil it can be hard to justify the time this requires. I remember one journeyman telling me that as electrical apprentices and journeymen, we are essentially mechanics. Though we do have to do the calculations on our own “side jobs,” on the commercial jobs, we, basically, install the raceways, do the rough-in, run the wire, etc. – i.e. we’re manipulating objects with our hands. Mechanics.

But we apprentices dutifully applied our minds to the theory part anyway (like we had any choice), starting with “Ohm’s Law,” which states: “the flow of current in an electric circuit is proportional to the applied voltage and inversely proportional to the resistance.”

$I = E/R$ , in which:

- I = the current flow in amperes;
- E = the applied voltage in volts; and
- R = the circuit resistance in Ohms.

What a formula tells you is that each factor can be expressed in terms of the other factors. So I decided that we were really looking at one thing from three different angles, that: *current* is really a manifestation of voltage and resistance, etc. etc. Of course the teachers all told us to imagine water and water pressure and all that, and that's usually the image that gets locked in people's minds. But to confuse matters further, David Bodanis (in *Electric Universe*) tells us that: "The individual electrons barely travel – in fact, they drift along...slowly, barely at walking speed... [In reality, the voltage] shakes the electrons that are *already waiting*..." – after that I was really confused.

Anyway, point being – a *system* refers to *itself* like Ohm's Law. So we see with the capitalist *system* that "the family" is a manifestation of "the state" and "the market," ...etc. etc. etc. And, circularly, they all reinforce each other again.

And a *system* (like this one we got, this podunk one), that is amoral, that springs from *no* values, can only be *effectively* countered by a *system* that is, *essentially, intrinsically, inter-woven values*.

The theory of wholism is truly oppositional because it confronts capital, a *truly* soulless system, with a system of inter-woven, mutually-reinforcing, *values*. Reverence for the earth is a manifestation of reverence for the ancestors in conversation with our living brothers and sisters. Wholism is about relationships of mutually-reinforcing *reverence*. Each angle can be expressed in terms of the others.

So our relationships with each other, in order to constitute an effective *counter* to 'Power,' have to become a living expression of oppositional *values* – a set of inter-woven values that become our '*sine qua nons*,' our 'without-which-nots,' always present in our pockets, never forgotten, never lost – so that our actions:

- Acknowledge and redeem the suffering and sacrifice of our ancestors and ourselves;
- Replenish and revere the earth, including the earth in our own bodies;
- Honor our responsibility to each other, leave no one behind – "each one, free one," "all of us, or none."

These values, always with us, never forgotten, inform our actions. These values penetrate and saturate, and allow us to make our mass movement our *unified* consciousness, and vice versa.

As long as we address the problem of a soulless system piecemeal, separating out single strands of the system, never challenging the loom, we can be contained and co-opted. As long as we keep attacking bits and pieces of the problem – on *their* turf rather than from the perspective of an alternative set of values – our dissent can be ‘managed,’ our critique contained – and we with it.

If we continue packaging our dissent, it’s like staying in boxes marked with big red Xs, waiting to be picked off serially in a sequence assigned according to the threat podunks imagine we pose. The only ultimate solution is *group withdrawal* from soullessness, and if we prepare for the long haul, we will get there.

It is the dearest wish of the wind from above that we, the wind from below, become simple extensions of machines, relinquishing the ability to even *imagine* wanting influence over the qualities of our physical environments. The ancestors have called our attention repeatedly to the fact that *we* are being molded to be like *machines*, rather than the other way around. That the great ‘all’ of us, our majesty and mystery, is reduced, by our attachment to ‘things,’ to simple logic formulas, is continuously contradicted by our bodies, by our remembered “wildness.”

Youth, fresh from that river of mystery most readily cleave to resistance. Those of us adults who are awake have a responsibility to support them, to validate their intuitive responses to an inhuman system, support their gaining the information, skills and knowledge that they need to become even more powerful, more *effective*, ‘counters.’

We can support them with our material resources – our homes, help and subsidies – but we *also* support them when we validate the *reality* of “wildness,” of “freedom” – by being personally willing to embrace the “fuck-it factor.”

To the degree to which organized labor operates in defense of the status quo, and to the degree to which the share of labor in the material process of production declines, *intellectual* skills and capabilities become social and political factors. Today, the organized refusal to cooperate of the scientists, mathematicians, technicians, industrial psychologists and public opinion pollsters may well accomplish what a strike, even a large-scale strike, can no



longer accomplish but once accomplished, namely, the beginning of the reversal, the preparation of the ground for political action. That the idea appears utterly unrealistic does not reduce the political responsibility involved in the position and function of the intellectual in contemporary industrial society. The intellectual refusal may find support in another catalyst, the instinctual refusal among the youth in protest. It is their lives which are at stake, and if not their lives, their mental health and their capacity to function as unmutated humans. Their protest will continue because it is a biological necessity. (Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. xxv)

Now I think of the “fuck-it factor” as akin to Marcuse’s “refusal.” It’s a buoyancy, an affirmative presence that’s finally called upon after years of suppression. And although it usually seems to be a spur of the moment thing, it’s actually been bubbling under the surface of apparent containment for years. But when it appears it happens so suddenly it seems like alchemy.

The shock, when it does, can be both liberating and terrifying (like wide open *Jaws* out of the blue still water) – depending on your point of view.

Of course, after the fact, we nod and say, “well, of course, it should have been obvious, given that freedom is the inherent nature of all things.”

So when Tim DeChristopher suddenly decided to intervene and block the despoliation of precious wilderness lands in Utah, he’d been preparing himself for years for that moment, whether he knew it or not.<sup>5</sup>

Rosa Parks had studied with Myles Horton at his Highlander School and had forged a fully formed fury by the time she settled solidly in her seat. Rachel Corrie had been pondering courage literally her whole life. Resistance, freedom, the call of the wild, bubbles up from a deep underground spring common to us all.

Though it’s hideous that a youth perished on the altar of “civilization’s” conceit, there was something grounding, essential, conveyed when the four-year old Siberian tiger Tatiana issued her reality check, her memo, to the arrogant bosses of the San Francisco Zoo – and

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<sup>5</sup> The December 22, 2008 *Democracy Now!* featured Tim DeChristopher, a Utah student who stood up to Bush administration plans to allow oil and gas industry desecration of Utah’s wilderness legacy.

to us all. Something exhilarating when (in a tale from the racetrack I heard last summer) a horse refuses to go into the starting gate, throws off her jockey, and full-out flies, sun aflash on her back, racing down the track, the delectstasy of running the only stimulus required. I bet she'd been wanting to do that forever – to run the race, feel the wind in her face, with no asshole on her back.

It's thrilling when a being refuses her assigned role in the script; exhilarating, paradigm-shifting, when the lie that we are thoroughly controlled, contained, domesticated, trained, is exposed.

For instance, a year ago, here where I live, a container ship “rammed a Bay Bridge tower...and dumped...bunker fuel into the bay.”

Emergency officials more than doubled the number of ships and cleanup workers attacking the massive oil spill throughout the Bay Area – while hundreds of frustrated citizens who tried to help were turned away from contaminated beaches and so-called training sessions...

Twenty of the boats are skimmers – specially rigged craft that skim oil up from the water – from private contractors hired by the company that owns the Cosco Busan container ship that rammed a Bay Bridge tower last week and dumped 58,000 gallons of bunker fuel into the bay. The other 40 boats are volunteer fishermen, recreational sailors and local agency craft that are patrolling to direct cleanup efforts, Eng said.

Beth Brown of San Francisco said she and her boyfriend spent about 15 minutes cleaning Baker Beach on Saturday morning, filling a couple of plastic bags with oily clumps. Then a park ranger and a cop appeared, told her the beach was closed and threatened them with arrest.

“I want to do what they want us to do but, right now, they want us to do nothing,” Brown said. “And I can't do nothing.” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, November 10, 2007)

In essence, she was saying to them: “I want to be a good citizen, but I refuse to be a fool” (“...I refused to be a fool dancing on the strings held by all of those big shots”), because it's a fool who ignores the earth speaking in and through them.

Facing reality means that we have to face the fact that we live in a system formed for the precise purpose of pounding us into passivity. It doesn't want us to become large. It doesn't want us to challenge authority. It doesn't want us to think for ourselves – on the contrary. But it is

critical, for all the reasons already discussed, that we begin to do so, that we develop our innate gifts and our ability to be powerful. The plans of 'Power' for us are not benign. Now is the time for a general awakening. Each time we listen to, and act on, the earth's voice, her protected *longing* for us, we grow stronger for the day when we are ready to confront 'Power.'

Back in the summer of 2008, when progressives were sweating the 2008 presidential election, a local Pacifica radio programmer, Kris Welch, rebroadcast a 2002 interview she'd conducted with John McCain. In response to callers' comments about the Middle East he said that he agreed with Plato that, "citizens will choose totalitarianism over chaos." Bush, as President, frequently joked that, "if this were a dictatorship this would be a heck of a lot easier, just so long as I'm the dictator." And...

Back in 1964 Ronald Reagan started telling a story he repeated many times on the long road to the White House. It was about how the masses ruin democracy by sucking dry the nation. ... In one tape-recorded speech in 1965, Reagan said: "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government...democracy always collapses over a loose fiscal policy, always to be followed by a dictatorship." (David Cay Johnston, *Free Lunch: How the Wealthiest Americans Enrich Themselves at Government Expense (And Stick You With The Bill)*, p. 24-5)

My favorite Bush-slip came from his 2007 State of the Union address in which he said, "chaos is the greatest ally we have in this struggle." And Kris Welch again, just now, on her radio show *Living Room*, brought her listeners another interesting interview, with director Don Goldmacher, about his film, *Heist*.<sup>6</sup> In it he said that the Wall Street Gang is destroying our standard of living: "It's going to go down anyway, but if the financial structure fails, it will plummet."

Resulting in... "chaos," perhaps? In which case, unless we've kept 'consciousness' in our pocket, available for ready access, and precepts on our lips with the will to prove them, what do you suppose will happen? Haven't we been shown the answer to that question repeatedly? Without consciousness, all too easily we can be manipulated into turning on each other. Suddenly a neighbor, who still has a nice house, a car, plenty of food, but who refuses to share, will receive the full force of popular fury long before it occurs to the people that she or he is a puppet, just like

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6 The March 13, 2009 *Living Room*. The film itself can be viewed at: [www.Heist-themovie.com](http://www.Heist-themovie.com)

everyone else. And by then the damage will have been done.

Knowing as we do how dearly the podrunks love categorization, coercion and control, looking around us, seeing the existing pattern of slotting people, and their nations, into “core,” and “periphery,” “knowledge workers,” or “production workers,” it’s pretty easy to guess what their long-term plans are.

...production workers in the United States and other high-wage countries were advised to stop working with things and learn how to work with ideas or people. A progressive former U.S. secretary of labor regularly celebrated the shift of the U.S. economy away from mass production to “symbolic analysis.” Everyone in the United States (and by implication, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other high-wage industrial economies) was to become a computer programmer, or perhaps a lawyer. (R. Baldoz, Charles Koeber, Philip Kraft, *The Critical Study of Work*, 2001, p. 4)

These words were written in a different era of course. Today the labor movement, and the left in general, is pressing for the return to the U.S. of a significant manufacturing base to build “the real economy,” instead of continuing to inflate the speculative fantasies of Wall Street. And if the pay scales of those proposed new manufacturing jobs are pegged to the Chinese standard, the podrunks might concede the point.

Two years after it bought Mr. Coffee in 1998, the Sunbeam Corporation shifted production from Cleveland, Ohio, where workers who make electric appliances earned more than \$21 an hour, to Matamoros, Mexico, where they averaged \$2.36. Three years after that, the company moved Mr. Coffee production to China, where they can hire labor at 47 cents an hour. (Jeff Faux, *The Global Class War*, 2006, p. 137)

The current fight in the polity over the Employee Free Choice Act is ultimately a battle over where to set that base wage standard. The last thing podrunks want is well-fed and well-read American “manual labor” getting all frisky and full of itself again. They saw this in the fifties and sixties in America and vowed never to let it happen again. And while they probably would prefer a neat organization of the world itself into white-skinned Northern “symbolic analysts,” and dark-skinned Southern “grunts,” climate change, peak oil, peak water, and the extension of democracy in the global South, will require maintaining a significant “grunterage” within the bowels of the “knowledge economy” itself. In

which case they intend not to give an inch of the ground of their Control to “the grunts or their designated drivers.”

But trends clearly in evidence – automation job elimination, incarceration before education, illness before wellness, withdrawal of the safety net, gentrification segregation, monopolization of information – suggest that existing gaps in access to the goodies will only get worse. Shrinking resources due to the podrunks’ over-zealous consumption of the planet, their privatizing what should have been our common treasures, have locked these tendencies in place. Trying to rebuild a manufacturing base in such circumstances brings to mind those over-worked deck chairs on the Titanic, if not the one about our bandaged vampire with the gleam in his eye.

Come the wet-ass hour, do we really want vampires in the captaincy, deciding what our world will look like and how we will live?

Even if President Obama is able to rein in the podrunks politically, this Titanic called “the consequences of raping the planet” will take decades to turn, if it can be turned at all, leaving the extreme right-wing nut-cases plenty of time to experiment with their “extra-political” power plays, which you can bet they’re cooking up in oceans as we speak.

And do we really believe in the ability of our politicians to detach themselves, come that soggy time, from their backroom buddies and club-mates? How have they performed on that score so far? Do you believe in magic? Do you truly think their hearts will change fundamentally when the system hasn’t?

Our elected “leaders” cannot do this thing that needs to be done. But they will resist like hell when *we* step up and propose *ourselves* as the ones to do it.

And we grunts, many of us, will resist as well, resist even the notion that we *are* all “grunts” – to the podrunks. Which means that those of us who *do* see reality will have to start now to challenge the division work and begin embracing our culture work. We have to start now reconstructing our lives around our *values*, our reconceived values – our *oppositional value-system*.

We have to *live* our values, not just *think* them.

Because, critical as it is to control the thoughts that we allow to occupy our bodies, thoughts *alone, unlived*, unconsciously cycles the Thinker back to Mind-Worship, and that is a value at odds with wholeness and wholism.

A renunciation of Mind-Worship means a *re-valuation* of the

Power of *the Hand*. With our hands we grow our own food. With our hands we make our own clothes. With our hands we build our own homes. With our hands we milk our own sheep. With our hands we mill our own wheat. With our hands we shuck our own corn. With our hands we toot our own horn (*Yay Wind From Below!*) – figuratively and literally, because with our hands we make our own beats. And with our hands we make music in the streets. Or dirt paths, whatever.

Living our values is akin to becoming those loving beings that Fromm described in *The Art of Loving* – surely one of the most important books of our time – a practice that requires “discipline, concentration and patience *throughout every phase of one’s life.*”

Wholism.

We have been controlled by many techniques, but, as Naomi Klein has pointed out, perhaps the most important way has been by pulling us off-center, keeping us off-balance, uncertain, insecure and worried. If you don’t have the basics, it’s hard to think about much else – like about what kind of world we really want. But it is precisely this latter question that is ‘for us,’ as Studs said, right now. Human matters.

In order to get to the future we want, as opposed to the one the podunks want for us, *we have to make planning our priority.* We have to create a plan based in our values and then live it, even when, or *especially* when, we’re shaken up and something is trying to push us off-center.

Once I studied martial arts and the teacher explained one of the stances, kenpo, with the analogy of gripping the floor of the subway train as it rounds a curve or changes speed. “Rotate your feet to the outside edges, keep your back straight, bend your knees slightly and sink into the stance so that you’re centered.”

“The Plan” is *our* kenpo stance. When they throw some new destabilization scheme at us, we return to our basics: the precepts that guide action:

Live simply,  
Help each other,  
*Don’t buy anything*  
*but the least you have to.*  
And whatever we use  
We get from friends.  
We’ll be forming the crew  
that builds the NEW.

No more settling  
for less than *what we want*.

Fundamentally, it's about all of us tuning ourselves to the same question, to this *one question*: "*what world do we want?*" Folding our actions together, to *that* question – the very one the podunks least want us to take responsibility for. But it is *we* who *literally* make the world we live in, *with our hands*, who must now begin conceptualizing the shape of the new world that will be fit for *life*. It is we who suffer the consequences of the big decisions, who must now start to make them.

So in times when we're most stressed, we return to kenpo stance, we come together and review our precepts: "don't buy *anything* but the least you have to;" "buy from friends, *not* from corporations," corporations only want to kick us to the curb like trash; "form a group" with others in your neighborhood that agree to a campaign of mutual aid, both for each other, and for the broader community.

We have to prepare ourselves *now* for the crises they *will* throw at us – destroying that which makes us feel more hopeful, food shortages, agent provocateurs, plans to poison our air and water, policies that attempt to divide us.

In our Plan, there are the things we agree to do in a crisis, and the things we agree to do *every* day. But *every* thing we do, every *positive* action, every thought, leads *out*, out the door and *on* to better things.

Your crew is not your tribe. Your community is not your culture. But that don't matter. They are the folks you work with to get the job done because you're in the same place at the same time, just like the construction workers who find themselves all together at a job site. You'll find your tribe later. But now there's a job to do and you have to help. We have to see both short and long, from above and on the ground, laterally, diagonally, and every which way, all at once.

We need strategies; we need a plan.  
We need approaches; we need a path.  
We need steps we can follow,  
And a view of the end;  
We need patience to get there,  
And a place to begin –

You have to have sound footing if you're gonna jump.  
– recognizing that each person's "start-point" is when and where he / she – you / me – decides to start. That could be today, a year from today,

or five years from today; it could mean embracing one strategy or many at once. It all depends on where you are *right now*.

Little by little  
we whittle and whittle  
away the death-worship,  
the denial of meaning,  
returning to reverence,  
to spiral renewal,  
to springs out of winters,  
and to all things communal.

### *Turning Toward What We Want... Withdrawing From What We Don't*

True individuality can only be born of unprescribed collectivity (“freely-associated individuals”), of a popularly-created totality – that wholeness to which its individualities relate as the larger expression of themselves, and from which they derive *their* wholeness. Without that larger totality which is *our voluntary creation* even more than we are the creations of it, we are not wholes, but rather only isolated fragments of Fear. In such a condition we cannot develop into individualities. In this we are no different from all social animals, and *in our oneness with all animals there is no shame, but only great joy*. (Journal entry, September 25, 1981)

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A year ago I made an implicit promise to my neighborhood when I planted our traffic circle. So you can imagine my feelings of guilt as I sit here typing these words while the sun streams in, the warmed earth smells of renewal, and the plum and peach blossoms announce the arrival of spring.

Maybe it's the unknown ailments I wrestle with every day, plowing a sense of urgency, that supercedes guilt and keeps me laboring over a keyboard instead of a shovel – or maybe my body and the earth are in sync in our distress and the urgency that calls me is only too real.

But I don't think it's illusion to believe, to know, that when we psychically let this system go, the shift will be so much easier than we'd reason to hope.



The earth calls. It does. Seeds just wanna do that thing. The sun is so sweet.

I've no doubt at all that, once we make our plans, our feet will easily find the paths that return us to, and return to us, our power.

All to say, I long to be out there digging weeds, planting the traffic circle, leaning on my plum tree and thanking it, once again, for her food. And while I know it will require many more acts of resistance than planting a communal plot to win for us our future without bosses, communal food is no small thing.

And once you've joined with that fate-assigned-few who *want* to wake up with you, you'll find in yourself a previously untapped creativity that generates endless things to do. What could be more fun than that?

Thoreau told us that when "new, universal, and more liberal laws...begin to establish themselves around [us]...in proportion as [we] simplify [our lives,]" that, then, "the laws of the universe...will appear less complex," and "solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness."

In the same way, 'wage work' will no longer *be* 'wage work.' It will be "what I have to do for now," while to your *real* work you give your *full* power, focus, commitment, and love. When you stop seeking the approval of a system that despises you, sooner or later it *will* fall away like the dead husk it is, as surely as the phoenix rises from the fire, and the butterfly from its' chrysalis.

So do not despise small acts. Small changes *do* lead to big ultimate effects, if you make them with consciousness. Whether it's digging up a lawn to plant food for the spirit-starved children in your neighborhood, or convening a gathering to pose the question, "what future do we want?" Once you stop trying to rise above your fellows at work, once you set the competition aside, and turn your attention to what your *body* wants to do, you'll find the energy required to do it. "The process of reclamation starts with *our bodies*, and our children's bodies." We can begin by taking ourselves, our art, our questions, seriously. It is our wholeness speaking.

*No one else can tell you what work you're here to do.*

The job, wage work, is the linchpin of a very insidious cycle of abuse – pull it out and the whole mechanism collapses.

We all know, if only unconsciously, that our lives are being stolen. And so we feel entitled to the "Compensatory Cheap Thrill of Consumption." But this thrill is not really cheap – it only seems so because the extorted labor is concealed by the appearance of the

commodity itself. Performing our assigned role as “consumers on autopilot” makes us complicit with the abuse – of ourselves and of the unseen workers who produce the commodities we buy. We have to face unvarnished the price of our “addiction to convenience” – or rather the illusion of ‘convenience.’

Our consumption maintains the cycle of abuse and the cycle of abuse compels our consumption.

Not long ago I listened to an interview with an author talking about how to insure that the food we eat is supported by, and supports, a healthy and sustainable *food system*. The author emphasized the importance of buying directly from local farmers. It was a listener-call-in program and a woman called to say that the last time she considered buying produce directly from a farmer at a local street market the green beans being offered were \$3.99 a pound. She turned around and went to a Safeway and found green beans for ninety-nine cents a pound.

“I’m glad we have a system that brings me green beans for only ninety-nine cents a pound,” she said.

The author replied that that seemingly low price disguised the true cost: the cost to the workers and consumers exposed to pesticides; the cost to the workers of slave wages; the cost to the health system to treat those workers and consumers; the cost to the planet of the unbearable toxic load, on top of the costs of global warming due to the excess fossil fuels needed to truck or ship the product out, or in the pesticides themselves; the cost to our souls of our disconnection from the earth; the cost to our understanding of the complexity of ecosystems... (I added those last two.)

There *is* a larger ‘Reckoning’ that we all have a responsibility to see to, because there *is* a larger ‘Debt.’ We have to withdraw from the corporations, peer into the false face, and return to reality, to the world around us right now: the ancestors, the earth, and to each other. From these sources come our food, our shelter, our clothing, our joy, and – most importantly – our awakening.

We put our *values* in our Plan  
that we implement with our *hands* –  
tied to a movement,  
tied to a mass,  
that one day soon  
will free us.

The trivialization and diminishment of manual work is one of the sources of our enslavement, so re-valuing manual work is one of the keys to freedom. The podunks know that *in reality* the hand is *everything*: our food...you know the list. Everything. Because our hand is key to our freedom a mass of millennia has gone into the myth that the hand is nothing, while Mind is All. *What a con.*

To say that the con worked is an understatement. Podrunk propaganda tells us to despise the laborer, the migrant worker, the factory grunt. And all too often we obligingly concur, even to the extent of despising ourselves...but not construction workers.

When I was trying to break into the trades, following A's advice, as I'd learned it was wise to do, I asked another woman-electrician, S, if I could be her "summer helper." This was a special category of worker the union recognized, usually inhabited by teenagers – sort of pre-apprentices – created probably to accommodate the children of the union brothers and sisters, to expose them to the work and give them a little income over the summer. It paid the same as the first bracket apprentice level.

I was over forty-five, had been to college, and I'd filled my share of professional shoes, but it never occurred to me that my becoming an electrician's "summer helper" could be interpreted as a misstep and consequent downward plunge through a trap-door called "Defective". Certainly no one could think this who'd worked with A, as I had, and seen the skill required to do the work she did. And A spoke of S with such a reverent tone, that I was convinced she must be the most masterful electrician who ever carved light out of darkness.

Arriving at her home late, at 7:10 AM, and already sweaty with anxiety over it, I found her waiting in the company van, clearly peeved.

"I was about to leave," she said grimly, not needing to spell out the implications of that sad event.

I apologized profusely, climbed into the passenger seat, and off we went. The mission that morning was to make magic happen for a company housed in an office building in *YouNameTheOutskirts*. My naiveté caused me to bubble with enthusiasm. I was like a puppy with S, or an infant, babbling away to help cushion the little space that was ours. She, on the other hand, was a woman of few words, not to say cold, and the confidences we shared tended to be spare and relevant, on her side at least. I tend to easily veer off point when making chit-chat, an unfortunate side-effect of problem-shyness.

My job was to be the brute labor, hauling out the tools, ladder and whatnot to make a smooth path for her brain to function freely, with unencumbered focus. She was completely intimidating with her confidence and competence. When I see that combination in someone I always marvel, having never known exactly what that feels like.

We journeyed up to the third floor to scope out the lay of the land – which generally involves tracking down the electrical room – and our first sight as we stepped off the elevator was the reception desk with the usual suspect stowed stiff-leggedly behind it. Blond, young, attractive, well-coiffed and clothed, she regarded S as she would a brown smear on her shoe. I later learned that this young woman's response to a construction worker was typical, particularly among the white-collared, but at the time I was surprised by it. After all, S probably earned four or five times what this young woman did, and isn't money the gauge by which everything is measured in class society?

It seems that once the podunk predators pitch their cons, their nets for all we dispossessed – Western Rationalism being the largest and most widely flung – the vulnerable rush in, respond to the duck call: “come fly with us above the rest, above the common mob unblessed.”

Podunk propaganda would have it that those of us who work with our hands are brutes, that it's a phenomenon worthy of the carny when we open our mouths and speak. For those swayed by this con the terms “Western Thought” and ‘thought’ are synonymous. *And yet, look* where we are – on the brink of destruction, destroying each other, and the planet. Perhaps it's time we thought with our hearts and hands instead of our heads – especially as what we do with our hands will make us a mass, and only a mass will free us.

The mass movement, therefore, is our true work, because only general freedom will support individual freedom – *and vice versa*.

To develop a meaningful mass, one of substance, one of weight, it's important we *physically* meet and greet. So the second stage of The Plan, after seeing reality, is to begin reaching out to others around you, in your physical environments, in order to begin *planning* for local – i.e. both village *and* micro-village level – self-sufficiency. The ideas that follow are suggestions for how to begin.

We're only as good as the system we surround ourselves with – so how good do we want to be? Granted, we were consumed before we could say a word about it and we'll have to tunnel out.

...Best grab a shovel...and dig.

Once, when I was an office worker, a boss sent me to a “training” on how to use a day planner.<sup>7</sup> Ha, ha – not-funny joke, I thought. The whole exercise, I knew, was just a way for management to change the subject from “overwork” to: “*you-just-need-to-be-better-organized*. If you can’t clear your desk it’s *your fault*.”

Of course I went along with the charade (as if I had a choice), deciding to treat it as seriously as the boss treated my workload.

But I found the workshop unexpectedly compelling because it emphasized *values* as the basis of effective *planning*. (I’m saying a little prayer here that just using such phrases as “effective planning” won’t transmogrify me into some brisk, horse-blinkered “project manager.”)

Define your values, the trainer said, and then make sure that everything you do, every day, reflects them and moves you toward your ultimate goals. This, we were told, was how to overcome lethargy, inertia, depression, that sense of futility that is the direct consequence of having to always be told what to do. Now, by definition, they could never go to *that* heart of things, after all, they were set up to serve the system itself; but the technique, I thought, was fundamentally sound. Unless we start to *live* the future we want – “the future in the present” – we won’t get there.

It’s *all* about planning, having a plan with clear goals that people can believe in.

It’s time to start talking with each other, sharing what we know, and applying all of our under-utilized creativity, all of our *true* power, to creating the next social arrangement.

We need spaces where we can gather, to meet and talk – neighborhood anchors at first and then, when we’re stronger, our own communal Great Hall with lands adjoined that provides access to toilets and showers, cooking facilities, and a large communal meeting room, solar power capture and distribution, artists’ studio, flour mills, communal gardens, pasture and farm, a bedroom-car park with charging station – organized by the local community.

Together we can figure out the transition problems. But we have to start, to say “enough,” and turn to each other for the answers to our deep, earth-renewing questions – asking of each other only an agreement to honor the ancestors, the earth, and each other.

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<sup>7</sup> One of the “Franklin-Covey” planning seminars.

Here's what I will do: meet and greet my neighbors, include my friends, set the day and time for meeting, and then begin.

Hopefully there'll be enough people around you who will want to come together – share food and stories, and think about the future – that you won't be forced to venture too far off shore in order to chart a course. But, if you're awake, you do what you have to.

The handout “Planning the Future We Want,” at the end of this book, includes these initial questions, a way to start.

Form a circle, and ask each person to think about and address questions like these:

- What is your art (skill, gift, love – that which you do unbidden, without force)? What do you do *really*? Who *are you* really?
- Have you ever tried to live that art? What happened?
- Have you ever thought about *only* doing your art? If so, what stops you?
- If you could start buying the goods you use from someone here, if they were of better quality, and less expensive, would you?
- If you could turn to people here for your entertainment – film, spoken word, music, dance – would you? If not, what would stop you?
- If you could plan a future where we could all *live* our wholeness, fully, what would it look like? Don't you deserve this? Do you want this for your children – or for *all* children?
- What if we started buying from *each other*, instead of corporations?
- What if we devoted our time, attention and allegiance to building the future we deserve, instead of to the job?
- What if we went beyond talking about these things and started doing these things? How would we start?

At the end of the meeting I will offer to anyone interested a copy of this book, which is free. You can copy it from the web site at [www.nas2endwork.org](http://www.nas2endwork.org) or request a hard copy by writing to:

The Nascence to End Work Savings Endowment (NEWSE)  
P.O. Box 3952  
Berkeley, CA 94703  
510.420.8054  
[nas2endwork@gmail.com](mailto:nas2endwork@gmail.com)  
[www.nas2endwork.org](http://www.nas2endwork.org)

“Nascence” means “birth.” To birth a movement to end work is the work of the NEW.

We’ve been conditioned to struggle with our frustrations – the challenge of trying to be a full human being, full of life, health, and joy – alone. Now is the time to talk *with each other* about these difficulties. Simply meeting together and acknowledging that the current social arrangement cannot meet *our need to be whole* is a huge step forward.

Of course the initial results of our coming together to share information won’t be obviously world-rocking. For example, one person may share with another that it’s that tattered toxic synthetic blanket breaking down and becoming friable that makes her feel that death is imminent, or we’ll learn by comparing notes that plastic-water really is liquid-death.

But I’m not talking exchanging macaroni and cheese recipes here either. I’m talking about sharing those painfully-purchased, often life-saving lessons, like: “never a bridge, always a retainer;” like: “most ‘soaps’ are actually ‘detergents’ that ruin the skin;” like: Pacifica Radio’s KPFA has featured a documentary (excerpts can be heard on their archive) that makes the case for healing cancer with a strict raw food diet, *not* by chemotherapy; like: there’s a way to handle a crying baby that relieves the parent’s and the baby’s mutual stress; like: rushing a child around and putting the job first does violence to the child, devastates his wholeness.

And we can’t expect evolutionary ideas and projects to slip down every throat like sweet nectar. There *will* be people who prefer tough draught-tolerant foliage to food in the community truck-patch, who prefer façade to fellowship in our inter-relationships. There will be those who find food ‘messy,’ who are offended by the ‘unsightliness’ of fallen leaves or a dead tomato plant. There will be some who won’t care about hunger in the neighborhood so long as *their* stomachs are full.

In which case, we’ll let our values, our value-*system*, be our guide and take such issues to our crew, once we have one. The solutions that gather in good fellowship will be fresh and invigorating. Sometimes just listening to the life-stories of these stalwarts of Tough-Love can lead, ultimately, to an opening. Invisibility is a toxic problem in this sick system, one that can be acknowledged without imbuing it with the power to pull us off-center.

The point is, when you encounter this problem of deep complicity and brainwashing you will already, values in pocket, have thought about

and discussed it. It will have occurred to you that when someone is uncaring about pain on the village doorstep, when someone chooses her personal aesthetic over a neighbor's full belly, there are understandable reasons to explain how she got that way. The individualism conditioning runs deep. It does. You'll know this and be able to react like the Chicano father (in the Bay Area, some years back) after his infant girl was bludgeoned by a neighbor's five-year old son; the father said of his baby's killer: "The child is not well."

No one was born a misanthrope, so when you encounter one, or two, you'll know what to do.

To discuss the ideas in this book, to begin *seeing reality*, is an important first step once you begin to meet.

Convening and sharing food, stories, and information on a regular basis is another, particularly as we are witnessing today a concerted *assault upon our access to information itself*.

Robert McChesney, being interviewed on KPFA about the demise of one daily newspaper after another, made this very point recently. He noted that there *are* still many newspapers today – the ones *not* taken over by big corporate hedge funds – operating in the black.

The corporate takeover of journalism...has devastated journalism... Newspaper publishing until quite recently was an absolute cash-cow because you had local monopolies or duopolies...The papers that have been most devastated [by the current recession] were those owned by these huge corporate hedge funds or corporate groups that took on phenomenal debt and now are just being devastated by the recession...[The current crisis journalism finds itself in] goes back decades...into the sixties and seventies...There was a sharp cut-back in the number of reporters and in the number of bureaus...long before the Internet and long before this current economic crisis...Part of the reason journalism's in such a crisis today is that it's so bad. Most of the journalism is horrendous. It's a *rational* thing that young people don't read our newspapers or watch what's called news on television... (Robert McChesney, *The Morning Show*, KPFA Radio [available in its archives], March 23, 2009)

He and co-writer John Nichols elaborate on these points in an article in *The Nation*:



The place to begin crafting solutions is with the understanding that the economic downturn did not cause the crisis in journalism; nor did the Internet. The economic collapse and Internet have greatly accentuated and accelerated a process that can be traced back to the 1970s, when corporate ownership and consolidation of newspapers took off. It was then that managers began to balance their books and to satisfy the demand from investors for ever-increasing returns by cutting journalists and shutting news bureaus. Go back and read a daily newspaper published in a medium-size American city in the 1960s, and you will be awed by the rich mix of international, national and local news coverage and by the frequency with which “outsiders” – civil rights campaigners, antiwar activists and consumer advocates like Ralph Nader – ended up on the front page. (“The Death and Life of Great American Newspapers,” *The Nation*, [reprinted on *CommonDreams.org*], March 20, 2009)

Recalling our Machiavelli – and the point made here as this chapter opened, namely that we should ignore what podrunks *say* and, rather, look around us at the *results* of their actions – can we think of a reason why the podrunks would *not* want young people to see journalism as a viable career option?

Just asking the question in the right way answers it, doesn't it?

What? ‘Power’ doesn't want more Wayne Madsens or Michael Moores or Watergate exposés, or a whole tribe of people delving into the endless financial and political scandals ‘Power’ is awash in? Whyever not? What we see is what they intend, as they are *very* organized...and we must be too. So, when we form crews, we can transmit *real* information and interpretation and organization of “the news.”

Once you are gathering regularly and a crew has begun to coalesce it's important to go a step further and begin imagining what both village *and* micro-village-level self-sufficiency might look like for *your* community, taking seriously the motto: *each one free one*.

Below are some “tactics for beginning to think communally” to consider (mentioned here, returned to in the next section):

- A *community anchor*, someone willing to put her home (temporarily) at the disposal of a movement (*and by “community,” I mean the small, micro-village you're building, your small collection of neighbors and friends.*)

- A *community inventory of skills, services and products*.
- A *process of community healing* from the abuse dealt to us all by this system – taking Myles Horton’s advice to share stories and food.
- A *process of developing a community consciousness* that sees the reality of ‘Power’-worship and commits to withdrawing psychically from it.
- A *community inventory of need*: shelter, food, health care, childcare, joy.
- A *short-term community plan for mutual support* in beginning to meet those needs.
- A *longer-term Community Exit Strategy* (a CoExiSt) for withdrawing from participation in that which is unworthy of us.

Once, during one of my bouts of out-of-workness, I was half-listening to KPFA (and it should be said that a local Pacifica radio station is a critical resource that every community should use as a replacement for corporate media, which is propaganda, pure and simple.)<sup>8</sup> There was a man speaking about an original type of building, completely self-sufficient. Hmm, nice, I thought, that’s obviously needed. But a house being one of those pricey items beyond most of our means I didn’t exactly sit up and shout “Excelsior!” At least, not until I heard him say, “once the guys working for me learned how to build their own earthships, I couldn’t get them to work for me anymore.” Then I sat up.

Here’s a quote from the Introduction from *Earthship: How to Build Your Own*, Vol. 1:

Today, it doesn’t take a prophet to see the clouds on the horizon. There are many signs of the “coming flood.” The overall abuse of the earth by humanity is about to leave our ever growing population “flooded” with survival emergencies, on many levels. This will affect water, air, food, shelter, energy, etc. All factors of human survival, as we know it, are immediately threatened

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<sup>8</sup> If you don’t have a local Pacifica radio station you can listen to one on the Internet – both KPFA and Amy Goodman’s *Democracy Now!* have audio archives and/or transcripts on the Internet.

by the rapidly deteriorating condition of the planet Earth. The media is full of emergencies regarding polluted oceans, rivers and streams, vanishing wildlife, air quality, radioactive waste, garbage, homeless families, etc. The situation is escalating and in many cases irreparable damage (relative to human life span) is done... Most housing today would be totally nonfunctional in terms of comfort, water, toilets, electricity, etc. without massive inputs of energy from centralized sources. There is also food, another basic living need, which also comes mostly from centralized production systems. The quality of this food is, at best, questionable, and it requires energy consuming transportation systems for distribution. All of this is available only through money, which itself is another system between us and our sustenance. Due to the fact that these systems have evolved within a certain narrowness of vision, they have begun to reach points where they do more harm than good. They are literally destroying the planet as they precariously sustain our rather incomplete concept of human life. Our ability to evolve beyond these systems is becoming increasingly necessary, and has a twofold impetus.

One: If we learn to live without these systems, we could radically slow down destruction of the planet and possibly reverse certain aspects of the deterioration.

Two: If it is already too late, we will need, in the near future, living units to sustain us via direct contact with existing natural phenomena.

We need to evolve self-sufficient living units that *are* their own systems. These units must energize themselves, heat and cool themselves, grow food and deal with their own waste. The current concept of housing, in general, supported by massive centralized systems, is no longer appropriate, safe, or reliable. We are now in need of *Earthships* – *independent vessels – to sail on the seas of tomorrow*. (Michael E. Reynolds, *Earthship: How to Build Your Own*, Volume 1, 1990)

He wrote those words in the late eighties. I think it was 1995 when I heard him interviewed on KPFA.

Immediately his vision caught fire in my mind. A house built *into* the earth, in balance with the earth, facing south, maintaining a constant seventy degree temperature simply *by its design*, completely self-sustaining; a house that fried its' human feces, distributed the resulting

ashes on the plants growing within the house itself, generated its own energy, collected its own water! And this was not smoke in somebody's pipe. They exist, all over the world now – with a base in Taos, New Mexico.

It glowed with essential truth, this model for what a house should be and do. I saw it as *the* solution. What it proved, unequivocally, was that want, scarcity, and misery were *manufactured*. Ousmane Sembene's words swam through this truth, expanding it:

“Real misfortune is not just a matter of being hungry and thirsty; it is a matter of knowing that there are people who want you to be hungry and thirsty – and that is the way it is with us.”

I devoted literally years trying to figure out how my son and I could seize this lifeboat. I didn't have a thought-out oppositional value-system then, I just knew I wanted *out*, a generalized 'out,' for more than just me. How could I get land? How could I get help? I was a single mother with no skills. I felt overwhelmed by the enormity of the task.

After finding that years of thinking brought no result (the Peterkin Problem again), and growing ever more desperate, I wrote to [biotecture@earthship.org](mailto:biotecture@earthship.org):

*Subject:* Vision to end poverty.

*Date:* (If the date on my copy is correct) July 28, 2000.

What inspired me most about Michael Reynolds' initial vision as I understood it was the power of the earthship in ending poverty. In Book One he talks a lot about keeping earthships affordable, even saying one could be built for \$5,000. In a recent Solar Survival brochure it says that to build one costs about the same as conventional housing. How can a low income person afford that? I'm disappointed in this drift away from the initial concept.

Is this an issue that is still being looked at?

Some months later I was excited to receive a response from Michael Reynolds himself. He wrote:

Yes. But regulations and codes have made it difficult.

Thirty years of exploration into biology, physics and human nature have brought me to the realization that humanity has, itself, forged the sword that is potentially responsible for piercing its own heart.

We have corralled ourselves with laws and codes that, while written to protect us, are also keeping us from evolving at the pace necessary to keep up with global change and population explosion. This is much like a barn built to protect horses from the cold. By an act of fate it catches on fire and traps them inside to burn to death. Due to global change and increasing population, our barn is burning. Our laws and codes have become barriers that won't let us escape the burning barn fast enough to survive. The future will bring humanity extreme hardship unless we can bypass certain laws and codes in designated areas in order to experiment with new and more logical ways of living in our physical environment.

In the 1940s, New Mexico designated several thousand acres of land for testing weapons of nuclear destruction. There, scientists dropped an atomic bomb. Many codes and environmental standards were put aside for this endeavor in the name of defense from our enemies. Can't we now take this same bold step to designate both acreage and legislation in every state to explore methods of sustainable life on this planet? The evolution of sustainable living methods must be allowed a "test site," free from the crippling restraints of laws, codes and basic human encumbrances, in the name of defense...

...from our own failing methods of living.

Thrilled, I tried to start up a correspondence.

That was *not* what he had in mind by writing to me. Despite being a very busy man, he'd reached out, had his say, and he was done holding hands. I kept the emails always, though, holding on to a belief that one day *I* would return to his initial vision.

I believe the time is now.

In Michael Reynolds' response, I think we can see another example of the necessity of seeing reality, of keeping our oppositional values, our consciousness, in our pocket. The "we" that he talks about does not exist in this system. If it did, his argument – his belief that it will take conditions getting really, really bad before "humanity" wakes up and clears a path to the obvious – might make sense. It assumes a dull myopia, not a meanness of disposition, afflicting the so-called rulers.

And yet...youth, always more optimistic – a critically necessary corrective, *always* – rushes to his defense. My son hears Michael Reynolds' response and leaps upon it. "But we can use his argument, *and* his authority, using the strategy of the Transition Movement, to pressure

local governments to do just what he says, call this the emergency it is, and set aside land and codes to address it. We could form local non-profits just for that purpose.” (More on this idea later.)

With our consciousness in hand we will craft *workable* plans, plans that avoid the short circuits, stay off the ‘Power’ roads and build the NEW roads, plans that lead to a future without bosses.

Below I offer four “starting point” strategies that I consider critical. As you meet, however, many more strategies and tactics will occur to you:

- Consumer boycott of big corporations;
- Using websites to build the movement, develop product and services exchanges, and strengthen our Crews’ mutual support systems;
- Building ambassador bridges to the bulwarks of our mission: the architects of earthships, the natural educators, the Zapatista transistors who interface with the state, and the local organic farmers;
- Claiming the commons: articulating communal needs like a Great Hall with a communal kitchen, laundry and bathrooms; a communal farm, woods, orchard and garden; free online access, domain name registration, and web page hosting; communal solar power generation and distribution; a charging station for our retrofitted bedroom-vehicles that have solar panels and AC power;
- The General Strike.

The next section will examine the above-mentioned strategies and tactics.

Once we get rolling, I think we’ll find that renouncing the processed life is easier than we thought. The hardest part will be trust. But we shouldn’t wait for more tumors before deciding to change our diets.

Unless we do the planning *first*, unless we have our kenpo stance prepared, our bodies in a created-crisis *will* react by being scared, making it hard to have each other’s back, making it hard to help.

My just-arrived union newsletter tells the story of Liliana Robbins, one of the many unsung heroes we have among us who will be the cutting edge that carves our future.

This woman, as Tookie would say, has “*heart*.”

In May, 2007, Robbins, one of the most senior and respected workers at one of NG Jensen's ["a custom brokerage firm in the state of Washington on the Canadian border"] customs stations in Blaine, Washington, contacted Seattle Local 77 asking for help for herself and her co-workers, who assign tariff numbers and clear lumber and other Canadian goods for entry in to the U.S. Organizer Chris Martin met with her.

Frustrated and angry, Robbins told Martin how a decent job... had gone downhill as managers snatched away holidays and vacation time, changed work schedules at will and engaged in blatant nepotism.

"There was huge support for the union at the beginning," says Robbins, who met with some of her co-workers at a nearby gas station. They decided to put informational literature about the benefits of unions on cars in the parking lot. Immediately, supervisors went out and snatched the literature, so Robbins brought some pamphlets into work with her.

Overnight, Robbins' relationship with her employer changed. She was written up for distributing pamphlets, even though co-workers routinely brought in catalogues to sell merchandise or distributed sign-up lists for fundraisers.

"I went full force at trying to find every avenue that would help my co-workers, with the same thoroughness that I applied to my job," says Robbins, who set up a meeting at a nearby library for NG Jensen workers to meet with Local 77.

Only three workers showed up for the meeting. Several drove by, but were afraid to show their faces after a rumor circulated about a supervisor who had lined up a snitch to report back on attendance. But, even more persuasive was watching how Robbins, a model employee, was singled out for harassment because of her support for a union.

The union drive was stillborn. But the company was not finished with Robbins. She got a phone call late one night from Jensen telling her that she was terminated because of "business conditions," despite the fact that more junior and far less-experienced workers remained on the job...

"I couldn't blame my co-workers," says Robbins. "It takes a strong person to go through what I did." (*The Electrical Worker*, March, 2009)

It does.

She lost “her home in Birch Bay, overlooking the Pacific...After 20 years, she is moving into an apartment.”

Just typing those words...words fail, fury flames.

Podrunks can turn on a dime when “workers” try to claim their own lives because they’ve *planned* for decades, centuries, millennia, what to do when our backs start to get straight.

Rather than engage with podrunks on their own turf, it’s time we started constructing our own.

We need “our own things,” places, gatherings, music, goods, food, services, celebrations, and, most importantly...land – for farms, spiritual sustenance, gardens, trees... *and earthships*.

Recall: only an *enormous* amount of violence over *centuries* could pound us into the box labeled “commodity available for sale on the market.” Before that, we had our common lands and forests. We grew our own food, made our own homes and clothes.

We had *time*.

If we pry the lid open and climb out of that box *now*, the podrunks will have to risk a total de-legitimization of their claim to rule in order to force us *en masse* back into it. The official rhetoric put forward by most Western states is a *democratic* rhetoric, offering no purchase for repressive forces to grab a hold to.

Granted this never stopped America before when it wanted to set aside the Constitution and incarcerate whole groups. And it’s never stopped the mind-boggling increase in rates of incarceration inflicted on low-income people. But these outcomes are only possible because we do the system’s Division Work instead of *our Culture Work*. We are all complicit. It will take planning, preparation and a heap of consciousness to set Division Work aside.

One in every 31 U.S. adults is in the corrections system, which includes jail, prison, probation and supervision, more than double the rate of a quarter century ago, according to a report...by the Pew Center on the States...The United States has the highest incarceration rate and biggest prison population of any country in the world, according to figures from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Most of those in the U.S. corrections system – one in 45 – are already on probation or parole, with one in 100 in prison or jail, the Pew study found...Penitentiary systems have been the fastest-



growing spending area for states after Medicaid, the healthcare program for those with low income. (*The Epoch Times*, March 12-18, 2009)

No. Withdrawal from what is not worthy of us will not be a smooth road with coffee kiosks on the side. What podrunks have in mind for us is a, to their minds, ‘neat,’ in reality, bloody, arrangement of us, we magnificent wind from below, into a small set of “knowledge workers” in one corner (drawn from the indebted children of the “middle class;”) a larger one of beaten down “manual workers,” including prison-slaves and farm-laborers (drawn from the indebted children of the “working class,”) who also fuel that indispensable blob of complicity-seeking “security workers” (guards, police, soldiers, and the like;) and then...a teeny-weeny speck of gloriously rich, *unindebted*, “Them.”

People deemed “superfluous” will be prisoned, dead, or tightly contained. That this way of thinking is completely loony, given the environmental crisis if nothing else, will not stop them. “The child is not well.”

I stress the issue of “indebtedness” because, in the present moment, we are living the realization of a key podrunk scheme to control us with debt-slavery. This issue was featured on the March 26, 2009 *Democracy Now!* (The *Democracy Now!* archives on their website include, amazingly enough, written *transcripts*. Awesome!)

*INTRO:* Lawmakers and public officials in California, Ohio, South Carolina, Missouri, Washington and other states are attempting to crack down on the controversial practice known as payday lending. Payday loans are short-term loans or cash advances secured by a post-dated check. The annual interest rate for these loans can be as high as 400 percent, ten times the highest credit card rates. Today, it’s a \$40 billion industry with more than 22,000 stores. We speak with journalist Daniel Brook about his *Harper’s Magazine* article, “Usury Country,” and with Ginna Green of the Center for Responsible Lending.

*AMY GOODMAN:* In the early ’90s, there were fewer than 200 payday lending stores in the country. Today it’s a \$40 billion industry with more than 22,000 stores. There are more payday lending stores than McDonald’s and Starbucks combined. As more Americans are living paycheck to paycheck, the demand for payday loans is increasing.

We're joined now by two guests who have been following this story: Journalist Daniel Brook joins us from Philadelphia. His article "Usury Country: Welcome to the Birthplace of Payday Lending" appears in the new issue [April, 2009] of *Harper's*. He is also the author of the book *The Trap: Selling Out to Stay Afloat in Winner-Take-All America*.

And we're joined by Ginna Green of the Center for Responsible Lending. The group is releasing a report today that reveals payday lenders are significantly more concentrated in African American and Latino neighborhoods in California than in white neighborhoods.

*GINNA GREEN:* One of the key findings of our report that's coming out today, "Predatory Profiling: The Role of Race and Ethnicity in the Location of Payday Lenders in California," is that in this state, payday lenders are *eight times* more concentrated in African American and Latino neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods. And even after we account for factors like income, education, poverty rate, we find that they're still *2.4 times* more concentrated in African American and Latino neighborhoods. I think this research has borne out what many people have thought we've known intuitively, that payday loans appear to really cluster in black and brown neighborhoods.

*JUAN GONZALEZ:* Daniel Brook, especially these [payday lending] chains, I would assume that they would need some investors or some capital to be able to expand rapidly and provide this cash to the working poor. Did you look into what were the financial institutions that were investing or behind these chains?

*DANIEL BROOK:* Yes, I did. Check Into Cash itself is a privately held company controlled by Allan Jones. But they told me, when I went to company headquarters, that they had a large line of credit from Wells Fargo Bank. Some of the other chains, including Advance America, which is the largest of the payday lending chains, are publicly traded on the stock exchange and are funded—have lines of credit from all the major banks in the United States, including Citigroup, JP Morgan, etc.

AMY GOODMAN: Daniel Brook, in addition to writing your piece, “Usury Country,” in *Harper’s*, you’ve written a book, *The Trap: Selling Out to Stay Afloat in Winner-Take-All America*. And I’d like you to talk about how this, how these payday loans fit in with the bigger story, especially a story we did last week with Reverend Jesse Jackson, and that is the story of student loans.

DANIEL BROOK: Yeah. In *The Trap: Selling Out to Stay Afloat in Winner-Take-All America*, I look again at this rising economic inequality in the United States, this growing gap between rich and poor. *The Trap* focuses on a different group of people. If payday loans are for the lower middle class or working poor, we might say, *The Trap* is about college-educated professionals. But it argues that this increasing gap between rich and poor poses problems for this group, as well, which, of course, compared to the lower middle class is, of course, relatively well-off.

And the choice it imposes on the upper middle class is not whether or not to take out a payday loan, but whether or not to sell out, whether or not to do a job that will pay them a lot of money, but in which they don’t believe and which will both sort of hurt the country, in that they’re not doing something more service-oriented, but also make them feel like they’ve sold out. So student loans are a big part of the trap. As we’ve shifted towards a privatized system of higher education, relying more and more on debt and more and more specifically on bank-issued private debt, the debt loads of students who attend both public and private colleges, and particularly professional schools and graduate schools—and the University of California at Berkeley, which is ostensibly a public school, charges \$25,000 tuition for its law school, so even students from public schools are emerging with large debt loads—end up—it ends up dictating career choice to a very disturbing extent.

I think it’s one of the things that drives a lot of the troubling trends in our society politically, including the revolving door in Washington, where people who had, say, worked in a congressman’s office on issues they believed in turn around and triple, quintuple their salary by going to K Street and lobbying.

The podunks understand very well the “vulnerability” of all children and youth to the pull of nature – the pull to “service,” or “art” – in their bodies. It exerts a pull as relentless as gravity, and every so often one of their own is claimed by it.

As emphasized, and reemphasized, here, those who would be “kings” are very organized, and very determined to fight, tooth and nail, every effort we make to slip our chains and leashes.

*But*, we should hold in our minds, hearts, and hands, the *truth* that *the obstacles to our freedom are not technological or practical*. Peoples all over the globe have historically been self-sufficient. We *know* how to provide for ourselves. We’ve *never* needed the pretenders to ‘Power.’ *But they’ve* always needed us for Their Grand Pretense to have any pulse at all. They wear their head honcho illusions and their big kahuna dreams like an Edgar-suit. Everybody can see they’re the walking-dead but them. Time to send them the memo: “your fantasies will be chucked. We are waking up.”

The last section of this chapter assumes “a crew.” But what if nobody wants to work with you?

Never doubt the truth: freeing *oneself* psychically is not nothing.

If you have to wake up in bed alone, you can still:

- Delve more deeply into your art;
- Continue simplifying your life and reorienting your allegiance;
- Journal your process;
- Help build interest in the Nascence – put the issue of ending wage work on the table, and in people’s minds, e.g. by writing articles and “letters to the editor;”
- Ask folks to discuss this book with you (especially youth);
- Ask your local library to purchase the *Earthship* manuals, and to obtain this book;
- Offer to arrange bulk purchases from local farmers of organic produce to help with your, and your neighbors, food bills, health and sanity;
- Stanch the propaganda flow into your body by listening to a Pacific-network radio station and by patronizing the progressive news sites;
- Write about your neighborhood experience and put it up on your own or the Berkeley Nascence website;
- Learn how to use Ning social networking software so it will be available to your crew, once it forms;

- Write your own local or community plan and post it on your Nascence website.

If it's slow going, a real slog, then you're in the right place, there's work to be done. If there's no one to help you design either a village (local) or micro-village (community) plan – *you* design one. Look around you. Where could solar panels be staged? Land made communal? Community food grown? Bulk food buys arranged? If no one wants to meet to plan the future maybe they'll meet to plan a piece of it.

Within lower-income communities of color there is much speculation right now about the plans 'Power' has for us. It's obvious to anyone paying attention that the widespread phenomenon of "gentrification" is an effort to bring to America the "Paris-model" for "dealing with" the darker-skinned manual labor – we who clean the homes and offices, clip the shrubs, nanny the children, change the elders' bedclothes, and service the sexual repression of the podunks and "knowledge-workers." These latter, mostly fair-skinned privileged, will, if all goes according to *podrunk* plans, remain in the city to hold down the fort of "civilization."

You see, in Paris, the immigrant manual labor is consigned to the fringes of the city. "Out of sight, out of mind" being the general idea.

After all, the implications of peak oil, peak water, climate change, yada-yada-yada, mean that those huddled around the existing infrastructure will have an easier time weathering the storms of the podunks' intended coming chaos.

If we manual grunts are successfully pushed to the fringes of "civilization," we will be easier to "manage," if not eliminate altogether. Indeed, it will be so much easier to clip us from the story of "civilization" if the podunks can bypass all the "tiresome" (to their minds) hand-wringing they fully expect from the good-hearted full-bellied-few left in the cities to "manage" "civilization."

What if we interjected *our own plans*, our CoExiSts, in every urban area? What if we started *now*, living our future, freeing our wholeness, refusing division work, doing our Culture Work...

### *Living the Future / Freeing Our Wholeness*

If we offer our children nothing to define themselves by *except* the market, they *will* try to excel in the market (formal and informal, surface or underground).

Because Power is a closed system, a self-reinforcing cycle, the only way to negate it is to embrace what *it* has negated. We have to go *outside* that cycle.

Only in a planned economy in which the whole nation has rationally mastered the economic and social forces can the individual share responsibility and use creative intelligence. (Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*)

By definition living cultures align with an inherent human nature that is joyous and free, reveres life, and respects freedom – align, therefore, with *values* rooted in the earth itself...

State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous and then dies of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of the processes of production. The state is not ‘abolished’. It withers away. (Frederick Engels)

“Power is contagious,” Marilyn French said, but she added: “so is pleasure.”

Joy is our guide in these matters. What serves the cause of joy we keep. What doesn’t is for the bone-pile.

Once I did a brief stint as the director of a neighborhood non-profit. I think I lasted maybe three months before I got canned.

Near the end of this short term, the president of the Board arranged for me to meet the retired head of the large corporation that was the non-profit’s patron. This corporation had, in fact, *created* the non-profit, primarily for PR purposes – you know the sort of thing: “come see what we’re doing for the community!”

I think this Board member wanted me to meet with the ex-corporate chief to pull my coat, to impress me with the affluence that awaited those who could grasp the basics of survival in hierarchies. What can I say? I do learn slow.

So there we were, sitting across the table from each other in the restaurant of a *very* ritzy hotel – his “home away from home.” He preferred living there, at his advanced age, than wherever his own house was. I forget most of the conversation, something to do with a grant I’d better write one way rather than another, but then he told this story about his son, somewhat off-point, that I never forgot. I think he needed to talk about it, needed...some insight that he imagined someone from another world, someone from *way* outside his own experience, could provide.

What most lingers in memory about his telling of the story was his utter confusion. He told me that his son had refused the lure of corporate power in order to be an *artist* in Maine. The Ex-Chief seemed so lonely and lost in his dissonance (this was *his* son, not a common shlub like the rest of us.) “Why,” he asked, “do you think he’s doing this?” – i.e., “why would he give up *wealth* in order to be an *artist*?” He was completely unable to grasp his son’s choice. What, his manner said, could be more seductive, more appealing, than ‘Power’?

Nature is on our side. This is essentially what Marcuse meant when he said, “protest will continue because it is a biological necessity.”

A significant theme in the propaganda we’ve been conditioned with is that ‘nature’ represents the worst part of us, our ‘animal,’ ‘sensual,’ ‘unthinking,’ ‘instinctual,’ ‘brute-like,’ side. The corporate ‘Chiefs’ have bought this con themselves down to the last moan of their repressed longing. It’s a con “civilization” depends on.

But the truth is that ‘nature’ is simply ‘life’ – or ‘freedom.’ The “Rational Mind” of “civilization” is an enraged rant, a “cry of the lost,” against life itself.

We reap what we sow, but Nature has love over and above that justice, and gives us shadow and blossom and fruit that spring from no planting of ours. (George Eliot)

Nature is open, generous, non-controlling, rich...and infinitely interesting. We become our *best* selves when we yield to her gravity.

But we *cannot* yield, we cannot stretch to our full lengths, when compressed in a box called “a job.”

Joel Bakan illustrates this continually in his book *The Corporation*.

As former Goodyear Tire CEO Sam Gibara said, “If you really did what you wanted to do that suits your personal thoughts and your personal priorities, you’d act differently. But as a CEO you cannot do that...”

...Though Edward Ivey acknowledged in his report that “a human fatality is really beyond value, subjectively,” that, “it is really impossible to put a value on human life,” he knew it was equally impossible for him *not* to put a value on a human life for the purpose of his analysis...

...some people in advertising are honest about what they do. “I’m sucking Satan’s pecker” is how Chris Hooper, a highly

successful television ad director and voice-over artist, describes his work for the likes of McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and other major corporations. Hooper says his job is to create "images that are trying to sell products to people that they don't really need" and that "encourage very sophomoric behavior, irresponsible, hedonistic, egotistical, narcissistic behavior." Despite this he carries on... (p. 51, 64, 125-6)

When your job requires you to act contrary to your principles, what's the price tag on that?

Look around you at the world made by our obeisance to 'Power' and let the cost fully register in your consciousness.

And though the pull of 'nature' is all-powerful *ultimately*, over the short term in which we live our lives, the pull of "the job" wins out.

And I was astounded that my [childhood] friend would defend this particular racist folly. [The Vietnam War] What for? For his job at the post-office? And the answer came back at once, alas – yes. For his job at the post-office. (James Baldwin, *No Name In the Street*, p. 19)

Except for those brave few who live their art, follow their wholeness, listen to their bodies, *choose* a different path.

If I had to summarize our future in a few words it would be these: "living consciously, with reverence."

To *get* a different world, we have to *live* a different world, *harbor* a different world *in our bodies*. Now.

But, put simply, "the job" does not allow this.

We have sacrificed ourselves on the altar of Individualism and Narrow Self-Interest because other options have been systematically closed off. Organized 'Power' closed them off and only Organized Freedom, people, us – heeding the call of our future – can open them up again.

'The job' is the linchpin of a diseased system that *cannot* be made healthy. If we want our children to have access to their full selves, if we want them to have a bio-rich, healthy planet, if we want to focus our human capacities on cooperation rather than war, if we want to choose life over death, we will have to make a commitment to sit down with each other, ask the relevant questions, and continue meeting until we've answered them.



In essence, we will have to organize *a campaign of mutual aid and fellowship*. But we can only do this on a society-wide scale if we:

- Reduce our consumption and end our support of corporations.
- Move away from individual solutions and toward communal solutions.
- Reduce the amount of time we give to the job, and eventually leave it behind altogether.
- Refuse Division Work, embrace Culture Work, and say, “the job that must be done requires all of us, or none.”

This section that concludes the book will be a discussion of the “tactics for beginning to think communally” within the framework of the four, already-mentioned, “starting-point strategies.”

The “tactics for beginning to think communally” are about *planning*:

- A *community anchor*, someone willing to put her home (temporarily) at the disposal of a movement (*and by “community,” I mean the small, micro-village you’re building, your small collection of neighbors and friends.*)
- A *community inventory of skills, services and products*.
- A *process of community healing* from the abuse dealt to us all by this system – taking Myles Horton’s advice to share stories and food.
- A *process of developing a community consciousness* that sees the reality of ‘Power’-worship and commits to withdrawing psychically from it.
- A *community inventory of need*: shelter, food, health care, childcare, joy.
- A *short-term community plan for mutual support* in beginning to meet those needs.
- A *longer-term Community Exit Strategy* (a CoExiSt) for withdrawing from participation in that which is unworthy of us.

And the “starting-point strategies” are about *action*:

- Consumer boycott of big corporations;
- Using websites to build the movement, develop product and services exchanges, and strengthen our Crews’ mutual support systems;
- Building ambassador bridges to the bulwarks of our mission: the architects of earthships, the natural educators, the Zapatista transistors who interface with the state, and the local organic farmers;
- Claiming the commons: articulating communal needs like a Great Hall with a communal kitchen, laundry and bathrooms; a communal farm, woods, orchard and garden; free online access, domain name registration, and web page hosting; communal solar power generation and distribution; a charging station for our retrofitted bedroom-vehicles that have solar panels and AC power;
- The General Strike.

*Just Say “No!”...To Corporations, or...“Boycott the Corpse, and then Bury It!”* (The multiple strands of this action can be interwoven on our Nascence websites.)

As consumption is addictive – a compulsive substitute for real human interactions, and real human lives – we’ll need each other, in more ways than one, to break the habit.

Just saying “no” is critical in many ways, but I’d like to focus on three. We have to say “no” to: support our brothers and sisters around the globe; support our own creativity, wholeness and health; and to allow us to ‘see’ our power when we stake the vampire.

It will be argued that people around the world “need those jobs,” or that *we* “need those jobs.”

This is like arguing that the women of Afghanistan need American soldiers in combat boots stomping through their homes and streets, shooting their husbands and sons, because they’ve been denied full access to the polity, that only ‘Power’ can bring ‘freedom’ to ‘the people.’ This is, of course, so ludicrous it doesn’t merit discussion.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Corporations could care less whether you or I or a farmer in China has a “job.” This goes

without saying. When Sunbeam left Cleveland, do you think it *cared* how its former “workers” fared?

And when “workers” are tossed into the street left and right when the economy “contracts,” people don’t think, “well, at least we had the corporation for a while. That’s the important thing.”

We’ve been batted about and treated like trash for *centuries*. Do you *really* think we can’t weather a storm that will bring us our *freedom*?

Ask the local community outside the Coca-Cola facility in Plachimada, in the state of Kerala, India how they feel about the “jobs” Coca-Cola so generously offered them. Ask them what they think about Coca-Cola’s contamination of their groundwater with pesticides, or about its’ just plain-old theft of their water – 500,000 gallons a day!

And as for the really, really ‘cheap’ products the super-exploited, usually dark-skinned peoples of other lands bring us, “all of us, or none” means that our solidarity is *with them* as they battle the corporation and its surrogates. Believe me, they understand communal banding-together far better than we do. If *we* stake the vampire, *they* can live.

We can no longer consume teenage girls in China / Indonesia / the Philippines...or an entire *population* in the Congo...in order to have more cell phones or ultra-thin-whatevers.

Period.

Our comfortable lives cannot be bought with blood. We have to trust the voice of the ancestors in us. Any solution we devise together must embrace *everyone* – we cannot leave any of our brothers and sisters either hanging by a thread, or standing outside the shiny, glittering chambers of decision-making – meaning, that the handout of a few jobs from some re-tooled newly ‘green’ economy is not sufficient. “All of us, or none,” must be our motto – absolutely. Whatever we have now that is soaked in the blood of fellow humans is enough.

Rather than consume products soaked in blood, it’s time to smell the blooms grown with love.

Granted, I am far from typical in my consumption pattern as I’ve been sitting in my room reading and typing for what feels like a lifetime, but when I consider the products that sustain me, I find that the more “awake” I become, the more my ‘needs’ shift to those ‘things’ that cannot be priced.

Being “awake,” of course, is a process that occurs in direct proportion to “*time freed from wage work,*” or *life lived unrushed*. That’s why I’m writing this. Unburdened by all the cons, the bounties of the

earth have become more aural, aromatic and tactile. I seem to better appreciate the green smell of the germinal earth, the springy feel of it in my hands. I feel a quickening of my senses, a longing for a more rounded stimulation, beyond the oral.

At the same time, I seem to move more slowly through the pulsing sensations of the earth, putting me at odds with those preoccupied with speed. I consume food, water, warmth, smells, ideas...and a lot of coffee. I tell myself, "it's free-trade, sustainably grown, organic coffee..." Still.

And then there's that toilet paper. In the future, bidets and composting toilets await us, but we aren't there yet. So what do we do for non-corporate toilet paper? ...and interim non-corporate financial structures? ...and interim non-corporate electronic communication? (I *so* want to be done with AT&T, there's no way words can convey how badly I want them *gone*.)

Take it to the crew. As we figure out our own "withdrawal problems," our solutions can be posted on our Nascence websites.

The point of inventorying your crew's skills, services and products is dual. It's a way to support each other materially, but also *creatively*.

As we begin to treat our own dreams and the dreams of our crewmates as real, valid, and exciting, they begin to take on a firmer shape and substance – and we begin to feel a little less crazy – because our art is acknowledged.

Within the small sphere of my life there's a woman who makes soaps, a woman who makes books, filmmakers, musicians, martial-artists, actors, chicken-lovers, carpenters, yoghurt-makers, Chinese-medicine practitioners, visual artists, electricians and gardeners. When I think about the intersecting concentric circles of all our skills, talents, and gifts, it reinforces the 'knowing' that all we need to take back our world is the *wanting to...enough...and, of course, also, the trusting-to*.

With the inventory, over time, we begin to realize how truly gifted we are. If I really love organic rice-meal brownies, I can be certain that there's a '*you*' out there who really loves to make them. And then perhaps I'll go to '*you*' rather than to some big-box chain for some anonymous crap passing itself off as food. And in exchange for you servicing my chocolate fix, there might be an electrical problem you want some advice on. Ka-boom, done, dollar-nexus makes an exit...little by little.

A product and services exchange is *what we want*.

To the degree that we can free ourselves from dependence on

corporations now, for the products we need to live, to that degree will the podunks be less able to turn us against each other; and, to that degree, we'll be able to sail our self-sufficiency ark...to the NEW world.

And, while we're on the subject of those oh-so-toxic big-box stores, we can merge our spiritual and political commitments, and begin to *feel* our power, by starting our wholesale withdrawal with targeted boycotts of *really* horrendous corporations, or ones doing really horrendous things. For example, the news on our local Pacifica station recently has been reporting that Starbucks, Costco and Whole Foods are joining forces to sink by overloading with water the Employee Free Choice Act. These corporations have a certain pseudo happy-face feel about them for reasons opaque to me, all three being viciously anti-Union. But for some reason they enjoy a better reputation than those other die-hard corporate misanthropes, WalMart and Home Depot. Why not start our boycotts with these five? And if we throw in Coca-Cola for good measure, in solidarity with our Kirala brothers and sisters, I'd say we have the fixings for a fine flexing of the communal muscle.

*Watch Our Communal Force Flex!*

*All together now!*  
*One, Two, Three, Four,*  
*We don't buy from you no more!*  
*Buy from the people,*  
*Buy from the source*  
*Buy from each other*  
*And bury the corpse!*

*One, Two, Three, Four,*  
*Show the vampires to the door!*  
*Buy from the people,*  
*Buy from the source*  
*Buy from each other*  
*And bury the corpse!*  
*Don't buy from the big-box!*  
*Don't buy from the big-box!*

Make it fun. Make it real. But make it happen. Put the word out: "we don't buy from you no more." Say why, and keep spreading the good news. It has an effect whether we see it or not, but, sooner or later... we'll see it.

Not only are fun and work *not* mutually exclusive, but *fun is* what realizes the potential of whatever we do, it's the quickening of life, the sperm fertilizing the egg.

*The Electronic FLEA (Free Linkages, Exchanges and Assistance) Festival and Street Fair*

So what might a Product and Services Exchange look like? And can it significantly reduce the buying we do from corporations? Of course that depends on many unknowns, the most important one being, perhaps, "how badly do you want good fellowship?"

I remember when my son was in his tens he had the experience, a few summers in a row, of going away to a music camp. Each time after he came home he would be depressed for a while. Making art communally, hearing the sound of your instrument harmonizing with others' – living music reverberating through the trees – is so intoxicating. It's what our bodies want.

There were few comforts at the camp of the sort the corporate world tries to make us believe we need. But oh how he missed that making of music communally, the sharing of food and art, once it was gone.

Obviously there's nothing remotely comparable electronically. The Internet is a *tool*, *not* an experience – critical though it is for expanding the power of the people. But as people damaged by an abusive system, we're susceptible to substitutes for the holes in our souls, especially those not only addictive, but almost coercively available. I hope you never let this tool get away from you – or take anonymous voices that present themselves to you, posing as whatever, at face value. Not a good idea. The podunks are devoting a lot of resources right now to the manipulation of opinion over the...what should we call it?...the Virtual Opium? There are false-faces galore. That said, the power to disseminate *the people's* ideas today? ...Wow.

In order to build a mass movement the social networking tools like "Ning" will be indispensable. An article about one of its founders, Gina Bianchini, makes this argument:

Unlike general social networking sites, which create a common river of profiles in which everyone swims (think of our individual networks of social connections as groups of rafters floating on the current), Ning has built a platform on which anyone can build a defined online community of people interacting around any issue or interest. A MyBarackObama.com in every garage! ...

Why set up a custom social network? For political or advocacy communicators, Gina sees it as a chance to start and facilitate a conversation among supporters or advocates... What makes a Ning-based social network “custom” is that it’s functionally yours, since you generate the members and you control the community features. You can also control the appearance and branding of the site — it’ll be hosted on Ning, but it can appear to be a part of your normal advocacy or membership site... (<http://www.epolitics.com/2009/01/15/nings-gina-bianchini-on-using-custom-online-social-networks-for-politics-advocacy/>)

Building our social-networking sites, sharing our skills and art, working hard to jump-start intangibles, with no guarantees of success, will be doubly challenging because of our mutual-suspicion-and-individualism training.

Trust is always a problem in a non-culture, in an abusive system based on force. This problem underscores the importance of devoting however much time is required to the initial task of “seeing reality.” This discussion-time will hopefully air and resolve whatever reservations might exist in your small group about the relevance and practicality of embracing a commitment to “shared reverence for life” – to that which leads away from a death-defined cultural-*absence*.

It’s important for a *crew* to have three-phase power too.

It also underscores the importance of beginning to break down the mutual-suspicion-and-individualism conditioning with affirmative moves out-of-doors – taking our art to the streets in such a way that carnivals, colors, sounds, costumes, busting out unexpectedly on the streets of one’s town, over time communicates the messages that *its time for all of us to take our art seriously, and* that we can, and should, interact with each other spontaneously. This will make all of us safer from police harassment, as festive gathering is normalized, but will especially make it safer for targeted low-income youth of color.

As a place to begin, consider where your money goes, what products you use, and whether they could be locally replaced, either by someone in your group, or near enough. And if, at the same time, we’re unearthing and disseminating the truth about how hazardous the products the corpse-designed products brought into our homes are, our personal efforts to honor our art take on an even broader significance. It really *doesn’t* make sense to prop up corpses with our consumer dollars so that they can continue to harm us. *Why shouldn’t we* make our own

soaps, detergents, and other products used every day, and share them with the broader community?

What might naturally follow after that assessment is a website design that has pages for “products needed,” “products produced,” “assistance needed,” “assistance available” – listings that are regularly viewed by your crew, with linkages made attended to.

And although the temptation at this point is to launch into some perky, feel-good list (PowerPoint-capable) – “Buy local! Grow your own food! Think happy thoughts!” – typical in final chapters following grim news, Baldwin hovers at our shoulder and counsels against the ingenuous simplicity of pap. Writing about the shameful McCarthy era in this country, he said:

For, intellectual activity, according to me, is, and must be, disinterested – the truth *is* a two-edged sword – and if one is not willing to be pierced by that sword, even to the extreme of dying on it, then all of one’s intellectual activity is a masturbatory delusion and a wicked and dangerous fraud. (James Baldwin, *No Name In the Street*, p. 31)

So – a little rugged truth: if I’ve made this sound like a PowerPoint presentation – it *so* is not. We will have to work our asses off, and take enormous psychic risks in reaching out to others unlike ourselves, to move the mountain of narcissism in this country, the me-first-ness, the you-last-ness, the I’m-better-than-you-ness.

And, believe me, I know from bitter personal experience that our exorcism-maintenance chores will have to be *devoutly* performed when it comes to the “Narcissism-Blossoms-Out-Of-Time-Issues” training. No matter how ‘awake’ I think I am, the least bit of ‘rush’ and the old pattern floods back. We’ll have to *practice* being consciously slow, *practice* recognizing the ‘rush demon’ when it rises, *practice* an immediate response of slowing ourselves down.

The price of an oppositional consciousness is eternal vigilance.

Reverence requires *time* – time to notice, to pay attention, to *feel* gratitude.

Notice how all our other animal friends give thanks: the cat’s long, languid stretches; the dog’s snuffling appreciation of the density of smell; the squirrel’s everyday heroics in their diving acrobatics and their flipping aerobatics through the trees; by comparison our everyday obliviousness looks crude indeed.



But there's a deeper, *catalytic* truth beneath the rugged one: *we have no choice* but to take up this challenge, and figure it out, whatever the problems – *our children and theirs need a future based on freedom.*

Over the long haul, the amount of time it takes to get to our future will depend on the amount of total commitment that a few “workers” and students and street-folks and youth together devote to it.

Most challenges to ‘Power’ throughout the history of class society have involved this alliance in some way or another. Students, youth and street-folks bring idealism, energy, time, and the fact of being so freshly from that river of freedom. And working people bring practical knowledge, skills, patience, and material resources. These are broad-stroke generalizations, of course. There are plenty of really powerful people of all ages and backgrounds who will bring all of these things...and more.

And when I say “material resources,” I don’t just mean, a house, say, that provides shelter to students or youth who commit for the long haul. I also mean chickens that lay eggs, a vegetable garden, a sewing machine, a loom, a compost pile, computer programs, vehicles, and power tools.

If electronic connections are continually reinforced by *physical* ones, using the physical resources offered by your immediate environment, there will be an energy generated that is utterly compelling, that logically extends to the streets. And when you spill into the public commons, presenting visible displays of working together with the hand, showing the products made with the hand, augmented by the universal force of harmonizing instruments, people are drawn, and the ideas embodied by these acts disseminated and discussed. Little by little...

*Building ambassador bridges to the bulwarks of our mission – the architects of earthships, the natural educators, the Zapatista transistors who interface with the state, and the local organic farmers...*

### *The Ambassador Bridges*

I’ve often wished that I’d been gifted with a more cosmopolitan life. I envy the well-traveled, the multi-lingual, the ones who know the ways of many lands. I’ve lived in only three places in my life, all in America, and one of them hardly counts, being but a brief, school-related moorage.

But all three, in their different ways, were places that packed multiple worlds tightly together. Here, in the Bay Area, for example, I once rented a house in a wood just off a main freeway. Outside my door, before the freeway noise, I regularly heard the clippety-clopping of hoofbeats as girls clattered by on horseback.

And of course our micro-climates are notorious (“the coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco.”)

But I probably shouldn't find the odd conjunctions of this region disorienting, growing up as I did in Detroit, where ten minutes of brief travel could take you to another country. Literally.

There's one summer that lingers in memory so longingly.

Because of a date with a guy long forgotten, I'd found out that there were horse stables only ten minutes away, in Windsor, Canada. After that I haunted one of them, pitchforking hay, saddling and brushing the horses, hoping for a chance to ride. The horses looked at me, and most humans, with clear contempt in their eyes. I didn't care. For one summer I pretended to exist in the fantasy of an earlier time, when we lived on the earth as friend.

The Ambassador Bridge, spanning the Detroit River, brought me to this other world, this other country.

To begin to live anew, the worlds stolen from us will have to be restored. Dependency can only be upended with some affirmative shoves – and Self-Sufficiency, our life raft, only returned, with some affirmative tugs.

Within the crew will hopefully be found those who gravitate naturally to these restoration projects, who possess the skills of translation necessary to reach out across the chasm of the cultural divide that widens to the degree that we wake up.

Remember what Machiavelli said, speaking to those who crave 'Power'? “...*few know what you are*, and these few dare not oppose themselves to the opinion of the many who have the majesty of the State to back them up.”

We few will have to dare to oppose, but in such a way that abjures force, in argument or action. Freedom can't be shoved down throats, it can only bloom in hearts. We should keep in mind that fun *does* realize the potential of what we do, *is* the quickening of life, the sperm fertilizing the egg. It will be a delicate dance that reclaims what is ours by birth.

The Zapatistas are our role models. We don't seek “political power.” On the contrary, to allow ourselves to get bogged down in the polity is like extending our neck to the vampire – or our arm to receive the Mr. Smith virus.

No. The only power we have is our values, our value-*system*.

So we are the planters of seeds and the builders of bridges. We

simply say out loud, to ourselves and to others, *what we want*, and rely on ‘political power’ to respond in accordance with the peoples’ wishes. If they refuse to hear what we want – the right to be whole, to live without fear, to share good fellowship – then we have to acknowledge that we don’t yet have sufficient numbers (people or resources), and then continue doing what we do. Politicians are seldom recalcitrant against numbers. When the movement builds, they will follow.

Earthships, natural educators, local government, organic farmers: each of these areas that we give our attention to could be a book in itself. We’ll have to rely on our own work, shared and discussed on our Nascence websites, to fully evolve these projects, explore the multiplicity of issues that arise, and marvel at the rich ideas that respond to each call.

All to say, my suggestions here bubbled up from the earth at *my* feet. I’ve looked around at Bay Area-Berkeley, low income-style, and shaped what seems to make sense. The truth will be in the trying. But your groundings might bubble up quite different factors to work with.

One thing is certain, however – just sitting down to the exercise means we’re tuning our minds, all of us together, to the same challenges – *consciously*. The resulting creativity can’t be fully imagined now. All we can know is that it will be fertile. (All of these strategies overlap – which is a good thing as our goal is wholeness – so expect working on the commons to expand each of them.)

### *Earthships*

The mass movement is our true work, because only general freedom will support individual freedom – *and vice versa*.

Time to talk about the “vice versa.”

The illusion of individual freedom under capitalism is of course a con. Nothing could be further from our lived reality. Podrunks have us by the short hairs and we’ll have to pry those fingers loose, one by one, to get free.

Wielding the earthship, however, is like bringing an axe to the problem. It could accelerate their demise exponentially.

Its primary potency, of course, is that it could return to us the self-sufficiency stolen when our commons were enclosed. The earthship is a technology that does an end-run around the strategy of enclosure, forcing podrunks to rely on rules and regs to restrict us, as Michael Reynolds said.

But its secondary potency, in potential, is as *a curriculum* – an idea I believe, I hope, Michael Reynolds will endorse. My intention is to ask.

What if our children were taught how to build their own world from infancy, as is done in most communal cultures? To understand how an earthship works you have to understand how *the earth works*. Can you imagine a more relevant education than one that teaches, and every day of one's life reinforces, how *the earth works*?

And once you're empowered with the skills and tools *to provide your own* shelter, food and comfort, whatever else you choose to contribute to the Great Commons of Creation, will be a *free gift from your heart*, your love – and those gifts are as variable and numerous as the givers.

What if we could set all the competition aside, relax...and *be happy*?

Who knows what richness flows from *freedom*?

Volume One of *Earthship* emphasizes the importance of working *with* the earth, and although that sounds like common sense, we wouldn't be in the environmental crisis we're in if our so-called rulers shared even a little of that priority.

Michael Reynolds uses the term “interfacing” for “working *with* the earth”:

There are many existing natural phenomena which result in temperature, energy, food production, and all things we need to sustain life. We must learn to align ourselves with these phenomena – to interface with them. We must create a vessel which helps us to do this. Through interfacing with existing phenomena on site, the vessel must provide an environment which will sustain human life...The phenomena with which the Earthship interfaces are all related to the four elements, *fire, earth, air and water*. (p. 21, 28)

He then launches into the basics of siting, and then orienting, the ‘vessel’ to make its relationship with the earth as friendly as possible. But these basics constitute a knowledge-set that our children don't have, that *I* don't have – because we aren't taught what's important, or *useful*.

What if we were given knowledge that we used every day? Wouldn't we treasure it? Wouldn't it be precious? Think how eagerly a child of two puts his or her hands in everything you do. What if what you were doing was accurately siting and designing an Earthship?

What *is* the tilt of the Earth from the plane of its solar orbit? What *do* you call the angle of the sun above the horizon plane of the earth? And by how many degrees does this differ summer to winter? What do we call the arc of the sun? What do you call the movement of heat through

liquid or gas? How does the earth respire?

Those among us most interested in Earthships should consider journeying to Taos, New Mexico, extending an invitation to Michael Reynolds, taking in the ideas that come from cross-fertilization...and see what happens.

### *Natural Educators*

Once we start seeing reality, once we understand how podunks think, it will free up a lot of wasted psychic energy. On the news just now I heard a laid-off teacher say, “if the state refuses to fund education, then it better start building *a lot* more prisons!” And she said it like it was a *threat*, you know? See what I mean?

Whereas, once we see reality more clearly we have no choice but to accept the, either ‘hard’ or ‘liberating’ (depending...), *truth* that if we want our children to realize their full potentials; if we want them to receive a rich, stimulating education; if we want them to be as *large* as the ancestors want them to be, as large as the *earth* wants them to be, we will have to plan and organize our children’s education *ourselves*. This should not feel as daunting as it may, perhaps, feel.

When I tallied up just the *visible* skills and gifts ribbed in the small set of connections around me, it was kinda freaky. It drove home the point that underutilized talent is the hallmark of Podrunk-land. It’s a certainty that we have masses of retired physicists, pianists, unseen artists, perhaps even...belligerent atheists,...who will want to help our children find their questions.

Several years back, I listened to a documentary on KPFA called *A Sidewalk Astronomer*. It reinforced what I knew: in every community there are natural educators who never get called on to share their gifts, because we don’t have a society, yet, that asks any more of us than obedience...and, of course, to shop.

The “Sidewalk Astronomer” is John Dodson, who, when he’d finished his slave-work, turned to his soul’s-work. He built his own telescope in his garage for twenty dollars and then set it up on the sidewalk and encouraged passers-by...*to look*.

“The exterior decorator does lovely work,” he says, when a group of children are awed by the up-close-and-personal view he gives them of the moon. But he thinks of himself as a cosmologist, not an astronomer, because he’s interested in “*the whole thing*.” Though in youth he was “a belligerent atheist,” as he termed it, he came to believe, along with the

child Einstein, pondering the magnet he was given, that “something deeply hidden has to be *behind* things.”

It is the deep lovers of life that we want with our children – and come the NEW day...that will mean...*all of us*.

But in the transition to that day, I think we'll want to find the John Dodsons out there, who are so aflame with their questions that others catch fire too. They're out there...waiting to be asked.

Identifying them may be part of what “the inventory” should do...we can raise the question with the crew.

With such artist-educators as John Dodson among us, we'll have the best advice possible on how to redesign “education” to make it not just *earth*-friendly, but *child*-friendly, too.

What a concept.

### *The Zapatista Transistors*

In *Earthship*, Volume One, Michael Reynolds wrote:

One very important aspect of this new concept for housing is that it must be available to the masses. That is to say, it cannot be a multi-million dollar vessel that only the rich can afford. Everyone is entitled to voyage into the future. The concept, design, and actual method of manifestation of a Earthship must be developed with this in mind. *In addition to interfacing with natural phenomena, this concept must interface with the nature of the common person.* (p. 10)

Which prompted my emailed question to him, “What about the low-income? Is there still a concern about making an earthship affordable to all?” – prompting *him* to write back:

Yes. But regulations and codes have made it difficult...The evolution of sustainable living methods must be allowed a “test site,” free from the crippling restraints of laws, codes and basic human encumbrances, in the name of defense...  
...from our own failing methods of living.

When I read this to my son lightbulbs lit in his head.

“Why couldn't a crew form a non-profit just for the purpose of interfacing with local governments, like the folks in the Transition Movement are doing, calling for a moratorium on ‘business-as-usual’ in order to confront the effects of climate disruption?”

This is one of those situations in which the wisdom and experience of the elders must defer to the idealism and energy of youth.

A couple years ago, outraged by the intention of our local library commission to “move” our local branch library, annihilating a community hub, in order to “develop” a site at a nearby transit station, I participated in a petition drive to interrupt their plan to fast-track their earthmover. I’m sure they’re still backroom dealing about it. It’s what they do.

While collecting signatures, the reaction of one elder sistah made an impression. She said, “it don’t matter what the people want. If they want to move this library, they’re gonna move it.” And she proceeded to cite as a ‘for-instance’ another community struggle she’d participated in...unsuccessfully.

Unfortunately, elder cynicism about what government can be moved to do for the people is only too well justified. *Has anybody done a count of the homes lost in low income communities, and the community gardens seized by local governments, during the manufactured “real estate bubble” all over the country? ...of the number of devastated communities, disappointed activists?*

There’s a wonderful community garden and farmer’s market not far from where I live. When I asked the man on whose energy and inspiration it’s largely fueled whether he’s planning to secure the deed, he blithely blew off my concern with a shrug and a smile. But bitter experience has shown that what the city giveth it will most certainly, when the right hand yanks its chain, one day taketh back.

We must advise youthful optimism to never forget that vampires – whether in government or the “halls of finance” – have PhDs in “how to hammer the hopes of the people while greasing the politicians’ palms.”

Since 1980 it has become official policy to ensure that the rich receive the benefits of government...

...Nearly three decades after Mr. Reagan’s revolution, the single biggest piece of our economy, a third of it, is still government. From raking leaves in city parks to buying stealth bombers that cost \$2 billion a copy, government takes the same share. But money for the basics that make society work is growing scarce. From those leaves in the park to textbooks to highway bridge maintenance to food safety inspections, money is dwindling because so much has been diverted to the already rich through giveaways, tax breaks, and a host of subsidies that range from the explicit to the deeply hidden.

Evidence that the elites have captured the government and are milking it for their own benefit is so overwhelming that, on one level, you can find it as an unstated assumption in everyday news reports.

...There is a reason that 35,000 people are registered as lobbyists in Washington, double the number of lobbyists employed there in 2000. They are there to seek favors, from outright gifts of your tax dollars to subtle changes in rules that funnel money to their clients, thwart competition, hold you back, and buoy others. (David Cay Johnston, *Free Lunch: How the Wealthiest Americans Enrich Themselves at Government Expense (and Stick You With the Bill)*, p. 23-4)

So the road *will* be pocked and studded with rocks...what else is new?

There are a few doors opening right now, opportunities that I hope we can seize. Designating “climate change” a crisis of such massive proportions that *business cannot* continue as usual, presents the opportunity for pushing the door wider so the *people* can come through. Responding to this crisis is a goal, a priority, readily understood and embraced by every thinking human. On its face, the strategy promoted by the Transition Movement makes *sense*, and that means its logic will be hard for local elected officials to dispute.

And a local government that becomes a “transitional economy,” necessarily expands the commons.

It will be up to us to then push the question of setting aside, as Michael Reynolds advises, “the crippling restraints of laws, codes and basic human encumbrances,” to allow “the evolution of sustainable living methods.”

But interfacing with a state that despises unleashed people-power will require some advanced study with the male black widow. This talent will have to be cultivated, and the resulting tactics that we develop shared...on our websites.

### *Organic farmers*

You, reading this, know far more about this issue than I do, so perhaps you’ll share your ideas on your Nascence website.

All I know is my own body, and what it has taught me over the years.



Once, as a young woman, I was ill with a chronic flu that lasted for months. During that time it so happened that I watched a PBS documentary about unregulated and ever-increasing pesticide use in the global South. I looked at what I was eating daily from those parts of the world – bananas, frozen strawberries, coffee, frozen orange juice – and realized they were all saturated with poison.

After that, for the first time, I started looking more consciously at my diet. I began noticing that I *felt better* when I eliminated the pesticides and stopped eating meat.

And recently I discovered, after listening to the documentary on the connections between diet and cancer, that cutting *processed* foods out of my diet entirely did far more to help my body than the illness industry ever did.

We *are* nature. We *are* earth. Garbage in, garbage out, is true on multiple levels. If we treat our bodies like trash dumps, the animals we harbor in them *will* conclude that we're done with our bodies, and that it's time to return them to the earth whence they came. It sorta makes sense, if you look at it from their point of view.

The earth *is* a source of power.

If we want to be free we cannot turn our backs on it and allow ourselves to be fed like pets. We must feed *ourselves*, every day, with *actual food* – healthy, organic, living, food.

Those lovers of life among our farmer-friends are key allies for cutting the corporate leash, and reclaiming the knowledge needed to be self-sufficient. It's important to identify the ones nearby, support them, bulk purchase from them, and *learn* from them – sharing their knowledge among the crew, and across all crews, as we ever expand our own gardens.

### *Claiming the Commons*

Body willing, and with the ancestors' help, I intend to print up a few copies of this book, and take the show on the road. And if you give me...weed, whites and wine, and you show me a sign, I'll be willin'... to be movin'.

I'm referring to that lovely moment in the James Cameron film *The Abyss* in which the crew harmonizes together, singing these lines – if I learned it right:

I been warped by the rain,  
Driven by the snow,  
Drunk and dirty,  
But don't you know,  
I'm still...  
...willin'.

Out on the road,  
Late last night,  
I seen my purty Alice  
In every headlight,  
Alice...  
...Dallas Alice.

And I been from  
Tucson to Tucumcari,  
Tehachapi to Tonapah,  
Driven every kinda rig that's ever been made,  
Driven the back roads so I wouldn't get weighed.  
And if you give me...  
...weed, whites and wine,  
And you show me a sign,  
I'd be willin'...  
...to be movin'...

There aren't many songs that adequately convey what it *feels like* to have to slave, slave away one's life, to sacrifice...everything...for your family, for your world. This song of Lowell T. George's – *Willin'* – does.

Bertolt Brecht was right: “fearful is the seductive power of goodness!” Virginia Woolf was right: “Life...calls for gigantic courage and strength...”

It does. It calls for us to be...“willin'.”

That one word moves me so much.

Drunk, dirty, tired, lonely...but...“willin'.” We get up every morning, drag our asses out of bed, put our dreams on hold, and...eventually...let them go, so this world that despises us can keep on rolling...along.

It's just so fucking unfair.

When Pink asked “Dear Mr. President”:

What do you feel when you see all the homeless on the street?  
Who do you pray for at night before you go to sleep?  
What do you feel when you look in the mirror?  
Are you proud?

How do you sleep while the rest of us cry?  
How do you dream when a mother has no chance to say goodbye?  
Can you even look me in the eye,  
And tell me why?

...Let me tell you 'bout hard work,  
Minimum wage with a baby on the way,  
Let me tell you 'bout hard work,  
Rebuilding your house after the bombs took them away,  
Let me tell you 'bout hard work,  
Building a bed out of a cardboard box,  
Hard work...hard work...  
You don't know nothing 'bout hard work...

She put her finger on the problem.  
Podrunks don't know nothing 'bout hard work.

Which explains the confusion of the corporate-chief whose question about his son began this section. Their upbringing is not just *different* from ours, it's the *inverse* of ours. They raise their offspring to believe they are *entitled to rule*. We raise ours with the *expectation of service* – not service freely given, but service *coerced*. The brainwashing is so deep we don't see it. It lulls us to sleep. Every movie, every television “show” presents us with the option of working or...working. “Gotta get up. Gotta go to work. Gotta bring home the bacon. Gotta pay the rent.” Gotta, gotta, gotta. No choice. That's just how the world works.

But not for them.

We shoulder that boulder every morning, and every morning it's heavier than the day before, 'til eventually...one day...it flattens us... flattens us right out.

Have you ever gone outside early in the morning when the sky is just waking up and watered your garden, your trees, your friends of green? If you sit with them, after, peace and contentment wash over you, because peace and contentment is washing over *them*, you can *feel* it. And you *feel*, *this is good, this is as it should be, this is want I want* – I want an *end to want*.

Which is what it must feel like to rest. Not “rest” in *a box* surrounded by a world of hate, fear, mistrust, and misery – but “rest” in *a world* where everyone has what they need, and *what they want*.

*What I want* is to claim the commons, which is also claiming the “opens.” There’s a funny caption in a recent *Onion* with the photo of a man in a prison suit. It reads: “Unsung Heroes. By drawing the entire Burlington police force to his armed standoff, Bill Twible allowed a group of junior high students to skateboard all up and down Church Street without getting hassled for once.”

*We are* captives in this present system. No doubt. To tunnel *out*, the energy that animates the shovel must be *our dreams* – our dreams for *what we want*.

When we gather in our crews, after we’ve begun to see reality, after we’ve begun to heal, after we’ve taken a good, hard look at the possibilities within ourselves and within our physical environments, with this solid sense in hand, we begin to envision, to manifest, the future in the present – we begin to *see* what we can make *now* that reflects it. Your ideas will be as rich, diverse and fresh as the people who comprise you.

Here’s what I’d add to the mix.

At the risk of sounding a bit Machiavellian myself, I think there are two levels to our activism, two “faces” with a single underlying aikido. There is the face we must wear for the state, and the face we wear for our communities. This is a temporary necessity, as temporary as the state itself. But the underlying aikido is uniform.

“Aikido” means “way of adapting the spirit.” So what I’m describing is not so much two different faces, as a recognizing of two different realities that require different things of us.

The following are a few theaters in which we must practice our aikido:

- Public festivals or street parties;
- Growing food everywhere;
- Generating electricity everywhere;
- Education redesign;

- Embracing the excluded (by taking the technology outside with traveling tutorials and earthship construction), and embracing all children and youth;
- “Power-down” plans that include: code suspensions and business-license cessations; free online access, domain name registration, and web page hosting;<sup>9</sup> land trusts that set aside land for communal living arrangements (explaining the “power down” implications of the right to shelter); use of public land for community owned and run Earthship projects, farms, gardens, and electricity generation;
- “CoExiSt” plans that include savings associations; land trusts; communal Earthship centers with electricity generation and charging stations for electric or retrofitted vehicles, farms, gardens, and shared living facilities.

What we’re trying to call into being – aside from our future freedom – is cooperation from the state and cooperation from the broader community. We need the state off our backs. We need some breathing room.

We’ve discussed the problems that confront our efforts to be whole – these problems afflict all levels of the current system. We cannot escape them by focusing on the local level, but they are more manageable on the local level.

One of the biggest problems, aside from the repressiveness of the state itself, will be neighbors still locked into Division Work. In the face of unresponsiveness from our neighbors and repressiveness from the state, we’ll have to keep in our hearts the courage of people like Fannie Lou Hamer, Liliana Robbins, Paul Robeson, John Brown, Steven Biko (whose face is represented on the cover of this book), Walter Rodney, and Mother Jones, who put it all on the line and followed their hearts when it wasn’t only unpopular but dangerous to do so.

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<sup>9</sup> One of the interviews on the April 08, 2009 *Democracy Now!* was with Wally Bowen, “the executive director of the Mountain Area Information Network in Asheville, North Carolina, which is a non-profit Internet Service Provider that offers Internet service in western North Carolina.” He’s written a “Local Network Cookbook: A Recipe for Launching a Local Broadband Wireless Network,” the link to which is part of the *Democracy Now!* archive.

The work that must be done – reclaiming our selves, our earth, and each other – requires us to gather in numbers. This will be threatening to the state and to many of our fellows, especially as it’s precisely those particularly targeted, labeled and despised by this system who must be particularly embraced.

On the community front we can begin with some spontaneous street marketing of our wares. As shopping is one of those class society-encouraged activities that is for the most part non-threatening, these festivals should hopefully be received fairly warmly by our neighbors, to the extent that they’re fun, apparently extemporaneous (while actually well-planned), present useful, *low-priced*, products and disappear quickly, leaving behind no trash. Eventually these ghost-like gatherings could make their appearances unexpectedly all over the city, popping up guerilla warfare-like, extending their stay in time only once they’ve been embraced – both by the broader community, and by the state in the form of a suspension of business license regulations, or at least a moratorium on enforcement.

Simultaneously, there will hopefully be folks in our crews who can interface creatively, sensitively, and subtly with the state; folks who can speak its language and persuasively present both problem and solution to the ecological disaster that we’re in – the solution, of course, being *us*. These crewmates will have the authority and example of both the Transition Movement and Michael Reynolds at their disposal, the latter all the more so to the degree that we win his endorsement. That’s an unknown. But we have his words *then*, whatever are his words *now*.

This movement could become the public face of the “power down” strategy. If we seize responsibility now for its design, we can hopefully include many of the key pieces of our overall vision: the rationale for code and business license suspension, universal web access and page creation, earthship-preference in home and building design, growing food everywhere, generating electricity everywhere, redesigning education, land trusts that set aside land for communal living arrangements (explaining the “power down” implications of the right to shelter), and embracing the excluded and especially all youth.

Every public building and its adjunct lands should be generating electricity and growing food. We can identify which cities in the Transition Movement have set up Energy Services Companies (ESCOs) “owned by the community, to provide locally generated electricity,” and pressure our local city councils to emulate their example. And we can

further demand that land be set aside to address the growing problems of food and shelter insecurity, and youth abandonment – land granted to “the people” *in perpetuity*. Land set aside for communal living cannot be commodified. It will fall into the category of “human intelligence, water, air and fire.” Eventually the attractiveness of communal living, the *good fellowship* found there, will lead to it supplanting other forms. As “the state” withers, so will our narcissism-needs.

Low income youth particularly, but all youth generally, need, *desperately* need, their “own things,” need the art that emanates from their hands recognized. They need to feel *seen*, needed, and loved.

We are failing them utterly.

Why *shouldn't they* plan, site, design, and build their own earthships as shelter and gathering places? No one knows the possibilities of neighborhoods better than the youth who live there. They know where the abandoned buildings and neglected open spaces are located. And Earthships are inexpensive to build – assuming that irrelevant and onerous codes are moved out of the way – they are beautiful, safe, self-sufficient, and they *are* the future.

A major factor in establishing the proper frame of mind for “voyaging” in an Earthship is that *an Earthship is not a house*. A house as we know it is an out-of-date concept, no longer appropriate for human life on Earth. With this understanding, we will not be trying to make an Earthship into a house. An Earthship is a vessel to take care of us in the world of tomorrow, when population and global abuse will be realities to reckon with. This tomorrow is coming fast. We will be more concerned with self-sufficient comfort and food production than with “style” and “tradition”... The point is that human dogma is the only thing between us and a harmonious future on the Earth. (Michael Reynolds, *Earthship*, Volume One, p. 227)

The local government can, and should, subsidize the earth removal, and provide the automobile tires and recycled aluminum cans (the primarily building materials of the earthship.) As Michael Reynolds says:

The only real major piece of equipment needed to build a tire building is a backhoe...Other typical tools needed are a chain saw, skill saw, and a cement mixer...The secondary materials are those which make up the fill in walls, ceilings, floors, glazing, and

miscellaneous carpentry...Floors can be made from any local indigenous material from concrete to flagstone to tile or wood. Some Earthships in New Mexico have used adobe mud floors which are traditional in the area. They are very beautiful and will work anywhere. Floors should take advantage of local materials that are of a low energy impact nature, however they are quite conventional in the application to the Earthship structure. (p. 78-9)

Earthship architects of the people can teach the skills and supervise the construction. The construction site will be safe, healthy and protective of its people of all ages. There will be no deadlines or time pressures. It takes what it takes.

Any and all who want to help and learn are welcome. In particular, youth and adults without homes are invited to learn the basics of self-sufficiency.

Earthship construction sites are also *learning centers* that should be open to people of all ages and backgrounds who want to learn the basics of shelter security. The few operations that present hazards to small children can be performed in a separated area. But, as a rule, when a small child asks, "why aren't we helping?" the correct answer should be: "you are *so* right. Let's go help. What do we want to learn how to do first?" And because time is not an issue, *it doesn't matter* if it takes that child four times as long to stuff an automobile tire with earth as it would an adult. What the community gains, and what the child gains, from *everyone helping* is immeasurable.

One way to begin reaching out to young people driven from the school system, even before bringing up the idea of Earthships, is to attract them with "traveling tutorials."

While I was haunting our branch library during the petition drive to save it, I noticed a lot of black youth taking advantage of the free internet access. They were checking out each other's MySpace pages, which meant they had to endure a lot of frowning and lectures directed at them because of their inability to be quiet. The vibe, clearly in evidence from most of the library staff, was that black youth were not wanted. The patrons weren't bothered, as far I could see. *I* certainly wasn't. When you go to a public space, you expect living humans to show some signs of life.

A van that is simultaneously a screen for displaying webpage-design tutorials – along with explaining how to use other youth-driven software



obsessions – would give young people what *all* people want: to belong, to be a part, to feel as powerful, capable and brilliant as every other person. And it would accommodate *them* – their need for movement and fresh air, and authenticity – rather than demanding that they adjust themselves to a system unworthy of any of us.

Low-income children of color are being pushed to the fringes of this current system and they know it. They know they are purposely being excluded from access to the goodies. Their rage is real, and justified.

At the same time, we low-income *parents* of color (and many parents of all incomes and races) can no longer, out of our own feeling of grief for our lost dreams or exclusion from “the good life,” *direct our longing* for our children’s acceptance *into violence and abusive pressure* on them to conform...to obey...to do what they’re told, without questioning, without discussion. We have been worse than merely autocratic with our children, we have caused them to doubt their worth.

‘Force’ must be divorced from our lives.

When we become autocrats to our children, we present a free gift of unpaid Division Work to the vampires. We perpetuate the cons, the hurt, the hate, the hopelessness. Our children cannot be their best selves with us sitting on their souls, any more than they can with an abusive system sitting on them. Once we have a world designed for living things, it will remove the barriers to our wholeness, to our ability to relax in the world, and with our children.

Done with the fearing youth.

Done. Done. Done.

Love them

and they’ll love you back.

Feed them

and they’ll grow.

Done with the hurting youth.

Done. Done. Done.

Hitting is so passé,

so completely

yesterday.

We’re too brilliant

for such crude techniques,

Too buoyant

to be so cold.

Why should young people be hammered into seats to learn “their numbers?” Why shouldn’t our brilliant children be taught how to read and create blueprints? Why can’t knowledge of the earth be taught through practical application?

In our hearts, we know that the “education” we impose on our children is designed to make them obedient followers of orders, *not* creative thinkers. We lie to ourselves and we lie to them. We tell ourselves (because it’s been hammered into us) that “merit rises,” that if we *push* our children to be the “really smart ones,” they’ll be recognized by the system and rewarded with the designation “boss.” Though none of us are happy either bossing or being bossed, we perpetuate the cons out of fear that our children will be left behind, out of fear that there’s no alternative.

It’s time to stop lying, and to stop being afraid.

If we love ourselves and our children, if we want them to be able to fulfill their potentials, to *claim* their biological inheritance, to *be* the powerful and joyful beings that all of us inherently are, then we must stop lying, stop fearing, and embrace the quite visible and obvious alternatives to coercion, force, violence, competition, limitation, division, and isolation.

*Each one free...a youth!* It is the youth, primarily, who will have to take this on – along with their adult, wage-working and wage-free supporters. But our acts, when informed by a coherent theory and a ‘workable plan,’ are engraved, and therefore enlarged, with a monumental meaning and mission.

If you *consciously* embrace the wind from below, it blows stronger.

This system makes us feel unconsciously trapped by our children because while “the market” uses (some of) them, *we* bear the costs (of bearing and raising), costs that often break us financially.

What if we gave our children permission to *free* us? *What if we got on the same side?*

What is the *real* work, the *real* learning, our children (and *all of us*) might do in The Nascence?

Our youth are inheriting a lot of problems, so they’ll (*we’ll*) need to study them and find the solutions.

Problem: ending wage work globally.

Problem: designing self-sufficient villages.

Problem: harnessing clean energy for all.

Problem: cleaning polluted environments (hint: read Paul Stamets' *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World*)

Problem: designing systems for consensus-forging / collective decision-making.

Problem: staking the corporate vampire and retooling production facilities.

Problem: recirculating resources and designing inter-region product exchanges.

Problem: sustainable transportation systems.

We have to grow what we want for our children and for ourselves, and that means shifting our minds, bodies, and spirits away from commodities and towards building the commons.

It's like growing a garden – *our* garden – what we give love and attention to thrives, and that which we turn away from becomes dry and spare, to eventually curl into itself and die.

We have to release our children and youth from our unconscious insecurity patterns. In a rare recording of a speech given at an organizing meeting, Doctor Martin Luther King told the adults in the room not to worry about the youth risking arrest, risking their lives. He said, “they’re gonna be alright.”

I think I know what he means. Young people *must* do this work in order to claim their biological inheritance. It's too important *not* to do.

So we must have their backs – and model their courage.

It's critical that we adults *allow* our children to *stay* awake.

It's critical, therefore, that *we* awake.

And...though it may be difficult, we'll have to take to heart the following precepts:

Refuse Division Work;

*All* of us, or none;

No tests;

No diplomas;

No degrees.

They aren't needed  
to be free.

Competition is Division Work. “All of us, or none!” points to our Culture Work.

The NEW world is a sensible world – sleek, spare, capable, and uncomprehending of ‘waste.’ What we don’t need, what is not useful for maintaining health, sanity, joy and love for all living things...we don’t make in the first place.

Virginia Woolf saw this over seventy years ago.

“Let us then discuss...the sort of education that is needed...It must be built not of carved stone and stained glass, but of some cheap, easily combustible material which does not hoard dust and perpetrate traditions. Do not have chapels. Do not have museums and libraries with chained books and first editions under glass cases. Let the pictures and the books be new and always changing. Let it be decorated afresh by each generation with their own hands cheaply. The work of the living is cheap; often they will give it for the sake of being allowed to do it. ...The poor college must teach only the arts that can be taught cheaply and practiced by poor people; such as medicine, mathematics, music, painting and literature. It should teach the arts of human intercourse; the art of understanding other people’s lives and minds, and the little arts of talk, of dress, of cookery that are allied with them. The aim of the new college, the cheap college, should be not to segregate and specialize, but to combine. It should explore the ways in which mind and body can be made to cooperate; discover what new combinations make good wholes in human life. *The teachers should be drawn from the good livers as well as from the good thinkers. ... competition would be abolished. Life would be open and easy. People who love learning for itself would gladly come there.* Musicians, painters, writers, would teach there, because they would learn. ... They would come to the poor college and practise their arts there because it would be a place where society was free; not parceled out into the miserable distinctions of rich and poor, of clever and stupid; but where all the different degrees and kinds of mind, body and soul merit cooperated. Let us then found this new college; this poor college; in which learning is sought for itself; where advertisement is abolished; and there are no degrees; and lectures are not given, and sermons are not preached, and the old poisoned vanities and parades which breed competition and jealousy...”  
The letter broke off there... (*Three Guineas*, p. 33-4)

I think all artists (the people who knew themselves to be artists) across the millennia, have imagined this time, this time we're in, when the *dream* of unity is actually coming into being.

Just as the "poor college" is very rich spiritually, the "poor village" or the "poor NEW world" is a treasure trove of all things joyful, fun, interesting and involving. It is one in which we can relax because, finally, we are all pulling together. Done with suspicion, mistrust and duplicity. We are making a human world that is as clear, clean and honest as the earth itself.

Beginning to establish pieces of this NEW world in the dead husk of the old means that the old way of thinking will continue to drag down the spiritually light, clean and fresh way for a while to come. How long depends on us.

Rather than fear this approaching "poverty," the *liberating* alternative is to rush toward it, embrace it, merge with it, *become it*, model everything we do on it, make sure that whatever we work on, and work *for*, points the way *out*.

The problems here on out we solve  
with wholeness *willingly* evolved,  
each second pollinating each hour  
with the alternative energy of three phase power.

As John Trudell says, "*we* are alternative energy."

So, for instance, a theory of wholeness sees human energy concentrated in "tent cities" not as "problem," but rather as "opportunity."

*JUAN GONZALEZ:* As the nation's economic and housing crisis worsens, homelessness is also on the rise. A report from the National Center for Family Homelessness estimates that one in fifty American children are now homeless. With the number of homeless people far exceeding the existing network of shelters, an increasing number of people are setting up roving encampments or shanty towns that are popularly known as tent cities.

*AMY GOODMAN:* And right here in Seattle, tent cities have been around since the late '90s, have also served as centers for organizing around affordable housing and services for the homeless. Seattle's newest tent city is called Nickelsville. The encampment is made up of over a hundred pink tents and is named to protest the Mayor Greg Nickels's policies around the homeless. (*Democracy Now!*, March 30, 2009)

We are alternative energy. This system, locked in its cons, every day trying to keep us caught in them, tries to make us believe that gathering so much energy in one place is actually a 'drain' on 'society.'

There is available land, available people, and a form of architecture that represents the future. The con-artist-politicians try to convince us to see 'problem' where all I see is 'solution.' If they can keep us believing in their 'upside-down-world,' they can prolong the life of the scam. Lord knows why they want to. Do they think they're exempt? <sup>10</sup>

From here on out, we do and make only that which is *useful* to the future. Earthships are the infrastructure of the NEW world. Every vessel built is a gift to the future. We can begin creating around us a world that reflects *what we want to be*, which means that the model for our NEW world is *distributed generation*.

Refusing a fear-and-force-based system is no longer a matter of attending big protests once a year while the rest of the year our lives roll along just the same. Each second of each hour, we are preparing to *live light for the General Strike*.

Where would we be right now without the sacrifice of so many people during the Great Depression who built the bridges, the roads, the sewer systems, that we use up today without even a thought of thanks?

Where would we be right now without the sacrifice of so many kidnapped Africans who built the buildings, the roads, laid the railroad tracks, ran the plantations and the mills, and received the whip and endless heartbreak for thanks?

Where would we be right now without the sacrifice and annihilated dreams of all the dark-skinned "despised" of the global South who give us all the 'stuff' we think we need, so 'cheap'?

Where would we be right now without the sacrifice of rural and urban peoples of all cultures and races *across the millennia* whose lives were hijacked so a few could feel 'distinct'?

The job that must be done requires all of us, or none.

Across all false divisions that states inculcate, *people are people everywhere*.

The Earthships that we build now to address pressing shelter needs will be no less useful a few generations on. Every vessel built today is a vote of confidence in our ability to live lightly on the planet, in harmony, in balance, One.

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<sup>10</sup> This is a line from the Mamet film *House of Games*.

A friend of mine is, as we speak, trying to figure out how to convert a vehicle into a tiny temporary bedroom, with at least one 120V receptacle. How do you solve the aerodynamic issues of a couple solar panels on a ski rack? Where do you put the batteries? What type of batteries do you use? What inverter? What controller? It's all a boggle to me. But, assuming he figures it out, it's a possible way to live 'light,' if we lose our homes, if we want to lighten our burden of debt, if we want to devote our lives to building the NEW, rather than propping up a dead husk, or squeezing a 'living' from a system made to crush us. Why shouldn't we gather in snug "beds" around earthship construction sites with recharging stations for our batteries, with gardens, kitchen and bathroom facilities appended? We can choose either to join gatherings in the communal "Hall" or we can choose a quiet moment with our coffee, books, or laptop in our retrofitted vehicles. A single receptacle could mean the difference between an uncomfortable huddle versus a little haven.

The fact that we're offering assertively – preemptively – *alternative* plans, plans that are creative, dynamic and interesting, is critical to forestalling the expected plans of 'Power' to separate and divide, come the wet-ass hour. We are putting an alternative on the table. 'Power' will *not* be able to claim that there's a vacuum to fill. *We* are the catalytic element in the catalytic truth. *We* bring the ideas that germinate, the proposals pregnant with life.

### *The General Strike*

A CoExiSt is just a crew or a group of crews that want to share communal land. A CoExiSt reflects The Zapatista Way. We don't want to take state power, we CoExiSt.

And if there are enough CoExiSts in every urban area, conscious people helping to bring the future into existence, *choosing* to put their bodies in the way of the state's Division Work, *choosing* to prevent pod drunk plans to beat down hope and install totalitarianism, we can make something glorious out of the challenges of transition.

Wherever you live on the planet, you are suffering the consequences of unrestrained pod drunk greed.

And while you may *think* you're exempt from the impacts of all the despair-inducing devices, all the infinitely devious pod drunk policies designed to keep their pitiful narrow asses on top of the heaps of misery they *so* love to make – the impact of resource shortages, peaking available water and fossil fuels, gaping holes in the "safety net," widening gaps

between them that got and them that not...nature don't work that way. One day, either you, your child, or some descendant of your child, is gonna wish you'd walked the Courage Road when you had the choice.

Looking for the *individual* solution is thinking the old thoughts. Looking for the *communal* solution is thinking the NEW thoughts.

Claiming or acquiring communal land for this movement, growing "our own things," is critical. And persuasive as our "Power-Down Plans" will be, there's always the chance that, either through the schemes of 'Power,' or from the depths of the Cons, our local 'leaders' could fail to make the fundamental connections between freeing human energy now, and building a future that allows us *all* to be free.

There's always a chance they won't give up the land.

Therefore, all our planning, all our thoughts, should "lean toward the light," toward *living light for the General Strike*.

Refusal...renunciation...of a system unworthy of us is no longer a matter of protest demonstrations on designated days planned months and years in advance – invitations extended to all malevolent vampires inclined to wreak havoc.

Rather, refusal, today, like a lot of things about our future, is modeled on the concept of distributed generation.

The sun don't designate a single day or place to shine, and neither do we. We shine *every* day, everywhere. And one of the rays we emit is the reality that we *will* have to organize dissent.

Starting with our "Boycott the Corpse" days, which celebrate *people* rather than podunk power, which get us accustomed to claiming the streets, and draw consumer dollars away from the corporate-vampire, we point our planning toward *coordinated wholesale withdrawals*, first from shopping, and then from work.

We needn't wait for any specific date, some artificial number of participating crews that signal it's time to give the Corpse the blues. You have to *practice* to get good at something, so we have to *practice* our activism aikido, *our mass movement aikido*. As with everything else, we start with what we got...and then we build.

So part of our regular practice as a crew is *planning regular coordinated consumer strikes*, strikes that occur on a "FLEA Festivals" Day, in order to offer a "people's celebratory alternative" to wallowing in the corporate muck.



The bigger the splash of our flung wrench into the corporate gears, the more we fertilize the seeds of our key ideas (as much the purpose of our selling as the selling):

*“No one else can tell you what work you’re here to do.”*

*“For human intelligence is like water, air, and fire – it cannot be bought or sold.”*

*“Across all false divisions that states inculcate, people are people everywhere.”*

*“The work that must be done requires all of us, or none.”*

As our crews multiply, at some point we’ll want to take our General Work Strike out the strategy-garage and take her for a spin – merging the lanes of our crews together.

*All together now!  
One, Two, Three, Four,  
Freedom’s waiting out that door!  
Five, Six, Seven, Eight,  
We got cutters at the gate!  
Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve,  
Free yourself from wage-slave hell!*

Recently, *Democracy Now!* interviewed Kali Akuno, “the national organizer for the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and organizer in the US solidarity effort with the struggle of the workers and people of Guadeloupe.” Below is an excerpt. You can read the entire March 27, 2009 interview by going to the *Democracy Now!* archive.

*Labor Victory in Guadeloupe After Six-Week Strike Reverberates Across French Caribbean and France:*

*INTRO:* The financial crisis has had reverberations beyond the United States and Europe, with people taking to the streets in cities across the globe to protest rising wealth inequality and to call for economic and labor rights. Perhaps the most significant action took place in the French Caribbean, on the island of Guadeloupe. Amid rising costs of living, labor leaders in Guadeloupe led a forty-four-day general strike that closed down roads, schools, gas stations and public transportation. The strikers claimed a victory earlier this month with a plan to improve wages and living standards...

*AMY GOODMAN:* Very quickly, Kali Akuno, there were massive protests in the streets earlier this month in France and the biggest demonstration since Sarkozy's election. And then, next week, the G20 is going to be meeting. Where do you think the significance of the Guadeloupe protest and victory fits into? And can it have any bearing on G20 and its blowback to France?

*KALI AKUNO:* I think it will have a major impact, Amy. You know, workers all over Europe that I'm in contact with are using it as a kind of a standard-bearer. And I think with the earlier victory in Bolivia with the constitutional referendum and also the victory that happened in Venezuela, this is one of the key early victories in this crisis. I think people all over the world are looking to us as an example.

Nothing reveals the power of human solidarity like the General Strike. If our "Power-Down Plans" don't result in land, we'll have to work even harder to build the numbers that will allow the weight of our refusal to register, allow it to spread its weight on the government plate.

One way or another, we gotta get our hands on some communal land. It's critical to our workable plans – and a workable plan – worked on together, realized together – is the key to knocking down the door of this system, and dispelling the cons that enclose us. There's no individual escape from this corpse, we'll have to hold the light steady for each other, share tools, cut ourselves an opening, and then bury the stinking thing once we're clear of it...and make sure it stays buried.

*In Nascence:* Your creativity is well beyond my ability to imagine. I hope you'll share your ideas and plans on your Nascence websites. They might include savings associations and land trusts; communal Earthship centers and electricity generation; communal festivals and bartering systems; farms and gardens; or similar strategies with interesting configurations.

I think we'll find that renouncing the processed life is easier than we thought. The hardest part will be trust, and overcoming fear. But when we refuse to settle, when we decide to *live our wholeness*, we expand the realm of "the possible" – for ourselves, and for the people in our lives – breaking that *Groundhog Day* curse we've been living under for far too long.

Once the commercial imperative is off our backs we can follow up on all the suppressed ideas. The big automakers' decision to crush and bury all those electric cars in the desert wasn't a fluke. This happens all the time with ideas that would free us from slavery rather than secure another link, another lock. Tesla had to fight like hell to give us his gifts – we will also have to...until we don't.

We are waking up. More and more of us *are* withdrawing, if only psychically, from wage work while turning our psyches and our *uncoerced* labor towards a future without bosses. Though this movement is now achieving critical mass on a world scale, it's been going on for millennia, for as long as class society itself.

And though the goal is held in common, there are innumerable tributaries feeding it, flowing along different streams, avoiding or vaulting different obstacles, so our chart cannot be laminated, bound or framed; the only universal is the luminescence behind it: our *intention*. And the principle force fueling our intention must be, as Erich Fromm pointed out, *faith*.

I like to call it "*trust*." We have to trust in the ancestors, the earth, and each other. We have to trust that we're not alone, and that, before we're able to see it clearly before our eyes, our movement is there, building, and that individually, in our apparently separate lives, a common course *is* flowing.

Now is the seed time of *global* union, faith and honor. We go up together or we go down together. A world, no less than a society, *is* defined by the state of mind of those hanging by a thread. And by that standard as well, 'civilization,' podrunck-style, has been a *disaster*.

And when those who's stomachs are full, and contribution recognized, gloam, gloat, and glow with self-satisfaction, pleased with the way of things when their sisters are cold and their sons bleed for them unknown, it sets in motion the bitterest rage in those tottering on the edge. For it means their suffering is unseen and uncared-about, and callously dismissed from the assessments of the Good Life, the Just World... 'Progress.' It means their agony is casually pasted over with phrases like, "the poor will always be with us," while hidden from public view the hail-fellow-well-met nod-nod-wink-wink is given to the fellow callous few, that postpones our long-awaited future, and sends the suffering to arms.

What would *you* do when told, "too bad, so sad, you're screwed. Sucks to be you!"?

We have to be willing to take in the truth, to accept that what's being done to others *is* being done to oneself. We have to peer into the false face, look behind it, ask the tough questions – “Where does the semiconductor material come from? How was it obtained?” – before we blithely leap to buy in. For the most part it's those “recirculating physical resources” that should pull our attention, as Buckminster Fuller said.

If there's no Pacifica-network radio station nearby, we can listen on the Internet. But to take in the truth, we must first minimize the corporate propaganda that pollutes our airwaves and our brainwaves.

Our comfortable lives cannot be bought with blood. We have to trust the voice of the ancestors calling us to redeem their suffering, and the suffering of all our relations. Acknowledging “the Debt” simultaneously frees us from the shackles of the “Mind-Worship”-Con, shaking off the fear that we're too small to manage our own world.

Wage-work reinforces this con, every moment we give to it, just by being what it is, the separation of conception from execution. It separates us from our power – from the collective mind, from the earth, from our bodies, and from each other. We can only reclaim our power by freeing our minds of division, by honoring that which is whole, alive and self-generating in ourselves and in our physical environments – without exploitation, without force.

In the world of our choosing, in *our* garden, *force is anathema*.

And while it's easy to say: “Don't let the job drain the energy which should go to developing your art,” in practice, without a world that supports this, it's purt near impossible. Jobs pull you into their logic – and in the absence of an *opposing* pull – the ancestors, the earth, and each other – a strong *oppositional* system of values – we easily fall in line with what it asks of us, because cooperation is in our ancestral memory.

The only way to withstand its pull is to *consciously* pull back.

What we do now, *with consciousness*, will be our lasting gift to the future, so that our children (and theirs) will one day be free to plan each day, fresh, anew, and to restore the earth, each day, fresh, anew, in ingenious, creative ways beyond our imagining today.

...OK, I guess it's time for the long-winded wrap-up. Shall I spare you?

Whups, too late.

This book is offered free in order to help build the movement to end wage work. If you find it useful, please consider a donation in any amount you can afford to the Nascence to End Work Savings Endowment (NEWSE) – so that we may continue printing the book and giving it out to others.

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President Barack Obama may well have concluded that the people aren't ready to roll, and who could argue, really, as we haven't... yet.

I think we'd better *get* ready to roll because if that door he's standing in slams shut, we'll need a battering ram instead of a workable plan.

Time to blow your whistle and toot your horn, Mama comin' home jus' as sure as you born, as Mrs. Trotter would say.

## *Planning the Future We Want*

*All being an artist means is to have the courage to look beneath the lies spun to ensnare us. And though it takes courage to stand alone, when all your fellows are ensnared, once you look at truth baldly, you feel blessed, because, really, what else is there? And what a gift, the power to cut through illusion – propaganda, lies – and reveal truth – the shock of essential truth is food for the soul.*

The current social arrangement has led to a cultural crisis of caring.

On a global scale, we're experiencing the extension of the commodity form to *everything*, removing from our personal understanding how the goods we use were made, getting in the way of honest relationships with each other – engulfing and diminishing all of life...unless – unless *we* decide to make a better world.

What this extension of the commodity form, this separation of conception from execution – especially as we now make fewer and fewer of the commodities we use in our lives, importing ever more – means on the personal level is an end to wholeness and an end to a sense of agency in determining our own lives.

The job serves to remind us always of our dependent status through bosses, hierarchy, authoritarianism, disciplining, the note in the personnel file – with a veneer of scientific authority (via so-called “management theory”) bestowed on it all.

The separation of conception from execution means that we are made into instruments that realize the dreams of others, never our own. It means we have no time or energy to make sense of the world or to imagine how to change it through the realization of *our own* dreams.

Each of us longs to be recognized in our culture of invisibility.

Decisions that affect our lives happen behind the scenes. *We* happen behind the scenes – no one knows our true selves, save a fate-assigned few.

“We are too big for jobs” – but the longer we're in a job, the smaller we get.

I'm sure we could make an equation of it:

*Size of the soul = the reciprocal of number of years worked times the ratio of total deferred dreams to the number of days of work-related depression. (I'm starting to feel depressed just thinking about it.)*

The job keeps us from developing our wholeness and our wholeness is what makes life worth living. The job keeps us from uniting with our fellows, learning from our ancestors, and living respectfully with all life.

So...what can we do?

We can begin meeting and talking, considering some precepts, like:

*Live simply,  
Help each other.  
No more settling  
for less than what we want.*

When we refuse to settle, when we decide to *live our wholeness*, we expand the realm of the ‘possible’ – for ourselves, and for the people in our lives – breaking that *Groundhog Day* curse we’ve been living under for far too long.

*We need strategies; we need a plan. We need approaches; we need a path. We need steps we can follow, and a view of the end;*

*We need patience to get there...and a place to begin...*

You have to have sound footing for a leap of consciousness – or of faith. Each person’s “start-point” is when and where he / she – you / me – decides to start. That could be today, a year from today, or five years from today; it all depends on where you are *right now*. The important thing is to start. *A place to begin*: A circle dance – going around the room, sharing and talking, with lots of listening:

- What is your art (skill, gift, love – that which you do unbidden, without force)? What do you do *really*? Who *are* you really?
- Have you ever tried to live that art? What happened?
- Have you ever thought about *only* doing your art? If so, what stops you?
- If you could start buying the goods you use from someone here, if they were of better quality, and less expensive, would you?
- If you could turn to people here for your entertainment – film, spoken word, music, dance – would you? If not, what would stop you?
- If you could plan a future where we could all *live* our wholeness, fully, what would it look like? Don’t you deserve this? Do you want this for your children – or for *all* children?
- What if we started buying from *each other*, instead of corporations?
- What if we devoted our time, attention and allegiance to building the future we deserve, instead of to the job?
- What if we went beyond talking about these things and started doing these things? How would we start?

*Little by little  
we whittle and whittle  
away the death-worship,  
the denial of meaning,  
returning to reverence,  
to spiral renewal,  
to springs out of winters,  
and to all things  
communal.*

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*Much Gratitude To All Those Who Resist With Love, and To My Personal Subset Thereof:*

Louis Armstrong, James Baldwin, Harry Belafonte,  
Larry Bensky, Steven Biko, Barbara Ehrenreich, Black Elk,  
John Brown, James Cameron, Joel and Ethan Coen,  
George Carlin, Emily Dickinson, Mark Doty, Frederick Douglas,  
George Eliot, Frederick Engels, Ella Fitzgerald,  
Bob Fosse, Roberta Flack, Aretha Franklin, Erich Fromm,  
Coleen Gragen, Amy Goodman, David Gordon, Dick Gregory,  
Woody Guthrie, Fannie Lou Hamer, Isaac Hayes,  
Donny Hathaway, Jimi Hendrix, Billie Holiday, Myles Horton,  
Zora Neale Hurston, Terence K. Hopkins, Jesse Jackson,  
Brian Jacques, C.L.R. James, Mother Jones, Janis Joplin,  
Chaka Khan, Carole King, Martin Luther King, Gladys Knight,  
Akira Kurosawa, Bruce Lee, Spike Lee, Little Richard,  
Malcolm X, Herbert Marcuse, Bob Marley, Miriam Makeba,  
Karl Marx, Hugh Masekela, Curtis Mayfield, Letta Mbulu,  
Herman Melville, Toshiro Mfuni, Bette Midler, Alice Miller,  
Joni Mitchell, Michael Moore, Laura Nyro, Barack Obama,  
Tillie Olsen, Grace Paley, Utah Phillips, Karl Polanyi, Prince,  
Richard Pryor, Otis Redding, Michael Reynolds, Paul Robeson,  
Walter Rodney, Rolling Thunder, Rumi, Ken Saro-Wiwa,  
May Sarton, Pete Seeger, Ousmane Sembene,  
William Shakespeare, Robert Shaw, Sly Stone, Studs Terkel,  
Nikola Tesla, John Kennedy Toole, Jim Thompson,  
Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ben Vereen,  
Laurence and Andrew Wachowski, Immanuel Wallerstein,  
Colin Watson, Ida B. Wells, Oskar Werner, Walt Whitman,  
Stanley Tookie Williams, Bill Withers, Virginia Woolf,  
The Zapatistas.

This is my public figure personal-impact list – people who soothed my soul when I needed it – just a tiny cross-section of all the numberless heroic lovers of life, known and unknown. Though I've only been in the physical presence of six of them, they are all friends and relations.