

Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth

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IGNITING A REVOLUTION

VOICES IN DEFENSE OF THE EARTH

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Against Civilization, For Reconnection to Life!

Terra Greenbrier

Civilization saturates us to the core. On physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels, we are born manufactured in Civilization's image. It has torn each of us from our wild selves and the wild world that we rely on for survival. It flows in our blood, projecting itself onto the world around us and representing itself as "reality." To perpetuate itself, it demands that we must separate, isolate, categorize, label, package and inevitably devour our own inner wildness, and the unmolested places around us that we have come to call "wilderness."

Existing as an interlocking complex of physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and psychological systems, Civilization is not defined merely by physical places or specific eras of history. The word itself refers to the phenomenon of the "City," which first appeared at different times in different places around the world. But the "civilizing process" looks similar in all these places. The transition from nomadic, foraging lifestyles, to sedentary, horticultural society, with its complex economic and property systems as well as various types of social hierarchies, define this process. This process has tended to result in the rise of the City—a glaring example of ecological imbalance and social alienation. Both in pre-industrial contexts, as with the Aztecs of Mesoamerica, and in industrial contexts, such as our own, it's clear that such scenarios have been, and continue to be, recipes for disaster.

A Deepening Disconnection...

An underlying logic of domination and control fuels Civilization. The physical institutions that reflect and enforce this logic include school, work, media, science, medicine, religious institutions, the nation-state and its military, political systems, and economies. Concepts like Progress, patriarchy, domestication, reason, morality, and politics constitute a social foundation for the Machine. These systems and values that surround us separate us from directly experiencing the diversity and inter-relatedness

of the living world. Living within the circle of life, as an integral part of a whole organism, forms a basis for our relationships with other humans. Without this primal relatedness, the roles and assumptions that predefine us in Civilization control our own self-image, and consequently our understanding of the humans around us.

In Civilization, we surround ourselves with symbolic culture: predetermined measurements of time, representations of the world through language, number, science, history, myth—culture itself. We wear synthetic clothing, live in wasteful and isolating shelters, eat toxic food made in factories, spend our time in artificial and sterile environments doing monotonous and tedious things to keep the machine of Progress and Capital running, in exchange for money or diplomas. We take drugs to keep our caged wild selves from hurting ourselves or lashing out at those around us. We numb our pain and depression with alcohol, or distract ourselves from it with superficial pursuits like pop culture, junk food, shopping, or religion. Surely the point has been made crystalline that Civilization must collapse or be made to collapse, by many a rambling street person and anti-civ writer.

But what hasn't seemed so clear, is how we might go about destroying Civilization in our own lives; how one might free oneself from our physical dependence on it, and the mental, social, emotional, and spiritual psychoses that come from this dependence. Like an addiction, Civilization convinces us we need it to live.

The thousand year-old legacy of hoarding, warring, and ecological imbalance that has brought us here to the edge of catastrophe, reflects what's been a steadily deepening disconnection with the physical world around us. It's this disconnection and desensitization that has allowed us in modern, industrial society to justify living far beyond the limits of the planet's life-support systems, and to objectify and exploit our non-human neighbors, as well as each other. In many Civilized cultures, animal exploitation, racism, and sexism are just some of the more familiar manifestations of this objectifying impulse. In our collective denial, we imagine ourselves as super-humans, trusting in the brave new world of high technology to finally allow us to supersede our messy human-ness.

A Cancerous Trajectory...

Within leftist and liberal political circles, this cancerous trajectory is so often accepted as unchangeable reality. We are encouraged to grasp at crumbs of inclusion thrown to us by the systems that maintain this ongoing fantasy of human superiority and technological utopia. Mass Society and its movements boil down our passions and convictions into one monolithic voice, with a goal of palatability at the forefront. Our desires for sanity and balance are constantly co-opted by the "Spectacle"—the all-encompassing world of mass media and its conformist and consumerist

values that tell us who we are and why we are alive. To dare to live outside of it becomes either a matter of societal privilege, or just sheer luck.

In taking this critical analysis to the next step of confrontation, we continuously seek practical courses of action from which to express our opposition. Reform-oriented campaigns are crafted to appeal to society's "moral conscience," while playing right into the hands of the political systems that guard the royal towers. Even the courageous and righteous direct actions of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), while aimed at institutions profiting off ecocide, can only go so far toward toppling their foundations: the logic of Civilization and all its institutions. While Ted Kaczynski may have spoken eloquently of some of the fundamental causes of the destruction of earth, his actions too were limited in their effectiveness. In terms of an anti-civilization praxis, they can hardly be considered a threat. This is not to discount their worth. They serve a necessary purpose: propaganda by the deed. But symbolically exposing the perpetrators of ecocide is only one facet of our opposition to the Megamachine. We are also creating examples of possibilities of life outside of, and in opposition to, the institutions that control us.

An all-too common mistake comes with the creation of "alternatives" to destructive lifestyles that still rely on mass society, industrialism, the nation state. These efforts usually simply reproduce the logic of civilized thinking, existing in a comfortable social niche. They are easily "recuperated" back into the Spectacle, and offered up for consumption in the marketplace. The failure to challenge the most basic assumptions of society keeps us constantly dissatisfied and miserable, with just enough distractions to allow us to avoid this uncomfortable realization.

Nation-state organization and industrial technology have enabled the domination of the individual by "the majority," and suppressed the self-regulating, anarchic nature of life. They work counter to any physical patterns we could observe in wild nature. Even if masses of people all simultaneously removed themselves from industrial society by self-organizing "alternative" lifestyles, it should be clear that the corporate/state powers wouldn't allow it to happen without a fight. Their very existence depends on our dependence on them. "Democracy" itself is an institution that follows the logic of civilization perfectly. It serves to alienate us from our own power over our lives, controlling our personal and collective desires and values, channeling it into the marketplace of ideas and products.

Catalyzing situations...

From this perspective, and seen as a matter of community and self-defense, one might welcome the dissolution of the physical infrastructure of civilization—industrialism—before it renders life on earth, and human freedom itself, dysfunctional. This is not a call to "bring on industrial collapse," but rather a sobering acceptance of the inevitability of such a collapse (or series of collapses), and a call to gather with others in decentral-

ized, bioregionally-based communities in order to survive it (those of us who actually want to anyway). In creating a multiplicity of examples of life without the super-system that only takes and gives nothing back, we can pass on information and experiences with different methods of ecological culture, while also defending our communities from those who would take control.

What took thousands of years to come to this point could take even longer to unravel. But we can get the process started by creating, or merely participating in, catalyzing situations. Through these situations we might urge people to question the ecological wisdom of a human-centered, control-oriented culture. Global warming, power failures, computer glitches, and damage incurred by nature's whims in the form of hurricanes and floods, can all provide fertile ground for further, and more lasting, destabilization of the industrial infrastructure. This infrastructure is very tangible, and thus physically vulnerable. With enough people acting directly and simultaneously, around the world, interconnected systems of domination COULD, theoretically, crash. Without this megamachinery clouding our vision of how to live in balance, people might just begin to sober up out of our collective hallucinations. The potential for living outside the institutions that control us may just seem to make a lot more sense, and propel us to start living with a realistic, biocentric view of ourselves on planet earth.

Many radicals and anarchists see no point in even embarking on such a project, considering what appears to be the average mindset in industrial culture. "People don't want to destroy civilization," claim the already defeated. But consider this: (1) just because it seems at this point in time that most modern humans don't want to destroy civilization, it doesn't mean that will always be the case; and (2) if one deeply believes that civilization must end in order for humans to be truly liberated and live in harmony within nature, why should we deny our convictions by working toward a "more realistic," less suffocating (for western societies) world, thus prolonging the painful effects of civilization on the entire planet?

And besides, what is more unrealistic than believing that there is sufficient time (before the collapse of our planet's life-support systems, or the complete technocratic control of physical reality, whichever comes first) to build a broad-based, multi-ethnic/racial/sexual/generational social movement? One that is so cohesive and powerful that it can resist the highly technocratic mechanisms of state repression long enough to allow millions to re-organize into decentralized, anarcho-communist, worker controlled, ecologically harmonious, classless, international networks of syndicates that can maintain a global non-capitalist trade system that doesn't contribute to the degradation of the earth, or require that people work soul-killing, monotonous jobs to maintain it, and preserves peoples' individual freedoms, as well as returning stolen lands to native people, and administering reparations to Africans and others for slavery and other atrocities... It's a nice fantasy...

Scattering Seeds...

In the time we have left before the wild chaos of nature takes back control from the hands of (a small, elite network of) the human species, we might embark on the project of asking ourselves what seeds we can scatter here that will one day sprout from the compost of our decadent society.

Visions of a post-civilized world have become more and more vivid to many of us who are attempting to live in ecological balance, free of our mental cages of domestication. “Rewilding” is not a political strategy aimed at organizing masses or exercising “freedom of speech.” It’s an impulse toward personal and communal liberation that looks at the past for inspiration and wisdom, and toward the future to adapt and prepare for new and drastic changes in our daily lives. It also looks at the situation as it currently stands, and accepts both the impoverishment we have inherited, and the possibilities that we have to work with. Breaking free from our domestication helps us survive both physically and psychologically amidst waste and boredom. It allows us to confront the subtle, psychic logic of Civilization within ourselves, and reclaim our Self from the false self that we were taught to create and project to the world.

As opposed to hyper-competitive systems like capitalism, sharing and cooperation make life easier. This is a very old idea, of course—perhaps even instinctual to our species. If seen within this context, modern decentralized DIY networks could not only render civilization useless, but they could be used to subvert it—much in the same way the Black Panthers or the American Indian Movement included morning breakfast programs for children and community-based cultural education in their strategy, or like the German autonomous squatting communities in the 1980s. Food, housing, education, health, trade, communication, music, and art can all be seen in terms of a postindustrial reality. It’s not up to us to figure out how, and if, these things will function in the future for anyone other than ourselves and our immediate communities, but we can begin the task of that exploration now, and share it with the world around us.

Beyond “Society”...

A large part of that exploratory process can include a deep questioning of the very existence of some elements of modern life that often go unquestioned, such as systems of food production, education, and technology; mass society; and “culture” itself. Rather than merely looking to adapt these elements into our lives in a more participatory or ecological way, we can incorporate into our cultural conversations an active self-questioning of the very origins and functioning of these activities in our daily lives. Even without taking drastic measures like abandoning agriculture and modern medicine, we can take our process of unlearning and deconstructing our socialization—our domestication—beyond where most radicals have typically gone before. Picking up where others have left off, we can move from veganism and organic agriculture to urban/suburban edible

landscaping and wild food foraging; from Waldorf and Montessori schools to “unschooling,” cooperative homeschooling projects rooted in self-directed, ecologically-based learning; from community theater and recycled object art to invisible theater and surrealism.

Learning and practicing earth-based lifeways can help us gain a more direct understanding of life without civilization’s constructs, inspired by the wisdom of those who live them. Having been domesticated already, we can never return to a purely “wild” existence. Instead, “going feral” is a way of escaping the dense layers of our domestication. By peeling back our alienation from nature’s cycles and stories just a few layers, we enter the realms of permaculture, edible landscaping, wild food foraging, earthen building, and even subsistence hunting. These experiences can help us resolve the basic crisis in our psyches, or what Chellis Glendenning refers to as “the original trauma,” in her important book *My Name is Chellis and I’m in Recovery from Western Civilization*.

On a personal level, an ethic of “truth-speaking” and “radical honesty” can transform our highly mediated interpersonal relationships into directly lived, interactive, and participatory exchanges. These transformations can allow for a deeper and more powerful level of healing and collaboration. Without the tedium of social relationships simply filling time between work and school, our connections can set off wildfires, personally and socially.

The task that lies before us is both old and new. We are everything that has come before us, and at the same time, like nothing that has ever come before. Within a process of constant self-questioning, we can only become more open to the infinity of possible futures.