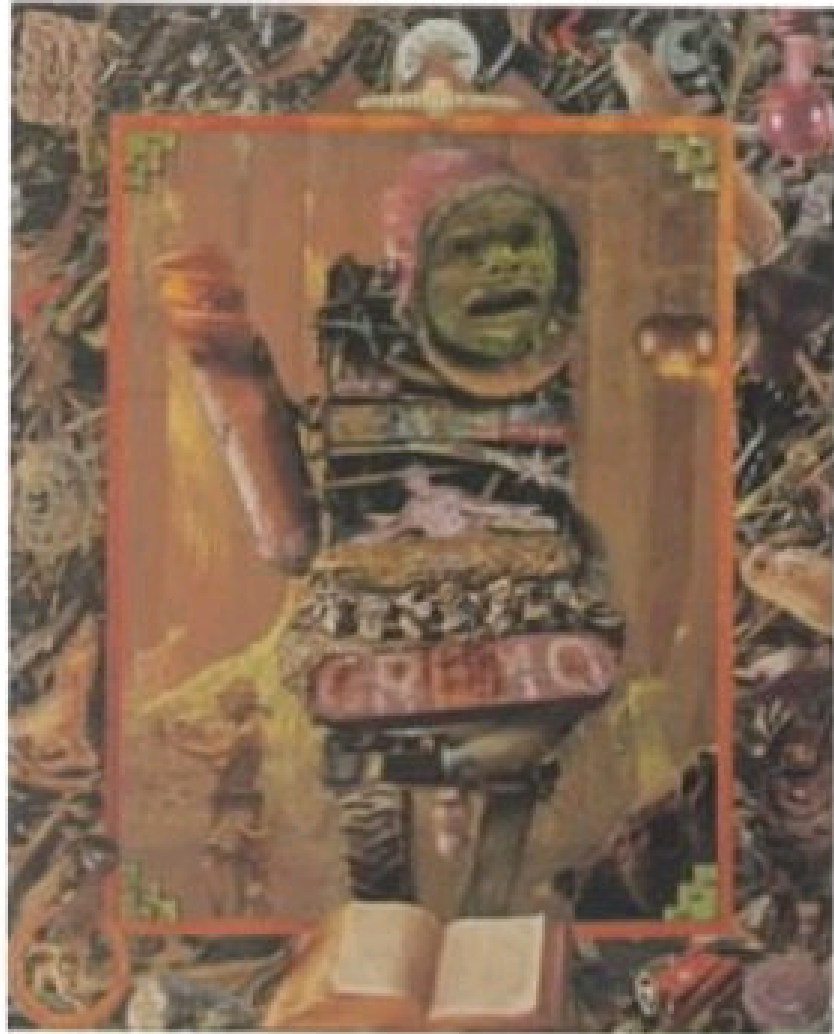


# FUTURE PRIMITIVE

AND OTHER ESSAYS



JOHN ZERZAN

# Future Primitive and Other Essays

By John Zerzan  
Anti-Copyright

## Introduction

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The Point of No Return for Everybody

My personal introduction to the visions of John Zerzan came from exposure to the broadsides of *Upshot*, collaborations between John and Paula Zerzan—back in the San Francisco of the 1970s—that still retain their power. One of my favorites was (and still is) “The Point of No Return for Everybody.” This stark, but evocative portrait of contemporary social reality interrupted by sparks of disconnected resistance, is for me a hallmark of John Zerzan’s profound vision of a dying civilization and its inchoate discontents.

After John left San Francisco for Oregon, “Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous” became the vehicle for a similar project infused with the same spirit. This project was also largely a collaboration—this time between John Zerzan and Dan Todd—and eventually a nicely done collection of some of its most subversive posters and flyers was published as *Adventures in Subversion: Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous Flyers, 1981-1985*.

However, from the 1970s up to the present John has also been busy producing a regular stream of major essays appearing in many different periodicals, most significantly in the *Fifth Estate* and *Telos* earlier, and in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* and *Demolition Derby* of late. Taken together, these essays constitute a far-reaching and extreme critique of human civilization, along with the culture and technology which make it possible.

In 1988 the first collection of these essays was published under the title *Elements of Refusal* by Left Bank Books in Seattle. In the introduction to *Elements* David Brown announced that “No less than as they appeared these essays are provocative and important..John’s writings have always contained that critical spirit which best characterized both the old ‘Frankfurt School’ and the Situationists-but are more radical, and without the debilitating despair of the former or the disgusting love affair with technology and ‘progress’ afflicting the latter.” John presses on with his critique where most others have feared to tread.

Also in 1988, John Zerzan and Alice Carnes edited *Questioning Technology*, published by Freedom Press in London (and since republished by New Society Publishers). This anthology of essays by a variety of authors, from Morris Berman to Jacques Ellul, and from George Bradford to Russell Means, presented the *other* side of the technology question, the critical side that is rarely ever even formulated.

And to bring things up to date, *Future Primitive* is the second collection-certainly not to be the last-of John Zerzan’s own writings, this time from 1988 to the present.

For John, the demand for authentic life and the struggle against mere 'survival' are palpably and continually present throughout history. If we just look, we can't miss the signs of this struggle. From the 'fall' into alienation, which he takes as the beginning of civilization, to the spasmodic episodes of release and repression represented in the bizarre litanies which constitute our daily news, we can hardly evade the signs of this perennial confrontation.

Not that every modern institution isn't deployed precisely to prevent this realization. State, economy, culture—all work overtime attempting to legitimate and bolster the cracking foundations of the machine of civilization. Ideologies, commodities, all the rituals of domination and alienation multiply as the machine continually contrives newer and 'better' pseudo-satisfactions for desires that by their nature must be left ultimately unfulfilled.

How could the thirst for genuine community ever be quenched in a world where the typical 'human' relationships are buying and selling, order-giving and order-taking? How could our lust for sensual intercourse ever overcome our mutual isolation through technologies which demand that we travel at faster and faster speeds to destinations all equally devoid of real life? How could our desires for multi-dimensional and directly immediate personal communication ever be fulfilled by instruments of separation and deceit like the mass media and the proliferating networks of electronic information processing?

John Zerzan not only presents us with irrefutable evidence of this ubiquitous and continuous confrontation between our primordial desires and their simulated satisfactions, but he has insisted over the years that everything is only getting *worse*. Our alienation is becoming more acute. Our appetites are becoming voracious and indiscriminate cravings. Our fantasies more violent, and our episodes of violence more fantastic.

Part One of this volume is primarily made up of John's most significant essays of the last few years, all appearing in *Anarchy* and *Demolition Derby*. "Future Primitive" takes recent anthropological and archaeological revisionism to an ultimate conclusion that "life before domestication/agriculture was in fact largely one of leisure, intimacy with nature, sensual wisdom, sexual equality, and health." If for millenia upon millenia human communities successfully refused descent into the traps of division of labor, domestication and symbolic reification, what does this say about the true situation of modern humanity? Does civilization represent only the recent, yet near total, degradation of human life? As more and more evidence mounts, it becomes harder for the apologists of repression and alienation to avoid this judgment.

"The Mass Psychology of Misery" plumbs the massive psychic misery evident just under the surface of officially declared contentment. John asks, if "material immiseration" didn't lead as Marx predicted to the downfall of capitalism, still might "psychic suffering" lead "to the reopening of revolt"? Along the way he presents a masterful demolition of the claims of psychology in its new role as "the predominant religion" marching forward employing "the therapeutic model of authority."

"Tonality and the Totality" recounts a detailed musical history which reveals a development in concert with the advance of civilization. According to this account, the domestication of humanity proceeded concurrently with the domestication of polyphonous voices. Despite its

apolitical image, Zerzan warns us that “for quite some time music... has been developing an ideological power of expression hitherto unknown.”

“The Catastrophe of Postmodernism” takes all the major hucksters of this academic literary fashion to task for their refusal of critical coherence. Mistaking language and text for their only realities, postmodernists devalue or ignore lived experience. In effect, they leave themselves no standpoint from which one could gain any grasp of the social totality. For John, “Postmodernism is contemporaneity, a morass of deferred solutions on every level, featuring ambiguity, the refusal to ponder origins or ends, as well as the denial of oppositional approaches, ‘the new realism’. Signifying nothing and going nowhere, postmodernism is an inverted millenarianism....”

Part Two of the present volume consists of the nine brief essays which, at least so far, make up the corpus of “The Nihilist’s Dictionary,” John’s column appearing in *Anarchy* magazine. Most of these short takes illuminate the *other* side of the dominant categories of contemporary ideology-technology, culture, division of labor, progress, community, society-with an acerbic abruptness that will unsettle those accustomed to their unquestioned celebration. While the opening piece on ‘Niceism’ takes up the often ignored complicity of the ‘nice’ with the false, “the passionate and feral embrace of wildness” is the ending theme of the most positive entry in this dictionary of negation.

Two brief, but significant, reviews are appended to these essays to complete this volume. The reviews – of Murray Bookchin’s *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* and Jean Baudrillard’s *America* – quickly explode the pretensions of Bookchin’s ideology of “Libertarian Municipalism” and those of Baudrillard’s celebration of flashy incoherence.

In each of his essays John Zerzan doesn’t just question authority, he settles for nothing less than its demolition. Shall we demand any less from ourselves?

Lev Chernyi, *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*

## Chapter 1: Future Primitive

Division of labor, which has had so much to do with bringing us to the present global crisis, works daily to prevent our understanding the origins of this horrendous present. Mary LeCron Foster (1990) surely errs on the side of understatement in allowing that anthropology is today "in danger of serious and damaging fragmentation." Shanks and Tilley (1987b) voice a rare, related challenge: "The point of archaeology is not merely to interpret the past but to change the manner in which the past is interpreted in the service of social reconstruction in the present." Of course, the social sciences themselves work against the breadth and depth of vision necessary to such a reconstruction. In terms of human origins and development, the array of splintered fields and sub-fields- anthropology, archaeology, paleontology, ethnology, paleobotany, ethnoanthropology, etc., etc. - mirrors the narrowing, crippling effect that civilization has embodied from its very beginning.

Nonetheless, the literature can provide highly useful assistance, if approached with an appropriate method and awareness and the desire to proceed past its limitations. In fact, the weakness of more or less orthodox modes of thinking can and does yield to the demands of an increasingly dissatisfied society. Unhappiness with contemporary life becomes distrust with the official lies that are told to legitimate that life, and a truer picture of human development emerges. Renunciation and subjugation in modern life have long been explained as necessary concomitants of "human nature." After all, our pre-civilized existence of deprivation, brutality, and ignorance made authority a benevolent gift that rescued us from savagery. "Cave man" and 'Neanderthal' are still invoked to remind us where we would be without religion, government, and toil.

This ideological view of our past has been radically overturned in recent decades, through the work of academics like Richard Lee and Marshall Sahlins. A nearly complete reversal in anthropological orthodoxy has come about, with important implications. Now we can see that life before domestication/agriculture was in fact largely one of leisure, intimacy with nature, sensual wisdom, sexual equality, and health. This was our human nature, for a couple of million years, prior to enslavement by priests, kings, and bosses.

And lately another stunning revelation has appeared, a related one that deepens the first and may be telling us something equally important about who we were and what we might again become. The main line of attack against new descriptions of gatherer-hunter life has been, though often indirect or not explicitly stated, to characterize that life, condescendingly, as the most an evolving species could achieve at an early stage. Thus, the argument allows that there was a long period of apparent grace and pacific existence, but says that humans simply didn't have the mental capacity to leave simple ways behind in favor of complex social and technological achievement.

In another fundamental blow to civilization, we now learn that not only was human life once, and for so long, a state that did not know alienation or domination, but as the investigations since the '80s by archaeologists John Fowlett, Thomas Wynn, and others have shown, those humans

possessed an intelligence at least equal to our own. At a stroke, as it were, the 'ignorance' thesis is disposed of, and we contemplate where we came from in a new light.

To put the issue of mental capacity in context, it is useful to review the various (and again, ideologically loaded) interpretations of human origins and development. Robert Ardrey (1961, 1976) served up a bloodthirsty, macho version of prehistory, as have to slightly lesser degrees, Desmond Morris and Lionel Tiger. Similarly, Freud and Konrad Lorenz wrote of the innate depravity of the species, thereby providing their contributions to hierarchy and power in the present.

Fortunately, a far more plausible outlook has emerged, one that corresponds to the overall version of Paleolithic life in general. Food sharing has for some time been considered an integral part of earliest human society (e.g. Washburn and DeVore, 1961). Jane Goodall (1971) and Richard Leakey (1978), among others, have concluded that it was the key element in establishing our uniquely Homo development at least as early as 2 million years ago. This emphasis, carried forward since the early '70s by Linton, Zihlman, Tanner, and Isaac, has become ascendant. One of the telling arguments in favor of the cooperation thesis, as against that of generalized violence and male domination, involves a diminishing, during early evolution, of the difference in size and strength between males and females. Sexual dimorphism, as it is called, was originally very pronounced, including such features as prominent canines or "fighting teeth" in males and much smaller canines for the female. The disappearance of large male canines strongly suggests that the female of the species exercised a selection for sociable, sharing males. Most apes today have significantly longer and larger canines, male to female, in the absence of this female choice capacity (Zihlman 1981, Tanner 1981).

Division of labor between the sexes is another key area in human beginnings, a condition once simply taken for granted and expressed by the term hunter-gatherer. Now it is widely accepted that gathering of plant foods, once thought to be the exclusive domain of women and of secondary importance to hunting by males, constituted the main food source (Johansen and Shreeve 1989). Since females were not significantly dependent on males for food (Hamilton 1984), it seems likely that rather than division of labor, flexibility and joint activity would have been central (Bender 1989). As Zihlman (1981) points out, an overall behavioral flexibility may have been the primary ingredient in early human existence. Joan Gero (1991) has demonstrated that stone tools were as likely to have been made by women as by men, and indeed Poirier (1987) reminds us that there is "no archaeological evidence supporting the contention that early humans exhibited a sexual division of labor." It is unlikely that food collecting involved much, if any division of labor (Slocum 1975) and probably that sexual specialization came quite late in human evolution (Zihlman 1981, Crader and Isaac 1981).

So if the adaptation that began our species centered on gathering, when did hunting come in? Binford (1984) has argued that there is no indication of use of animal products (i.e. evidence of butchery practices) until the appearance, relatively quite recent, of anatomically modern humans. Electron microscope studies of fossil teeth found in East Africa (Walker 1984) suggest a diet composed primarily of fruit, while a similar examination of stone tools from a 1.5 million-year-old site at Koobi Fora in Kenya (Keeley and Toth 1981) shows that they were used on plant

materials. The small amount of meat in the early Paleolithic diet was probably scavenged, rather than hunted (Ehrenberg 1989b).

The 'natural' condition of the species was evidently a diet made up largely of vegetables rich in fiber, as opposed to the modern high fat and animal protein diet with its attendant chronic disorders (Mendeloff 1977). Though our early forbears employed their "detailed knowledge of the environment and cognitive mapping" (Zihlman 1981) in the service of a plant-gathering subsistence, the archaeological evidence for hunting appears to slowly increase with time (Hodder 1991).

Much evidence, however, has overturned assumptions as to widespread prehistoric hunting. Collections of bones seen earlier as evidence of large kills of mammals, for example, have turned out to be, upon closer examination, the results of movement by flowing water or caches by animals. Lewis Binford's "Were There Elephant Hunters at Tooralba?" (1989) is a good instance of such a closer look, in which he doubts there was significant hunting until 200,000 years ago or sooner. Adrienne Zihlman (1981) has concluded that "hunting arose relatively late in evolution," and "may not extend beyond the last one hundred thousand years." And there are many (e.g. Straus 1986, Trinkhaus 1986) who do not see evidence for serious hunting of large mammals until even later, viz. the later Upper Paleolithic, just before the emergence of agriculture.

The oldest known surviving artifacts are stone tools from Hadar in eastern Africa. With more refined dating methods, they may prove to be 3.1 million years old (Klein 1989). Perhaps the main reason these may be classified as representing human effort is that they involve the crafting of one tool by using another, a uniquely human attribute so far as we know. *Homo habilis*, or "handy man," designates what has been thought of as the first known human species, its name reflecting association with the earliest stone tools (Coppens 1989). Basic wooden and bone implements, though more perishable and thus scantily represented in the archaeological record, were also used by *Homo habilis* as part of a "remarkably simple and effective" adaptation in Africa and Asia (Fagan 1990). Our ancestors at this stage had smaller brains and bodies than we do, but Poirier (1987) notes that "their postcranial anatomy was rather like modern humans," and Holloway (1972, 1974) allows that his studies of cranial endocasts from this period indicate a basically modern brain organization. Similarly, tools older than 2 million years have been found to exhibit a consistent right-handed orientation in the ways stone has been flaked off in their formation. Right-handedness as a tendency is correlated in moderns with such distinctly human features as pronounced lateralization of the brain and marked functional separation of the cerebral hemispheres (Holloway 1981a). Klein (1989) concludes that "basic human cognitive and communicational abilities are almost certainly implied."

*Homo erectus* is the other main predecessor to *Homo sapiens*, according to longstanding usage, appearing about 1.75 million years ago as humans moved out of forests into drier, more open African grasslands. Although brain size alone does not necessarily correlate with mental capacity, the cranial capacity of *Homo erectus* overlaps with that of moderns such that this species "must have been capable of many of the same behaviors" (Ciochon, Olsen and Tames 1990). As Johanson and Edey (1981) put it, "If the largest-brained *erectus* were to be rated against the smallest-brained *sapiens* - all their other characteristics ignored - their species names

would have to be reversed." Homo Neanderthalus, which immediately preceded us, possessed brains somewhat larger than our own (Delson 1985, Holloway 1985, Donald 1991). Though of course the much-maligned Neanderthal has been pictured as a primitive, brutish creature - in keeping with the prevailing Hobbesian ideology - despite manifest intelligence as well as enormous physical strength (Shreeve 1991).

Recently, however, the whole species framework has become a doubtful proposition (Day 1987, Rightmire 1990). Attention has been drawn to the fact that fossil specimens from various Homo species "all show intermediate morphological traits," leading to suspicion of an arbitrary division of humanity into separate taxa (Gingerich 1979, Tobias 1982). Fagan (1989), for example, tells us that "it is very hard to draw a clear taxonomic boundary between Homo erectus and archaic Homo sapiens on the one hand, and between archaic and anatomically modern Homo sapiens on the other." Likewise, Foley (1989): "the anatomical distinctions between Homo erectus and Homo sapiens are not great." Jelinek (1978) flatly declares that "there is no good reason, anatomical or cultural" for separating erectus and sapiens into two species, and has concluded (1980a) that people from at least the Middle Paleolithic onward "may be viewed as Homo sapiens" (as does Hublin 1986). The tremendous upward revision of early intelligence, discussed below, must be seen as connected to the present confusion over species, as the once-prevailing overall evolutionary model gives way.

But the controversy over species categorization is only interesting in the context of how our earliest forbears lived. Despite the minimal nature of what could be expected to survive so many millennia, we can glimpse some of the texture of that life, with its often elegant, pre-division of labor approaches. The "tool kit" from the Olduvai Gorge area made famous by the Leakeys contains "at least six clearly recognizable tool types" dating from about 1.7 million years ago (M. Leakey, 1978). There soon appeared the Acheulian handaxe, with its symmetrical beauty, in use for about a million years. Teardrop-shaped, and possessed of a remarkable balance, it exudes grace and utility from an era much prior to sym-bolization. Isaac (1986) noted that "the basic needs for sharp edges that humans have can be met from the varied range of forms generated from 'Oldowan' patterns of stone flaking," wondering how it came to be thought that "more complex equals better adapted." In this distant early time, according to cut-marks found on surviving bones, humans were using scavenged animal sinews and skins for such things as cord, bags, and rugs (Gowlett 1984). Further evidence suggests furs for cave wall coverings and seats, and seaweed beds for sleeping (Butzer 1970).

The use of fire goes back almost 2 million years (Kempe 1988) and might have appeared even earlier but for the tropical conditions of humanity's original African homeland, as Poirier (1987) implies. Perfected fire-making included the firing of caves to eliminate insects and heated pebble floors (Perles 1975, Lumley 1976), amenities that show up very early in the Paleolithic.

As John Gowlett (1986) notes, there are still some archaeologists who consider anything earlier than Homo sapiens, a mere 30,000 years ago, as greatly more primitive than we "fully human" types. But along with the documentation, referred to above, of fundamentally 'modern' brain anatomy even in early humans, this minority must now contend with recent work depicting complete human intelligence as present virtually with the birth of the Homo species. Thomas



Wynn (1985) judged manufacture of the Acheulian handaxe to have required "a stage of intelligence that is typical of fully modern adults." Gowlett, like Wynn, examines the required "operational thinking" involved in the right hammer, the right force and the right striking angle, in an ordered sequence and with flexibility needed for modifying the procedure. He contends that manipulation, concentration, visualization of form in three dimensions, and planning were needed, and that these requirements "were the common property of early human beings as much as two million years ago, and this," he adds, "is hard knowledge, not speculation."

During the vast time-span of the Paleolithic, there were remarkably few changes in technology (Rolland 1990). Innovation, "over 2 1/2 million years measured in stone tool development was practically nil," according to Gerhard Kraus (1990). Seen in the light of what we now know of prehistoric intelligence, such 'stagnation' is especially vexing to many social scientists. "It is difficult to comprehend such slow development," in the judgment of Wymer (1989). It strikes me as very plausible that intelligence, informed by the success and satisfaction of a gatherer-hunter existence, is the very reason for the pronounced absence of 'progress'. Division of labor, domestication, symbolic culture--these were evidently refused until very recently.

Contemporary thought, in its postmodern incarnation, would like to rule out the reality of a divide between nature and culture; given the abilities present among people before civilization, however, it may be more accurate to say that basically, they long chose nature over culture. It is also popular to see almost every human act or object as symbolic (e.g. Botscharow 1989), a position which is, generally speaking, part of the denial of a nature versus culture distinction. But it is culture as the manipulation of basic symbolic forms that is involved here. It also seems clear that reified time, language (written, certainly, and probably spoken language for all or most of this period), number, and art had no place, despite an intelligence fully capable of them.

I would like to interject, in passing, my agreement with Goldschmidt (1990) that "the hidden dimension in the construction of the symbolic world is time." And as Norman O. Brown put it, "life not repressed is not in historical time," which I take as a reminder that time as a materiality is not inherent in reality, but a cultural imposition, perhaps the first cultural imposition, on it. As this elemental dimension of symbolic culture progresses, so does, by equal steps, alienation from the natural.

Cohen (1974) has discussed symbols as "essential for the development and maintenance of social order." Which implies--as does, more forcefully, a great deal of positive evidence--that before the emergence of symbols there was no condition of dis-order requiring them. In a similar vein, Levi-Strauss (1953) pointed out that "mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution." So whence the absence of order, the conflicts or "oppositions?" The literature on the Paleolithic contains almost nothing that deals with this essential question, among thousands of monographs on specific features. A reasonable hypothesis, in my opinion, is that division of labor, unnoticed because of its glacially slow pace, and not sufficiently understood because of its newness, began to cause small fissures in the human community and unhealthy practices vis-a-vis nature. In the later Upper Paleolithic, "15,000 years ago, we begin to observe specialized collection of plants in the Middle East, and specialized hunting," observed Gowlett (1984). The sudden appearance of symbolic activities

(e.g. ritual and art) in the Upper Paleolithic has definitely seemed to archaeologists one of prehistory's "big surprises" (Binford 1972b), given the absence of such behaviors in the Middle Paleolithic (Foster 1990, Kozłowski 1990). But signs of division of labor and specialization were making their presence felt as a breakdown of wholeness and natural order, a lack that needed redressing. What is surprising is that this transition to civilization can still be seen as benign. Foster (1990) seems to celebrate it by concluding that the "symbolic mode...has proved extraordinarily adaptive, else why has Homo sapiens become material master of the world?" He is certainly correct, as he is to recognize "the manipulation of symbols [to be] the very stuff of culture," but he appears oblivious to the fact that this successful adaptation has brought alienation and destruction of nature along to their present horrifying prominence.

It is reasonable to assume that the symbolic world originated in the formulation of language, which somehow appeared from a "matrix of extensive nonverbal communication" (Tanner and Zihlman 1976) and face-to-face contact. There is no agreement as to when language began, but no evidence exists of speech before the cultural 'explosion' of the later Upper Paleolithic (Dibble 1984, 1989). It seems to have acted as an "inhibiting agent," a way of bringing life under "greater control" (Mumford 1972), stemming the flood of images and sensations to which the pre-modern individual was open. In this sense it would have likely marked an early turning away from a life of openness and communion with nature, toward one more oriented to the overlordship and domestication that followed symbolic culture's inauguration. It is probably a mistake, by the way, to assume that thought is advanced (if there were such a thing as 'neutral' thought, whose advance could be universally appreciated) because we actually think in language; there is no conclusive evidence that we must do so (Allport 1983). There are many cases (Lecours and Joannette 1980, Levine et al. 1982), involving stroke and like impairments, of patients who have lost speech, including the ability to talk silently to themselves, who were fully capable of coherent thought of all kinds. These data strongly suggest that "human intellectual skill is uniquely powerful, even in the absence of language" (Donald 1991).

In terms of symbolization in action, Goldschmidt (1990) seems correct in judging that "the Upper Paleolithic invention of ritual may well have been the keystone in the structure of culture that gave it its great impetus for expansion." Ritual has played a number of pivotal roles in what Hodder (1990) termed "the relentless unfolding of symbolic and social structures" accompanying the arrival of cultural mediation. It was as a means of achieving and consolidating social cohesion that ritual was essential (Johnson 1982, Conkey 1985); totemic rituals, for example, reinforce clan unity.

The start of an appreciation of domestication, or taming of nature, is seen in a cultural ordering of the wild, through ritual. Evidently, the female as a cultural category, viz. seen as wild or dangerous, dates from this period. The ritual "Venus" figurines appear as of 25,000 years ago, and seem to be an example of earliest symbolic likeness of women for the purpose of representation and control (Hodder 1990). Even more concretely, subjugation of the wild occurs at this time in the first systematic hunting of large mammals; ritual was an integral part of this activity (Hammond 1974, Frison 1986).

Ritual, as shamanic practice, may also be considered as a regression from that state in which all

shared a consciousness we would now classify as extrasensory (Leonard 1972). When specialists alone claim access to such perceptual heights as may have once been communal, further backward moves in division of labor are facilitated or enhanced. The way back to bliss through ritual is a virtually universal mythic theme, promising the dissolution of measurable time, among other joys. This theme of ritual points to an absence that it falsely claims to fill, as does symbolic culture in general.

Ritual as a means of organizing emotions, a method of cultural direction and restraint, introduces art, a facet of ritual expressiveness (Bender 1989). "There can be little doubt," to Gans (1985), "that the various forms of secular art derive originally from ritual." We can detect the beginning of an unease, a feeling that an earlier, direct authenticity is departing. La Barre (1972), I believe, is correct in judging that "art and religion alike arise from unsatisfied desire." At first, more abstractly as language, then more purposively as ritual and art, culture steps in to deal artificially with spiritual and social anxiety.

Ritual and magic must have dominated early (Upper Paleolithic) art and were probably essential, along with an increasing division of labor, for the coordination and direction of community (Wymer 1981). Similarly, Pfeiffer (1982) has depicted the famous Upper Paleolithic European cave paintings as the original form of initiating youth into now complex social systems; as necessary for order and discipline (see also Gamble 1982, Jochim 1983). And art may have contributed to the control of nature, as part of development of the earliest territorialism, for example (Straus 1990).

The emergence of symbolic culture, with its inherent will to manipulate and control, soon opened the door to domestication of nature. After two million years of human life within the bounds of nature, in balance with other wild species, agriculture changed our lifestyle, our way of adapting, in an unprecedented way. Never before has such a radical change occurred in a species so utterly and so swiftly (Pfeiffer 1977). Self-domestication through language, ritual, and art inspired the taming of plants and animals that followed. Appearing only 10,000 years ago, farming quickly triumphed; for control, by its very nature, invites intensification. Once the will to production broke through, it became more productive the more efficiently it was exercised, and hence more ascendant and adaptive.

Agriculture enables greatly increased division of labor, establishes the material foundations of social hierarchy, and initiates environmental destruction. Priests, kings, drudgery, sexual inequality, warfare are a few of its fairly immediate specific consequences (Ehrenberg 1986b, Wymer 1981, Festinger 1983). Whereas Paleolithic peoples enjoyed a highly varied diet, using several thousand species of plants for food, with farming these sources were vastly reduced (White 1959, Gouldie 1986).

Given the intelligence and the very great practical knowledge of Stone Age humanity, the question has often been asked, "Why didn't agriculture begin, at say, 1,000,000 B.C. rather than about 8,000 B.C.?" I have provided a brief answer in terms of slowly accelerating alienation in the form of division of labor and symbolization, but given how negative the results were, it is still a bewildering phenomenon. Thus, as Binford (1968) put it, "The question to be asked is not

why agriculture...was not developed everywhere, but why it was developed at all." The end of gatherer-hunter life brought a decline in size, stature, and skeletal robusticity (Cohen and Armelagos 1981, Harris and Ross 1981), and introduced tooth decay, nutritional deficiencies, and most infectious diseases (Larsen 1982, Buikstra 1976a, Cohen 1981). "Taken as a whole...an overall decline in the quality--and probably the length--of human life," concluded Cohen and Armelagos (1981).

Another outcome was the invention of number, unnecessary before the ownership of crops, animals, and land that is one of agriculture's hallmarks. The development of number further impelled the urge to treat nature as something to be dominated. Writing was also required by domestication, for the earliest business transactions and political administration (Larsen 1988). Levi-Strauss has argued persuasively that the primary function of written communication was to facilitate exploitation and subjugation (1955); cities and empires, for example, would be impossible without it. Here we see clearly the joining of the logic of symbolization and the growth of capital.

Conformity, repetition, and regularity were the keys to civilization upon its triumph, replacing the spontaneity, enchantment, and discovery of the pre-agricultural human state that survived so very long. Clark (1979) cites a gatherer-hunter "amplitude of leisure," deciding "it was this and the pleasurable way of life that went with it, rather than penury and a day-long grind, that explains why social life remained so static." One of the most enduring and widespread myths is that there was once a Golden Age, characterized by peace and innocence, and that something happened to destroy this idyll and consign us to misery and suffering. Eden, or whatever name it goes by, was the home of our primeval forager ancestors, and expresses the yearning of disillusioned tillers of the soil for a lost life of freedom and relative ease.

The once rich environs people inhabited prior to domestication and agriculture are now virtually nonexistent. For the few remaining foragers there exist only the most marginal lands, those isolated places as yet unwanted by agriculture. And surviving gatherer-hunters, who have somehow managed to evade civilization's tremendous pressures to turn them into slaves (i.e. farmers, political subjects, wage laborers), have all been influenced by contact with outside peoples (Lee 1976, Mithen 1990).

Duffy (1984) points out that the present day gatherer-hunters he studied, the Mbuti Pygmies of central Africa, have been acculturated by surrounding villager-agriculturalists for hundreds of years, and to some extent, by generations of contact with government authorities and missionaries. And yet it seems that an impulse toward authentic life can survive down through the ages: "Try to imagine," he counsels, "a way of life where land, shelter, and food are free, and where there are no leaders, bosses, politics, organized crime, taxes, or laws. Add to this the benefits of being part of a society where everything is shared, where there are no rich people and no poor people, and where happiness does not mean the accumulation of material possessions." The Mbuti have never domesticated animals or planted crops.

Among the members of non-agriculturalist bands resides a highly sane combination of little work and material abundance. Bodley (1976) discovered that the San (aka Bushmen) of the harsh

Kalahari Desert of southern Africa work fewer hours, and fewer of their number work, than do the neighboring cultivators. In times of drought, moreover, it has been the San to whom the farmers have turned for their survival (Lee 1968). They spend "strikingly little time laboring and much time at rest and leisure," according to Tanaka (1980), while others (e.g. Marshall 1976, Guenther 1976) have commented on San vitality and freedom compared with sedentary farmers, their relatively secure and easygoing life.

Flood (1983) noted that to Australian aborigines "the labour involved in tilling and planting outweighed the possible advantages." Speaking more generally, Tanaka (1976) has pointed to the abundant and stable plant foods in the society of early humanity, just as "they exist in every modern gatherer society." Likewise, Festinger (1983) referred to Paleolithic access to "considerable food without a great deal of effort," adding that "contemporary groups that still live on hunting and gathering do very well, even though they have been pushed into very marginal habitats."

As Hole and Flannery (1963) summarized: "No group on earth has more leisure time than hunters and gatherers, who spend it primarily on games, conversation and relaxing." They have much more free time, adds Binford (1968), "than do modern industrial or farm workers, or even professors of archaeology."

The non-domesticated know that, as Vaneigem (1975) put it, only the present can be total. This by itself means that they live life with incomparably greater immediacy, density and passion than we do. It has been said that some revolutionary days are worth centuries; until then "We look before and after," as Shelley wrote, "And sigh for what is not...."

The Mbuti believe (Turnbull 1976) that "by a correct fulfillment of the present, the past and the future will take care of themselves." Primitive peoples do not live through memories, and generally have no interest in birthdays or measuring their ages (Cipriani 1966). As for the future, they have little desire to control what does not yet exist, just as they have little desire to control nature. Their moment-by-moment joining with the flux and flow of the natural world does not preclude an awareness of the seasons, but this does not constitute an alienated time consciousness that robs them of the present.

Though contemporary gatherer-hunters eat more meat than their pre-historic forbears, vegetable foods still constitute the mainstay of their diet in tropical and subtropical regions (Lee 1968a, Yellen and Lee 1976). Both the Kalahari San and the Hazda of East Africa, where game is more abundant than in the Kalahari, rely on gathering for 80 percent of their sustenance (Tanaka 1980). The !Kung branch of the San search for more than a hundred different kinds of plants (Thomas 1968) and exhibit no nutritional deficiency (Truswell and Hansen 1976). This is similar to the healthful, varied diet of Australian foragers (Fisher 1982, Flood 1983). The overall diet of gatherers is better than that of cultivators, starvation is very rare, and their health status generally superior, with much less chronic disease (Lee and Devore 1968a, Ackerman 1990).

Lauren van der Post (1958) expressed wonder at the exuberant San laugh, which rises "sheer from the stomach, a laugh you never hear among civilized people." He found this emblematic of

a great vigor and clarity of senses that yet manages to withstand and elude the onslaught of civilization. Truswell and Hansen (1976) may have encountered it in the person of a San who had survived an unarmed fight with a leopard; although injured, he had killed the animal with his bare hands.

The Andaman Islanders, west of Thailand, have no leaders, no idea of symbolic representation, and no domesticated animals. There is also an absence of aggression, violence, and disease; wounds heal surprisingly quickly, and their sight and hearing are particularly acute. They are said to have declined since European intrusion in the mid-19th century, but exhibit other such remarkable physical traits as a natural immunity to malaria, skin with sufficient elasticity to rule out post-childbirth stretch marks and the wrinkling we associate with ageing, and an 'unbelievable' strength of teeth: Cipriani (1966) reported seeing children of 10 to 15 years crush nails with them. He also testified to the Andamese practice of collecting honey with no protective clothing at all; "yet they are never stung, and watching them one felt in the presence of some age-old mystery, lost by the civilized world."

DeVries (1952) has cited a wide range of contrasts by which the superior health of gatherer-hunters can be established, including an absence of degenerative diseases and mental disabilities, and childbirth without difficulty or pain. He also points out that this begins to erode from the moment of contact with civilization.

Relatedly, there is a great deal of evidence not only for physical and emotional vigor among primitives but also concerning their heightened sensory abilities. Darwin described people at the southernmost tip of South America who went about almost naked in frigid conditions, while Peasley (1983) observed Aborigines who were renowned for their ability to live through bitterly cold desert nights "without any form of clothing." Levi-Strauss (1979) was astounded to learn of a particular [South American] tribe which was able to "see the planet Venus in full daylight," a feat comparable to that of the North African Dogon who consider Sirius B the most important star; somehow aware, without instruments, of a star that can only be found with the most powerful of telescopes (Temple 1976). In this vein, Boyden (1970) recounted the Bushman ability to see four of the moons of Jupiter with the naked eye.

In *The Harmless People* (1959), Marshall told how one Bushman walked unerringly to a spot in a vast plain, "with no bush or tree to mark place," and pointed out a blade of grass with an almost invisible filament of vine around it. He had encountered it months before in the rainy season when it was green. Now, in parched weather, he dug there to expose a succulent root and quenched his thirst. Also in the Kalahari Desert, van der Post (1958) meditated upon San/Bushman communion with nature, a level of experience that "could almost be called mystical. For instance, they seemed to know what it actually felt like to be an elephant, a lion, an antelope, a steenbuck, a lizard, a striped mouse, mantis, baobab tree, yellow-crested cobra or starry-eyed amaryllis, to mention only a few of the brilliant multitudes through which they moved." It seems almost pedestrian to add that gatherer-hunters have often been remarked to possess tracking skills that virtually defy rational explanation (e.g. Lee 1979).

Rohrlich-Leavitt (1976) noted, "The data show that gatherer-hunters are generally nonterritorial

and bilocal; reject group aggression and competition; share their resources freely; value egalitarianism and personal autonomy in the context of group cooperation; and are indulgent and loving with children." Dozens of studies stress communal sharing and egalitarianism as perhaps the defining traits of such groups (e.g. Marshall 1961 and 1976, Sahlins 1968, Pilbeam 1972, Damas 1972, Diamond 1974, Lafitau 1974, Tanaka 1976 and 1980, Wiessner 1977, Morris 1982, Riches 1982, Smith 1988, Mithen 1990). Lee (1982) referred to the "universality among foragers" of sharing, while Marshall's classic 1961 work spoke of the "ethic of generosity and humility" informing a "strongly egalitarian" gatherer-hunter orientation. Tanaka provides a typical example: "The most admired character trait is generosity, and the most despised and disliked are stinginess and selfishness."

Baer (1986) listed "egalitarianism, democracy, personalism, individuation, nurturance" as key virtues of the non-civilized, and Lee (1988) cited "an absolute aversion to rank distinctions" among "simple foraging peoples around the world." Leacock and Lee (1982) specified that "any assumption of authority" within the group "leads to ridicule or anger among the !Kung, as has been recorded for the Mbuti (Turnbull 1962), the Hazda (Woodburn 1980) and the Montagnais-Naskapi (Thwaites 1906), among others."

"Not even the father of an extended family can tell his sons and daughters what to do. Most people appear to operate on their own internal schedules," reported Lee (1972) of the !Kung of Botswana. Ingold (1987) judged that "in most hunting and gathering societies, a supreme value is placed upon the principle of individual autonomy," similar to Wilson's finding (1988) of "an ethic of independence" that is "common to the focused open societies." The esteemed field anthropologist Radin (1953) went so far as to say: "Free scope is allowed for every conceivable kind of personality outlet or expression in primitive society. No moral judgment is passed on any aspect of human personality as such."

Turnbull (1976) looked on the structure of Mbuti social life as "an apparent vacuum, a lack of internal system that is almost anarchical." According to Duffy (1984), "the Mbuti are naturally acephalous - they do not have leaders or rulers, and decisions concerning the band are made by consensus." There is an enormous qualitative difference between foragers and farmers in this regard, as in so many others. For instance, agricultural Bantu tribes (e.g. the Saga) surround the San, and are organized by kingship, hierarchy and work; the San exhibit egalitarianism, autonomy, and sharing. Domestication is the principle which accounts for this drastic distinction.

Domination within a society is not unrelated to domination of nature. In gatherer-hunter societies, on the other hand, no strict hierarchy exists between the human and the non-human species (Noske 1989), and relations among foragers are likewise non-hierarchical. The non-domesticated typically view the animals they hunt as equals; this essentially egalitarian relationship is ended by the advent of domestication.

When progressive estrangement from nature became outright social control (agriculture), more than just social attitudes changed. Descriptions by sailors and explorers who arrived in "newly discovered" regions tell how wild mammals and birds originally showed no fear at all of the human invaders (Brock 1981). A few contemporary gatherers practiced no hunting before outside

contact, but while the majority certainly do hunt, "it is not normally an aggressive act" (Rohrlich-Leavitt 1976). Turnbull (1965) observed Mbuti hunting as quite without any aggressive spirit, even carried out with a sort of regret. Hewitt (1986) reported a sympathy bond between hunter and hunted among the Xan Bushmen he encountered in the 19th century.

As regards violence among gatherer-hunters, Lee (1988) found that "the !Kung hate fighting, and think anybody who fought would be stupid." The Mbuti, by Duffy's account (1984), "look on any form of violence between one person and another with great abhorrence and distaste, and never represent it in their dancing or playacting." Homicide and suicide, concluded Bodley (1976), are both "decidedly uncommon" among undisturbed gatherer-hunters. The 'warlike' nature of Native American peoples was often fabricated to add legitimacy to European aims of conquest (Kroeber 1961); the foraging Comanche maintained their non-violent ways for centuries before the European invasion, becoming violent only upon contact with marauding civilization (Fried 1973).

The development of symbolic culture, which rapidly led to agriculture, is linked through ritual to alienated social life among extant foraging groups. Bloch (1977) found a correlation between levels of ritual and hierarchy. Put negatively, Woodburn (1968) could see the connection between an absence of ritual and the absence of specialized roles and hierarchy among the Hazda of Tanzania. Turner's study of the west African Ndembu (1957) revealed a profusion of ritual structures and ceremonies intended to redress the conflicts arising from the breakdown of an earlier, more seamless society. These ceremonies and structures function in a politically integrative way. Ritual is a repetitive activity for which outcomes and responses are essentially assured by social contract; it conveys the message that symbolic practice, via group membership and social rules, provides control (Cohen 1985). Ritual fosters the concept of control or domination, and has been seen to tend toward leadership roles (Hitchcock 1982) and centralized political structures (Lourandos 1985). A monopoly of ceremonial institutions clearly extends the concept of authority (Bender 1978), and may itself be the original formal authority.

Among agricultural tribes of New Guinea, leadership and the inequality it implies are based upon participation in hierarchies of ritual initiation or upon shamanistic spirit-mediumship (Kelly 1977, Modjeska 1982). In the role of shamans we see a concrete practice of ritual as it contributes to domination in human society.

Radin (1937) discussed "the same marked tendency" among Asian and North American tribal peoples for shamans or medicine men "to organize and develop the theory that they alone are in communication with the supernatural." This exclusive access seems to empower them at the expense of the rest; Lommel (1967) saw "an increase in the shaman's psychic potency...counterbalanced by a weakening of potency in other members of the group." This practice has fairly obvious implications for power relationships in other areas of life, and contrasts with earlier periods devoid of religious leadership.

The Batuque of Brazil are host to shamans who each claim control over certain spirits and attempt to sell supernatural services to clients, rather like priests of competing sects (S. Leacock 1988). Specialists of this type in "magically controlling nature...would naturally come to control



men, too," in the opinion of Muller (1961). In fact, the shaman is often the most powerful individual in pre-agricultural societies (e.g. Sheehan 1985); he is in a position to institute change. Johannessen (1987) offers the thesis that resistance to the innovation of planting was overcome by the influence of shamans, among the Indians of the American Southwest, for instance. Similarly, Marquardt (1985) has suggested that ritual authority structures have played an important role in the initiation and organization of production in North America. Another student of American groups (Ingold 1987) saw an important connection between shamans' role in mastering wildness in nature and an emerging subordination of women.

Berndt (1974a) has discussed the importance among Aborigines of ritual sexual division of labor in the development of negative sex roles, while Randolph (1988) comes straight to the point: "Ritual activity is needed to create 'proper' men and women." There is "no reason in nature" for gender divisions, argues Bender (1989). "They have to be created by proscription and taboo, they have to be 'naturalized' through ideology and ritual."

But gatherer-hunter societies, by their very nature, deny ritual its potential to domesticate women. The structure (non-structure?) of egalitarian bands, even those most oriented toward hunting, includes a guarantee of autonomy to both sexes. This guarantee is the fact that the materials of subsistence are equally available to women and men and that, further, the success of the band is dependent on cooperation based on that autonomy (Leacock 1978, Friedl 1975). The spheres of the sexes are often somewhat separate, but inasmuch as the contribution of women is generally at least equal to that of men, social equality of the sexes is "a key feature of forager societies" (Ehrenberg 1989b). Many anthropologists, in fact, have found the status of women in forager groups to be higher than in any other type of society (e.g. Fluer-Lobban 1979, Rohrlach-Leavitt, Sykes and Weatherford 1975, Leacock 1978).

In all major decisions, observed Turnbull (1970) of the Mbuti, "men and women have equal say, hunting and gathering being equally important." He made it clear (1981) that there is sexual differentiation - probably a good deal more than was the case with their distant forbears - "but without any sense of superordination or subordination." Men actually work more hours than women among the !Kung, according to Post and Taylor (1984).

It should be added, in terms of the division of labor common among contemporary gatherer-hunters, that this differentiation of roles is by no means universal. Nor was it when the Roman historian Tacitus wrote, of the Fenni of the Baltic region, that "the women support themselves by hunting, exactly like the men...and count their lot happier than that of others who groan over field labor." Or when Procopius found, in the 6th century A.D., that the Serithifinni of what is now Finland "neither till the land themselves, nor do their women work it for them, but the women regularly join the men in hunting."

The Tiwi women of Melville Island regularly hunt (Martin and Voorhies 1975) as do the Agta women in the Philippines (Estioko-- Griffen and Griffen 1981). In Mbuti society, "there is little specialization according to sex. Even the hunt is a joint effort," reports Turnbull (1962), and Cotlow (1971) testifies that "among the traditional Eskimos it is (or was) a cooperative enterprise for the whole family group."

Darwin (1871) found another aspect of sexual equality: "...in utterly barbarous tribes the women have more power in choosing, rejecting, and tempting their lovers, or of afterwards changing their husbands, than might have been expected." The !Kung Bushmen and Mbuti exemplify this female autonomy, as reported by Marshall (1959) and Thomas (1965); "Women apparently leave a man whenever they are unhappy with their marriage," concluded Begler (1978). Marshall (1970) also found that rape was extremely rare or absent among the !Kung.

An intriguing phenomenon concerning gatherer-hunter women is their ability to prevent pregnancy in the absence of any contraception (Silberbauer 1981). Many hypotheses have been put forth and debunked, e.g. conception somehow related to levels of body fat (Frisch 1974, Leibowitz 1986). What seems a very plausible explanation is based on the fact that undomesticated people are very much more in tune with their physical selves. Foraging women's senses and processes are not alienated from themselves or dulled; control over childbearing is probably less than mysterious to those whose bodies are not foreign objects to be acted upon.

The Pygmies of Zaire celebrate the first menstrual period of every girl with a great festival of gratitude and rejoicing (Turnbull 1962). The young woman feels pride and pleasure, and the entire band expresses its happiness. Among agricultural villagers, however, a menstruating woman is regarded as unclean and dangerous, to be quarantined by taboo (Duffy 1984). The relaxed, egalitarian relationship between San men and women, with its flexibility of roles and mutual respect impressed Draper (1971, 1972, 1975); a relationship, she made clear, that endures as long as they remain gatherer-hunters and no longer.

Duffy (1984) found that each child in an Mbuti camp calls every man father and every woman mother. Forager children receive far more care, time, and attention than do those in civilization's isolated nuclear families. Post and Taylor (1984) described the "almost permanent contact" with their mothers and other adults that Bushman children enjoy. !Kung infants studied by Ainsworth (1967) showed marked precocity of early cognitive and motor skills development. This was attributed both to the exercise and stimulation produced by unrestricted freedom of movement, and to the high degree of physical warmth and closeness between !Kung parents and children (see also Konner 1976).

Draper (1976) could see that "competitiveness in games is almost entirely lacking among the !Kung," as Shostack (1976) observed "!Kung boys and girls playing together and sharing most games." She also found that children are not prevented from experimental sex play, consonant with the freedom of older Mbuti youth to "indulge in premarital sex with enthusiasm and delight" (Turnbull 1981). The Zuni "have no sense of sin," Ruth Benedict (1946) wrote in a related vein. "Chastity as a way of life is regarded with great disfavor...Pleasant relations between the sexes are merely one aspect of pleasant relations with human beings...Sex is an incident in a happy life."

Coontz and Henderson (1986) point to a growing body of evidence in support of the proposition that relations between the sexes are most egalitarian in the simplest foraging societies. Women play an essential role in traditional agriculture, but receive no corresponding status for their contribution, unlike the case of gatherer-hunter society (Chevallard and Leconte 1986, Whyte

1978). As with plants and animals, so are women subject to domestication with the coming of agriculture. Culture, securing its foundations with the new order, requires the firm subjugation of instinct, freedom, and sexuality. All disorder must be banished, the elemental and spontaneous taken firmly in hand. Women's creativity and their very being as sexual persons are pressured to give way to the role, expressed in all peasant religions, of Great Mother, that is, fecund breeder of men and food.

The men of the South American Munduruc, a farming tribe, refer to plants and sex in the same phrase about subduing women: "We tame them with the banana" (Murphy and Murphy 1985). Simone de Beauvoir (1949) recognized in the equation of the plow and the phallus a symbol of male authority over women. Among the Amazonian Jivaro, another agricultural group, women are beasts of burden and the personal property of men (Harner 1972); the "abduction of adult women is a prominent part of much warfare" by these lowland South American tribes (Ferguson 1988). Brutalization and isolation of women seem to be functions of agricultural societies (Gregor 1988), and the female continues to perform most or even all of the work in such groups (Morgan 1985).

Head-hunting is practiced by the above-mentioned groups, as part of endemic warfare over coveted agricultural land (Lathrap 1970); head-hunting and near-constant warring is also witnessed among the farming tribes of Highlands New Guinea (Watson 1970). Lenski and Lenski's 1974 researches concluded that warfare is rare among foragers but becomes extremely common with agrarian societies. As Wilson (1988) put it succinctly, "Revenge, feuds, rioting, warfare and battle seem to emerge among, and to be typical of, domesticated peoples."

Tribal conflicts, Godelier (1977) argues, are "explainable primarily by reference to colonial domination" and should not be seen as having an origin "in the functioning of pre-colonial structures." Certainly contact with civilization can have an unsettling, degenerative effect, but Godelier's marxism (viz. unwillingness to question domestication/production), is, one suspects, relevant to such a judgment. Thus it could be said that the Copper Eskimos, who have a significant incidence of homicide within their group (Damas 1972), owe this violence to the impact of outside influences, but their reliance on domesticated dogs should also be noted.

Arens (1979) has asserted, paralleling Godelier to some extent, that cannibalism as a cultural phenomenon is a fiction, invented and promoted by agencies of outside conquest. But there is documentation of this practice (e.g. Poole 1983, Tuzin 1976) among, once again, peoples involved in domestication. The studies by Hogg (1966), for example, reveal its presence among certain African tribes, steeped in ritual and grounded in agriculture. Cannibalism is generally a form of cultural control of chaos, in which the victim represents animality, or all that should be tamed (Sanday 1986). Significantly, one of the important myths of Fiji Islanders, "How the Fijians first became cannibals," is literally a tale of planting (Sahlins 1983). Similarly, the highly domesticated and time-conscious Aztecs practiced human sacrifice as a gesture to tame unruly forces and uphold the social equilibrium of a very alienated society. As Norbeck (1961) pointed out, non-domesticated, "culturally impoverished" societies are devoid of cannibalism and human sacrifice.

As for one of the basic underpinnings of violence in more complex societies, Barnes (1970) found that "reports in the ethnographic literature of territorial struggles" between gatherer-hunters are "extremely rare." !Kung boundaries are vague and undefended (Lee 1979); Pandaram territories overlap, and individuals go where they please (Morris 1982); Hazda move freely from region to region (Woodburn 1968); boundaries and trespass have little or no meaning to the Mbuti (Turnbull 1966); and Australian Aborigines reject territorial or social demarcations (Gumpert 1981, Hamilton 1982). An ethic of generosity and hospitality takes the place of exclusivity (Steward 1968, Hiatt 1968).

Gatherer-hunter peoples have developed "no conception of private property," in the estimation of Kitwood (1984). As noted above in reference to sharing, and with Sansom's (1980) characterization of Aborigines as "people without property," foragers do not share civilization's obsession with externals.

"Mine and thine, the seeds of all mischief, have no place with them," wrote Pietro (1511) of the native North Americans encountered on the second voyage of Columbus. The Bushmen have "no sense of possession," according to Post (1958), and Lee (1972) saw them making "no sharp dichotomy between the resources of the natural environment and the social wealth." There is a line between nature and culture, again, and the non-civilized choose the former.

There are many gatherer-hunters who could carry all that they make use of in one hand, who die with pretty much what they had as they came into the world. Once humans shared everything; with agriculture, ownership becomes paramount and a species presumes to own the world. A deformation the imagination could scarcely equal.

Sahlins (1972) spoke of this eloquently: "The world's most primitive people have few possessions, but they are not poor. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all, it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization."

The "common tendency" of gatherer-hunters "to reject farming until it was absolutely thrust upon them" (Bodley 1976) bespeaks a nature/culture divide also present in the Mbuti recognition that if one of them becomes a villager he is no longer an Mbuti (Turnbull 1976). They know that forager band and agriculturalist village are opposed societies with opposed values.

At times, however, the crucial factor of domestication can be lost sight of. "The historic foraging populations of the Western Coast of North America have long been considered anomalous among foragers," declared Cohen (1981); as Kelly (1991) also put it, "tribes of the Northwest Coast break all the stereotypes of hunter-gatherers." These foragers, whose main sustenance is fishing, have exhibited such alienated features as chiefs, hierarchy, warfare and slavery. But almost always overlooked are their domesticated tobacco and domesticated dogs. Even this celebrated 'anomaly' contains features of domestication. Its practice, from ritual to production, with various accompanying forms of domination, seems to anchor and promote the facets of decline from an earlier state of grace.

Thomas (1981) provides another North American example, that of the Great Basin Shoshones and three of their component societies, the Kawich Mountain Shoshones, Reese River Shoshones, and Owens Valley Paiutes. The three groups showed distinctly different levels of agriculture, with increasing territoriality or ownership and hierarchy closely corresponding to higher degrees of domestication.

To `define' a disalienated world would be impossible and even undesirable, but I think we can and should try to reveal the unworld of today and how it got this way. We have taken a monstrously wrong turn with symbolic culture and division of labor, from a place of enchantment, understanding and wholeness to the absence we find at the heart of the doctrine of progress. Empty and emptying, the logic of domestication with its demand to control everything now shows us the ruin of the civilization that ruins the rest. Assuming the inferiority of nature enables the domination of cultural systems that soon will make the very earth uninhabitable.

Postmodernism says to us that a society without power relations can only be an abstraction (Foucault, 1982). This is a lie unless we accept the death of nature and renounce what once was and what we can find again. Turnbull spoke of the intimacy between Mbuti people and the forest, dancing almost as if making love to the forest. In the bosom of a life of equals that is no abstraction, that struggles to endure, they were "dancing with the forest, dancing with the moon."

## Chapter 2: The Mass Psychology Of Misery Part 1

Quite a while ago, just before the upheavals of the '60s-shifts that have not ceased, but have been forced in less direct, less public directions-Marcuse in his *One-Dimensional Man*, described a populace characterized by flattened personality, satisfied and content. With the pervasive anguish of today, who could be so described? Therein lies a deep, if inchoate critique.

Much theorizing has announced the erosion of individuality's last remnants; but if this were so, if society now consists of the thoroughly homogenized and domesticated, how can there remain the enduring tension which must account for such levels of pain and loss? More and more people I have known have cracked up. It's going on to a staggering degree, in a context of generalized, severe emotional disease-ease.

Marx predicted, erroneously, that a deepening material immiseration would lead to revolt and to capital's downfall. Might it not be that an increasing psychic suffering is itself leading to the reopening of revolt-indeed, that this may even be the last hope of resistance?

And yet it is obvious that "mere" suffering is no guarantee of anything. "Desire does not 'want' revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right," as Deleuze and Guattari pointed out, while further on in *Anti-Oedipus*, remembering fascism, noting that people have desired against their own interests, and that tolerance of humiliation and enslavement remains widespread.

We know that behind psychic repression and avoidance stands social repression, even as massive denial shows at least some signs of giving way to a necessary confrontation with reality in all of its dimensions. Awareness of the social must not mean ignoring the personal, for that would only repeat, in its own terms, the main error of psychology. If in the nightmare of today each of us has his or her fears and limitations, there is no liberating route that forgets the primacy of the whole, including how that whole exists in each of us.

Stress, loneliness, depression, boredom-the madness of everyday life. Ever-greater levels of sadness, implying a recognition, on the visceral level at least, that things could be different. How much joy is there left in the technological society, this field of alienation and anxiety? Mental health epidemiologists suspect that no more than twenty percent of us are free of psychopathological symptoms. Thus we act out a "pathology of normalcy" marked by the chronic psychic impoverishment of a qualitatively unhealthy society.

Arthur Barsky's *Worried Sick* (1988) diagnoses an American condition where, despite all the medical "advances," the population has never felt such a "constant need for medical care." The crisis of the family and of personal life in general sees to it that the pursuit of health, and emotional health in particular, has reached truly industrial proportions. A work-life increasingly toxic, in every sense of the word, joins with the disintegration of the family to fuel the soaring growth of the corporate industrial health machine. But for a public in its misery dramatically more interested in health care than ever before, the dominant model of medical care is clearly only part of the problem, not its solution. Thus Thomas Bittker writes of "The Industrialization of American Psychiatry" (*American Journal of Psychiatry*, February 1985) and Gina Kolata

discusses how much distrust of doctors exists, as medicine is seen as just another business (New York Times, February 20, 1990).

The mental disorder of going along with things as they are is now treated almost entirely by biochemicals, to reduce the individual's consciousness of socially induced anguish, Tranquilizers are now the world's most widely prescribed drugs, and anti-depressants set record sales as well. Temporary relief-despite side-effects and addictive properties-is easily obtained, while we are all ground down a little more. The burden of simply getting by is "Why All Those People Feel They Never Have Any Time," according to Trish Hall (New York Times, January 2, 1988), who concluded that 'everybody just seems to feel worn out' by it all.

An October '89 Gallup poll found that stress-related illness is becoming the leading hazard in the nation's workplaces, and a month later an almost five-fold increase in California stress-related disability claims was reported to have occurred between 1982 and 1986. More recent figures estimate that almost two-thirds of new cases in employee assistance programs represent psychiatric or stress symptoms. In his *Modern Madness* (1986), Douglas La Bier asked, "What is it about work today that can cause such harm?"

Part of the answer is found in a growing literature that reveals the Information Age "office of tomorrow" to be no better than the sweatshop of yesteryear. In fact, computerization introduces a neo-Taylorist monitoring of work that surpasses all earlier management control techniques. The "technological whip" now increasingly held over white-collar workers prompted Curt Supplee, in a January '90 Washington Post article, to judge, "We have seen the future, and it hurts." A few months earlier Sue Miller wrote in the Baltimore Evening Sun of another part of the job burnout picture, referring to a national clinical psychology study that determined that no less than a staggering 93 percent of American women "are caught up in a blues epidemic."

Meanwhile, the suicide and homicide rates are rising in the U.S. and eighty percent of the populace admit to having at least thought of suicide. Teenage suicide has risen enormously in the past three decades, and the number of teens locked up in mental wards has soared since 1970. So very many ways to gauge the pain: serious obesity among children has increased more than fifty percent in the last fifteen to twenty years; severe eating disorders (bulimia and anorexia) among college women are now relatively common; sexual dysfunction is widespread; the incidence of panic and anxiety attacks is rising to the point of possibly overtaking depression as our most general psychological malady; isolation and a sense of meaninglessness continue to make even absurd cults and IV evangelism seem attractive to many.

The litany of cultural symptomatics is virtually endless. Despite its generally escapist function, even much of contemporary film reflects the malaise; see Robert Phillip Kolker's *A Cinema of Loneliness*: Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman, for example. And many recent novels are even more unflinching in their depiction of the desolation and degradation of society, and the burnout of youth in particular, e.g. Bret Easton Ellis' *Less Than Zero*, Fred Pfail's *Goodman 2020*, and *The Knockout Artist* by Harry Crews, to mention just a few.

In this context of immiseration, what is happening to prevailing values and mores is of signal

interest in further situating our “mass psychology” and its significance. There are plenty of signs that the demand for “instant gratification” is more and more insistent, bringing with it outraged lamentations from both left and right and a further corrosion of the structure of repression.

Credit card fraud, chiefly the deliberate running up of bills, reached the billion-and-a-half-dollar level in 1988 as the personal bankruptcy solution to debt, which doubled between 1980 and 1990. Defaults on federal student loans more than quadrupled from 1983 to 1989.

In November ‘89, in a totally unprecedented action, the U.S. Navy was forced to suspend operations world-wide for 48 hours owing to a rash of accidents involving deaths and injuries over the preceding three weeks. A total safety review was involved in the moratorium, which renewed discussion of drug abuse, absenteeism, unqualified personnel, and other problems threatening the Navy’s very capacity to function.

Meanwhile, levels of employee theft reach ever higher levels. In 1989 the Dallas Police Department reported a 29 percent increase in retail shrinkage over the previous five years, and a national survey conducted by London House said 62 percent of fast-food employees admitted stealing from employers. In early 1990 the FBI disclosed that shoplifting was up 35 percent since 1984, cutting heavily into retail profits.

November 1988 broke a forty-year mark for low voter turnout, continuing a downward direction in electoral participation that has plagued presidential elections since 1960. Average college entrance exam (SAT) scores declined throughout the ‘70s and early ‘80s, then rebounded very slightly, and in 1988 continued to fall. At the beginning of the ‘80s Arthur Levin’s portrait of college students, *When Dreams and Heroes Died*, recounted “a generalized cynicism and lack of trust,” while at the end of the decade Robert Nisbet’s *The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in North America* decried the disastrous effects that the younger generation’s attitude of “hanging loose” was having on the system. George F. Will, for his part, reminded us all that social arrangements, including the authority of the government, rest “on a willingness of the public to believe in them,” and Harvard economist Harvey Liebenstein’s *Inside the Firm* echoed him in stressing that companies must depend on the kind of work their employees want to do.

The nation’s high schools now graduate barely seventy percent of students who enter as freshman, despite massive focus on the dropout rate problem. As Michael de Courcy Hinds put it (*New York Times*, February 17, 1990), “U.S. educators are trying almost anything to keep children in school,” while an even more fundamental phenomenon is the rising number of people of all ages unwilling to learn to read and write. David Harman (*Illiteracy: A National Dilemma*, 1987) gave voice to how baffling the situation is, asking why has the acquisition of such skills, “seemingly so simple, been so evasive?”

The answer may be that illiteracy, like schooling, is increasingly seen to be valued merely for its contribution to the workplace. The refusal of literacy is but another sign of a deep turn-off from the system, part of the spreading disaffection. In mid-1988 a Hooper survey indicated that work now ranks eighth out of ten on a scale of important satisfactions in life, and 1989 showed the lowest annual productivity growth since the 1981-83 recession. The drug “epidemic,” which cost



the government almost \$25 billion to combat in the '80s, threatens society most acutely at the level of the refusal of work and sacrifice. There is no "war on drugs" that can touch the situation while at the same time defending this landscape of pain and false values. The need for escape grows stronger and the sick social order feels consequent desertion, the steady corrosion of all that holds it up.

Unfortunately, the biggest "escape" of all is one that serves, in the main, to preserve the distorted present: what Sennett has called "the increasing importance of psychology in bourgeois life." This includes the extraordinary proliferation of new kinds of therapy since the '60s, and behind this phenomenon the rise of psychology as the predominant religion. In the Psychological Society the individual sees himself as a problem. This ideology constitutes a pre-eminent social imprisonment, because it denies the social; psychology refuses to consider that society as a whole shares fundamental responsibility for the conditions produced in every human being.

The ramifications of this ideology can be seen on all sides. For instance, the advice to those besieged by work stress to "take a deep breath, laugh, walk it off," etc. Or the moralizing exhortations to recycle, as if a personal ethics of consumption is a real answer to the global eco-crisis caused by industrial production. Or the 1990 California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem as a solution to the major social breakdown in that state.

At the very center of contemporary life, this outlook legitimates alienation, loneliness, despair, and anxiety, because it cannot see the context for our malaise. It privatizes distress, and suggests that only non-social responses are attainable. This "bottomless fraud of mere inwardness," in Adorno's words, pervades every aspect of American life, mystifying experience and thus perpetuating oppression.

The widespread allegiance to a therapeutic world view constitutes a culture tyrannized by the therapeutic in which, in the name of mental health, we are getting mental disease. With the expanding influence of behavioral experts, powerlessness and estrangement expand as well; modern life must be interpreted for us by the new expertise and its popularizers.

Gail Sheehy's *Passages* (1977), for example, considers life developments without reference to any social or historical context, thereby vitiating her concern for the "free and autonomous self." Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Managed Heart* (1983) focuses on the "commercialization of human feelings" in an increasingly service-sector economy, and manages to avoid any questioning of the totality by remaining ignorant of the fact of class society and the unhappiness it produces. When *Society Becomes an Addict* (1987) is Anne Wilson Schaef's completely incoherent attempt to deny, despite the title, the existence of society, by dealing strictly with the interpersonal. And these books are among the least escapist of the avalanche of "how-to" therapy books inundating the bookstores and supermarkets.

It is clear that psychology is part of the absence of community or solidarity, and of the accelerating social disintegration. The emphasis is on changing one's personality, and avoiding at all costs the facts of bureaucratic consumer capitalism and its meaning to our lives and consciousness. Consider Samuel Klarreich's *Stress Solution* (1988): "...I believe that we can

largely determine what will be stressful, and how much it will interfere with our lives, by the views we uphold irrespective of what goes on in the workplace.” Under the sign of productivity, the citizen is now trained as a lifelong inmate of an industrial world, a condition, as Ivan Illich noted, not unrelated to the fact that everyone tends toward the condition of therapy’s patient, or at least tends to accept its world-view.

In the Psychological Society, social conflicts of all kinds are automatically shifted to the level of psychic problems, in order that they can be charged to individuals as private matters. Schooling produces near-universal resistance, which is classified, for example, as “hyperkinesis” and dealt with by drugs and/or psychiatric ideology. Rather than recognize the child’s protest, his or her life is invaded still further, to ensure that no one eludes the therapeutic net.

It is clear that a retreat from the social, based largely on the experience of defeat and consequent resignation, promotes the personal as the only possible terrain of authenticity. A desperate denizen of the “singles world” is quoted by Louise Banikow: “My ambition is wholly personal now. All I want to do is fall in love.” But the demand for fulfilment, however circumscribed by psychology, is that of a ravening hunger and a level of suffering that threaten to burst the bonds of the prescribed inner world. As noted above, indifference to authority, distrust of institutions, and a spreading nihilism mean that the therapeutic can neither satisfy the individual nor ultimately safeguard the social order. Toynbee noted that a decadent culture furthers the rise of a new church that extends hope to the proletariat while servicing only the needs of the ruling class. Perhaps sooner than later People will begin to realize that psychology is this Church, Which may be the reason why so many voices of therapy now Counsel their flocks against “unrealistic expectations” of what life could be.

For over half a century the regulative, hierarchical needs of a bureaucratic-consumerist system have sought modern means of control and prediction. The same consolatory ideology of the psychological outlook, in which the self is the over-arching form of reality, has served these control needs and owes most of its assumptions to Sigmund Freud.

For Freud and his Wagnerian theory of warring instincts and the arbitrary division of the self into id, ego and superego, the passions of the individual were primordial and dangerous. The work of civilization was to check and harness them. The whole edifice of psychoanalysis, Freud said, is based upon the theory of necessary repression; domination is obviously assisted by this view. That human culture is established only by means of suffering, that constant renunciation of desire is inevitable for continuance of civilization, that work is sustained by the energy of stifled love—all this is required by the “natural aggressiveness” of “human nature,” the latter an eternal and universal fact, of course.

Understanding fully the deforming force of all this repression, Freud considered it likely that neurosis has come to characterize all of humanity. Despite his growing fear of fascism after World War 1, he nonetheless contributed to its growth by justifying the renunciation of happiness. Reich referred to Freud and Hitler with some bitterness, observing that “a few years later, a pathological genius-making the best of ignorance and fear of happiness-brought Europe to the verge of destruction with the slogan of ‘heroic renunciation’.”

With the Oedipus complex, inescapable source of guilt and repression, we see Freud again as the consummate Hobbesian. This universal condition is the vehicle whereby self-imposed taboos are learned via the (male) childhood' experience of fear of the father and lust for the mother. It is based on Freud's reactionary fairy tale of a primal horde dominated by a powerful father who possessed all available women and who was killed and devoured by his sons. This was ludicrous anthropology even when penned, and fully exhibits one of Freud's most basic errors, that of equating society with civilization. There is now convincing evidence that precivilized life was a time of non-dominance and equality, certainly not the bizarre patriarchy Freud provided as origin of most of our sense of guilt and shame. He remained convinced of the inescapability of the Oedipal background, and the central validity of both the Oedipal complex and of guilt itself for the interests of culture.

Freud considered psychic life as shut in on itself, uninfluenced by society. This premise leads to a deterministic view of childhood and even infancy, along with such judgements as "the fear of becoming poor is derived from regressive anal eroticism, Consider his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and its ten editions between 1904 and 1924 to which new examples of "slips," or unintended revelatory usages of words, were continually added. We do not find a single instance, despite the upheavals of many of those years in and near Austria, of Freud detecting a "slip" that related to fear of revolution on the part of this bourgeois subjects, or even of any day-to-day social fears, such as related to strikes, insubordination, or the like. It seems more than likely that unrepressed slips concerning such matters were simple screened Out as unimportant to his universalist, ahistorical views.

Also worth noting is Freud's "discovery" of the death instinct In his deepening pessimism, he countered Eros, the life instinct with Thanatos, a craving for death and destruction, as fundamental and ineradicable a part of the species as Striving for life. The aim of all life is death," simply put (1920). While it may be pedestrian to note that this discovery was accompanied by the mass carnage of World War 1, an increasingly unhappy marriage, and the onset of cancer of the jaw, there is no mistaking the service this dystopian metaphysics performs in justifying authority. The assumption of the death instinct-that aggression, hatred, and fear will always be with us-militates against the idea that liberation is possible. In later decades, the death instinct-oriented work of Melanie Klein flourished in English ruling circles precisely because of its emphasis on social restraints in limiting aggressiveness. Today's leading neo-Freudian, Lacan, also seems to see suffering and domination as inevitable; specifically, he holds that patriarchy is a law of nature.

Marcuse, Norman O. Brown and others have re-theorized Freud in a radical direction by taking his ideas as descriptive rather than prescriptive, and there is a limited plausibility to an orientation that takes his dark views as valid only with respect to alienated life, rather than to any and all imaginable social worlds. There are even many Freudian feminists; their efforts to apply psychoanalytic dogma to the oppression of women, however, appear even more contrived.

Freud did identify the "female principle" as closer to nature, less sublimated, less diffused through repression than that of the male. But true to his overall values, he located an essential advance in civilization in the victory of male intellectuality over womanly sensuality. What is

saddest about the various attempts to reappropriate Freud is the absence of a critique of civilization: his entire work is predicated on the acceptance of civilization as highest value. And basic in a methodological sense, regarding those who would merely reorient the Freudian edifice, is Foucault's warning that the will to any system "is to extend our participation in the present system."

In the area of gender difference, Freud straightforwardly affirmed the basic inferiority of the female. His view of women as castrated men is a case of biological determinism: anatomically they are simply less, and condemned by this to masochism and penis envy.

I make no pretense to completeness or depth in this brief look at Freud, but it should be already obvious how false was his disclaimer (New Introductory Lectures, 1933) that Freudianism posits any values beyond those inherent in "objective" science. And to this fundamental failing could be added the arbitrary nature of virtually all of his philosophy. Divorced as it pointedly is from gross social reality-further examples are legion, but seduction theory comes to mind, in which he declared that sexual abuse is, most importantly, fantasy-one Freudian inference could just as plausibly be replaced by a different one. Overall, we encounter, in the summary of Frederick Crews, "a doctrine plagued by mechanism, reification, and arbitrary universalism."

On the level of treatment, by his own accounts, Freud never was able to permanently cure a single patient, and psychoanalysis has proven no more effective since. In 1984 the National Institute of Mental Health estimated that over forty million Americans are mentally ill, while a study by Regier, Boyd et al. (Archives of General Psychiatry, November 1988) showed that fifteen percent of the adult population had a "psychiatric disorder." One obvious dimension of this worsening situation, in Joel Kovel's words, is the contemporary family, which "has fallen into a morass of permanent crisis, as indicated by the endless stream of emotionally disabled individuals it turns over to the mental health industry.

If alienation is the essence of all psychiatric conditions, Psychology is the study of the alienated, but lacks the awareness that this is so. The effect of the total society, in which the individual can no longer recognize himself or herself, by the canons of Freud and the Psychological Society, is seen as irrelevant to diagnosis and treatment. Thus psychiatry appropriates disabling pain and frustration, redefines them as illnesses and, in some cases, is able to suppress the symptoms. Meanwhile, a morbid world continues its estranging technological rationality that excludes any continuously spontaneous, affective life: the person is subjected to a discipline designed, at the expense of the sensuous, to make him or her an instrument of production.

Mental illness is primarily an unconscious escape from this design, a form of passive resistance. R.D. Laing spoke of schizophrenia as a psychic numbing which feigns a kind of death to preserve something of one's inner aliveness. The representative schizophrenic is around 20, at the point of culmination of the long period of socialization which has prepared him to take up his role in the workplace. He is not "adequate" to this destiny. Historically, it is noteworthy that schizophrenia is very closely related to industrialism, as Torrey shows convincingly in his *Schizophrenia and Civilization* (1980).

In recent years Szasz, Foucault, Goffman, and others have called attention to the ideological preconceptions through which “mental illness” is seen. “Objective” language cloaks cultural biases, as in the case, for instance, of sexual “disorders”: in the 19th century masturbation was treated as a disease, and it has only been within the past twenty years that the psychological establishment declassified homosexuality as illness.

And it has long been transparent that there is a class component to the origins and treatment of mental illness. Not only is what is called “eccentric” among the rich often termed psychiatric disorder-and treated quite differently among the poor, but many studies since Hollingshead and Redlich’s *Social Class and Mental Illness* (1958) have demonstrated how much more likely are the poor to become emotionally disabled. Roy Porter observed that because it imagines power, madness is both impotence and omnipotence, which serves as a reminder that due to the influence of alienation, powerlessness, and poverty, women are more often driven to breakdown than men. Society makes us all feel manipulated and thus mistrustful: “paranoid,” and who could not be depressed? The gap between the alleged neutrality and wisdom of the medical model and the rising levels of pain and disease is widening, the credibility of the former visibly corroding.

**END OF PART ONE**

## Part 2: The Mass Psychology Of Misery

It has been the failure of earlier forms of social control that has given psychological medicine, with its inherently expansionist aims, its upward trajectory in the past three decades. The therapeutic model of authority (and the supposedly value-free professional power that backs it up) is increasingly intertwined with state power, and has mounted an invasion of the self much more far reaching than earlier efforts, “There are no limits to the ambition of psychoanalytic control; if it had its way, nothing would escape it,” according to Guattari.

In terms of the medicalization of deviant behavior, a great deal more is included, than, say, the psychiatric sanctions on Soviet dissidents or the rise of a battery of mind control techniques, including behavior modification, in U.S. Prisons Punishment has come to include treatment and treatment new powers of punishment; medicine, psychology, education and social work take over more and more aspects of control and discipline while the legal machinery grows more medical, psychological, pedagogical. But the new arrangements, relying chiefly on fear and necessitating more and more co-operation by the ruled in order to function, are no guarantee of civic harmony. In fact, with their overall failure, class society is running out of tactics and excuses, and the new encroachments have created new pockets of resistance.

The setup now usually referred to as “community mental health” can be legitimately traced to the establishment of the Mental Hygiene Movement in 1908. In the context of the Taylorist degradation of work called Scientific Management and a challenging tide of worker militancy, the new psychological offensive was based on the dictum that “individual unrest to a large degree means bad mental hygiene.” Community psychiatry represents a later, nationalized form of this industrial psychology, developed to deflect radical currents away from social transformation objectives and back under the yoke of the dominating logic of productivity. By the 1920s, the workers had become the objects of social science professionals to an even greater degree, with the work of Elton Mayo and others, at a time when the promotion of consumption as a way of life came to be seen as itself a means of easing unrest, collective and individual. And by the end of the 1930s, industrial psychology had “already developed many of the central innovations which now characterize community psychology,” according to Diana Ralph’s *Work and Madness* (1983), such as mass psychological testing, the mental health team, auxiliary non-professional counselors, family and out-patient therapy, and psychiatric counseling to businesses.

The million-plus men rejected by the armed forces during World War II for “mental unfitness” and the steady rise, observable since the mid-‘50s, in stress-related illnesses, called attention to the immensely crippling nature of modern industrial alienation. Government funding was called for, and was provided by the 1963 federal Community Mental Health Center legislation. Armed with the relatively new tranquilizing drugs to anaesthetize the poor as well as the unemployed, a state presence was initiated in urban areas hitherto beyond the reach of the therapeutic ethos. Small wonder that some black militants saw the new mental health services as basically refined police pacification and surveillance systems for the ghettos. The concerns of the dominant order, ever anxious about the masses, are chiefly served, however, here as elsewhere, by the strength of the image of what science has shown to be normal, healthy, and productive. Authority’s best friend is relentless self-inspection according to the ruling canons of repressive normalcy in the

Psychological Society.

The nuclear family once provided the psychic underpinning of what Norman O. Brown called “the nightmare of infinitely expanding technological progress.” Thought by some to be a bastion against the outer world, it has always served as transmission belt for the reigning ideology, more specifically as the place in which the interiorizing psychology of women is produced the social and economic exploitation of women is legitimated and the artificial scarcity of sexuality is guarded.

Meanwhile, the state’s concern with delinquent, uneducable and unsocializable children, as studied by Donzelot and others, is but one aspect of its overshadowing of the family. Behind the medicalized image of the good, the state advances and the family steadily loses its functions. Rothbaum and Weisz, in *Child Psychopathology and the Quest for Control* (1989), discuss the very rapid rise of their subject while Castel, Castel and Lovell’s earlier *The Psychiatric Society* (1982) could glimpse the nearing day when childhood will be totally regimented by medicine and psychology. Some facets of this trend are no longer in the realm of conjecture; James R. Schiffman, for instance, wrote of one by-product of the battered family in his “Teen-Agers End Up in Psychiatric Hospitals in Alarming Numbers” (*Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 3, 1989).

Therapy is a key ritual of our prevailing psychological religion and a vigorously growing one. The American Psychiatric Association’s membership jumped from 27,355 in 1983 to 36,223 by the end of the ‘80s, and in 1989 a record 22 million visited psychiatrists or other therapists covered to at least some extent by health insurance plans. Considering that only a small minority of those who practice the estimated 500 varieties of psychotherapy are psychiatrists or otherwise health insurance-recognized, even these figures do not capture the magnitude of therapy’s shadow world.

Philip Rieff termed psychoanalysis “yet another method of learning how to endure the loneliness produced by culture,” which is a good enough way to introduce the artificial situation and relationship of therapy, a peculiarly distanced, circumscribed and asymmetrical affair. Most of the time, one person talks and the other listens. The client almost always talks about himself and the therapist almost never does. The therapist scrupulously eschews social contact with clients. another reminder to the latter that they have not been talking to a friend, along with the strict time limits enclosing a space divorced from everyday reality. Similarly, the purely contractual nature of the therapeutic connection in itself guarantees that all therapy inevitably reproduces alienated society. To deal with alienation via a relationship paid for by the hour is to overlook the congruence of therapist and prostitute as regards the traits just enumerated.

Gramsci defined “intellectual” as the “functionary in charge of consent,” a formulation which also fits the role of therapist. By leading others to concentrate their ‘desiring energy outside the social territory,’ as Guattari put it, he thereby manipulates them into accepting the constraints of society. By failing to challenge the social categories within which clients have organized their experiences, the therapist strengthens the hold of those categories. He tries, typically, to focus clients away from stories about work and into the so-called “real” areas—personal life and childhood.

Psychological health, as a function of therapy, is largely an educational procedure. The project is that of a shared system: the client is led to acceptance of the therapist's basic assumptions and metaphysics. Francois Roustang, in *Psychoanalysis Never Lets Go* (1983), wondered why a therapeutic method whose "explicit aim is the liberation of forces with a view toward being capable 'of enjoyment and efficiency' (Freud) so often ends in alienation either...because the treatment turns out to be interminable, or...(the client) adopts the manner of speech and thought, the theses as well as the prejudices of psychoanalysis."

Ever since Hans Lysenko's short but famous article of 1952, "The Effects of Psychotherapy," countless other studies have validated his finding:

"Persons given intensive and prolonged psychotherapy are no better off than those in matched control groups given no treatment over the same time interval." On the other hand, there is no doubt that therapy or counseling does make many people feel better, regardless of specific results. This anomaly must be due to the fact that consumers of therapy believe they have been cared for, comforted, listened to. In a society growing ever Colder, this is no small thing. It is also true that the Psychological Society conditions its subjects into blaming themselves and that those who most feel they need therapy tend to be those most easily exploited: the loneliest, most insecure nervous, depressed, etc. It is easy to state the old dictum, "Natura sanat, medicus curat" (Nature heals, doctors/counselors/therapists treat); but where is the natural in the hyper-estranged world of pain and isolation we find ourselves in? And yet there is no getting around the imperative to remake the world. If therapy is to heal, make whole, what other possibility is there but to transform this world, which would of course also constitute a de-therapizing of society. It is clearly in this spirit that the Situationist International declared in 1963, "Sooner or later the S.I. must define itself as a therapeutic."

Unfortunately, the great communal causes later in the decade acquired a specifically therapeutic cast mainly in their degeneration, in the splintering of the '60's thrust into smaller, more idiosyncratic efforts. "The personal is the political" gave way to the merely personal, as defeat and disillusion overtook naive activism.

Conceived out of critical responses to Freudian psychoanalysis, which has shifted its sights toward ever-earlier phases of development in childhood and infancy, the Human Potential Movement began in the mid-60s and acquired its characteristic features by the early '70s. With a post-Freudian emphasis on the conscious ego and its actualization, Human Potential set forth a smorgasbord of therapies, including varieties or amalgams of personal growth seminars, body awareness techniques, and Eastern spiritual disciplines. Almost buried in the welter of partial solutions lies a subversive potential: the notion that, as Adelaide Bry put it, life "can be a time of infinite and joyous possibility." The demand for instant relief from psychic immiseration underlined an increasing concern for the dignity and fulfillment of individuals, and Daniel Yankelovich (*New Rules*, 1981) saw the cultural centrality of this quest, concluding that by the end of the '70s, some eighty percent of Americans had become interested in this therapeutic search for transformation.



But the privatized approaches of the Human Potential Movement, high-water mark of contemporary Psychological Society, were obviously unable to deliver on their promises to provide any lasting, non-illusory breakthroughs. Arthur Janov recognized that “everyone in this society is in a lot of pain,” but expressed no awareness at all of the repressive society generating it. His Primal Scream technique qualifies as the most ludicrous cure-all of the ‘70s. Scientology’s promise of empowerment consisted mainly of bioelectronic feedback technologies aimed at socializing people to an authoritarian enterprise and world view. The popularity of cult groups like the Moonies reminds one of a time-tested process for the uninitiated: isolation, deprivation, anticipation, and suggestion; brainwashing and the shamanic visionquest both use it.

Werner Erhard’s EST, speaking of intensive psychological manipulation was one of the most popular and, in some ways, most characteristic Human Potential phenomena. Its founder became very wealthy by helping Erhard Seminars Training adepts “choose to become what they are.” In a classic case of blaming the victim, EST brought large numbers to a near-religious embrace of one of the system’s basic lies: its graduates are obediently conformist because they “accept responsibility” for having created things as they are. Transcendental Meditation actually marketed itself in terms of the passive incorporation into society it helped its students achieve. TM’s alleged usefulness for adjustment to the varied “excesses and stresses” of modern society was a major selling point to corporations, for example.

Trapped in a highly rationalized and technological world, Human Potential seekers naturally wanted personal development, emotional immediacy, and above all, a sense of having some control over their lives. Self-help best-sellers of the ‘70s, including *Power, Your Erroneous Zones, How to Take Charge of Your Life, Self-Creation, Looking Out for #1, and Pulling Your Own Strings*, focus on the issue of control. Preaching the gospel of reality as a personal construct, however, meant that control had to be narrowly defined. Once again acceptance of social reality as a given meant, for example, that “sensitivity training” would likely mean continued insensitivity to most of reality, an openness to more of the same alienation-more ignorance, more suffering.

The Human Potential Movement did at least raise publicly and widely the notion of an end to disease, however much it failed to make good on that claim. As more and more of everyday life has come under medical dominion and supervision, the almost bewildering array of new therapies was part of an undercutting of the older, mainly Freudian, “scientific” model for behavior. In the shift of therapeutic expectations, a radical hope appeared, which went beyond merely positive-thinking or empty confessionalist aspects and is different from quiescence.

A current form of self-help which clearly represents a step forward from both traditional therapy, commodified and under the direction of expertise, and the mass-marketed seminar-introduction sort of training is the very popular “support group.” Non-commercial and based on peer-group equality. support groups for many types of emotional distress have quadrupled in number in the past ten years. Where these groups do not enforce the 12-step ideology of “anonymous” groups (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous) based on the individual’s subjection to a “Higher Power” (read: all constituted authority and most of them do not-they provide a great source of solidarity, and work against the depoliticizing force of illness or distress experienced in an isolated state.

If the Human Potential Movement thought it possible to re-create personality and thus transform life, New Ageism goes it one better with its central slogan, "Create your own reality." Considering the advancing, invasive desolation, an alternative reality seems desirable—the eternal consolation of religion. For the New Age, booming since the mid-1980s, is essentially a religious turning away from reality by people who are overloaded by feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, a more definitive turning away than that of the prevailing psychologistic evasion. Religion invents a realm of non-alienation to compensate for the actual one; New Age philosophy announces a coming new era of harmony and peace, obviously inverting the present, unacceptable state. An undemanding, eclectic, materialistic substitute religion where any balm, any occult nonsense—channeling, crystal healing, reincarnation, rescue by UFOs, etc.—goes. "It's true if you believe it."

Anything goes, so long as it goes along with what authority has ordained: anger is "unhealthy," "negativity" a condition to be avoided at all costs. Feminism and ecology are supposedly "roots" of the New Age scene, but likewise were militant workers a "root" of the Nazi movement (National Socialist German Workers Party, remember). Which brings to mind the chief New Age influence, Carl Jung. It is unknown or irrelevant to "non judgmental" bliss-seekers that in his attempt to resurrect all the old faiths and myths, Jung was less a psychologist than a figure of theology and reaction. Further, as president of the International Society for Psychotherapy from 1933 to 1939, he presided over its Nazified German section and co-edited the *Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie* (with M.H. Goring, cousin of the Reichsmarshall of the same name).

Still gathering steam, apparently, since the appearance of Otto Kernberg's *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (1975) and *The Culture of Narcissism* by Christopher Lasch (1978), is the idea that "narcissistic personality disorders" are the epitome of what is happening to all of us, and represent the "underlying character structure" of our age. Narcissus, the image of self-love and a growing demand for fulfillment, has replaced Oedipus, with its components of guilt and repression, as the myth of our time—a shift proclaimed and adopted far beyond the Freudian community.

In passing, it is noteworthy that this change, underway since the '60s, seems to connect more with the Human Potential search for self-development than with New Age whose devotees take their desires less seriously. Common New Age nostrums, e.g. "You are infinitely creative," "You have unlimited potential," smack of a vague wish-fulfillment sanitized against anger, by those who doubt their own capacities for change and growth. Though the concept of narcissism is somewhat elusive, clinically and socially, it is often expressed in a demanding, aggressive way that frightens various partisans of traditional authority. The Human Potential preoccupation with "getting in touch with one's feelings," it must be added, was not nearly as strongly self-affirming as narcissism is, where feelings—chiefly anger—are more powerful than those that need to be searched for.

Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* remains extremely influential as a social analysis of the transition from Oedipus to Narcissus, given great currency and publicity by those who lament this turning away from internalized sacrifice and respect for authority. The "new leftist" Lasch proved himself

a strict Freudian, and an overtly conservative one at that, looking back nostalgically at the days of the authoritarian conscience based on strong parental and social discipline. There is no trace of refusal in Lasch's work, which embraces the existing repressive order as the only available morality. Similar to his sour rejection of the "impulse-ridden" narcissistic personality is Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985). Postman moralizes about the decline of political discourse, no longer "serious" but "shriveled and absurd," a condition caused by the widespread attitude that "amusement and pleasure" take precedence over "serious public involvement." Sennett and Bookchin can be mentioned as two other erstwhile radicals who see the narcissistic withdrawal from the present political framework as anything but positive or subversive. But even an orthodox Freudian like Russell Jacoby (*Telos*, Summer 1980) recognized that in the corrosion of sacrifice, "narcissism harbors a protest in the name of individual health and happiness," and Gilles Lipovetsky considered narcissism in France to have been born during the May, '68 uprisings.

Thus narcissism is more than just the location of desire in the self, or the equally ubiquitous necessity to maintain feelings of self-identity and self-esteem. There are more and more "narcissistically troubled" people, products of the lovelessness and extreme alienation of modern divided society, and its cultural and spiritual impoverishment. Deep feelings of emptiness characterize the narcissist, coupled with a boundless rage, often just under the surface, at the sense of dependency felt because of dominated life, and the hollowness of one starved by a deficient reality.

Freudian theory attributes the common trait of defiance to an immature "clinging to anal eroticism," while ignoring Society just as Lasch expresses his fear of narcissistic resentment and insubordination" in a parallel defense of oppressive existence. The angry longing for autonomy and self-worth brings to mind another clash of values that relates to value itself. In each of us lives a narcissist who wants to be loved for himself or herself and not for his or her abilities, or even qualities. Value per se, intrinsic—a dangerously anti-instrumental, anti-capital orientation. To a Freudian therapist like Arnold Rothstein, this "expectation that the world should gratify him just because he wishes it" is repugnant. He prescribes lengthy psychoanalysis which will ultimately permit an acceptance of "the relative passivity, helplessness, and vulnerability implicit in the human condition."

Others have seen in narcissism the hunger for a qualitatively different world. Norman O. Brown referred to its project of "loving union with the world," while the feminist Stephanie Engel has argued that "the call back to the memory of original narcissistic bliss pushes us toward a dream of the future." Marcuse saw narcissism as an essential element of utopian thought, a mythic structure celebrating and yearning for completeness.

The Psychological Society offers, of course, every variety of commodity, from clothes and cars to books and therapies. for every life-style, in a vain effort to assuage the prevailing appetite for authenticity. Debord was right in his counsel that the more we capitulate to a recognition of self in the dominant images of need, the less we understand our own existence and desires. The images society provides do not permit us to find ourselves at home there, and one sees instead a ravening, infuriating sense of denial and loss, which nominates "narcissism" as a subversive

configuration of misery.

Two centuries ago Schiller spoke of the “wound” civilization has inflicted on modern humanity-division of labor. In announcing the age of “psychological man,” Philip Rieff discerned a culture “in which technics is invading and conquering the last enemy-man’s inner life, the psyche itself.” In the specialist culture of our bureaucratic-industrial age, the reliance on experts to interpret and evaluate inner life is in itself the most malignant and invasive reach of division of labor. As we have become more alien from our own experiences, which are processed, standardized, labeled, and subjected to hierarchical control, technology emerges as the power behind our misery and the main form of ideological domination. In fact, technology comes to replace ideology. The force deforming us stands increasingly revealed, while illusions are ground away by the process of immiseration.

Lasch and others may resent and try to discount the demanding nature of the contemporary “psychological” spirit, but what is contested has clearly widened for a great many, even if the outcome is equally unclear. Thus the Psychological Society may be failing to deflect or even defer conflict by means of its favorite question, “Can one change?” The real question is whether the world-that-enforces-our-inability-to-change can be forced to change, and beyond recognition.

## Chapter 3: Tonality and the Totality

In 1908, Arnold Schoenberg's "Second Quartet in F Sharp Minor" attained the decisive break with harmonic development: it was the first atonal composition. Fittingly, the movement in question is begun by the soprano with the words: 'Ich fühle Luft von anderen Planeten' ('I feel air from other planets').

Adorno saw the radical openness of atonal music as an "expression of unmitigated suffering, bound by no convention whatsoever" and as such "often hostile to culture" and "containing elements of barbarism." The rejection of tonality indeed enabled expression of the most intense subjectivity, the loneliness of the subject under technology domination. Nonetheless, the equivalencies by which human emotion is universalized and objectified are still present, if released from the centralized control of the "laws of harmony." Schoenberg's "emancipation of dissonance" allowed for the presentation of human passions with unprecedented immediacy via dissonant harmonies that have little or no tendency to resolve. The avoidance of tonal suggestion and resolution provides the listener with precious little support or security; Schoenberg's atonal work often seems almost hysterically emotional due to the absence of points of real repose. "It is driven frantically toward the unattainable," noted Leonard Meyer.

In this sense, atonality proved to be the most extreme manifestation of the general anti-authoritarian upheaval in society of the five or so years preceding World War I. Schoenberg's abandonment of tonality coincides with the abandonment of perspective in painting by Picasso and Kandinsky (in 1908). But with these "two great negative gestures" in culture, as they have been termed, it was the composer who found himself propelled into a public void. In his steadfast affirmation of alienation, his unwillingness to present any scene of human realization that was not feral, difficult, wild, Schoenberg's atonality was too much of a threat and challenge to find much acceptance. The expressionist painter August Macke wrote to his colleague Franz Marc following an evening of Schoenberg's chamber music in 1911: "Can you imagine music in which tonality has been completely abandoned? I was reminded constantly of Kandinsky's large compositions which are written, as it were, in no single key... this music which lets every tone stand by itself." Unfortunately, their feeling for such a radically libertarian approach was not shared by many, not exposed to many.

As Macke's letter implies, before the atonal breakout, music had achieved meaning through the defined relations of chords to a tonal center. Schoenberg's THEORY OF HARMONY summed up the old system well: "It has always been the referring of all results to a center, to an emanating point... Tonality does not serve. On the contrary, it demands to be served."

Some defenders of tonality, on the other hand, have adopted a frankly socially authoritarian point of view, feeling that more than just changes in music were at stake. Levarie and Levy's MUSIC MORPHOLOGY (1983), for example, proceeded from the philosophical thesis that "Chaos is non-being" to the political stance that "The revolt against tonality... is an egalitarian revolution." They further pronounced atonality to be "a general contemporary phenomenon," noting with displeasure how "Obsessive fear of tonality reveals a deep aversion to the concept of hierarchy and rank." This stance is reminiscent of Hindemith's conclusion that it is impossible to deny the validity of hierarchical tone relationships and that there is therefore "no such thing as atonal

music." Such comments obviously seek to defend more than the dominant musical form: they would preserve authority, standardization, hierarchy and whatever cultural grammar guarantees a world defined by such values.

Schoenberg's atonal experiment suffered as a part of the defeat of World War I and its aftermath meted out for social dissonance. By the early 1920s he had given up the systemless radicalism of atonality: not a single "free" note survived. In the absence of a tonal center he inserted the totally rule-governed 32-tone set, which, as Adorno judged, "virtually extinguishes the subject." Dodecaphony, or serialism as it is also called, constituted a new compliance in the place of tonality, corresponding to a new phase of increasingly systematized industrialism introduced with World War I. Schoenberg forged new laws to control what was liberated by the old tonal rules of resolution, new laws that guarantee a more complete circulation among all twelve pitches and may be said to speak to capital's growing need for improved recirculation. Serial technique is a kind of total integration in which movement is strictly controlled, as in a bureaucratically enforced mode. Its conceptual drawback for the dominant order is that while greater circulation is achieved via its new standardized demands (none of the tones is to be repeated before the other eleven have been heard), the concentrated control actually allows for very little production. This is seen most clearly in the extreme understatement and brevity in much of the work of Webern, Schoenberg's most successful disciple; at times there are as many pauses as notes, while the second of Webern's early Three Pieces for Cello and Piano, for example, lasts only thirteen seconds.

The old harmonic system and its major/minor key points of reference provided easily understood places of departure and destination. Serialism accords equal use to each more, making any chord feasible: this conveys a somewhat homeless, fragmentary sense, suitable to an age of more diffuse, traditionless domination.

As of World War I, art music in general began to fragment. Stravinsky led the neoclassicist tendency, which reaffirmed a tonal center despite the prevailing winds of change. Grounded firmly in the 18th century, it seemed to increasing numbers of composers, especially after World War II, to be no solution to music's theoretical problems. Serialist figure Pierre Boulez termed its rather flagrantly anachronistic character and refusal of development a 'mockery.' Neoclassical music seemed to share at least something with the new serialist movement, however: an often stark, austere character, in line with the general trend toward contraction and pessimism. Benjamin Britten seemed preoccupied with the problem of suffering, while many of Aaron Copeland's works evoke the loneliness of industrial cities, whose very energy is bereft of real vitality. Another major traditionalist, Vaughan Williams, ended his masterful Sixth Symphony with what can only be described as an objective statement of utter nihilism.

Meanwhile, by the 1950's, serialism came to be regarded as overdetermined, its discipline too severe, so much so that it occasioned 'chance' music (also called aleatory music or indeterminacy). Closely identified popularly with John Cage, chance seemed another part of the larger swing away from the subject- which electronic or computer-generated composition would take even further- whereby the human voice disappears and even the performer is often eliminated. Paradoxically, the aesthetic effects produced by random methods are the same as

those realized by totally ordered music. The minimalism of Reich, Glass, and others seem a mass-marketed neoconservatism in its pleasant, repetitious poverty of ideas. Iannis Xenakis, imitating the brutalism of his teacher Le Corbusier, may be said to stand for the height of the cybernetizing, computer-worshipping approach: he has sought an "alloy of music and technology" based on his research into "logico-mathematical invariants."

Art music is today bewildered by a scattering influence, the absence of any unifying, common-practice language. And yet the main thrust of all of it- if one can use the word thrust in such an enervated context- is a cold expressionlessness wholly befitting the enormous increase in alienation, objectification and reification of worldwide late capitalism. A divided society must finally make do with a divided art: the landscape does not 'harmonize.' It is an era that perhaps cannot even be given a musical ending anymore; it has certainly become both too unruly and too bleak to be composed and brought to a tonal, cadenced close. When art and even symbolization itself seem false to many, the question occurs, where do the forces lie by which music can be kept alive, where is the enchantment?

"All art is mortal, not merely the individual artifacts but the arts themselves," wrote Spengler. Art- with music in the forefront- may, as Hegel speculated it would, be already well within the age of its demise. Samuel Lipman's *MUSIC AFTER MODERNISM* (1979) pronounced music's terminal illness, its status as "living on the capital of the explosion of creativity which lasted from before Bach to World War I." The failure of tonality's 'creativity' is of course part of an overall entropy in which capital, in Lipman's accidental accuracy of words, turns toxic and unmistakably self-destructive. Adorno saw that "There are fewer and fewer works from the past that continue to be good. It is as if the entire supply of culture is dwindling." Some would merely hold on to the museum pieces of tonality at all costs and deplore the lack of their resupply. This is the meaning of virtually all the standard laments on the subject, such as Constant Lambert's *THE AGONY OF MODERN MUSIC* (1955) in which Henry Pleasants told us that "The vein which for three hundred years offered a seemingly inexhaustible yield of beautiful music has run out," or Roland Stromberg in *AFTER EVERYTHING* (1975): "It is hard ...not to think that serious music has reached the state of total decay." But the same death verdict also comes from non-antiquarians: a 1983 lecture by noted serialist composer Milton Babbitt was called "The Unlikely Survival of Serious Music." Earlier, Babbitt, in the face of unpopularity of contemporary art music posed, defiantly and unrealistically, the "complete elimination of the public and social aspects of musical composition" and penned an article entitled "Who Cares If You Listen?"

The lack of a public for 'difficult' music is obvious and noteworthy. If Bloch was correct to judge "All we hear is ourselves," it may also be correct to conclude that the listener does not want that element in music that is a confrontation with our age. Adorno referred to Schoenberg's music as the reflection of a broken and empty world, evoking a reply from Milan Rankovic that "Such a reflection cannot be loved because it reproduces the same emptiness in the spirit of the listener." A further question, relating to the limits of art itself, is whether estrangement in music could ever prove effective in the struggle against the estrangement of society.

Modern music, however splintered and removed from the old tonal paradigm, has obviously not

effaced the popularity of Baroque, Classical and Romantic masters. And in the area of music education tonality continues to prevail at all levels; undergraduates in composition classes are instructed that the dominant 'demands' resolution, that it "must resolve" to the tonic, etc., and the students' musical sense itself is appraised in terms of the once-unchallenged harmonic categories and rules. Tonality, as should be clear by now, is an ideology in purely musical terms, and that perseveres.

One wonders, in fact, why art music, where traditions are revered, should have made the break that it has, while all of pop music (and almost all jazz, which inherited its harmonic system from classic European tonality), where traditions are often despised, has held back. There is no form of popular music in the industrial world that exists outside the province of mass tonal consciousness. As Richard Norton said so well: "It is the tonality of the church, school, office, parade, convention, cafeteria, workplace, airport, airplane, automobile, truck, tractor, lounge, lobby, bar, gym, brothel, bank, and elevator. Afraid of being without it on foot, humans are presently strapping it to their bodies in order to walk to it, run to it, work to it, and relax to it. It is everywhere. It is music and it writes the songs."

It is also as totally integrated into commercialized mass production as any product of the assembly line. The music never changes from the seemingly eternal formula, despite superficial variations; the 'good' song, the harmonically marketable song, is one that contains fewer different chords than a 14th century ballad. Its expressive potential exists solely within the limited confines of consumer choice, wherein, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, "Something is provided for everyone so that none shall escape." As a one-dimensional code of consumer society, it is a training course in passivity.

Music, reduced to background noise which no longer takes itself seriously, is at the same time a central, omnipresent element of the environment, more so than ever before. The immersion in tonality is at once distraction and pervasive control, as the silence of isolation and boredom must be filled in. It comforts us, denying that the world is as reified as it is, reduced to making believe that- as Beckett put it in *ENDGAME*- anything is happening, that anything changes. Pop music also provides the pleasure of identification, the immediate experience of collective identity that only massified culture, unconscious of the authoritarian ideology which is tonality, can provide.

Rock music was a 'revolution' compared with earlier pop music only in the sense of lyrics and tempo (and volume)- no tonal revolution had even been dimly conceived. Studies have shown that all types of (tonal) music calm the unruly; consider how punk has standardized and cliched the musical sneer. It is not only the music of overt pacification, like New Age composition, which denies the negative as dangerous and evil in the same way that Socialist Realism did, and likewise aids and abets the daily oppression. Just as surely it will take more than rockers smashing their guitars on stage, even though the limits of tonality may be behind such acts, to signal a new age.

Like language, tonality is historically characterized by its unfreedom. We are made tonal by society: only in the elimination of that society will occur the superseding of all grammars of domination.



## Chapter 4: The Catastrophe of Post-Modernism

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*The primacy of language & the end of the subject*

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*The exhaustion of modernism & the rise of postmodernism*

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*The celebration of impotence*

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*Derrida, deconstruction & diff'rance*

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*Barthes, Foucault & Lyotard*

7.

*Deleuze, Guattari & Baudrillard*

Madonna, "Are We Having Fun Yet?", supermarket tabloids, Milli Vanilli, virtual reality, "shop 'till you drop," PeeWee's Big Adventure, New Age/computer 'empowerment', mega-malls, Talking Heads, comic-strip movies, 'green' consumption. A build-up of the resolutely superficial and cynical. Toyota commercial: "New values: saving, caring—all that stuff;" Details magazine: "Style Matters;" "Why Ask Why? Try Bud Dry;" watching television endlessly while mocking it. Incoherence, fragmentation, relativism—up to and including the dismantling of the very notion of meaning (because the record of rationality has been so poor?); embrace of the marginal, while ignoring how easily margins are made fashionable. "The death of the subject" and "the crisis of representation."

Postmodernism. Originally a theme within aesthetics, it has colonized "ever wider areas," according to Ernesto Laclau, "until it has become the new horizon of our cultural, philosophical, and political experience." "The growing conviction," as Richard Kearney has it, "that human culture as we have known it...is now reaching its end." It is, especially in the U.S., the intersection of poststructuralist philosophy and a vastly wider condition of society: both specialized ethos and, far more importantly, the arrival of what modern industrial society has portended. Postmodernism is contemporaneity, a morass of deferred solutions on every level, featuring ambiguity, the refusal to ponder either origins or ends, as well as the denial of oppositional approaches, "the new realism." Signifying nothing and going nowhere, pm [postmodernism] is an inverted millenarianism, a gathering fruition of the technological 'life'-system of universal capital. It is not accidental that Carnegie-Mellon University, which in the

'80s was the first to require that all students be equipped with computers, is establishing "the nation's first poststructuralist undergraduate curriculum."

Consumer narcissism and a cosmic "what's the difference?" mark the end of philosophy as such and the etching of a landscape, according to Kroker and Cook, of "disintegration and decay against the back-ground radiation of parody, kitsch and burnout." Henry Kariel concludes that "for postmodernists, it is simply too late to oppose the momentum of industrial society." Surface, novelty, contingency—there are no grounds available for criticizing our crisis. If the representative postmodernist resists summarizable conclusions, in favor of an alleged pluralism and openness of perspective, it is also reasonable (if one is allowed to use such a word) to predict that if and when we live in a completely pm culture, we would no longer know how to say so.

### *The primacy of language & the end of the subject*

In terms of systematic thought, the growing preoccupation with language is a key factor accounting for the pm climate of narrowed focus and retreat. The so-called "descent into language," or the "linguistic turn" has levied the postmodernist—poststructuralist assumption that language constitutes the human world and the human world constitutes the whole world. For most of this century language has been moving to center stage in philosophy, among figures as diverse as Wittgenstein, Quine, Heidegger, and Gadamer, while growing attention to communication theory, linguistics, cybernetics, and computer languages demonstrates a similar emphasis over several decades in science and technology. This very pronounced turn toward language itself was embraced by Foucault as a "decisive leap towards a wholly new form of thought." Less positively, it can be at least partially explained in terms of pessimism following the ebbing of the oppositional moment of the '60s. The '70s witnessed an alarming withdrawal into what Edward Said called the "labyrinth of textuality," as contrasted with the sometimes more insurrectionary intellectual activity of the preceding period.

Perhaps it isn't paradoxical that "the fetish of the textual," as Ben Agger judged, "beckons in an age when intellectuals are dispossessed of their words." Language is more and more debased; drained of meaning, especially in its public usage. No longer can even words be counted on, and this is part of a larger anti-theory current, behind which stands a much larger defeat than the '60s: that of the whole train of Enlightenment rationality. We have depended on language as the supposedly sound and transparent handmaiden of reason and where has it gotten us? Auschwitz, Hiroshima, mass psychic misery, impending destruction of the planet, to name a few. Enter postmodernism, with its seemingly bizarre and fragmented turns and twists. Edith Wyschograd's *Saints and Postmodernism* (1990) not only testifies to the ubiquity of the pm 'approach'—there are apparently no fields outside its ken - - but also comments cogently on the new direction: "postmodernism as a 'philosophical' and 'literary' discursive style cannot straightforwardly appeal to the techniques of reason, themselves the instruments of theory, but must forge new and necessarily arcane means for undermining the pieties of reason."

The immediate antecedent of postmodernism/poststructuralism, reigning in the '50s and much of the '60s, was organized around the centrality it accorded the linguistic model. Structuralism provided the premise that language constitutes our only means of access to the world of objects and experience and its extension, that meaning arises wholly from the play of differences within

cultural sign systems. Levi-Strauss, for example, argued that the key to anthropology lies in the uncovering of unconscious social laws (e.g. those that regulate marriage ties and kinship), which are structured like language. It was the Swiss linguist Saussure who stressed, in a move very influential to postmodernism, that meaning resides not in a relationship between an utterance and that to which it refers, but in the relationship of signs to one another. This Saussurian belief in the enclosed, self-referential nature of language implies that everything is determined within language, leading to the scrapping of such quaint notions as alienation, ideology, repression, etc. and concluding that language and consciousness are virtually the same.

On this trajectory, which rejects the view of language as an external means deployed by consciousness, appears the also very influential neo-Freudian, Jacques Lacan. For Lacan, not only is consciousness thoroughly permeated by language and without existence for itself apart from language, even the “unconscious is structured like a language.”

Earlier thinkers, most notably Nietzsche and Heidegger, had already suggested that a different language or a changed relationship to language might somehow bring new and important insights. With the linguistic turn of more recent times, even the concept of an individual who thinks as the basis of knowledge becomes shaky. Saussure discovered that “language is not a function of the speaking subject,” the primacy of language displacing who it is that gives voice to it. Roland Barthes, whose career joins the structuralist and poststructuralist periods, decided “It is language that speaks, not the author,” paralleled by Althusser’s observation that history is “a process without a subject.”

If the subject is felt to be essentially a function of language, its stifling mediation and that of the symbolic order in general ascends toward the top of the agenda. Thus does postmodernism flail about trying to communicate what lies beyond language, “to present the unrepresentable.” Meanwhile, given the radical doubt introduced as to the availability to us of a referent in the world outside of language, the real fades from consideration. Jacques Derrida, the pivotal figure of the postmodernism ethos, proceeds as if the connection between words and the world were arbitrary. The object world plays no role for him.

### *The exhaustion of modernism & the rise of postmodernism*

But before turning to Derrida, a few more comments on precursors and the wider change in culture. Postmodernism raises questions about communication and meaning, so that the category of the aesthetic, for one, becomes problematic. For modernism, with its sunnier belief in representation, art and literature held at least some promise for providing a vision of fulfilment or understanding. Until the end of modernism, “high culture” was seen as a repository of moral and spiritual wisdom. Now there seems to be no such belief, the ubiquity of the question of language perhaps telling as to the vacancy left by the failure of other candidates of promising starting points of human imagination. In the ‘60s modernism seems to have reached the end of its development, the austere canon of its painting (e.g. Rothko, Reinhardt) giving way to pop art’s uncritical espousal of the consumer culture’s commercial vernacular. Postmodernism, and not just in the arts, is modernism without the hopes and dreams that made modernity bearable.

A widespread “fast food” tendency is seen in the visual arts, in the direction of easily consumable entertainment. Howard Fox finds that “theatricality may be the single most pervasive property of postmodern art.” A decadence or exhaustion of development is also detected in the dark paintings of an Eric Fischl, where often a kind of horror seems to lurk just below the surface. This quality links Fischl, America’s quintessential pm painter, to the equally sinister Twin Peaks and pm’s quintessential television figure, David Lynch. The image, since Warhol, is self-consciously a mechanically reproducible commodity and this is the bottom-line reason for both the depthlessness and the common note of eeriness and foreboding.

Postmodern art’s oft-noted eclecticism is an arbitrary recycling of fragments from everywhere, especially the past, often taking the form of parody and kitsch. Demoralized, derealized, dehistoricized: art that can no longer take itself seriously. The image no longer refers primarily to some ‘original’, situated elsewhere in the ‘real’ world; it increasingly refers only to other images. In this way it reflects how lost we are, how removed from nature, in the ever more mediated world of technological capitalism.

The term postmodernism was first applied, in the ‘70s, to architecture. Christopher Jencks wrote of an anti-planning, pro-pluralism approach, the abandoning of modernism’s dream of pure form in favor of listening to “the multiple languages of the people.” More honest are Robert Venturi’s celebration of Las Vegas and Piers Gough’s admission that pm architecture is no more caring for people than was modernist architecture. The arches and columns laid over modernist boxes are a thin facade of playfulness and individuality, which scarcely transforms the anonymous concentrations of wealth and power underneath.

Postmodernist writers question the very grounds for literature instead of continuing to create the illusion of an external world. The novel redirects its attention to itself; Donald Barthelme, for example, writes stories that seem to always remind the reader that they are artifices. By protesting against statement, point of view and other patterns of representation, pm literature exhibits its discomfort with the forms that tame and domesticate cultural products. As the wider world becomes more artificial and meaning less subject to our control, the new approach would rather reveal the illusion even at the cost of no longer saying anything. Here as elsewhere art is struggling against itself, its prior claims to help us understand the world evaporating while even the concept of imagination loses its potency.

For some the loss of narrative voice or point of view is equivalent to the loss of our ability to locate ourselves historically. For postmodernists this loss is a kind of liberation. Raymond Federman, for instance, glories in the coming fiction that “will be seemingly devoid of any meaning...deliberately illogical, irrational, unrealistic, non sequitur, and incoherent.”

Fantasy, on the rise for decades, is a common form of the post- modern, carrying with it the reminder that the fantastic confronts civilization with the very forces it must repress for its survival. But it is a fantasy that, paralleling both deconstruction and high levels of cynicism and resignation in society, does not believe in itself to the extent of very much understanding or communicating. Pm writers seem to smother in the folds of language, conveying little else than their ironic stance regarding more traditional literature’s pretensions to truth and meaning.

Perhaps typical is Laurie Moore's 1990 novel, *Like Life*, whose title and content reveal a retreat from living and an inversion of the American Dream, in which things can only get worse.

*The celebration of impotence*

Postmodernism subverts two of the over-arching tenets of Enlightenment humanism: the power of language to shape the world and the power of consciousness to shape a self. Thus we have the postmodernist void, the general notion that the yearning for emancipation and freedom promised by humanist principles of subjectivity cannot be satisfied. Pm views the self as a linguistic convention; as William Burroughs put it, "Your 'I' is a completely illusory concept."

It is obvious that the celebrated ideal of individuality has been under pressure for a long time. Capitalism in fact has made a career of celebrating the individual while destroying him/her. And the works of Marx and Freud have done much to expose the largely misdirected and naive belief in the sovereign, rational Kantian self in charge of reality, with their more recent structuralist interpreters, Althusser and Lacan, contributing to and updating the effort. But this time the pressure is so extreme that the term 'individual' has been rendered obsolete, replaced by 'subject', which always includes the aspect of being subjected (as in the older "a subject of the king," for example). Even some libertarian radicals, such as the Interrogations group in France, join in the postmodernist chorus to reject the individual as a criterion for value due to the debasing of the category by ideology and history.

So pm reveals that autonomy has largely been a myth and cherished ideals of mastery and will are similarly misguided. But if we are promised herewith a new and serious attempt at demystifying authority, concealed behind the guises of a bourgeois humanist 'freedom', we actually get a dispersal of the subject so radical as to render it impotent, even nonexistent, as any kind of agent at all. Who or what is left to achieve a liberation, or is that just one more pipe dream? The postmodern stance wants it both ways: to put the thinking person "under erasure," while the very existence of its own critique depends on discredited ideas like subjectivity. Fred Dallmayr, acknowledging the widespread appeal of contemporary anti-humanism, warns that primary casualties are reflection and a sense of values. To assert that we are instances of language fore- most is obviously to strip away our capacity to grasp the whole, at a time when we are urgently required to do just that. Small wonder that to some, pm amounts, in practice, to merely a liberalism without the subject, while feminists who try to define or reclaim an authentic and autonomous female identity would also likely be unpersuaded.

The postmodern subject, what is presumably left of subject-hood, seems to be mainly the personality constructed by and for technological capital, described by the marxist literary theorist Terry Eagleton as a "dispersed, decentered network of libidinal attachments, emptied of ethical substance and psychical interiority, the ephemeral function of this or that act of consumption, media experience, sexual relationship, trend or fashion." If Eagleton's definition of today's non-subject as announced by pm is unfaithful to their point of view, it is difficult to see where, to find grounds for a distancing from his scathing summary. With postmodernism even alienation dissolves, for there is no longer a subject to be alienated! Contemporary fragmentation and powerlessness could hardly be heralded more completely, or existing anger and disaffection more

thoroughly ignored.

*Derrida, deconstruction & difference*

Enough, for now, on background and general traits. The most influential specific postmodern approach has been Jacques Derrida's, known since the '60s as deconstruction. Postmodernism in philosophy means above all the writings of Derrida, and this earliest and most extreme outlook has found a resonance well beyond philosophy, in the popular culture and its mores.

Certainly the "linguistic turn" bears on the emergence of Derrida, causing David Wood to call deconstruction "an absolutely unavoidable move in philosophy today," as thought negotiates its inescapable predicament as written language. That language is not innocent or neutral but bears a considerable number of presuppositions it has been his career to develop, exposing what he sees as the fundamentally self-contradictory nature of human discourse. The mathematician Kurt Godel's "Incompleteness Theorem" states that any formal system can be either consistent or complete, but not both. In rather parallel fashion, Derrida claims that language is constantly turning against itself so that, analyzed closely, we can neither say what we mean or mean what we say. But like semiologists before him, Derrida also suggests, at the same time, that a deconstructive method could demystify the ideological contents of all texts, interpreting all human activities as essentially texts. The basic contradiction and cover-up strategy inherent in the metaphysics of language in its widest sense might be laid bare and a more intimate kind of knowing result.

What works against this latter claim, with its political promise constantly hinted at by Derrida, is precisely the content of deconstruction; it sees language as a constantly moving independent force that disallows a stabilizing of meaning or definite communication, as referred to above. This internally-generated flux he called 'diff,rance' and this is what calls the very idea of meaning to collapse, along with the self-referential nature of language, which, as noted previously, says that there is no space outside of language, no "out there" for meaning to exist in anyway. Intention and the subject are overwhelmed, and what is revealed are not any "inner truths" but an endless proliferation of possible meanings generated by diff,rance, the principle that characterizes language. Meaning within language is also made elusive by Derrida's insistence that language is metaphorical and cannot therefore directly convey truth, a notion taken from Nietzsche, one which erases the distinction between philosophy and literature. All these insights supposedly contribute to the daring and subversive nature of deconstruction, but they surely provoke some basic questions as well. If meaning is indeterminate, how are Derrida's argument and terms not also indeterminate, un-pin-downable? He has replied to critics, for example, that they are unclear as to his meaning, while his 'meaning' is that there can be no clear, definable meaning. And though his entire project is in an important sense aimed at subverting all systems' claims to any kind of transcendent truth, he raises diff,rance to the transcendent status of any philosophical first principle.

For Derrida, it has been the valorizing of speech over writing that has caused all of Western thought to overlook the downfall that language itself causes philosophy. By privileging the spoken word a false sense of immediacy is produced, the invalid notion that in speaking the thing itself is present and representation overcome. But speech is no more 'authentic' than the written

word, not at all immune from the built-in failure of language to accurately or definitely deliver the (representational) goods. It is the misplaced desire for presence that characterizes Western metaphysics, an unreflected desire for the success of representation. It is important to note that because Derrida rejects the possibility of an unmediated existence, he assails the efficacy of representation but not the category itself. He mocks the game but plays it just the same. Difference (later simply 'difference') shades into indifference, due to the unavailability of truth or meaning, and joins the cynicism at large.

Early on, Derrida discussed philosophy's false steps in the area of presence by reference to Husserl's tortured pursuit of it. Next he developed his theory of 'grammatology', in which he restored writing to its proper primacy as against the West's phonocentric, or speech-valued, bias. This was mainly accomplished by critiques of major figures who committed the sin of phonocentrism, including Rousseau, Heidegger, Saussure, and Levi-Strauss, which is not to overlook his great indebtedness to the latter three of these four.

As if remembering the obvious implications of his deconstructive approach, Derrida's writings shift in the '70s from the earlier, fairly straightforward philosophical discussions. Glas (1974) is a mishmash of Hegel and Genet, in which argument is replaced by free association and bad puns. Though baffling to even his warmest admirers, Glas certainly is in keeping with the tenet of the unavoidable ambiguity of language and a will to subvert the pretensions of orderly discourse. Spurs (1978) is a book-length study of Nietzsche that ultimately finds its focus in nothing Nietzsche published, but in a handwritten note in the margin of one of his notebooks: "I have forgotten my umbrella." Endless, undecidable possibilities exist as to the meaning or importance of this scrawled comment. This, of course, is Derrida's point, to suggest that the same can be said for everything Nietzsche wrote. The place for thought, according to deconstruction, is clearly (er, let us say unclearly) with the relative, the fragmented, the marginal.

Meaning is certainly not something to be pinned down, if it exists at all. Commenting on Plato's Phaedrus, the master of de-composition goes so far as to assert that "like any text [it] couldn't not be involved, at least in a virtual, dynamic, lateral manner, with all the words that composed the system of the Greek language."

Related is Derrida's opposition to binary opposites, like literal/metaphorical, serious/playful, deep/superficial, nature/culture, ad infinitum. He sees these as basic conceptual hierarchies, mainly smuggled in by language itself, which provide the illusion of definition or orientation. He further claims that the deconstructive work of overturning these pairings, which valorize one of the two over the other, leads to a political and social overturning of actual, non-conceptual hierarchies. But to automatically refuse all binary oppositions is itself a metaphysical proposition; it in fact bypasses politics and history out of a failure to see in opposites, however imprecise they may be, anything but a linguistic reality. In the dismantling of every binarism, deconstruction aims at "conceiving difference without opposition." What in a smaller dosage would seem a salutary approach, a skepticism about neat, either/or characterizations, proceeds to the very questionable prescription of refusing all unambiguity. To say that there can be no yes or no position is tantamount to a paralysis of relativism, in which 'impotence' becomes the valorized partner to 'opposition'.

Perhaps the case of Paul De Man, who extended and deepened Derrida's seminal deconstructive positions (surpassing him, in the opinion of many), is instructive. Shortly after the death of De Man in 1985, it was discovered that as a young man he had written several anti-semitic, pro-Nazi newspaper articles in occupied Belgium. The status of this brilliant Yale deconstructor, and indeed to some, the moral and philosophical value of deconstruction itself, were called into question by the sensational revelation. De Man, like Derrida, had stressed "the duplicity, the confusion, the untruth that we take for granted in the use of language." Consistent with this, albeit to his discredit, in my opinion, was Derrida's tortuous commentary on De Man's collaborationist period: in sum, "how can we judge, who has the right to say?" A shabby testimony for deconstruction, considered in any way as a moment of the anti-authoritarian.

Derrida announced that deconstruction "instigates the subversion of every kingdom." In fact, it has remained within the safely academic realm of inventing ever more ingenious textual complications to keep itself in business and avoid reflecting on its own political situation. One of Derrida's most central terms, dissemination, describes language, under the principle of difference, as not so much a rich harvest of meanings but a kind of endless loss and spillage, with meaning appearing everywhere and evaporating virtually at once. This flow of language, ceaseless and unsatisfying, is a most accurate parallel to that of the heart of consumer capital and its endless circulation of non-significance. Derrida thus unwittingly eternalizes and universalizes dominated life by rendering human communication in its image. The "every kingdom" he would see deconstruction subverting is instead extended and deemed absolute.

Derrida represents both the well-travelled French tradition of explication de texte and a reaction against the Gallic veneration of Cartesian classicist language with its ideals of clarity and balance. Deconstruction emerged also, to a degree, as part of the original element of the near-revolution of 1968, namely the student revolt against rigidified French higher education. Some of its key terms (e.g. dissemination) are borrowed from Blanchot's reading of Heidegger, which is not to deny a significant originality in Derridean thought. Presence and representation constantly call each other into question, revealing the underlying system as infinitely fissured, and this in itself is an important contribution.

Unfortunately, to transform metaphysics into the question of writing, in which meanings virtually choose themselves and thus one discourse (and therefore mode of action) cannot be demonstrated to be better than another, seems less than radical. Deconstruction is now embraced by the heads of English departments, professional societies, and other bodies-in-good-standing because it raises the issue of representation itself so weakly. Derrida's deconstruction of philosophy admits that it must leave intact the very concept whose lack of basis it exposes. While finding the notion of a language-independent reality untenable, neither does deconstruction promise liberation from the famous "prison house of language." The essence of language, the primacy of the symbolic, are not really tackled, but are shown to be as inescapable as they are inadequate to fulfilment. No exit; as Derrida declared: "It is not a question of releasing oneself into an unrepressive new order (there are none)."

*The crisis of representation*



If deconstruction's contribution is mainly just an erosion of our assurance of reality, it forgets that reality—advertising and mass culture to mention just two superficial examples—has already accomplished this. Thus this quintessentially postmodern point of view bespeaks the movement of thinking from decadence to its elegiac, or post-thought phase, or as John Fekete summarized it, “a most profound crisis of the Western mind, a most profound loss of nerve.”

Today's overload of representation serves to underline the radical impoverishment of life in technological class society—technology is deprivation. The classical theory of representation held that meaning or truth preceded and prescribed the representations that communicated it. But we may now inhabit a postmodern culture where the image has become less the expression of an individual subject than the commodity of an anonymous consumerist technology. Ever more mediated, life in the Information Age is increasingly controlled by the manipulation of signs, symbols, marketing and testing data, etc. Our time, says Derrida, is “a time without nature.”

All formulations of the postmodern agree in detecting a crisis of representation. Derrida, as noted, began a challenge of the nature of the philosophical project itself as grounded in representation, raising some unanswerable questions about the relationship between representation and thought. Deconstruction undercuts the epistemological claims of representation, showing that language, for example, is inadequate to the task of representation. But this undercutting avoids tackling the repressive nature of its subject, insisting, again, that pure presence, a space beyond representation, can only be a utopian dream. There can be no unmediated contact or communication, only signs and representations; deconstruction is a search for presence and fulfilment interminably, necessarily, deferred.

Jacques Lacan, sharing the same resignation as Derrida, at least reveals more concerning the malign essence of representation. Extending Freud, he determined that the subject is both constituted and alienated by the entry into the symbolic order, namely, into language. While denying the possibility of a return to a pre-language state in which the broken promise of presence might be honored, he could at least see the central, crippling stroke that is the submission of free-ranging desires to the symbolic world, the surrender of uniqueness to language. Lacan termed *jouissance* unspeakable because it could properly occur only outside of language: that happiness which is the desire for a world without the fracture of money or writing, a society without representation.

The inability to generate symbolic meaning is, somewhat ironically, a basic problem for postmodernism. It plays out its stance at the frontier between what can be represented and what cannot, a half-way resolution (at best) that refuses to refuse representation. (Instead of providing the arguments for the view of the symbolic as repressive and alienating, the reader is referred to the first five essays of my *Elements of Refusal* [Left Bank Books, 1988], which deal with time, language, number, art, and agriculture as cultural estrangements owing to symbolization.) Meanwhile an estranged and exhausted public loses interest in the alleged solace of culture, and with the deepening and thickening of mediation emerges the discovery that perhaps this was always the meaning of culture. It is certainly not out of character, however, to find that postmodernism does not recognize reflection on the origins of representation, insisting as it does

on the impossibility of unmediated existence.

In response to the longing for the lost wholeness of pre-civilization, postmodernism says that culture has become so fundamental to human existence that there is no possibility of delving down under it. This, of course, recalls Freud, who recognized the essence of civilization as a suppression of freedom and wholeness, but who decided that work and culture were more important. Freud at least was honest enough to admit the contradiction or non-reconciliation involved in opting for the crippling nature of civilization, whereas the postmodernists do not.

Floyd Merrell found that “a key, perhaps the principal key to Derridean thought” was Derrida’s decision to place the question of origins off limits. And so while hinting throughout his work at a complicity between the fundamental assumptions of Western thought and the violences and repressions that have characterized Western civilization, Derrida has centrally, and very influentially, repudiated all notions of origins. Causative thinking, after all, is one of the objects of scorn for postmodernists. ‘Nature’ is an illusion, so what could ‘unnatural’ mean? In place of the situationists’ wonderful “Under the pavement it’s the beach,” we have Foucault’s famous repudiation, in *The Order of Things*, of the whole notion of the “repressive hypothesis.” Freud gave us an understanding of culture as stunting and neurosis-generating; pm tells us that culture is all we can ever have, and that its foundations, if they exist, are not available to our understanding. Postmodernism is apparently what we are left with when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good.

Not only does pm echo Beckett’s comment in *Endgame*, “there’s no more nature,” but it also denies that there ever was any recognizable space outside of language and culture. ‘Nature’, declared Derrida in discussing Rousseau, “has never existed.” Again, alienation is ruled out; that concept necessarily implies an idea of authenticity which postmodernism finds unintelligible. In this vein, Derrida cited “the loss of what has never taken place, of a self-presence which has never been given but only dreamed of...” Despite the limitations of structuralism, Levi-Strauss’ sense of affiliation with Rousseau, on the other hand, bore witness to his search for origins. Refusing to rule out liberation, either in terms of beginnings or goals, Levi-Strauss never ceased to long for an ‘intact’ society, a non-fractured world where immediacy had not yet been broken. For this Derrida, pejoratively to be sure, presents Rousseau as a utopian and Levi-Strauss as an anarchist, cautioning against a “step further toward a sort of original an-archy,” which would be only a dangerous delusion.

The real danger consists in not challenging, at the most basic level, the alienation and domination threatening to completely overcome nature, what is left of the natural in the world and within ourselves. Marcuse discerned that “the memory of gratification is at the origin of all thinking, and the impulse to recapture past gratification is the hidden driving power behind the process of thought.” The question of origins also involves the whole question of the birth of abstraction and indeed of philosophical conceptuality as such, and Marcuse came close, in his search for what would constitute a state of being without repression, to confronting culture itself. He certainly never quite escaped the impression “that something essential had been forgotten” by humanity. Similar is the brief pronouncement by Novalis, “Philosophy is homesickness.” By comparison, Kroker and Cook are undeniably correct in concluding that “the postmodern culture is a

forgetting, a forgetting of origins and destinations.”

*Barthes, Foucault & Lyotard*

Turning to other poststructuralist/ postmodern figures, Roland Barthes, earlier in his career a major structuralist thinker, deserves mention. His *Writing Degree Zero* expressed the hope that language can be used in a utopian way and that there are controlling codes in culture that can be broken. By the early '70s, however, he fell into line with Derrida in seeing language as a metaphorical quagmire, whose metaphoricity is not recognized. Philosophy is befuddled by its own language and language in general cannot claim mastery of what it discusses. With *The Empire of Signs* (1970), Barthes had already renounced any critical, analytical intention. Ostensibly about Japan, this book is presented “without claiming to depict or analyze any reality whatsoever.” Various fragments deal with cultural forms as diverse as haiku and slot machines, as parts of a sort of anti-utopian landscape wherein forms possess no meaning and all is surface. *Empire* may qualify as the first fully postmodern offering, and by the mid-'70s its author's notion of the pleasure of the text carried forward the same Derridean disdain for belief in the validity of public discourse. Writing had become an end in itself, a merely personal aesthetic the overriding consideration. Before his death in 1980, Barthes had explicitly denounced “any intellectual mode of writing,” especially anything smacking of the political. By the time of his final work, *Barthes by Barthes*, the hedonism of words, paralleling a real-life dandyism, considered concepts not in terms of their validity or invalidity but only for their efficacy as tactics of writing.

In 1985 AIDS claimed the most widely known influence on postmodernism, Michel Foucault. Sometimes called “the philosopher of the death of man” and considered by many the greatest of Nietzsche's modern disciples, his wide-ranging historical studies (e.g. on madness, penal practices, sexuality) made him very well known and in themselves suggest differences between Foucault and the relatively more abstract and ahistorical Derrida. Structuralism, as noted, had already forcefully devalued the individual on largely linguistic grounds, whereas Foucault characterized “man (as) only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a simple fold in our knowledge that will soon disappear.” His emphasis lies in exposing ‘man’ as that which is represented and brought forth as an object, specifically as a virtual invention of the modern human sciences. Despite an idiosyncratic style, Foucault's works were much more popular than those of Horkheimer and Adorno (e.g. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*) and Erving Goffman, in the same vein of revealing the hidden agenda of bourgeois rationality. He pointed to the ‘individualizing’ tactic at work in the key institutions in the early 1800s (the family, work, medicine, psychiatry, education), bringing out their normalizing, disciplinary roles within emerging capitalist modernity, as the ‘individual’ is created by and for the dominant order.

Foucault, typically pm, rejects originary thinking and the notion that there is a ‘reality’ behind or underneath the prevailing discourse of an era. Likewise, the subject is a delusion essentially created by discourse, an ‘I’ created out of the ruling linguistic usages. And so his detailed historical narratives, termed ‘archaeologies’ of knowledge, are offered instead of theoretical overviews, as if they carried no ideological or philosophical assumptions. For Foucault there are no foundations of the social to be apprehended outside the contexts of various periods, or

epistemes, as he called them; the foundations change from one episteme to another. The prevailing discourse, which constitutes its subjects, is seemingly self-forming; this is a rather unhelpful approach to history resulting primarily from the fact that Foucault makes no reference to social groups, but focuses entirely on systems of thought. A further problem arises from his view that the episteme of an age cannot be known by those who labor within it. If consciousness is precisely what, by Foucault's own account, fails to be aware of its relativism or to know what it would have looked like in previous epistemes, then Foucault's own elevated, encompassing awareness is impossible. This difficulty is acknowledged at the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), but remains unanswered, a rather glaring and obvious problem.

The dilemma of postmodernism is this: how can the status and validity of its theoretical approaches be ascertained if neither truth nor foundations for knowledge are admitted? If we remove the possibility of rational foundations or standards, on what basis can we operate? How can we understand what the society is that we oppose, let alone come to share such an understanding? Foucault's insistence on a Nietzschean perspectivism translates into the irreducible pluralism of interpretation. He relativized knowledge and truth only insofar as these notions attach to thought-systems other than his own, however. When pressed on this point, Foucault admitted to being incapable of rationally justifying his own opinions. Thus the liberal Habermas claims that postmodern thinkers like Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard are 'neoconservative' for offering no consistent argumentation to move in one social direction rather than another. The pm embrace of relativism (or 'pluralism') also means there is nothing to prevent the perspective of one social tendency from including a claim for the right to dominate another, in the absence of the possibility of determining standards.

The topic of power, in fact, was a central one to Foucault and the ways he treated it are revealing. He wrote of the significant institutions of modern society as united by a control intentionality, a "carceral continuum" that expresses the logical finale of capitalism, from which there is no escape. But power itself, he determined, is a grid or field of relations in which subjects are constituted as both the products and the agents of power. Everything thus partakes of power and so it is no good trying to find a 'fundamental', oppressive power to fight against. Modern power is insidious and "comes from everywhere." Like God, it is everywhere and nowhere at once.

Foucault finds no beach underneath the paving stones, no 'natural' order at all. There is only the certainty of successive regimes of power, each one of which must somehow be resisted. But Foucault's characteristically pm aversion to the whole notion of the human subject makes it quite difficult to see where such resistance might spring from, notwithstanding his view that there is no resistance to power that is not a variant of power itself. Regarding the latter point, Foucault reached a further dead-end in considering the relationship of power to knowledge. He came to see them as inextricably and ubiquitously linked, directly implying one another. The difficulties in continuing to say anything of substance in light of this interrelationship caused Foucault to eventually give up on a theory of power. The determinism involved meant, for one thing, that his political involvement became increasingly slight. It is not hard to see why Foucaultism was greatly boosted by the media, while the situationists, for example, were blacked out.

Castoriadis once referred to Foucault's ideas on power and opposition to it as, "Resist if it

amuses you—but without a strategy, because then you would no longer be proletarian, but power.” Foucault’s own activism had attempted to embody the empiricist dream of a theory- and ideology-free approach, that of the “specific intellectual” who participates in particular, local struggles. This tactic sees theory used only concretely, as ad hoc “tool kit” methods for specific campaigns.

Despite the good intentions, however, limiting theory to discrete, perishable instrumental ‘tools’ not only refuses an explicit overview of society but accepts the general division of labor which is at the heart of alienation and domination. The desire to respect differences, local knowledge and the like refuses a reductive, totalitarian-tending overvaluing of theory, but only to accept the atomization of late capitalism with its splintering of life into the narrow specialties that are the province of so many experts. If “we are caught between the arrogance of surveying the whole and the timidity of inspecting the parts,” as Rebecca Comay aptly put it, how does the second alternative (Foucault’s) represent an advance over liberal reformism in general? This seems an especially pertinent question when one remembers how much Foucault’s whole enterprise was aimed at disabusing us of the illusions of humanist reformers throughout history. The “specific intellectual” in fact turns out to be just one more expert, one more liberal attacking specifics rather than the roots of problems. And looking at the content of his activism, which was mainly in the area of penal reform, the orientation is almost too tepid to even qualify as liberal. In the ‘80s “he tried to gather, under the aegis of his chair at the College de France, historians, lawyers, judges, psychiatrists and doctors concerned with law and punishment,” according to Keith Gandall. All the cops. “The work I did on the historical relativity of the prison form,” said Foucault, “was an incitation to try to think of other forms of punishment.” Obviously, he accepted the legitimacy of this society and of punishment; no less unsurprising was his corollary dismissal of anarchists as infantile in their hopes for the future and faith in human potential.

The works of Jean-Francois Lyotard are significantly contradictory to each other—in itself a pm trait—but also express a central postmodern theme: that society cannot and should not be understood as a whole. Lyotard is a prime example of anti-totalizing thought to the point that he has summed up postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives” or overviews. The idea that it is unhealthy as well as impossible to grasp the whole is part of an enormous reaction in France since the ‘60s against marxist and Communist influences. While Lyotard’s chief target is the marxist tradition, once so very strong in French political and intellectual life, he goes further and rejects social theory in toto. For example, he has come to believe that any concept of alienation—the idea that an original unity, wholeness, or innocence is fractured by the fragmentation and indifference of capitalism—ends up as a totalitarian attempt to unify society coercively. Characteristically, his mid-‘70s *Libidinal Economy* denounces theory as terror.

One might say that this extreme reaction would be unlikely outside of a culture so dominated by the marxist left, but another look tells us that it fits perfectly with the wider, disillusioned postmodern condition. Lyotard’s wholesale rejection of post-Kantian Enlightenment values does, after all, embody the realization that rational critique, at least in the form of the confident values and beliefs of Kantian, Hegelian and Marxist metanarrative theory, has been debunked by dismal historical reality.

According to Lyotard, the pm era signifies that all consoling myths of intellectual mastery and truth are at an end, replaced by a plurality of 'language-games', the Wittgensteinian notion of 'truth' as provisionally shared and circulating without any kind of epistemological warrant or philosophical foundation. Language-games are a pragmatic, localized, tentative basis for knowledge; unlike the comprehensive views of theory or historical interpretation, they depend on the agreement of participants for their use-value. Lyotard's ideal is thus a multitude of "little narratives" instead of the "inherent dogmatism" of metanarratives or grand ideas. Unfortunately, such a pragmatic approach must accommodate to things as they are, and depends upon prevailing consensus virtually by definition. Thus Lyotard's approach is of limited value for creating a break from the everyday norms. Though his healthy, anti-authoritarian skepticism sees totalization as oppressive or coercive, what he overlooks is that the Foucaultian relativism of language-games, with their freely contracted agreement as to meaning, tends to hold that everything is of equal validity. As Gerard Raulet concluded, the resultant refusal of overview actually obeys the existing logic of homogeneity rather than somehow providing a haven for heterogeneity.

To find progress suspect is, of course, prerequisite to any critical approach, but the quest for heterogeneity must include awareness of its disappearance and a search for the reasons why it disappeared. Postmodern thought generally behaves as if in complete ignorance of the news that division of labor and commodification are eliminating the basis for cultural or social heterogeneity. Pm seeks to preserve what is virtually non-existent and rejects the wider thinking necessary to deal with impoverished reality. In this area it is of interest to look at the relationship between pm and technology, which happens to be of decisive importance to Lyotard.

Adorno found the way of contemporary totalitarianism prepared by the Enlightenment ideal of triumph over nature, also known as instrumental reason. Lyotard sees the fragmentation of knowledge as essential to combatting domination, which disallows the overview necessary to see that, to the contrary, the isolation that is fragmented knowledge forgets the social determination and purpose of that isolation. The celebrated 'heterogeneity' is nothing much more than the splintering effect of an overbearing totality he would rather ignore. Critique is never more discarded than in Lyotard's postmodern positivism, resting as it does on the acceptance of a technical rationality that forgoes critique. Unsurprisingly, in the era of the decomposition of meaning and the renunciation of seeing what the ensemble of mere 'facts' really add up to, Lyotard embraces the computerization of society. Rather like the Nietzschean Foucault, Lyotard believes that power is more and more the criterion of truth. He finds his companion in the post-modern pragmatist Richard Rorty who likewise welcomes modern technology and is deeply wedded to the hegemonic values of present-day industrial society.

In 1985 Lyotard put together a spectacular high-tech exhibition at the Pompidou Center in Paris, featuring the artificial realities and microcomputer work of such artists as Myron Krueger. At the opening, its planner declared, "We wanted...to indicate that the world is not evolving toward greater clarity and simplicity, but rather toward a new degree of complexity in which the individual may feel very lost but in which he can in fact become more free." Apparently overviews are permitted if they coincide with the plans of our masters for us and for nature. But the more specific point lies with 'immateriality', the title of the exhibit and a Lyotardian term

which he associates with the erosion of identity, the breaking down of stable barriers between the self and a world produced by our involvement in labyrinthine technological and social systems. Needless to say, he approves of this condition, celebrating, for instance, the ‘pluralizing’ potential of new communications technology—of the sort that de-sensualizes life, flattens experience and eradicates the natural world. Lyotard writes: “All peoples have a right to science,” as if he has the very slightest understanding of what science means. He prescribes “public free access to the memory and data banks.” A horrific view of liberation, somewhat captured by: “Data banks are the encyclopedia of tomorrow; they are ‘nature’ for postmodern men and women.”

Frank Lentricchia termed Derrida’s deconstructionist project “an elegant, commanding overview matched in philosophic history only by Hegel.” It is an obvious irony that the postmodernists require a general theory to support their assertion as to why there cannot and should not be general theories or metanarratives. Sartre, gestalt theorists and common sense tell us that what pm dismisses as “totalizing reason” is in fact inherent in perception itself: one sees a whole, as a rule, not discrete fragments. Another irony is provided by Charles Altieri’s observation of Lyotard,” that this thinker so acutely aware of the dangers inherent in master narratives nonetheless remains completely committed to the authority of generalized abstraction.” Pm announces an anti-generalist bias, but its practitioners, Lyotard perhaps especially, retain a very high level of abstraction in discussing culture, modernity and other such topics which are of course already vast generalizations.

“A liberated humanity,” wrote Adorno, “would by no means be a totality.” Nonetheless, we are currently stuck with a social world that is one and which totalizes with a vengeance. Postmodernism, with its celebrated fragmentation and heterogeneity, may choose to forget about the totality, but the totality will not forget about us.

### *Deleuze, Guattari & Baudrillard*

Gilles Deleuze’s ‘schizo-politics’ flow, at least in part, from the prevailing pm refusal of overview, of a point of departure. Also called ‘nomadology’, employing “rhizomatic writing,” Deleuze’s method champions the deterritorialization and decoding of structures of domination, by which capitalism will supersede itself through its own dynamic. With his sometime partner, Felix Guattari, with whom he shares a specialization in psychoanalysis, he hopes to see the system’s schizophrenic tendency intensified to the point of shattering. Deleuze seems to share, or at least comes very close to, the absurdist conviction of Yoshimoto Takai that consumption constitutes a new form of resistance.

This brand of denying the totality by the radical strategy of urging it to dispose of itself also recalls the impotent pm style of opposing representation: meanings do not penetrate to a center, they do not represent something beyond their reach. “Thinking without representing,” is Charles Scott’s description of Deleuze’s approach. Schizo-politics celebrates surfaces and discontinuities; nomadology is the opposite of history.

Deleuze also embodies the postmodern “death of the subject” theme, in his and Guattari’s best-

known work, *Anti-Oedipus*, and subsequently. 'Desiringmachines', formed by the coupling of parts, human and nonhuman, with no distinction between them, seek to replace humans as the focus of his social theory. In opposition to the illusion of an individual subject in society, Deleuze portrays a subject no longer even recognizably anthropocentric. One cannot escape the feeling, despite his supposedly radical intention, of an embrace of alienation, even a wallowing in estrangement and decadence.

In the early '70s Jean Baudrillard exposed the bourgeois foundations of marxism, mainly its veneration of production and work, in his *Mirror of Production* (1972). This contribution hastened the decline of marxism and the Communist Party in France, already in disarray after the reactionary role played by the Left against the upheavals of May '68. Since that time, however, Baudrillard has come to represent the darkest tendencies of postmodernism and has emerged, especially in America, as a pop star to the ultra-jaded, famous for his fully disenchanted views of the contemporary world. In addition to the unfortunate resonance between the almost hallucinatory morbidity of Baudrillard and a culture in decomposition, it is also true that he (along with Lyotard) has been magnified by the space he was expected to fill following the passing, in the '80s, of relatively deeper thinkers like Barthes and Foucault.

Derrida's deconstructive description of the impossibility of a referent outside of representation becomes, for Baudrillard, a negative metaphysics in which reality is transformed by capitalism into simulations that have no backing. The culture of capital is seen as having gone beyond its fissures and contradictions to a place of self-sufficiency that reads like a rather science-fiction rendering of Adorno's totally administered society. And there can be no resistance, no "going back," in part because the alternative would be that nostalgia for the natural, for origins, so adamantly ruled out by postmodernism.

"The real is that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction." Nature has been so far left behind that culture determines materiality; more specifically, media simulation shapes reality. "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth - - it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true." Debord's "society of the spectacle"—but at a stage of implosion of self, agency, and history into the void of simulations such that the spectacle is in service to itself alone.

It is obvious that in our "Information Age," the electronic media technologies have become increasingly dominant, but the overreach of Baudrillard's dark vision is equally obvious. To stress the power of images should not obscure underlying material determinants and objectives, namely profit and expansion. The assertion that the power of the media now means that the real no longer exists is related to his claim that power "can no longer be found anywhere"; and both claims are false. Intoxicating rhetoric cannot erase the fact that the essential information of the Information Age deals with the hard realities of efficiency, accounting, productivity and the like. Production has not been supplanted by simulation, unless one can say that the planet is being ravaged by mere images, which is not to say that a progressive acceptance of the artificial does not greatly assist the erosion of what is left of the natural.

Baudrillard contends that the difference between reality and representation has collapsed, leaving



us in a 'hyperreality' that is always and only a simulacrum. Curiously, he seems not only to acknowledge the inevitability of this development, but to celebrate it. The cultural, in its widest sense, has reached a qualitatively new stage in which the very realm of meaning and signification has disappeared. We live in "the age of events without consequences" in which the 'real' only survives as formal category, and this, he imagines, is welcomed. "Why should we think that people want to disavow their daily lives in order to search for an alternative? On the contrary, they want to make a destiny of it...to ratify monotony by a grander monotony." If there should be any 'resistance', his prescription for that is similar to that of Deleuze, who would prompt society to become more schizophrenic. That is, it consists wholly in what is granted by the system: "You want us to consume—O.K., let's consume always more, and anything whatsoever; for any useless and absurd purpose." This is the radical strategy he names 'hyperconformity'.

At many points, one can only guess as to which phenomena, if any, Baudrillard's hyperbole refers. The movement of consumer society toward both uniformity and dispersal is perhaps glimpsed in one passage...but why bother when the assertions seem all too often cosmically inflated and ludicrous. This most extreme of the postmodern theorists, now himself a top-selling cultural object, has referred to the "ominous emptiness of all discourse," apparently unaware of the phrase as an apt reference to his own vacuities.

Japan may not qualify as 'hyperreality', but it is worth mentioning that its culture seems to be even more estranged and postmodern than that of the U.S. In the judgment of Masao Miyoshi, "the dispersal and demise of modern subjectivity, as talked about by Barthes, Foucault, and many others, have long been evident in Japan, where intellectuals have chronically complained about the absence of selfhood." A flood of largely specialized information, provided by experts of all kinds, highlights the Japanese high-tech consumer ethos, in which the indeterminacy of meaning and a high valuation of perpetual novelty work hand in hand. Yoshimoto Takai is perhaps the most prolific national cultural critic; somehow it does not seem bizarre to many that he is also a male fashion model, who extols the virtues and values of shopping.

Yasuo Tanaka's hugely popular *Somehow, Crystal* (1980) was arguably the Japanese cultural phenomenon of the '80s, in that this vacuous, unabashedly consumerist novel, awash with brand names (a bit like Bret Easton Ellis's 1991 *American Psycho*), dominated the decade. But it is cynicism, even more than superficiality, that seems to mark that full dawning of postmodernism which Japan seems to be: how else does one explain that the most incisive analyses of pm there—Now is the Meta-Mass Age, for example—are published by the Parco Corporation, the country's trendiest marketing and retailing outlet. Shigesatu Itoi is a top media star, with his own television program, numerous publications, and constant appearances in magazines. The basis of this idol's fame? Simply that he wrote a series of state-of-the-art (flashy, fragmented, etc.) ads for Seibu, Japan's largest and most innovative department store chain. Where capitalism exists in its most advanced, postmodern form, knowledge is consumed in exactly the way that one buys clothes. 'Meaning' is pass., irrelevant; style and appearance are all.

We are fast arriving at a sad and empty place, which the spirit of postmodernism embodies all too well. "Never in any previous civilization have the great metaphysical preoccupations, the fundamental questions of being and the meaning of life, seemed so utterly remote and pointless," in Frederic Jameson's judgment. Peter Sloterdijk finds that "the discontent in culture has

assumed a new quality: it appears as universal, diffuse cynicism.” The erosion of meaning, pushed forward by intensified reification and fragmentation, causes the cynic to appear everywhere. Psychologically “a borderline melancholic,” he is now “a mass figure.”

The postmodern capitulation to perspectivism and decadence does not tend to view the present as alienated—surely an old-fashioned concept—but rather as normal and even pleasant. Robert Rauschenberg: “I really feel sorry for people who think things like soap dishes or mirrors or Coke bottles are ugly, because they’re surrounded by things like that all day long, and it must make them miserable.” It isn’t just that “everything is culture,” the culture of the commodity, that is offensive; it is also the pm affirmation of what is by its refusal to make qualitative distinctions and judgments. If the postmodern at least does us the favor, unwittingly, of registering the decomposition and even depravity of a cultural world that accompanies and abets the current frightening impoverishment of life, that may be its only ‘contribution’.

We are all aware of the possibility that we may have to endure, until its self-destruction and ours, a world fatally out of focus. “Obviously, culture does not dissolve merely because persons are alienated,” wrote John Murphy, adding, “A strange type of society has to be invented, nonetheless, in order for alienation to be considered normative.” Meanwhile, where are vitality, refusal, the possibility of creating a non-mutilated world? Barthes proclaimed a Nietzschean “hedonism of discourse;” Lyotard counselled, “Let us be pagans.” Such wild barbarians! Of course, their real stuff is blank and dispirited, a thoroughly relativized academic sterility. Postmodernism leaves us hopeless in an unending mall; without a living critique; nowhere.

## Part II: The Nihilists Dictionary

### Niceism

Nice-ism n. tendency, more or less socially codified, to approach reality in terms of whether others behave cordially; tyranny of decorum which disallows thinking or acting for oneself; mode of interaction based upon the above absence of critical judgement or autonomy.

All of us prefer what is friendly, sincere, pleasant-nice. But in an immiserated world of pervasive and real crisis, which should be causing all of us to radically reassess everything, the nice can be the false.

The face of domination is often a smiling one, a cultured one. Auschwitz comes to mind, with its managers who enjoyed their Goethe and Mozart. Similarly, it was not evil-looking monsters who built the A-bomb but nice liberal intellectuals. Ditto regarding those who are computerizing life and those who in other ways are the mainstays of participation in this rotting order, just as it is the nice businessperson (self-managed or otherwise) who is the backbone of a cruel work-and-shop existence by concealing its real horrors.

Cases of niceism include the peaceniks, whose ethic of niceness puts them-again and again and again-in stupid ritualized, no-win situations, those Earth First!ers who refuse to confront the thoroughly reprehensible ideology at the top of "their" organization, and Fifth Estate, whose highly important contributions now seem to be in danger of an eclipse by liberalism. All the single-issue causes, from ecologism to feminism, and all the militancy in their service, are only ways of evading the necessity of a qualitative break with more than just the excesses of the system.

The nice as the perfect enemy of tactical or analytical thinking: Be agreeable; don't let having radical ideas make waves in your personal behavior. Accept the pre-packaged methods and limits of the daily strangulation. Ingrained deference, the conditioned response to "play by the rules"-authority's rules-this is the real Fifth Column, the one within us.

In the context of a mauled social life that demands the drastic as a minimum response toward health, niceism becomes more and more infantile, conformist and dangerous. It cannot grant joy, only more routine and isolation. The pleasure of authenticity exists only against the grain of society. Niceism keeps us all in our places, confusedly reproducing all that we supposedly abhor. Let's stop being nice to this nightmare and all who would keep us in it.

### Technology

Tech-nol-o-gy n. According to Webster's: industrial or applied science. In reality: the ensemble of division of labor/production/industrialism and its impact on us and on nature. Technology is the sum of mediations between us and the natural world and the sum of those separations mediating us from each other. It is all the drudgery and toxicity required to produce and reproduce the stage of hyper-alienation we live in. It is the texture and the form of domination at

any given stage of hierarchy and commodification.

Those who still say that technology is “neutral,” “merely a tool,” have not yet begun to consider what is involved. Junger, Adorno and Horkheimer, Ellul and a few others over the past decades - not to mention the crushing, all but unavoidable truth of technology in its global and personal toll - have led to a deeper approach to the topic. Thirty-five years ago the esteemed philosopher Jaspers wrote that “Technology is only a means, in itself neither good nor evil. Everything depends upon what man makes of it, for what purpose it serves him, under what conditions he places it.” The archaic sexism aside, such superficial faith in specialization and technical progress is increasingly seen as ludicrous. Infinitely more on target was Marcuse when he suggested in 1964 that “the very concept of technical reason is perhaps ideological. Not only the application of technology, but technology itself is domination... methodical, ascetic, calculated, calculating control.” Today we experience that control as a steady reduction of our contact with the living world, a speeded-up Information Age emptiness drained by computerization and poisoned by the dead, domesticating imperialism of high-tech method. Never before have people been so infantilized, made so dependant on the machine for everything; as the earth rapidly approaches its extinction due to technology, our souls are shrunk and flattened by its pervasive rule. Any sense of wholeness and freedom can only return by the undoing of the massive division of labour at the heart of technological progress. This is the liberatory project in all its depth.

Of course, the popular literature does not yet reflect a critical awareness of what technology is. Some works completely embrace the direction we are being taken, such as McCorduck’s ‘Machines Who Think’ and Simons’ ‘Are Computers Alive?’, to mention a couple of the more horrendous. Other, even more recent books seem to offer a judgement that finally flies in the face of mass pro-tech propaganda, but fail dismally as they reach their conclusions. Murphy, Mickunas and Pilotta edited ‘The Underside of High-Tech: Technology and the Deformation of Human Sensibilities’, whose ferocious title is completely undercut by an ending that technology will become human as soon as we change our assumptions about it! Very similar is Siegel and Markoff’s ‘The High Cost of High Tech’; after chapters detailing the various levels of technological debilitation, we once again learn that its all just a question of attitude: “We must, as a society, understand the full impact of high technology if we are to shape it into a tool for enhancing human comfort, freedom and peace.” This kind of cowardice and/or dishonesty owes only in part to the fact that major publishing corporations do not wish to publicize fundamentally radical ideas.

The above-remarked flight into idealism is not a new tactic of avoidance. Martin Heidegger, considered by some the most original and deep thinker of this century, saw the individual becoming only so much raw material for the limitless expansion of industrial technology. Incredibly, his solution was to find in the Nazi movement the essential “encounter between global technology and modern man.” Behind the rhetoric of National Socialism, unfortunately, was only an acceleration of technique, even into the sphere of genocide as a problem of industrial production. For the Nazis and the gullible, it was, again a question of how technology is understood ideally, not as it really is. In 1940, the General Inspector for the German Road System put it this way: “Concrete and stone are material things. Man gives them form and spirit.

National Socialist technology possesses in all material achievement ideal content.”

The bizarre case of Heidegger should be a reminder to all that good intentions can go wildly astray without a willingness to face technology and its systematic nature as part of practical social reality. Heidegger feared the political consequences of really looking at technology critically; his apolitical theorizing thus constituted a part of the most monstrous development of modernity, despite his intention.

EarthFirst! claims to put nature first, to be above all petty “politics.” But it could well be that behind the macho swagger of a Dave Foreman (and the “deep ecology” theorists who also warn against radicals) is a failure of nerve like Heidegger’s, and the consequence, conceivably could be similar.

## **Culture**

Cul-ture n. commonly rendered as the sum of the customs, ideas, arts, patterns, etc. of a given society. Civilization is often given as a synonym, reminding us that cultivation - as in domestication - is right in there, too. The Situationists, in 1960, had it that “culture can be defined as the ensemble of means through which society thinks of itself and shows itself to itself.” Getting warmer, Barthes remarked that it is “ a machine to showing you desire. To desire, always to desire but never to understand.”

Culture was more respected once, seemingly, something to “live up to.” Now, instead of concern for how we fail culture, the emphasis is on how culture has failed us. Definitely something at work that thwarts us, does not satisfy and this makes itself more evident as we face globally and within us the death of nature. Culture, as the opposite of nature, grows discordant, sours, fades as we strangle in the thinner and thinner air of symbolic activity. High culture or low, palace or hovel, it’s the same prisonhouse of consciousness; the symbolic as the repressive.

It is inseparable from the birth and continuation of alienation surviving, as ever, as compensation, a trade of the real for its objectification. Culture embodies the split between wholeness and the parts of the whole turning into domination. Time, language, number, art-cultural impositions that have come to dominate us with lives of their own.

Magazines and journals now teem with articles lamenting the spread of cultural illiteracy and historical amnesia, two conditions that underline a basic dis-ease in society. In our postmodern epoch the faces of fashion range from blank to sullen, as hard drug use, suicide, and emotional disability rates continue to soar. About a year ago I got a ride from Berkeley to Oregon with a U.C. senior and somewhere along the drive I asked her, after talking about the ‘60s, among other things, to describe her own generation. She spoke of her co-students in terms of loveless sex, increasing heroin use, and “a sense of despair masked by consumerism.”

Meanwhile, massive denial continues. In a recent collection of essays on culture, DJ. Enright offers the sage counsel that “the more commonly personal misery and discontent are aired, the more firmly these ills tighten their grip on us.” Since anxiety first sought deliverance via cultural

form and expression, in the symbolic approach to authenticity, our condition has probably not been this transparently bankrupt. Robert Harbison's "Deliberate Regression" is another work displaying complete ignorance regarding the fundamental emptiness of culture: "the story of how enthusiasm for the primitive and the belief that salvation lies in unlearning came to be a force in almost every held of thought is exceedingly strange."

Certainly the ruins are there for everyone to see. From exhausted art in the form of the recycled mish-mash of postmodernism, to the poststructuralist technocrats like Lyotard, who finds in data banks "the Encyclopedia of tomorrow... 'nature' for postmodern man," including such utterly impotent forms of "opposition" as 'micropoliticS' and "schizopolitics," there is little but the obvious symptoms of a general fragmentation and despair. Peter Sloterdijk (Critique of Cynical Reason) points out that cynicism is the cardinal, pervasive outlook, for now the best that negation has to offer.

But the myth of culture will manage to survive as long as our immiseration fails to force us to confront it, and so cynicism will remain as long as we allow culture to remain in lieu of unmediated life.

## **Feral**

Fer-al adj. wild, or existing in a state of nature, as freely occurring animals or plants; having reverted to the wild state from domestication.

We exist in a landscape of absence wherein real life is steadily being drained out by debased work, the hollow cycle of consumerism and the mediated emptiness of high-tech dependency. Today it is not only the stereotypical yuppie workaholic who tries to cheat despair via activity, preferring not to contemplate a fate no less sterile than that of the planet and (domesticated) subjectivity in general. We are confronted, nonetheless, by the ruins of nature and the ruin of our own nature, the sheer enormity of the meaninglessness and the inauthentic amounting to a weight of lies. It's still drudgery and toxicity for the vast majority, while a poverty more absolute than financial renders more vacant the universal Dead Zone of civilization. "Empowered" by computerization? Infantilized, more like. An Information Age characterized by increased communication? No, that would presuppose experience worth communicating.

A time of unprecedented respect for the individual? Translation: wage-slavery needs the strategy of worker self-management at the point of production to stave off the continuing productivity crisis, and market research must target each "life-style" in the interest of a maximized consumer culture.

In the upside-down society the solution to massive alienation-induced drug use is a media barrage, with results as embarrassing as the hundreds of millions futilely spent against declining voter turnout. Meanwhile, TV, voice and soul of the modern world, dreams vainly of arresting the growth of illiteracy and what is left of emotional health by means of propaganda spots of thirty seconds or less. In the industrialized culture of irreversible depression, isolation, and cynicism, the spirit will die first, the death of the planet an afterthought. That is, unless we erase

this rotting order, all of its categories and dynamics.

Meanwhile, the parade of partial (and for that reason false) oppositions proceeds on its usual routes. There are the Greens and their like who try to extend the life of the racket of electoralism, based on the lie that there is validity in any person representing another; these types would perpetuate just one more home for protest, in lieu of the real thing. The peace “movement” exhibits, in its every (uniformly pathetic) gesture, that it is the best friend of authority, property and passivity. One illustration will suffice: in May 1989, on the 20th anniversary of Berkeley’s People’s Park battle, a thousand people rose up admirably, looting 28 businesses and injuring 15 cops; declared peace-creep spokesperson Julia Talley, “These riots have no place in the peace movement.” Which brings to mind the fatally misguided students in Tiananmen Square, after the June 3 massacre had begun, trying to prevent workers from fighting the government troops. And the general truth that the university is the number one source of that slow strangulation known as reform, the refusal of a qualitative break with degradation. Earth First! recognizes that domestication is the fundamental issue (e.g. that agriculture itself is malignant) but many of its partisans cannot see that our species could become wild.

Radical environmentalists appreciate that the turning of national forests into tree farms is merely a part of the overall project that also seeks their own suppression. But they will have to seek the wild everywhere rather than merely in wilderness as a separate preserve.

Freud saw that there is no civilization without the forcible renunciation of instincts, without monumental coercion. But, because the masses are basically “lazy and unintelligent,” civilization is justified, he reasoned. This model or prescription was based on the idea that pre-civilized life was brutal and deprived—a notion that has been, amazingly, reversed in the past 20 years. Prior to agriculture, in other words, humanity existed in a state of grace, ease and communion with nature that we can barely comprehend today.

The vista of authenticity emerges as no less than a wholesale dissolution of civilization’s edifice of repression. which Freud, by the way, described as “something which was imposed on a resisting majority by a minority which understood how to obtain possession of the means to power and coercion.” We can either passively continue on the road to utter domestication and destruction or turn in the direction of joyful upheaval, passionate and feral embrace of wildness and life that aims at dancing on the ruins of clocks, computers and that failure of imagination and will called work. Can we justify our lives by anything less than such a politics of rage and dreams?

## **Division Of Labor**

Di-vi-sion of la-bor n. 1. the breakdown into specific, circumscribed tasks for maximum efficiency of output which constitutes manufacture; cardinal aspect of production. 2. the fragmenting or reduction of human activity into separated toil that is the practical root of alienation; that basic specialization which makes civilization appear and develop.

The relative wholeness of pre-civilized life was first and foremost an absence of the narrowing,

confining separation of people into differentiated roles and functions. The foundation of our shrinkage of experience and powerlessness in the face of the reign of expertise, felt so acutely today, is the division of labor. It is hardly accidental that key ideologues of civilization have striven mightily to valorize it. In Plato's "Republic", for example, we are instructed that the origin of the state lies in that "natural" inequality of humanity that is embodied in the division of labor. Durkheim celebrated a fractionated, unequal world by divining that the touchstone of "human solidarity," its essential moral value is—you guessed it. Before him, according to Franz Borkenau, it was a great increase in division of labor occurring around 1600 that introduced the abstract category of work, which may be said to underlie, in turn, the whole modern, Cartesian notion that our bodily existence is merely an object of our (abstract) consciousness.

In the first sentence of "The Wealth of Nations" (1776), Adam Smith foresaw the essence of industrialism by determining that division of labor represents a qualitative increase in productivity. Twenty years later Schiller recognized that division of labor was producing a society in which its members were unable to develop their humanity. Marx could see both sides: "as a result of division of labor," the worker is "reduced to the condition of a machine." But decisive was Marx's worship of the fullness of production as essential to human liberation. The immiseration of humanity along the road of capital's development he saw as a necessary evil.

Marxism cannot escape the determining imprint of this decision in favor of division of labor, and its major voices certainly reflect this acceptance. Lukacs, for instance, chose to ignore it, seeing only the "reifying effects of the dominant commodity form" in his attention to the problem of proletarian consciousness. E.P. Thompson realized that with the factory system, "the character-structure of the rebellious pre-industrial labourer or artisan was violently recast into that of the submissive individual worker." But he devoted amazingly little attention to division of labor, the central mechanism by which this transformation was achieved. Marcuse tried to conceptualize a civilization without repression, while amply demonstrating the incompatibility of the two. In bowing to the "naturalness" inherent in division of labor, he judged that the "rational exercise of authority" and the "advancement of the whole" depend upon it—while a few pages later (in *Eros and Civilization*) granting that one's "labor becomes the more alien the more specialized the division of labor becomes."

Ellul understood how "the sharp knife of specialization has passed like a razor into the living flesh," how division of labor causes the ignorance of a "closed universe" cutting off the subject from others and from nature. Similarly did Horkheimer sum up the debilitation: "thus, for all their activity individuals are becoming more passive; for all their power over nature they are becoming more powerless in relation to society and themselves." Along these lines, Foucault emphasized productivity as the fundamental contemporary repression.

But recent Marxian thought continues in the trap of having, ultimately, to elevate division of labor for the sake of technological progress. Braverman's in many ways excellent *Labor and Monopoly Capital* explores the degradation of work, but sees it as mainly a problem of loss of "will and ambition to wrest control of production from capitalist hands." And Schwabbe's *Psychosocial Consequences of Natural and Alienated Labor* is dedicated to the ending of all domination in production and projects a self-management of production. The reason, obviously,



that he ignores division of labor is that it is inherent in production; he does not see that it is nonsense to speak of liberation and production in the same breath.

The tendency of division of labor has always been the forced labor of the interchangeable cog in an increasingly autonomous, impervious-to-desire apparatus. The barbarism of modern times is still the enslavement to technology, that is to say, to division of labor. "Specialization," wrote Giedion, "goes on without respite," and today more than ever can we see and feel the barren, de-eroticized world it has brought us to. Robinson Jeffers decided, "I don't think industrial civilization is worth the distortion of human nature, and the meanness and loss of contact with the earth, that it entails.

Meanwhile, the continuing myths of the "neutrality" and "inevitability" of technological development are crucial to fitting everyone to the yoke of division of labor. Those who oppose domination while defending its core principle are the perpetuators of our captivity. Consider Guattari, that radical post-structuralist, who finds that desire and dreams are quite possible "even in a society with highly developed industry and highly developed public information services, etc." Our advanced French opponent of alienation scoffs at the naive who detect the "essential wickedness of industrial societies," but does offer the prescription that "the whole attitude of specialists needs questioning." Not the existence of specialists, of course, merely their "attitudes."

To the question, "How much division of labor should we jettison?" returns, I believe, the answer, "How much wholeness for ourselves and the planet do we want?"

## **Progress**

Prog-ress n. 1.[archaic] official journey, as of a ruler. 2. historical development, in the sense of advance or improvement. 3. forward course of history or civilization, as in horror show or death-trip.

Perhaps no single idea in Western civilization has been as important as the notion of progress. It is also true that, as Robert Nisbet has put it, "Everything now suggests that Western faith in the dogma of progress is waning rapidly in all levels and spheres in this final part of the twentieth century."

In the anti-authoritarian milieu, too, progress has fallen on hard times. There was a time when the syndicalist blockheads, like their close Marxist relatives, could more or less successfully harangue as marginal and insignificant those disinterested in organizing their alienation via unions, councils and the like. Instead of the old respect for productivity and production (the pillars of progress), a Luddite prescription for the factories is ascendant and anti-work a cardinal starting point of radical dialog. We even see certain ageing leopards trying to change their spots: the Industrial Workers of the World, embarrassed by the first word of their name may yet move toward refusing the second (though certainly not as an organization).

The eco-crisis is clearly one factor in the discrediting of progress, but how it remained an article

of faith for so many for so long is a vexing question. For what has progress meant, after all? Its promise began to realize itself, in many ways, from history's very beginning. With the emergence of agriculture and civilization commenced, for instance, the progressive destruction of nature; large regions of the Near East, Africa and Greece were rather quickly rendered desert wastelands.

In terms of violence, the transformation from a mainly pacific and egalitarian gatherer-hunter mode to the violence of agriculture/civilization was rapid. "Revenge, feuds, warfare, and battle seem to emerge among, and to be typical of, domesticated peoples," according to Peter Wilson. And violence certainly has made progress along the way, needless to say, from state weapons of mega-death to the recent rise in outburst murders and serial killers.

Disease itself is very nearly an invention of civilized life; every known degenerative illness is part of the toll of historical betterment. From the wholeness and sensual vitality of pre-history, to the present vista of endemic ill-health and mass psychic misery-more progress.

The pinnacle of progress is today's Information Age. which embodies a progression in division of labor, from an earlier time of the greater possibility of unmediated understanding, to the stage where knowledge becomes merely an instrument of the repressive totality, to the current cybernetic era where data is all that's really left. Progress has put meaning itself to flight.

Science, the model of progress, has imprisoned and interrogated nature, while technology has sentenced it (and humanity) to forced labor. From the original dividing of the self that is civilization, to Descartes' splitting of the mind from the rest of objects (including the body), to our arid, high-tech present-a movement indeed wondrous. Two centuries ago the first inventors of industrial machinery were spat on by the English textile workers subjected to it and thought villainous by just about everyone but their capitalist paymasters. The designers of today's computerized slavery are lionized as cultural heroes, though opposition is beginning to mount.

In the absence of greater resistance, the inner logic of class society's development will culminate in a totally technicized life as its final stage. The equivalence of the progress of society and that of technology is becoming ever more apparent by the fact of their immanent convergence. "Theses on the Philosophy of History", Walter Benjamin's last and best work, contains this lyrically expressed insight:

"A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

## **Community**

**Com-mu-ni-ty** n. 1. a body of people having the same interests. 2. [Ecol.] an aggregate of organisms with mutual relations. 3. a concept invoked to establish solidarity, often when the basis for such affiliation is absent or when the actual content of that affiliation contradicts the stated political goal of solidarity.

Community, by which one obviously means more than, say, neighborhood, is a very elusive term but a continuing touchstone of radical value. In fact, all manner of folks resort to it, from the pacifist encampments near nuclear test sites to “serve the people” leftists with their sacrifice-plus-manipulation approach to the proto-fascist Afrikaaner settlers. It is invoked for a variety of purposes or goals, but as a liberatory notion is a fiction. Everyone feels the absence of community, because human fellowship must struggle, to even remotely exist, against what “community” is in reality. The nuclear family, religion, nationality, work, school, property, the specialism of roles-some combination of these seems to comprise every surviving community since the imposition of civilization. So we are dealing with an illusion, and to argue that some qualitatively higher form of community is allowed to exist within civilization is to affirm civilization. Positivity furthers the lie that the authentically social can co-exist with domestication. In this regard, what really accompanies domination, as community, is at best middle-class, respect-the-system protest.

Fifth Estate, for example, undercuts its (partial) critique of civilization by upholding community and ties to it in its every other sentence. At times it seems that the occasional Hollywood film (e.g. Emerald Forest, Dances With Wolves) outdoes our anti-authoritarian journals in showing that a liberatory solidarity springs from non-civilization and its combat with the “community” of industrial modernity.

Jacques Camatte discussed capital’s movement from the stage of formal domination to that of real domination. But there appear to be significant grounds from which to project the continuing erosion of support for existing community and a desire for genuine solidarity and freedom. As Fredy Perlman put it, near the end of his exceptional *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!*: “What is known is that Leviathan, the great artifice, single and world-embracing for the first time, in His-story, is decomposing...It is a good time for people to let go of its sanity, its masks and armors, and go mad, for they are already being ejected from its pretty polis.”

The refusal of community might be termed a self defeating isolation but it appears preferable, healthier, than declaring our allegiance to the daily fabric of an increasingly self-destructive world. Magnified alienation is not a condition chosen by those who insist on the truly social over the falsely communal. It is present in any case, due to the content of community. Opposition to the estrangement of civilized, pacified existence should at least amount to naming that estrangement instead of celebrating it by calling it community.

The defense of community is a conservative gesture that faces away from the radical break required. Why defend that to which we are held hostage?

In truth, there is no community. And only by abandoning what is passed off in its name can we move on to redeem a vision of communion and vibrant connectedness in a world that bears no

resemblance to this one. Only a negative “community,” based explicitly on contempt for the categories of existent community, is legitimate and appropriate to our aims.

## **Society**

So-ci-e-ty n. from L. socius, companion. 1. an organized aggregate of interrelated individuals and groups. 2. totalizing racket, advancing at the expense of the individual, nature and human solidarity.

Society everywhere is now driven by the treadmill of work and consumption. This harnessed movement, so very far from a state of companionship, does not take place without agony and disaffection. Having more never compensates for being less, as witness rampant addiction to drugs, work, exercise, sex, etc. Virtually anything can be and is overused in the desire for satisfaction in a society whose hallmark is denial of satisfaction. But such excess at least gives evidence of the hunger for fulfillment, that is, an immense dissatisfaction with what is before us.

Hucksters purvey every kind of dodge, for example. New Age panaceas, disgusting materialistic mysticism on a mass scale: sickly and self-absorbed, apparently incapable of looking at any part of reality with courage or honesty. For New Age practitioners, psychology is nothing short of an ideology and society is irrelevant.

Meanwhile, Bush, surveying “generations born numbly into despair,” was predictably loathsome enough to blame the victimized by citing their “moral emptiness.” The depth of immiseration might best be summed up by the federal survey of high schoolers released 9/19/91, which found that 27 percent of them “thought seriously” about suicide in the preceding year.

It could be that the social, with its growing testimony to alienation-mass depression, the refusal of literacy, the rise of panic disorders, etc.-may finally be registering politically. Such phenomena as continually declining voter turnout and deep distrust of government led the Kettering Foundation in June ‘91 to conclude that “the legitimacy of our political institutions is more at issue than our leaders imagine,” and an October study of three states (as reported by columnist Tom Wicker, 10/14/91) to discern “a dangerously broad gulf between the governors and the governed.”

The longing for nonmutilated life and a nonmutilated world in which to live it collides with one chilling fact: underlying the progress of modern society is capital’s insatiable need for growth and expansion. The collapse of state capitalism in Eastern Europe and the USSR leaves only the ‘triumphant’ regular variety, in command but now confronted insistently with far more basic contradictions than the ones it allegedly overcame in its pseudo-struggle with ‘socialism’. Of course, Soviet industrialism was not qualitatively different from any other variant of capitalism, and far more importantly, no system of production (division of labor, domination of nature, and work-and-pay slavery in more or less equal doses) can allow for either human happiness or ecological survival.

We can now see an approaching vista of all the world as a toxic, ozone-less deadness. Where

once most people looked to technology as a promise, now we know for certain that it will kill us. Computerization, with its congealed tedium and concealed poisons, expresses the trajectory of society, engineered sleekly away from sensuous existence and finding its current apotheosis in Virtual Reality.

The escapism of VR is not the issue, for which of us could get by without escapes? Likewise, it is not so much a diversion from consciousness as it is itself a consciousness of complete estrangement from the natural world. Virtual Reality testifies to a deep pathology, reminiscent of the Baroque canvases of Rubens that depict armored knights mingling with but separated from naked women. Here the 'alternative' technojunkies of Whole Earth Review, pioneer promoters of VR, show their true colors. A fetish of 'tools', and a total lack of interest in critique of society's direction, lead to glorification of the artificial paradise of VR.

The consumerist void of high tech simulation and manipulation owes its dominance to two increasing tendencies in society, specialization of labor and the isolation of individuals. From this context emerges the most terrifying aspect of evil: it tends to be committed by people who are not particularly evil. Society, which in no way could survive a conscious inspection is arranged to prevent that very inspection.

The dominant, oppressive ideas do not permeate the whole of society, rather their success is assured by the fragmented nature of opposition to them. Meanwhile, what society dreads most are precisely the lies it suspects it is built upon. This dread or avoidance is obviously not the same as beginning to subject a deadening force of circumstances to the force of events.

Adorno noted in the '60s that society is growing more and more entrapping and disabling. He predicted that eventually talk of causation within society would become meaningless: society itself is the cause. The struggle toward a society-if it could still be called that-of the face-to-face, in and of the natural world, must be based on an understanding of society today as a monolithic, all-encompassing death march.

## PART III: Reviews & Bibliography

### 1. Bookchin's Libertarian Municipalism

*The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship*, by Murray Bookchin (Sierra Club Books, 730 Polk St., San Francisco, CA. 94109, 1987).

As he's been doing for about fifteen years, Bookchin argues in this work for the formation of citizen's councils and popular municipal self-management groups to save the cities from the mismanagement of professional politicians and bureaucrats. Bankrupt of history and method, his rescue mission consists in advancing the totally non-anarchist (and illogical) thesis that increased participation in local politics points the way to the collapse of the state. We must, he counsels, slowly enlarge and expand the "existing institutions" and "try to democratize the republic." It is a tedious, even somewhat embarrassing review chore, as if such a book can be taken seriously from any remotely anti-authoritarian perspective.

He tries to make his pure reformism palatable by such devices as the false antinomies urbanization vs. cities, representation vs. sovereignty, and politics vs. statecraft, and unsupportable assertions, like referring to politics as having once been the "activity of an entire community." Another device is to ignore the real history of urban life, as if illusory; he resorts at times to putting such terms as "elected" representatives, "voters" and "taxpayers" in quotes as though the terms really don't, somehow, correspond to reality. Open the book at random and you will find similar absurdities and evasions.

Another key element does involve the historical record—but only to put historical banalities into new and unrecognizable shapes. The *polls* of classical Athens, for example, has long been Bookchin's model for a revitalization of urban politics. But unfortunately, as everyone knows, Athenian "democracy" of a few males presided over a harshly differentiated class structure. That it rested upon slavery and the suppression of women? Murray deftly passes over this, too, with a quick parenthetical aside conceding a few Greek "shortcomings"! Likewise with his revered New England town meetings, another beacon for a renewed city politics. Never mind the scores of monographs which admit (unlike, say, some old junior high school texts) that in those town meetings the same hierarchy and domination obtained as elsewhere in society.

Bookchin also tries, by the way, to give a rosy hue to cities at their origin, the better, I suppose, to argue for their continuance. Cities arose part and parcel with civilization, however, their temples and palaces reflecting the relatively sudden emergence of work, war, religion, and slavery. Villages, with their surviving element of the heterogenous and autonomous, their neighborly intimacy, were replaced by a large, unitary urbanism; consent and custom (rapidly ebbing along with the erasure of hunter-gatherer life), were supplanted by the authoritarian control of a dominant minority and its new coercive instruments.

And if his grasp of history is faulty (to put it generously), it is what is missing altogether that renders his book terminally pathetic. Nowhere does he find fault with the most fundamental dimension of modern living, that of wage-labor and the commodity. Nor does he deal with the important present-day features of that dimension: the productionist destruction of nature, the power of transnational corporations, Information Age computer mediation and quantification, the

enormous soporific, homogenizing and intrusive reach of the media, to name a few forces that strain to achieve a perfectly routinized, emptied, flattened-out, commodified ethos, and which submerge city life. To ignore the content of modern domination while advancing the cause of involvement in city politics is to give a faltering system precisely what it needs the most: participation of the disaffected.

While people turn off increasingly to representation and work, new schemes to “democratize” these fundamentally alienating modes must be promoted. Bookchin, in a parallel to the legitimizing of work via workers’ councils, works for the legitimation of both politics and cities via citizens’ councils. Massified society, with its ever-greater division of labor and standardizations, realizes itself in cities while destroying our very sense of place.

What is radical, what is healthy in trying to prop up cities any more than work? How much preferable a visionary discourse in the direction of wholeness and freedom, where the closest shape to “urban” might be shifting, mobile gatherings or celebrations, reconstituted at whim, where representation and work are unknown degradations. The only “politics” I want to engage in definitely does not consist in being a model citizen a la Murray Bookchin.

## **Amerika as Paradise (Review of Amerika by Jean Baudrillard)**

*America* by Jean Baudrillard (London: Verso, 1988)

For a couple of decades or so theory from France has been as much of a staple as cars from Japan, and the leading import is Jean Baudrillard. Edging out the German favorite, Habermas, he seems to have become— since death took Foucault out of the running in 1984—the number-one theorist to emerge since the ‘60s. We have seen the Situationist International’s appeal with the art school crowd but even here the most popular—if until now largely uncomprehended—is the thoroughly modern Baudrillard. Yes, a large favorite with the aesthete-nihilist crowd and for good reasons.

In the wake of the May ‘68 rising he attempted a merger of (then fashionable) semiotics with Marxism, but by the mid-70s had a parting of the ways with the latter. In *The Mirror of Production*, an uncharacteristically systematic, even accessible, book, he forcefully showed that each of Marx’s main categories or dimensions was a mirror image of capitalist society. From this point on Baudrillard moved toward his present outlook of bleak fatalism, presenting, with much hyperbole and abstract phrase-making, a world dominated by electronic media and moving into an almost science-fiction realm of unfreedom and unconnectedness.

With terms like the “end of the social” and the “catastrophe of meaning,” he depicts an increasingly high-tech reality that is no longer quite real but somehow a simulation, immune to critique or revolt, approaching a kind of black-hole quality where images and events no longer have identifiable reference points. A series of opaque if somewhat dazzling books have provided little beyond a high pitch of verbal pyrotechnics and a morose, not readily understandable framework for testing his unusual formulations. Since *America* deals with a definite place and

time, however, we finally can try to match concepts with social reality and make some judgement of his apocalyptic theorizing.

Early on we learn that, in its naive energy, America is “the *only remaining primitive society*” (italics his), that everything in it, despite the level of technology, “still bears the marks of a primitive society,” and that its primitivism has passed into the “character of a universe that is beyond us, that far outstrips its own moral, social, or ecological rationale.” One is tempted to wonder whether in such phrases, never explained, this word-drunk French traveler is his theory’s own best personification—the term “extermination of meaning” comes to mind.

And when Baudrillard does come down to earth, the results are often less than edifying. Concrete observations, for example, are few in number and largely inaccurate at that. After having classified jogging as a new form of voluntary servitude (also as a new form of adultery, also of suicide), he says that stopping a jogger may well result in physical assault. Another repeated image, more on the level of hallucination perhaps than inaccuracy, is that of American motel TVs always left on, even in vacant rooms. Beyond the merely mistaken is the offensive; noting that the lines outside expensive restaurants or nightclubs “are often longer than those at soup kitchens,” our esteemed social theorist adds that maybe the latter will become as fashionable as the former. The homeless will no doubt be warmed by this hope.

Returning to the theme of America as a primitive society, Baudrillard continues to rhapsodize about “the power of unculture,” the wonderfully unreflective nature of Americans. In a passage somehow referring to Porterville, California, he applauds “the whole of life as a drive-in. Truly magnificent.” This we are told, is the “true Utopian society.” I’m not kidding. It is *paradise*, no less, this society “secure in its wealth and power.” Paradise, because “There is no other.”

Does this have a ring of familiarity? All this nonsense is really what one has heard before: in high school civics class, in political science courses and other forms of overt propaganda: the old theses of American exceptionalism, American egalitarianism, American pluralism, from Tocqueville et al. One doubts that he has even heard these tired lies, to be able to reproduce them, as he does, without embarrassment.

Yes, Europe is so old and artificial, America is so fresh and blank as to be truly “beyond culture and politics.” All the hackneyed lines, again, served up in modern post-structuralist verbiage.

It is not that this anti-cultural hero never says anything valid. In noticing the ubiquitously self-publicizing nature of U.S. society: “The American flag itself bears witness to this by its omnipresence...not as a heroic sign but as the trademark of a good brand.” Maybe not terribly deep, but OK. It is very daunting, though, how rare are such moments of intelligence, how lacking in irony overall is the stream of downright silly and reactionary commentary.

Continuing on, the reader begins to get a bearing on Baudrillard’s perspective. Celebrating American ascendance, especially in his loving attention to the superficial, he comes into focus: this is the utter fascination with what is seen as the triumphant, the view of one for whom subjugation is taken for granted. He basks in the radiance of capital’s imagined transcendence—and transforms this into liberation. Thus the motel maid he encounters functions “*in total*



*freedom*” (italics his). Here is that state where “politics *frees itself* in the spectacle” (italics his). Utopia. Paradise.

America, where “even the garbage is clean.” America, “hyperreal in its vitality,” with all the energy of the simulacrum, realness itself conquered. Along with common sense, one longs for antidotes to such crapola, such as the sensible and modest *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Age* by Orrin Klapp. Baudrillard once chided post-structuralism for its “strange complicity with cybernetics” (*Forget Foucault*, 1977). In *America* we have a picture and an embrace of high-tech fascism, complete with mystifications and ecstasy. All told, a rather incredible book.

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