

REALITIES



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<http://www.wildwolff.com>

Introduction

Realities, plural?

My reality, yours. I cannot know what you see, what your reality is. I carry a whole load of my unique history in my reality. You have an entirely different history that colors what you see and what meaning you find in what you see.

Different cultures have different realities. The clothes we wear, the food we eat, the shelters we live in are part of a tribal, cultural reality. Every language describes a reality. The Inuit who live(d) in the Arctic have a dozen words for snow, different kinds and stages of snow. Indonesian and Malaysian have ten or more words for rice. Hawaiians have three words for *we*. The reality of countries 'created' from colonies may have conflicted realities because colonies rarely had 'natural' boundaries.

Reality is a concept made in my head, shaped from experiences, sights, feelings, many ideas that were taught me, impressed on me. And out of all those perceptions my mind somehow makes a whole that in the modern world is the stage and backdrop of where and how I live.

All societies, villages, tribes, cultures have ways to educate, describe the tribal reality to growing children. From birth our parents, teachers, neighbors, peers, shape the experiences and the meanings attached to experiences that make up my reality. Western culture is more forceful and more determined perhaps to impress a certain way of seeing what IS. Modern, or civilized, people have definite ideas about good and bad. Anything and everything can be good or bad: the way we dress, the color of our skin, what we do, what we can't do, what we say, how we deal with life. In the real reality (a useless concept of course) there is no good or bad, because that is a value judgment humans invented. And, as we all know all too well, what is good for me most likely is bad for someone else.

The two realities I write about are the reality of modern humans, a man-made world, and the very different reality of Nature, Mother ©, the planetary ecology.

The first I usually call the world, the second nature, or the planet.

We, modern humans, don't see the reality of nature as an ecology any more. We imagine we can control nature. I am quite sure that we cannot.

Modern humans—those of us who think of ourselves as civilized—have lost or rejected most of the perceptions we, humans, used to get from living in and with nature. The natural world has become background to us, pictures from the National Geographic, colored scenes from TV shows. Visual and aural experiences without touch, smell, feel. And we ignore, edit, what does not easily fit into what the TV tells us is reality. No animal is like the cuddly stuffed animals of Disney; no beach is as glamorous as pictures of Waikiki or Monte Carlo.

Realities differ not because we see differently, but how we have learned to interpret what we see, hear, feel. Through the eyes, but in the head, through our ears, but interpreted by our brains. What we call reality is manmade.

Most of us learn, sooner or later, that different realities cannot be bridged by force. Try patience. Try to walk in someone else's shoes. I heard an American politician raise his voice, *I cannot stand in someone else's shoes—that's un-American*. Too bad, because that is the essence of compassion.

Our western reality insists we are the best, the highest form of reality, that others must be shown or forced to become like us. And so, we make differences. Seeing differences is making enemies.

Is there then a real reality?

The most real reality I know is Nature, the Planetary Ecology.

That real reality is the original chaos.

For a few thousand years we, humans, have tried to conquer the original chaos by making our own worlds. Different man-made worlds with different ideologies shaping different governments. All human-made worlds are based on the idea of hierarchy, bosses and subjects. What we have made is a world that has made a very few of us own the rest of us. They, the masters, may succeed to so change the planet that it will no longer be habitable to us.

Then what?

We excelled in adapting to whatever chaos we found on this rich planet. We survived in jungles, in ice and snow, deserts, at very high altitudes, on small islands.

When we stopped adapting ourselves, thinking we could, should, would, adapt the chaos to our wants we began to walk a dead end path. Some of us now live lives emperors could not have dreamed even a hundred years ago.

But at what cost!

Before it is too late we must get to know the original chaos again, and see the most real reality we can experience. What there is is all there is. That, or nothing.

That means, for instance, that it is not possible to live a life that rarely if ever touches the realities of weather, temperature, the sting of a bee, the smell of a flower. It has become possible, even common, for whole generations of people to think of reality as something we make up, placed on top of the earth. Government, many governments on many levels, making a million laws that are made to mark paths for us to walk on and places we are not allowed to go. Years, whole periods of years, of indoctrination, a time when we must learn to see what we are supposed to see, hear what we are told is there, feel what it is supposed to feel like.

We don't know any more how far we have drifted from primitive people, our foreparents, who perceived and lived intimately with and in the natural world of their jungle, or desert or ice field. They learned the very few laws of nature. Yes, there is danger, water is precious, fire burns. Not because someone told us, but we learned as a small child to feel, to see, to experience. Realities based on experience are quite different from realities made from what other people teach, from text books, TV, movies.

On the most basic level we are no different from animals. Life means finding food to eat and shelter from the elements. Life eats life. Survival means never eat more than I need. Eat the leaves, save the plant. Hunt one, but leave enough for another day.

Our modern world has become entirely artificial. We buy food and don't know, nor care, where or even if it grew. We live in square boxes—there are no straight lines in nature. We think we need entertainment. Entertainment produced by experts, by a corporation, morphed from advertising to propaganda. Our life decisions are no longer based on the weather, or the availability of food and shelter, but on manmade ideas to make us productive, able to buy food and shelter with money. Money? An illusion.

We, *homo sapiens sapiens* (*man aware that he is aware*) has become someone almost wholly driven by his own brain activity. A unique way of being, never known even a few hundred years ago.

We may have gone through many shapes to evolve to who we have become, but that evolution was mostly of the mind, different from physical evolution. Everything in the world of nature constantly evolves, changes. Nature's whimsies know no limit. Colors, shapes, functions change. The climate changes seasonally and now in ways we haven't grasped yet. Not all evolution works, however. That is the essence of the theory of evolution. The endless changes, mutations, may work but most of the time are unimportant or do not work. Only occasionally a small change sticks.

I consider the possibility that the evolution of man in the last ten thousand years has been mostly in the brain, leading to a strange dominance of what brain scientists call the left brain, the left side of the two halves of the brain. The left brain is where language is, where cause and effect are thought, where logic resides. The right brain is where we see wholes, through which we see the relationship between everything. To survive in the jungle or on an ice field you need the right brain. To survive in today's so-called civilization you need the left brain. A very different kind of living because it requires a different way of seeing what is real. In a modern, entirely man-made world, we must adjust to illusion. Money, work, laws and endless controls prevent (protect?) us from seeing the real reality of What Is.

We can, and probably must, learn to accept again that the chaos of nature is real, wonderful, full of mysteries, amazement and dangers. But it is What Is.

No, I am not a brain scientist. I have collected some impressive degrees, but I am and have always been a generalist. I know a little about a lot of things; specialists are the ones who know a lot about a few things. And I know how to connect what we have put in different boxes but that in the ecological reality are, of course, related.

I was lucky to grow up at a time and in a place where nature was still mostly wild, where

the people around me were not white nor western. I learned when I was two, old enough to get around, to look out for snakes and other dangers, with people who communicated more with touch and smile than with words. Many years later I got to know a small group of people who still lived a very ancient life, without any of the things and ideas we think essential, but with a joy in just *being* that we no longer know. I feel the distance between them and us, then and now, acutely.

Yes, I have successfully lived in the modern world, I've earned enough money to raise a family; we lived well. As an old man I much prefer the ancient way of simple living above the fierce insanity, the confusion of so-called civilization. Here there is still some wild and it is easier to forget mind logic which does not work at all in the natural world—does not exist in the wild. There are no straight lines in nature

Here is what I try to communicate, compressing it to its most inner essence.

Daily I am confronted with, and bothered by, the enormous complexity of the modern world. The things we have to do to get food, to get enough money to buy food. The endless layers of bureaucracy. And all too often the system does not work. That is one reality. As we should know by now: quite unsustainable.

The other reality is the planetary ecology, not complicated but complex, it is enormous and has millions of pieces, but what defines it is that it is a whole. It is as our body, organic. Everything related to everything else. The essence of an organism is not the organs, the parts, not even our brain, but the interdependence of all those parts. The planetary ecology is first of all a whole. Sustainable for geologic ages.

The great difference between any human-made system and an ecology is that **all** human systems are hierarchical. A boss and peons, bosses of bosses. An ecology cannot be hierarchical. In ecologies it is the interaction, even interdependence, between the million pieces that makes an ecology work, a constant dynamic balance. There is no boss and cannot be a boss in an ecology.

That means we, one species, cannot rule the planetary ecology. All we do, are doing, is dangerously, perhaps fatally, crimping the planetary ecology.

I am not sure how we got here, much less sure how to get back to what I think the right path. *We can never go back*, people tell me. It seems all too likely that we may not have a choice, we probably must go back and start over.

Since the way we are, what we call civilized, begins and certainly ends in the mind, whatever adjustment we can make must also happen in the mind. I can imagine a scenario for that as well, but it is not easy. Changing our mind is not hard, changing our thinking is, but inevitable if we are to survive.

Don't look to leaders to lead, philosophers to teach, politicians to rule.

Rely on the simple but effective creativity of the meek.

A new reality must come from the people who have nothing but a normal human lust for life, who have not been made addicts to what we call civilization.

"We all — human and non-human alike — are refugees from the war zone that is civilization."

Derrick Jensen

NOTE:

I apologize for sometimes using 'Man' for human. I do, because our language, as our culture, is male-centered, and so it has come to be that we say mankind when we mean humankind. I have consciously stuck with the old use of man for mankind because it seems to me that many of the subjects I bring into these essays were done, first thought of, by males rather than both males and females. Modern humans are still, even now, male dominated. I don't support that, but it is still an aspect of our reality.

When I tell people that among so-called primitive people—who I call First People—there truly is no gender dominance they don't believe me. Modern humans are convinced that the difference between men and women is so ingrained, so essential, that we cannot imagine a world in which the two sexes are completely equal. But all who know them agree that among First People, and quite a few indigenous people, men are not bigger than women, women have muscles like men. They truly are equal.

Another reason to consider starting over again from that beginning!

I have written about my own experiences with a small group of First People I got to know in Malaysia, now many years ago. Stories can be found all through my writing, and in the book *What It Is To Be Human* © 1994, and an edited version, *Original Wisdom, Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing* © 2001. The original introduction to the book and a few stories are available on my web site:

<http://www.wildwolff.com/WIITBH/selection.pdf>

Enjoy...

each of these now chapters once were essays

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MAN ALONE

“We Indians think of the earth and the whole universe as a never-ending circle, and in this circle man is just another animal. The buffalo and the coyote are our brothers, the birds, our cousins. Even the tiniest ant, even a louse, even the smallest flower you can find—they are all relatives.”

Jenny Leading Cloud
White River Sioux

We, modern Man, walked out of the circle.

How can we deny our relatedness to all that lives? We cannot act as if we owned the place to do with what we want. That is not how a planetary ecosystem works. We **are** part of it, whether we like it or not. An ecosystem is not something you can resign from. It's like the head saying "I am better, more spiritual, than the body," and then proceed to abuse, reshape, pollute the body. When the body dies, the head dies.

We have done exactly that! And because we cannot see that what we are doing can only lead to our own extinction, we pretend that everything is fine. Progress. More and bigger. An economy that must "grow" every year.

Even a moment's thought should convince us that in a closed ecosystem, there is no *more*. The only way to live in a sustainable world is to live within our means. Anything more is stolen from our neighbors.

We are now engaged in trying to secure control over the oil of the world, so that, never mind other people's needs for oil, we at least will be allowed to continue our profligate way of life another year, another month. But oil is not the issue: it is the burning of oil and coal that is making what we now call Climate Change. Every scientific report tells of possibly irreversible changes coming much faster than we had thought (hoped). Glaciers are melting faster than we thought even a few years ago. The atmosphere is getting warmer, the seas are warmer, and even a few degrees has far-reaching consequences.

A few countries are doing something. Sweden decided it will be totally free from fossil fuels by 2015, only a few years from now. But Sweden does not contribute much to the problem. The United States, with 4% of the world's population, causes at least 25% of the pollution of the atmosphere. But American auto makers do not make small cars that sip fuel. It will take ten, or more, years to switch an enormous industry over to economic transportation.

My guess is that the American economy will be unable to change as rapidly as it needs to. We are bankrupt. It is not going to be a smooth change, but a crash.

I look at the way we live, the way we were taught to consume, when I consider our way of life: throwing away last year's electronic gadget, throwing away food, destroying forests that took a hundred and more years to grow, I cannot see this culture change in a few years. We, Americans, are going to get the greatest shock of our lives when we have to learn to live without cars, without electricity, without supermarkets, without manufactured food.

Don't be so pessimistic, I hear you say.

There is always hope, the saying says..

Needing so desperately to see through rose-colored glasses is Pollyanna. What is needed is seeing clearly. Accepting what is, ready to adapt — something Man does exceptionally well — to changed circumstances, even if it is we who changed the circumstances.

Almost half a century ago I was fortunate to get to know a small group of people who lived in a sustainable world that had been very little changed for thousands of years. Some call them Stone Age People; they are not, of course. But their way of life, nomads, hunter/gatherers, is ancient. They still know themselves securely within the circle.

When I knew them they lived very simple lives. So simple that we could not imagine living that simply. They owned nothing, certainly not the land they lived on.

That used to be true for all indigenous people. The idea of *owning* land was unimaginable before we stepped out of the circle.

The people I knew lived in the deep jungle. They were nomads. Their houses were the simplest structures, made from bamboo that grew all around them. They had no chiefs, no leaders. No laws, no police, no jails. They knew their environment intimately. They could find food all around. They did not 'work' when foraging through the day—not work 'in the sweat of their brow' certainly. Wandering here and there they knew to find an edible root, some fruit, leaves. Occasionally they hunted (with blow pipes and poison darts) but never more than they could eat, of course. They did not grow rice, or corn, or potatoes, there was enough starchy food to be found in the ground. They lived in the tropics, wore hardly any clothes. They bathed in streams. Made little fires for cooking and sitting around in the evening—not a bonfire as we would make, but three sticks glowing. They sang all day long. Little songs, mostly without words, just the joy of being alive bubbling up. And, amazingly, two or three people, each making what seemed random sounds, made a harmony.

Peter Matthiessen, famous travel writer, met a similar group of people in Africa, an encounter he describes in his book *The Tree Where Man Was Born*. He and a friend, and some bearers, met five pygmies, 'shorter than the bow they carried'. They had hunted, and were carrying slabs of meat seemingly as big as themselves. They smiled. Peter Matthiessen could not help but smile, "a smile that travelled all around my head," he writes. And as they mumble simple greetings, one group to another, he writes: "The encounter in the sunny wood is much too simple, too beautiful to be real, yet it is more real than anything I have known in a long time. I feel a warm flood of relief, as if I had been away all my life and had come home again—I want to embrace them all."

Yes, that is how I felt also when I first met the group of aborigines in Southeast Asia. As if I had come upon people who still knew what it is to be human. These little people were as all of us had been for the first many thousand years, before we became civilized and stepped out of the circle.

Man has changed in the last ten thousand years. Perhaps not physically, biologically; our DNA is probably the same. But we have become different people, and we have changed the planet beyond recognition. We have changed the face of the earth. Where there were immense forests, now there are deserts. We have moved mountains, connected oceans that were not connected. We have covered large areas of land with asphalt and concrete, with monstrous buildings rising to the clouds. We have been, and are, the cause of the extinction of a million species of plants and animals.

Our very nature is different. We have become fierce, violent, greedy beasts, thinking ourselves the masters of this planet. We have forgotten that once we knew ourselves to be in the circle of all Life—our forgetting has changed us.

We are convinced that we have improved, changed for the better, because we have immensely increased our ability to control Nature, control our fellow human, control ourselves.

We pride ourselves to have made our own world, ignoring the planetary ecosystem.

We knew always, and still know, that mono-culture (planting acres and acres of one plant) depletes the soil, but we have convinced ourselves that pumping chemicals and poisons into the earth allows us to continue. Why? Do we think it is more economical? More efficient?

No, and no.

There are many more of us today. Many multiples more. Some people live longer than we ever did before, as if the length of a life span has anything to do with the quality of life. We have conquered some age-old illnesses and gained new ones. We have developed sciences of hygiene and healing that amaze us, although that knowledge is locked onto systems that today are obviously created for the benefit of the providers rather than the receivers of these marvels.

We have spread all over the earth, appropriated all arable and most scenic land for our various uses. We have become very good at destroying existing ecosystems and replacing them with cities, roads, structures, and an endless number and kind of artifacts. (artifact is a man-made object).

In our haste to expand and take over we have eradicated habitats, causing the extinction of uncounted species of plant and animal life. Almost casually we have destroyed most indigenous cultures of this planet. As if that were not enough meddling, we have and continue to mix up ecosystems world-wide, by moving plants and animals from their places of origin (their unique 'niches' in the ecosystem) to places of our choosing. That almost always threatens and extinguishes native species, forces the local ecology to become fragile. And our unstoppable wanderlust sees to it that species we do not move by design, get moved by accident.

We build great cities. Enormous metropolises, many millions of humans clumped together. Today, 2006, half of the world's six and a half billion (that is six and a half thousand million) people live in cities.

These changes we have made to the planet look exactly like a cancer: uncontrollable growth of cells that eat, and so kill, their host.

We pride ourselves on having laws, man-made rules that usually have absolutely nothing to do with Nature's laws and the laws of ecology. Because our laws are unnatural, we must enforce them, forcefully. We created elaborate hierarchies and types of enforcers, penalties, and prisons.

Our will be done.

The richest and most powerful nation on earth has more people locked away than any other.

We have endlessly refined our ability to kill. We have invented ways to kill plants, animals, and our fellow humans, that were unthinkable even a few generations ago.

We have invented ways to wipe out whole societies from a distance.

We are proud of our progress. Electric light, flying machines, automobiles, endless gadgets, cyber space (which is not a space at all but a network of copper and glass wires, circling the planet). And now that we have come to the Age of Information, where everyone has access to all knowledge all the time, we are drowning in misinformation, misrepresentation and fluff.

Our pride makes it unthinkable to reflect on who we are, where we are going.

We talk about *sustainable*. Isn't it obvious that any system based on **more** is **unsustainable**?

Our thinking is wrong. We must stop thinking MORE. We must (again) get used to the idea of living within our means.

But, you say, we live infinitely better than our grandparents did.

In what way? More machines, gadgets, more food (and more obesity), better medical care (for some people). Better perhaps, unsustainable certainly.

We, who pride ourselves on using reason, left reason behind.

Scientists have warned us for years that oil, the energy that allows our profligacy, is running out. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but soon.

Other scientists have warned us about global warming, and its resulting climate change. That is obviously happening, although some governments deny it (they probably don't really deny it, but they want some time to grab as much oil producing territory as they can now so that if and when oil gets scarce we have first dibs).

Our contemporaneous thinking is firmly fixed on technology—*we can do anything our minds think up!*

But our modern minds do not understand that we are part of an ecology.

Man is not alone!

Probably ten thousand years ago we invented agriculture. Rather than constantly moving around someone thought of a way to stay put. Agriculture probably began when someone thought of ‘improving’ a grain by artificially improving the size of some grass seed heads. Domesticating (taming) plants led to domesticating (taming) animals. Being able to grow food more abundantly than Nature provided. That led to pacing off territory and claiming we *owned* it.

Ownership led to hierarchies: I above others, men above women, rich above poor.

And during that great changing it occurred to the domesticated humans that they were better than the rest of creation. Didn’t we have the smarts to change plants and animals. And eventually, inevitably, some of us were thought to be better than—certainly more powerful than—other humans.

And so we left the circle.

We learned that we could make nature do our will, if we just had enough power and will. Technology gave us the power, our will got honed by success.

It took time. In the beginning of the last century the majority of humanity still thought of themselves as part of all creation. Many indigenous peoples still thought themselves unbreakably related to their ‘land’ for instance. They did not think real estate, to be bought and sold. People all over the world felt a relatedness to the soil that supported them. In many languages the word *mother* or *earth mother* was used for land.

Until a few generations ago only westerners thought of land as property.

Today that seems to be the world culture.

Thinking ourselves better than other humans explained slavery by saying (believing?) that slaves were not quite human—although it must have been obvious that they were just as human as their masters, because they interbred. Elsewhere another way of thinking of slaves was as the spoils of war. In those cultures slaves were not inferior, but unfortunate; it was not unusual for slave women to marry and freely choose to stay with the people who had captured them.

If indeed the aborigines I knew, and the ones I read about, were content, reasonably well fed, joyful, and had not changed much in many thousands of years, then what happened to make us as we are: warlike, aggressive, lonely?

What made us choose to be tamed?

That is the question that haunts me.

Evolution is not teleological: it is not a change over time according to a preexisting plan, or toward a certain goal. Evolution does not follow a blue print. As I understand it, Nature allows endless individual variations in the process of reproduction. Many of these mutations are minor, some are outrageous and do not survive.

But small changes made over time make big differences.

From my point of view, the diversity of species is awesome. The mechanisms that are our bodies, are miraculous. It is obvious that life and environment are intimately related: what we now call an ecology, or ecosystem, the circle of earlier cultures. *Everything is related to everything* in an ecosystem: a multi-dimensional web. The planetary ecology is made up of a myriad of local ecologies.

From human and human-like bones, found here and there, we have learned that at one time, 30-40,000 years ago, there were more than one kind of humans. We don't know what happened, but only one kind survived. Now there is only one human species, albeit with different shapes, skin color, kind of hair, etc. One of the parameters of a species is that individuals can interbreed. Over the last few thousand years we have interbred every race (as we call it) with every other; therefore we must be one species, *homo sapiens*.

This is what one dictionary says about the meaning of our species' name:

"The genus *Homo* is believed to have existed for at least two million years, and modern humans (*H. sapiens sapiens*) first appeared in the Upper Paleolithic. Among several extinct species are *H. habilis*, *H. erectus*, and *H. neanderthalensis*.

HOMO: ORIGIN Latin, 'man.'

"sapiēt | 'sāpēānt | |,seɪpiənt | |,səpiəntli | |,seɪpiənt | adjective

1 formal wise, or attempting to appear wise.

• (chiefly in science fiction) intelligent : *sapient life forms*.

2 of or relating to the human species (*Homo sapiens*) : *our sapient ancestors of 40,000 years ago*.

noun

a human of the species *Homo sapiens*.

]

ORIGIN late Middle English : from Old French, or from Latin *sapient-* 'being wise,' from the verb *sapere*."

ORIGIN Latin, literally 'wise man.'

A species that is working hard to radically change the planet, and so, possibly, extinguishing itself, is *wise*?

For a few billion years all the earlier beings that eventually made Man were part of our close-knit ecosystem. I imagine the big change—we stepped out of the circle—came when Man figured out how to interfere in the random mutations that occur naturally, and improved a grass to become grain. Not only produced grains that were more abundant than the original, easier to harvest, with more nutrition, but, most important, the man-made grain was fertile. Of the latest creations of Man, Genetically Manipulated species, some are sterile—but that may be on purpose, so that farmers are forced to *buy* new seeds each year, instead of saving a few seeds for next year's planting. In a globalized culture we have made it possible to 'patent' species of animals and plants.

The first hundred thousand (or, some say million) years Man was nomadic, in order not to deplete the earth of the foods he needed for survival. Obviously he knew not to hunt more than he could eat (or preserve) and not to take all of a plant, so that it could grow back for tomorrow. Needless to say, there were few of us.

But agricultural indigenous peoples until recently still considered themselves part of the circle. Perhaps a privileged part of the circle, but they still retained a feeling of kinship with some if not all other Life.

The civilized west has broken the remaining ties with the Wild.

Taming became an obsession. We no longer allowed a certain percentage of our crop to be eaten by insects and other pests, we eradicate *all* competition (try to, anyway).

We eradicated large predators, for sport, and then by destruction of habitat, which now is the greatest threat to remaining wild species: the systematic, worldwide destruction of habitat.

There are very few wild humans left, although of course ten, twelve thousand years ago, all men were wild.

Wild men are different. For instance, they learn from the first day of life to be responsible for themselves. Of course mothers care for and defend their babies, but at a very young age, toddlers are left to learn by themselves. In all the indigenous and aboriginal cultures I know children are cherished for themselves; children experience that they are loved by everyone in a village, or larger area. Children grow up feeling a part of a whole, but responsible for themselves.

In contrast, we teach our children, from early on, that they are unique individuals, and that being loved is something that needs to be earned. We, modern civilized people, feel that we must see to it that all the right ideas, concepts, words, needs, behaviors, manners, values are imprinted in our children. That takes time and it takes a great deal of imprinting. Which, in turn, makes growing children think that their parents, or other authority figures (teachers, police) are responsible for them.

Wild people have no such ideas.

Evidently, it is very difficult for modern man to accept that earlier humans, and most non-western indigenous people, have and had very different growing-up experiences. And so, also very different points of view. I call them different realities. I make a distinction between reality and What Is, only as a way to explain the different views that exist about the world.

I use What Is to mean the planet, the weather, the wilderness, ocean, all things not (yet) touched by Man. In What Is, it is impossible to ask the question, “if nobody heard or saw a tree falling in the forest, did it happen?” What Is is not a human-centered reality.

Reality is what we have been told, and therefore believe to be true. For instance, the belief that humans are quintessentially different from animals, that because of this superiority we own this planet and can do with it what we want. And, for instance, the idea that if a human is not aware it does not happen!

People from other cultures have different realities. Children growing up in an indigenous society (in the last century) grow up with the reality that they are part of the village, or their extended family (not only mother and father, but grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and all others married into their large family). Those children have a strong feeling of *belonging*, which gives a security westerners don't know.

Westerners grow up with the idea that we are, each of us, unique, and on our own, we have to fight to survive. We talk about the world as a jungle—I assure you no jungle is as chaotic and dangerous as a western society.

Modern man thinks highly of himself: *See what we have accomplished! We have conquered Nature, made dams, dug canals through continents, moved mountains. We have covered over the earth in asphalt and concrete. Our buildings reach up in the clouds. We grow food a thousand acres at a time, with tons of pesticides and artificial fertilizer, even genetically manipulated genes—we have created plants that never were! Our medical knowledge is so great that we can transplant organs from a dead body to a sick one, and give the patient a few more years to live. We fly through the air, at speeds unimaginable; important people hurry in their own planes around the world in a day. Scientists with telescopes are unraveling the mysteries of the universe. All that and much more, doesn't that prove that we, homo sapiens in the 21st century, are superior beings?*

Are we, when our great deeds are destroying the planetary ecology? For what purpose? Is the ability to build tall buildings a measure of greatness? Keeping a body alive when it is time to die, is that an accomplishment? Are these great accomplishments available to all people or just a few? And, is it not true that our waste of energies is changing the planet that is our only home? Is it not obvious that a system that is based on 'growth' is unsustainable?

Is Man happy, or even content?

No. At best we are proud. It has been called arrogant.

We see ourselves far above, distinct from other Life. Seeing ourselves unique. We, humans, have intelligence, technology, language, a soul—take your pick, any one or all will do. We say to all Life, *we'll go it alone*. We know what we want, and we have the power to do it. That in itself should be proof that we are the highest form of life. The best. The most. The owners of the planet!

We built a whole world for and by Man Alone. We have rewritten history, or rather, the only history is that of Man Alone, all other Life is background, of no import.

That is what we tell our children from the first day.

This is what we constantly remind each other of: WE ARE BETTER THAN everything and anything else on this planet and probably in the universe.

It has become something unquestionable: our main and biggest axiom, underlying our world, the world we created on top of, but separate from, the planet.

Being apart from everything else alive, makes all other life just 'things'. To be tolerated, or eradicated, to be used, or abused. Thrown away, worthless.

Domesticated is to be enslaved.

The conviction that we are something special makes it possible to do with the earth as we please. We think we own it, we can sell it, dig it up, change it, steal treasures from the inside of the earth. Land is but property, real estate. Soil and water are but resources, to be used, trashed, abused if it pleases us.

We think so highly of ourselves that we do not need to consider consequences. If we, in our rush to live like kings, want to pollute the air, who is going to stop us? Pollute water with our industries? Others can clean it up. We *own* the planet! Property we can do with what we want.

By seeing ourselves as better than all other life, we see distinctions.

Our awareness has become seeing distinctions. The world around us has become an immense collection of things; the world of Man an uneasy mass of human differences. Some of us are more important than others of us. Within our species we see a hierarchy. Man above women; white above non-white.

It takes a severe blindness to remain convinced of one's *better-than*.

We, who created a whole world, create abstractions at will. Money, power over, lies loudly proclaimed — distinctions. We have broken the world up in pieces and can no longer see the whole.

Ego, I, self, most apart of all. Each wrapped up in its own imaginary boundaries.

Man Alone.

Most of us have lost (thrown away) knowing, even seeing the Whole. But some of us have had brief experiences of a reality that glowed with a radiance that could not be denied. Suddenly we saw, we really saw, the Whole.

I did. It is now obvious to me that I am part of that radiant, magical Whole.

Albert Hoffman, genius chemist, in his intense little book “Insight Outlook,” mentions that the first feeling of **belonging** occurred when he was but a young boy. In the book I found this quote: “Reality is as magical as the magical is real,” (Ernst Juenger, in Sicilian Letters to the Man of the Moon).

But our culture, our society, denies magic, and so denies those mystical feelings of being one-with that never were rare. We still have those, but are not allowed to accept the magic, or even remember it.

In truth, we, humans, cannot be alone. We were never made to be alone, although our current culture forces us to think it. Our deepest yearning is for community, oneness with at least one other, preferably with a community of others that we experience as *whø*, what *we belong to*.

Our man-made world is based on a million man-made rules, that deny, even suppress, memories of the magical, radiant Whole. We learn only distinctions, differences, things against a background.

In our man-made world, the Self is supreme—how can we maintain that Self and be one-with? We cannot.

By isolating ourselves from all that is natural, we also separate ourselves from our bodies, our physical selves. We are raised to think that we always and everywhere must wear clothes; elimination is ‘dirty’. In the circle, elimination is what we give back to the earth, fertilizer.

Civilized humans give nothing back, Nature is their resource. We give back only trash.

Bodily functions are suspect; bodily needs are to be controlled by Will.

Sex— relief from the rigors of a man-made world.

Sex— uppermost in our minds, but not to be talked about.

Sex— hemmed around with rules and morality.

Sex— a caricature of what it is in the Circle: now bloated, forced into forms it never had.

Man Alone!

Science is the tool (and the religion) of Man Alone. Science, the myth killer, leaves us without morals and ethics, and without history. For morality we make laws, then endless refinements and changes. Without history we cannot but repeat our mistakes, again and again.

We created a science flowering from matter, 'things' that have no intrinsic value, no relatedness to anything else except other things, and our human whims. Science limits us to five senses, denying we might have any other.

Science breeds technologies. We invented machines that DO for us. Machines that feed on energy (electric energy), generated by burning coal, later oil, giving us energy in an abundance never dreamt of.

But we never considered that the enormous amount of energies we have used were not ours to take. Where is the equation that shows the true cost?

A few thousand years ago the cost was measured in lives. Imagine a scene in Egypt, then. A pharaoh is dying, or contemplating his inevitable death. He designs a structure, to stand the ages: a four-sided pyramid. Huge blocks of stone have to be brought from some distance. Slaves can do that. If it takes the lives of a thousand slaves to move one block of stone, then it takes a thousand lives. If it takes many thousands of slaves to move the blocks of stone up the structure, then many thousands of slaves will be used.

The Panama Canal required the lives of what was it? 10,000, 30,000 men dead from yellow fever? But the canal was built, saving ships thousands of miles they no longer have to sail around the point of South America. Man changes the world he owns. At the time, the cost of a few thousand lives were probably thought well worth it..

A hundred and more dams we built in the U.S, and elsewhere. Fewer lives lost in the building, but enormous amounts of stone and concrete moved, this time with machines that used coal and oil to replace slave power.

Doesn't this prove Man's power?

Yes indeed. Always forgetting that there is a limit to slaves, as there is to coal and oil.

Even the slaves and the energy they represent were part of the whole, the circle.

Man Alone is a constant work of maintenance, and since no natural ecology maintains our man-made world, we have to plan it, pay for it, find the resources to do it.. Continually reminding us of our separation from the circle. We built and now must maintain an elaborate shell, which hides everything that is natural from our eye and nose.

Food comes from a factory, wrapped in plastic (made from oil), hiding its living origin. Milk in a square paper bottle, bought at a store. Meats (we eat only muscle meats) hygienically packaged, weighed, priced, and sealed in plastic, makes it easy to forget that it is animal we eat.

Our bodily functions hidden behind the bathroom door.

Sickness hidden behind uniforms, each organ its own specialist, sealed buildings.

Wastes buried.

Sex regulated by age and gender, by race, by social contract.

Nature cut up and controlled: groomed lawns, flower beds, parks crisscrossed with paths, zoos. What is left of the wild is preserved—unless, of course, we need thousand year old trees to build houses that may last fifty years for an exploding population..

And then?

Am I belaboring 'separation' too much? Yet it is the most enormous leap a species has ever made: to separate itself from the planet on, within, of, and where it has evolved.

There is no question that homo sapiens, as we call ourselves, evolved from other species over ages, millions of earth's circling of its sun. Ninety-nine point whatever percent of our DNA is identical to that of chimpanzees. There is no question that we are made of the stuff of this planet, the same chemicals, the same molecules, cells. All the principles of how our bodies function are identical to the functioning of all other mammalian species, and recognizably similar to the functioning of all other kinds of Life.

Of course I know that people who have always believed themselves to be essentially different from any other creation find it hard, if not impossible, to think that we might once have known ourselves part of All That Is.

It has been equally difficult, impossible at first, for people who knew themselves part of the circle, to imagine that they might step out of that intimate bond.

As millions of others, I was raised in two cultures, two different realities.

My parents were western scientists who knew we, humans, were essentially different from animals, I was educated in western universities.

But the people around me knew that they and plants and animals were in the same world. They felt an intimate relationship with the earth, the dirt under our feet, with rain and wind, storms, floods and earthquakes an unbreakable part of What Is.

I was outside and part of the circle.

For too long I lived a double life. There were two me's; every now and then I woke up in shock to discover the other.

In mid-life I got to know some very primitive people, Aborigines they were called, in Southeast Asia. For them the idea that we might be totally different from all other Life was unthinkable, laughable!

I saw how that one, single difference in how they thought of themselves made them relate entirely differently to their environment. They could not imagine doing harm to the earth, or even change what and how things grew. The idea of ownership was foreign to them. To fight anything or anyone was out of balance, and therefore sick-making. Food and shelter were where they found it. 'Working' for money is for slaves.

Ever since that time, now many decades ago, I slid more and more to knowing that I truly belong in the circle. A knowing that is now so deeply rooted that I cannot feel different.

Now, the idea of *not* being a part, an integral part of All That is, is unthinkable.

Now I experience our man-made world as a foreign country, loud, noisy, brash, and always dangerous.

When a bulldozer pushes over and then crushes a tree, I feel it in my bones. The thoughtless killing of all Life on an acre of land, which is what bulldozers do here, literally takes my breath away.

To me, bulldozers have become a symbol for Man Alone's War on Terra,. the Earth that formed us and gives us Life.

When I first heard the word 'bulldozer', it had to be explained to me. It was shortly after World War II. I was living in the Netherlands then, my mind filled with scientific theories and formulae I had to understand and memorize for my next exam at the university. I heard that bulldozers were part of the American Marshall Plan, meant to rebuild war-damaged areas of Europe. These machines would be used to rebuild dykes that hold sea water from flooding the land that lies below sea level. Over the ages the Dutch developed complex systems of dykes, canals and pumps (the famous windmills of Holland) to keep these lands dry and fertile. The man who mentioned the word 'bulldozer', also told me that the engineers who were to use these big machines feared that they would be too heavy to use on sand, particularly wet sand. I remember him telling me that there had been a lively exchange between the engineers and some officials of the Marshall Plan, urging the Americans to, please, send smaller, lighter machines.

The bulldozers that were sent—the largest made—bogged down in mud and sand.

A few years later, we lived in Suriname. The United States, generous with grants to developing countries, had sent some bulldozers to clear tropical jungle for development. A local engineer called me one day and said he wanted to show me three of these bulldozers, only a few weeks after they had arrived. We drove until the end of the road, then were taken by a small train a few miles further into the bush. There I was shown three enormous machines, hanging at odd angles into the soft floor of the jungle. All but one of them had been partially dismantled: the tracks were gone—stolen, my friend said. Only one was whole.

So, these were bulldozers! I had never imagined anything so immense.

The engineer explained that a few people had been taught to drive these machines, but somehow their instruction had omitted maintenance. These machines have to be oiled, and cleaned, parts must be checked daily. These three had run dry, and their great power, without maintenance, had stopped them nose down in soft mulch. It would have taken another bulldozer, perhaps two, to remove these carcasses. That was not possible, so they were left to be stripped, or rusted and eventually disintegrated.

The seemingly endless power we, humans, can create for our use has its frailties.

Then, more years later, I was in Malaysia. I travelled a road through the mountains to get to the place where I would park the car and walk to see my friends, the Aborigines, living deep in the jungle. A mountain road was blocked. A sharp curve had slid down into a steep ravine. The road had to be rebuilt. A *small* bulldozer was used to move rocks and debris, and then cut a new, firm road bed. I was forced to wait more than an hour until they cleared enough of the road to continue. Later, I told the Aborigines about this machine that *does the work of a hundred men!*

I think I had expected them to marvel at this evidence of Modern Man's power of inventiveness, but instead they said, *what do those hundred men do now?*

Again many years later. Now I live in Hawai'i, have lived here for many years. I live on the poor side of this island, the side of the island where it rains more and we have no white beaches (we have black beaches, new lava), and therefore fewer tourists, and because of that less infrastructure. Suddenly this part of the island is 'discovered'. Planeloads of speculators

land, buying up land and building 'spec houses'. Hurry, hurry; the price of land doubles every six months. The land here is relatively recent lava rock, perhaps a hundred years cooled. Not much grows on it yet. The only trees that grow are either those that can force their taproot into a crack and eventually make the crack a little wider, or the kind of tree that has surface roots, reaching hundreds of feet in all directions, to find enough nutrient and water. And between trees a thick cover of tenacious ferns and sedges that can find enough water and nutrient even on rock. In another hundred years all that becomes soil.

But it seems that the cheapest way to build is to get a bulldozer and 'clear' all, or the front part, of a rectangular acre lot.

For the first time I saw a very large bulldozer in action. Close up! The noise alone is overwhelming. The sheer force of this tank-like monster is almost unbelievable. Hundred foot trees are not cut, but pushed over, then crushed under the threads of this thing. For our lava rock, modern Man has made a refinement: a 'ripper', a six (or more?) foot iron tooth that literally rips the lava. As it is driven into the lava rock by the sheer weight of the dozer, then slowly dragged through the black rock, steam shoots up around the wound, rock screaming and screeching. Then it is cross-ripped. Breaking rock into huge chunks, which then get broken into smaller rocks by further ripping and driving back and forth. The land is left ripped, scarred, rough. Utterly bare of green. A rectangular scar on tortured land.

A thousand men would be hard put to cause that much destruction in a day.

Real estate agents say, Now *you* can decide where you want a tree to grow...! Without reminding the buyer that, even in the tropics, it will take a life time for a tree to grow. By the time the tree is grown the owner is either dead, or has long sold the place.

How is it possible that no one protests, complains, rebels?

The noise, sometimes all around, is mind-destroying.

But no, we protest the song of a minuscule frog.

Man Alone married to unnatural machines. A thoughtless tool to smash the earth. Thoughtless, as all our destructions, without ever considering consequences (it is already evident that this 'clearing' is disturbing the very fragile water ecology of this area). Ruthless. Completely outside of the circle.

Until my shaken soul remembers our winter storms: thunder reverberating for hours, echoing through the mountains, a continuous rumble reminding of Nature's power. Lightning horizontal flashes filling the dark from end to end. And the eternal ocean all around this island! The noise of crashing waves swallowing even the screech of ripping lava.

The mountains, the thunder, the ocean—they **are** the circle.

The Hawaiian word for horizon is *pō'ailani* — *po'ai* is round, all around; *lani* is sky. True: on an island the sky-ocean line is all around in a circle!

Man Alone.

Wherever we look there is Man's heavy hand: no paths but straight roads, connecting enormous buildings. In Nature there are no straight lines. Huge stretches of land flattened, asphalted; whole cities rising out of ancient swamps. Land cleared and planted in rows of all the same plants. Man, the great master of nature. Wild animals are put in zoos to remind us of our mastery. (Species on the endangered list, are 'saved' in zoos). Today an international meeting to discuss 'Sustainable Harvesting of Whales.' *Harvesting*, a word from our man-made world; another way of emphasizing our mastery over all beings. We tolerate wildness if it can be harvested.

Where for ages we had eaten what grew around us, we now distance ourselves from what grows: food is made in factories, colored, hermetically sealed in plastic. Animals grown for slaughter, out of sight; meat colored, sealed airtight. We have broken our bonds with seasons, strawberries are available the year 'round, anywhere in the world. Flowers are for decoration, trees for shade.

From the first day of life we are conditioned (brainwashed) to think of ourselves as special and singular (both concepts unnatural). Each baby in its own box. Its own bed, its own room.

Our bodies to be hidden behind clothes and custom; nudity is titillating.

It is no longer Nature that determines how we live, not the availability of food, shelter, water, good schools, roads... *We* decide where we want to live, and how. We move to sunny climes on condition that we air-condition our houses, our cars. In the mountains a house must be centrally heated. We build roads so that we can live 'in the country', tamed, of course. Sterilized, trimmed, made picture perfect.

Water comes in pipes, waste goes out in thicker pipes. Human and animal waste, which, in the circle is fertilizer, in the man-made world is hygienically disposed of, untouched by human hands.

Sex—as eating, is a natural function—is hidden behind morals, laws and chemicals. Sex has become something other than a natural hunger, now it is a tease: sex appeal, but don't touch! As food is bought in stores, wrapped in plastic, so too Sex must be sanitized and safe. Is it any wonder that Man Alone's world is a world of rape and sexual abuse?

Make no mistake, in the man-made world, it is Man who makes the rules, and there are thousands, millions, written and unwritten. But our rules have little or nothing to do with the natural flow and interaction of Life. Man-made morality, ethics, ideas, religion. And, because they are not natural, they must be enforced.

The natural ecology of a planet is a dynamic balance, a web of relationships. Everything is related to everything else: an ever changing, adapting harmony.

Harmony is not to be found in laws..

Having lost any intimate relationship with the rhythm of the natural world, we seek diversion. Entertainment must be our biggest industry (after weapons, perhaps). The TV is on all day, or the radio, or the little machine that whispers music in our ears, or the cell phone that is also a camera and also whatever else is packed in a small gadget. We are so insulated from What Is that we cannot bear to be alone.

We drown our alienation in drink or drugs.

'Addicts', another modern invention. The impulse to escape an unbearable artificial world by any means whatsoever. Society says: suppress, put away! An illness, a crime. We do not see that not everyone can be tamed. Some always rebel.

When we made food in factories, sterilizing it for longer shelf life, we had to add sugar, salt and fat. Half of all humans in 'civilized' areas, is obese, some grossly so. Most humans rarely have enough to eat, many are starving.

It is we, totally and utterly disconnected from any natural law or need, who have made a man-made world all the reality we are allowed to know. Our man-made world is a lonely one. We are on our own.

Consciously, or unconsciously we yearn for community, but where to find community in an artificial reality?

We think we have conquered Nature once and for all, but of course that is an illusion. Our man-made world is an illusion.

Nature has been pummeled and boxed in, squeezed and smashed, but of course it is still there. The planet is still there. We may think we own it, but we don't. Not really.

We pretend to have forgotten that Nature owns us!

What we call the Middle East is probably the part of the planet where Man first left the circle ten thousand years ago: they burned all their trees, making a desert. From there come the religions of Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, and the countless religions, all claiming to come from one or more of them. Of course they have many beliefs in common, one of these is that they fix our separation from the circle in a God far away, not of this earth. A God who created this planet and all that is on it, and then created Man in His likeness, some say to 'manage'—which we interpret as 'own'—the entire planet, *our* planet.

Believers all affirm there is only the one God, although they are continually fighting to the death about which One is *the* One.

I spent half my life looking for this faraway God. He is worshipped in most western, or westernized countries. Everyone told me about Him, and everyone had a different story. In Christian countries this faraway God was mostly a Sunday god. He was unknowable, but everyone had her or his own ideas about him. I talked to clerics in and without one of the many different uniforms. I joined, I attended, I listened and read, but somehow words and people got in the way. I understood, perhaps, but that was not enough. I needed to feel a touch, the finger of God reaching out to my finger. That happened once or twice, but then words, people, gatherings of people, rules got in the way. Do I pray to, or through, and what do I pray? Ask for favors? That seemed presumptuous. Reaffirm the wonder? Lose myself in the act of...?

And then I met the aborigines, for whom the divine was all around them, in them, in everything; a living presence, always, in their smiles, the little tunes they sang so joyfully.

Before the faraway God, humans had known Spirit, of course. Who, with eyes and ears and heart, can deny Spirit? The spirit of growth, the spirit of rocks. The spirit of life-giving springs. Humans always knew that the many spirits were all expressions of one Spirit.

But, to all, everywhere, Spirit, or the many, was / were of earth.

Right here, in me, in that tree, and always in the very ground that supports us (in all the meanings of the word *support*).

The faraway God, is said to be more god than all the other gods.

The faraway God tells his followers to bring the Word to the heathen: convert the infidels. Missionaries conquered much of the world for their churches. Followed traders, who conquered the world again. And always, after missionaries and traders, came the armies.

Faraway God is said to have demanded the erasure of all unbelieving cultures, which was successfully accomplished (with only a few isolated spots left) in the late twentieth century..

Faraway God, said a long, long time ago: Thou Shalt Not Kill. We never quite accepted that. Even the priests said we could (even should) kill if it were for the glory of our particular interpretation of the faraway God. Our man-made world today is torn, on the point of exploding, from the apparently unlimited violence between different children of what all agree is the One God.

Today there are a thousand ways to speak to, pray to, worship this faraway God. Priests

of this group of believers proclaim this dogma, not to be questioned. Priests of a neighboring group proclaim a different dogma, not to be questioned on penalty of being hanged, quartered, burned at the stake.

In the name of a faraway God we have been able to invent a thousand ways to torture and kill our fellow man.

Before, humans felt the miraculous depth of their feelings of belonging. They felt an unnameable quality in rocks, the sun, the wind, and the marvel of plants and animals eating each other—and always being closely, intimately related. The god of life-giving food! The bear spirit, the spirit of coyote. The spirit of the mouse. The great snake spirit. Once, we thanked the deer for giving his life to support ours.

Now, with the faraway God, we kill for sport.

Ancient groups of people all had stories of 'the beginning'. what believers in the faraway God call Creation Myths. Different cultures have different creation myths, many of them whimsical, casual, full of miraculous mistakes, but all of them human-centered. But none of the aboriginal and indigenous stories I have heard or read, says that we are so different that we can step out of the circle. Our seeds may have come from the stars, as some Native Americans tell in their stories, but we are an integral part of all Life on this planet. We are the same stuff.

'Spirit' is felt, in our skin, our soul. It is not a belief, but an experience. I touch a tree and its spirit resonates in something inside me. Plants talk to me; when I just look at a plant, I know what its essence is. I know its sap stops a sinus headache. A poultice of the well chewed leaves of another plant draws out dirt and infection. I know that deep inside, as all humans know deep inside, and I know that these knowings work.

Today I am thinking of the truly gruesome things we do and have done to each other and to the planet. And yet we talk about spirit, and God. What to say?

I am really quite sure that I belong to this planet. That is not a statement of faith, I have experienced it. Dimensions of the circle. When my cells are like the cells of any other organism of this planet, would it not follow that the spirit of the earthly circle is also in me?

God-fearing Man Alone.

We live in a very strange man-made world, intrinsically different from the natural world. We know almost nothing from immediate experience any more, but more of us know more about far away places and events than any human before.

Wild humans and indigenous people experienced weather and pain, they knew family and neighbors, plants and animals from daily contact. Personal, direct.

In our man-made world we know what we learn in school, which is what other people have written about their worlds. We have daily (many times daily) 'news'. News is information about politics and disasters—wars are both disasters and politics, waged in our name. What we know is words and pictures.

How can we see wholes where what is presented is nothing but pieces that don't fit? Fit, not only with what we were told yesterday, or what another news channel says, but also fit into a world where Man is but part of a planet that used to have herds of bison, that had wild tigers and elephants, owls, frogs, jungle vines and forests. News is about humans, human pain, human victory on the battle- or sports field. News feeds on death, accidental or intentional. A hint of cruelty thrown in from time to time; a flash of a body part flying through the air: anything that says *violence*.

Random violence is called crime, government sponsored violence is war; the difference never very clear.

Even our entertainment is violent sports, violent games. We train our offspring early, and then we say *this is who we are*. We tell our offspring (and ourselves) that we are born aggressive, raised in loud and boisterous homes, riding and soon driving crazy loud and lethal machines. Preparation for life, we say. Life is a fight, we are taught: competition, the ruthless survive. Buy cheap, sell dear. Does not matter what, how, nobody cares.

I was raised far away, another place, another time. We had no news, we knew very little about politics and so it was not important. In school I learned capitals and rivers—but the countries changed names and borders, the rivers were dammed. My friends and I entertained ourselves in honest dirt, with sticks and stones, and listening to ancient stories. But apparently every life in our separated world must have a War.

I was thrust into learning meaningless hatred and cruelty that almost destroyed me: is *that* who we are? Easier to think only white people are crazy. Until, of course, I learned of horrors in Africa, Asia. Maybe cruelty, violence and torture really are the nature of man? Prejudice, hatred are our basic nature?

No, I cannot accept that. Wild people were never that. We could not have survived the first hundred thousand years if we had been.

The war in which I first learned about man's inhumanity to man, is half a century behind me, but memories still stalk my nights; the scars still throb. But I swallow my stories, because nobody wants to hear them, and compared to today's news they are nothing new.

A few of us rebel at torture of prisoners, but, hey, look around: it happens. Leaders lie? So what, they've always lied, haven't they? They must have reasons, and anyway, we are too busy working two jobs to make payments. We can make a picture tell a thousand lies.

Big words: democracy, the economy, freedom, liberty. When repeated often enough they achieve a kind of stale taste, like apple pie bought tightly wrapped and packaged, made in a factory with unpronounceable chemicals.

Democracy is what we have and nobody else has, so it must be good, the only way.

The economy is the stock market, whatever that is.

Freedom, liberty, sure... something good, whatever.

Our rights, yeah, our rights are our rights.

We should be proud; happiness for all.

In the end, politics, news, entertainment, corporations, scandals, all blur into the plastic our world is wrapped in.

Heard a phrase: Contemporary Global Culture. Ha!

What culture? Odds and ends, cobbled together scraps from everywhere.

The New Age! Secrets of Hawaiian Spirituality! \$1500 weekend workshop: Introduction to Peruvian Shamanism! New miracle chemical that eats calories! State Department advisory: don't travel to the following fifteen countries... Tomorrow's gadget today: a phone that you can take into your bath! (All sentences with exclamations!)

Here's what Global Contemporary Culture is and has been for centuries: slavery, colonies, empires, weapons of mass destruction only for the super rich, the elite.

What we used to call wisdom is the collection of scraps we stole from the people we eradicated.

Once, long ages ago, when we lived in the circle, we had dignity, the dignity of being. We knew the earth as we know our own body—the earth *was* our body and we were the earth. Plants we ate and plants for healing. Clean, clean water, pure as blood. Children learned self-sufficiency and we learned patience, the patience of earth's rhythms. In the evening we sat around little fires; almost no smoke, a little light, a little warmth. Telling stories, or maybe just sitting, mesmerized by a small flame.

Did you know you need three sticks to keep a little fire going? Not one, not two, but three. (I'm talking about sticks, not logs).

Inside the circle you look around you where you are. Wherever you are, there is food, shelter, and others of the circle.

Our greatest skill was to learn from where we were in the circle. We blended in snow, surviving. We laughed in sun and wind, surviving. Mountains showed us humility and awe. Rivers brought life, cleanliness, and swept away. The wind, rainbows bound.

Man Alone has forgotten small, modest.

We make bonfires, burn a forest.

Do you have a permit from the fire department? The neighbors complain. .

Outside the circle, we learn to haze, to hate, humiliate.

Humility is weakness: Man Alone is never weak.
We learn prejudices, pre-judgments based on nothing.
God forbid, compassion.

Wars and more wars. Incomprehensible, inhuman suffering we bring on ourselves. Cities incinerated, mutilated masses. Generations gone: ethnic cleansing—evil wrapped in simple words. Endless fights for what? Just under the surface of flapping flags and slogans, always ego, greed, idiot idols. Wars fought with weapons conceived in unnatural minds. The earth itself shredded, torn apart.

Frying foe and 'collateral damage', mostly the latter.
More millions killed than were ever recorded; only the victors count.
In a few centuries of accelerated hubris we went from spears to atom bombs.
Half of all scientists invent new ways to kill and destroy.

No, no... NO!
Wrong, false.

STOP!

Man Alone has long forgotten to look around and find food and shelter where he is, because where he is, is never where he wants to be. He yearns for another, others, but cannot tolerate others that he cannot control. Controlled others are disposable. Property.

But his hunger is not for property (although he is told it is for more).

Impoverished Man alone.

This man-made world of ours is a rickety structure, a house of cards, because we do not know how to create a working ecology. Ecologies are not designed, not planned, not made. They grow. Ecologies are complex: everything—absolutely everything—related to everything else. More complex is more stable. A dynamic harmony, always changing, always balanced.

Our man-made world is the opposite: the rules of man-made Law are unrelated to anything real. Laws are straight lines. Nature has NO straight lines.

We make systems designed for eternity, but circumstances are never eternal. Things change; we are caught unprepared.

We say we plan and design to make things easy. And the easier we make it, the harder we have to work to afford the ease.

We don't see wholes, so we design endless parts, all different, none related. Every idea materialized: spikes of tangled things pointing here, there, everywhere.

We created a world with an infinity of things and no place for a living soul.

The natural world has energies that balance, that create a dynamic harmony. Predators and prey balance each other, need each other! Animals eat plants; some animals eat other animals, but never overeat, because then they don't eat tomorrow. The first law of harmony must be the survival of species, not the survival of individuals. Individuals are important only until they can reproduce themselves in order to assure the survival of the species.

One species cannot be more important than another, all species need each other.

In Nature there is no boss. (Lion King a human fiction).

Our man-made world is a world of soulless, endless wars, because there are bosses, leaders, rulers who follow paths that are born in their heads, and so we make the opposite of harmony.

The boss may turn out to be a virus.

Sick Man alone.

Geologists who studied the planet's layers of rocks, named Eras, Periods, Sub-periods, Epochs, and Ages. Most of the names were formed around a central kind of rock, found in a certain period, or an abundance of fossils that characterized another. They made a clock of names.

The latest of these Ages until recently was called the Holocene, meaning, 'current,' or 'new' geological age. Ages are counted in millions of years; the Holocene began 0,01 million years ago (that is 10,000 years). The Holocene also is referred to as the latest post-glacial period in the earth's long history: years after the last of many Ice Ages.

Very recently Paul Crutzen, a Nobel Prize winning scientist, suggested a new name for today: **Anthropocene**: the Age in which Man, anthropos, is effecting the planet. One species effecting the life of a planet! Some propose the Anthropocene to have begun in the late 18th Century when Watts improved the first steam engine; others say Anthropocene must be dated much earlier when Man in the Middle East and elsewhere deforested enormous stretches of land, creating what are now deserts.

Lately the consequences of Man's doings have become ever more visible: Global Warming, now called Climate Change. There is no question that Anthropocene is here. What a staggering thought! Man, who is—even in his billions—but a very, very small fraction of all Life on this planet, to have an impact on the planet? And the impact is destruction.

When we separated ourselves from all other Life, our hubris (arrogance) changed the planet.

Probably all civilizations are unsustainable. We now know that all earlier empires destroyed their immediate environment, which then caused their collapse. Empires crashed when they had depleted the environment they relied on (someone calculated that it took an average of 200 years to deplete an environment). And then, empires (civilizations) attempted to stretch their life time by conquering more environment.

A global civilization depletes the globe.

Man Alone

Does it not behoove us to take stock? Is what we have created in place of the natural world 'better'? Or, how long can this go on? Obviously this wanton widespread extinction, eradication, destruction is not sustainable.

Just when we thought that Modern Man had tamed the entire planet—almost all the landscape we see is cut, shaped, and planted to make it to our taste; almost all humans on earth now want automobiles, cell phones, antibiotics and coca cola—we come upon a slight glitch: Global Warming, which now manifests as Climate Change. The fossil fuels we burned to create our world on top of a world, changed the atmosphere: it protects us less from the fierce energy of the sun. More heat melts ice, raises the temperature and the level of the oceans. We're not even sure yet what consequences even a slight warming will produce. But at first we thought we have a century to study, now it seems that the effects of even a few degrees Centigrade may switch on major changes in decades, not centuries.

Can we reverse this trend?

It has been calculated that the level of the ocean may rise as much as a meter (three feet). Remember that almost all the enormous cities we have spawned are at current sea level, and half the world's population lives in cities.

Anthropocene; the Age of Man is going to be a short age.

Man Alone: a cancer: multiplying beyond balance while depleting the planet.

It is hard work to create, harder to maintain our man-made world. It requires all of our efforts to build and then maintain a world at odds with the planet's ecosystem. At the edges of our world it is only too obvious that the natural world is always there to absorb, forget and forgive the non-sense that is civilization. Our fight to control Nature is never won, cannot be won.

Even in the center of our man-made world there are cracks. We, each of us, have to work for our food and shelter, of course, but that work is becoming more and more abstract. Consider the thousands that work with money, other thousands that work with something we call education, The millions that work to entertain us, to keep us awake and aware only of our man-made world. Other millions who govern, millions who fight our wars. Does any of that have much to do with food and shelter?

No, it serves only to maintain the man-made world.

They say it is greed that drives us. Lust for oil, for power. Or even money—and money makes money, evermore.

Perhaps what drives us is a hidden yearning to come home into the circle...

Long ago, when we lived within the circle gathering and hunting food was not work. It was the adventure of being alive. We made our own shelter with what we found at hand. We maintained our natural world by caring for it.

But thinking ourselves better we must control. Caring becomes liking, rather than taking care of. When we lived in the circle it was obvious that we must see to it that the harmony of the whole was not broken (at least not stretched too much). Out of the circle we *love* dramatic sunsets and the view from our window, but can we see the whole?

Our science kills myths—leaving us without morals, without history. We substitute laws for morality, then endlessly refine and change. Without history we cannot but repeat our mistakes, again and again.

But we need science to create and maintain the man-made world.

Some science seeks the secrets of the universe, when and where and how it began, how it works. Curiosity? Yes, and perhaps gain if we can make a technology around it. Or a weapon. How we can make more plants grow on a smaller piece of land. How to breed a better dog, a fatter pig, rice with more protein. How to control humans.

Much of science is ultimately to control.

Some scientists, convinced of the extraordinary uniqueness of Man, seek the secrets of our being. Early success curing common infectious diseases made us daring to fight all ill health. New chemistry made possible control of pain, which in turn made possible more invasive surgery: exchanging organs, adding and removing tissue, and other wonders. Modern medicine is on a crusade to eradicate death.

Life has come to mean individual life span—which leads to disagreement of when it begins, and to tampering with its end. We excel in what we call extending life at both ends: prolonging a life span, and miraculous births of organisms barely formed.

Life, all Life, affirms being.

Life does not begin, nor end.

Life is not the span of my life, or yours—it is the whole of all living beings, which includes birth and death and birth again and death and on and on.

In the tapestry of all Life, life spans are but threads. The threads may change the color of the endless whole, change the pattern at times, but no span is more than a simple, single thread, born from previous threads, making the next threads. .

Occasionally there are a few shiny threads in the tapestry among dark ones. Striving to be a shiny thread usually makes knots, crimps the weave, destroys the harmony. The occasional shine that stands out is in the thread, not the striving.

The tapestry is the circle, the whole, the ecosystem of the planet.

(And as an image, “tapestry” is ancient but limited. The ecosystem is a multi-dimensional weave of all the many shapes and functions of Life, and includes the loom, and the machinery of the loom, the succession of weavers, and the space that holds the loom. And, and, and...

All our science, all our measurements and computer models, cannot put Humpty Dumpty back together again. But, science says, we can create a better egg! Once we scientists understand the mechanics of what makes an egg, and once we can measure all the chemicals and the forces that give it that form, then we can do better. We’ve cloned plants forever (that’s what cuttings are). After all, we have successfully cloned animals in a lab. But, somehow, clones don’t live long; one wonders.

What we call science is one way of acquiring knowledge: observation and extrapolation, I was taught. Science has rules, limits, if we acquire knowledge outside those limits, *it isn’t science*.

But it is still knowledge!

People who are in the circle know volumes about the world around them. Of course, otherwise they would not have survived so long. But they were not scientists. They had other ways of observing and extrapolating, a knowledge that was passed from father to son, mother to daughter. And because people in the circle have a different orientation, a different point of view, their knowledge and how they get it, is different. What they use their knowledge for, is different.

Many peoples in the circle don't name a newborn right away. Perhaps because you never know whether a baby will survive, *life is dangerous for your health*, as we used to say. But there was also another reason naming was postponed. A name should 'fit' and it takes time, years, to know what a new person's talents and temper are. It takes time for a new person's true nature to become evident.

In our outside-of-the-circle world a name (and a number) is given at birth to keep track of it, to give it an identity, but what kind of identity is that?

In the circle it takes time to understand an identity.

Outside the circle we have created an elaborate system of what we call 'education,' designed to prepare people for life in our civilization. Inborn character is often less important than the ambitions and needs of parents. (I know that I struggled at least half of my life span to discover and then to be who I was meant to be. What a waste!)

No, Man Alone cannot survive unless he sees himself part of the circle again. It is that simple.

Of course it is not at all simple.

Pride prohibits admitting a mistake on such a scale.

And there is an understandable abhorrence of 'going back'—for too long our motto has been *Forward*. Progress.

Almost seven billion people—that is 6,920,000,000 people.

Half of them in cities. The other half have to work hard to support the city half.

At least half of all humans—and probably considerably more than half—live lives of slavery, hunger, discontent. They live in the slums that surround cities, in cardboard hovels, along muddy, sewage-filled paths. No, or inadequate water. More than half have no, or very limited access to any kind of health care. They make do with food that is garbage.

Statistics that measure average income have become meaningless because the distance between rich and poor is growing exponentially. More and poorer poor, few and much richer rich.

The United Nations estimates that 24,000 children die each DAY from hunger. The U.N also estimates that twelve million refugees live in temporary, and utterly inadequate camps. That is today, 2006. Next year will be a magnitude worse.

Those of us who are educated and have access to the internet—do we even know any more why wars are waged? Do we care?

Those of us who eat well, have solid houses, adequate clothes, cars, and ride airplanes, do we know how the majority of humans live? Do we care?

Man Alone should feel burdened by the anguish, destruction and extinction that is on his head. Does he?

Some say they want to create a better world?

Why do we think it is up to us to 'create' a world at all? We've always had a world that allowed us to live. Not as we live today, but sustainably over long periods of time. Why did we leave that world? What made us step out of the circle?

I have known people and peoples all over the world to whom it never occurred that they could or should better themselves. Aborigines in the jungle, islands in the Pacific ocean, isolated tribes in the Philippines, farmers in Korea. Some of them even knew that white people had things they didn't, that there were airplanes and marvels of technology, but they laughed at that. *Let them enjoy it, they said, we have our trees and our rivers and good food, and we are FREE!*

None of these lucky people were poor, as we would classify them. They might not have had any money, or television sets, or antibiotics, but they were content.

Where does ambition come from? The desire to have more, be more?

I don't know. I don't understand.

The people I knew who were content, knew perfectly well that accidents happen, disasters happen. God's Will, or fate, or karma. Something one has to live with, allow for. Now and then there might even be some bad people who did awful things. That too happens.

The aborigines told me that I was only the third outsider who had taken an interest in them, and had gotten to know them, *but you needn't worry. The other two died unpleasant deaths: one was eaten by a tiger, the other fell off a cliff and was impaled on a bamboo, it took him a long time to die*, and they nodded assent. (The other two were probably agitators who had tried to make trouble some time earlier). *You don't have to worry, because you don't want anything from us.*

There was nothing wrong with the original world we lived in for a hundred thousand years. But we discovered hubris (a Greek word that means arrogance). Was that it? We were inflated with our own specialness, and so had to create a world in OUR image. Was that it?

What a mess **Man Alone** made.

Our species has an amazing ability to adapt, we can survive almost everywhere, thanks to our ability to imagine ways to get around difficulties. We live almost in all of the earth's different climates, conditions, soils. Man learned to survive in the bitter cold of the Arctic, and in hot, dry deserts. We can live at high altitudes where the air is thin, and in steamy jungles down below. We can survive on a diet of blood, meat and milk, and on an all vegetable diet.

The little houses on tall stilts the Aborigines make of bamboo that grows all around them, an igloo made with blocks of snow, mud plastered houses all over the world, tipis made with animal skins—all these are marvels of inventive use of available resources.

We have a perhaps unique capacity to imagine.

Adaptation to extreme climates, and to high altitude, was to some extent biological, but it was also made possible by inventive use of our imagination. We were very good at creating shelter out of available materials, and finding ways to cover ourselves.

It stands to reason that our inventive talents were used to develop more efficient weapons. Developing weapons—that may be our true genius.

Moving out of the circle perhaps came when we began to kill more than we could eat. And, of course, sooner or later we killed our fellow man. That seems a BIG step, and a fatal one.

Yes, I am simplifying, probably over-simplifying. Man's cultural evolutions (there were many) must have been multi-faceted, many-dimensional, and multi-directional.

And now, here we are. Close to seven billion people, many of them on the threshold of tasting the riches they have so far only imagined, or seen in western movies. Climate Change is with us to stay. Energy, obviously, is no longer unlimited. Water soon won't be enough for a civilized standard of living. Undeclared wars are raging, killing thousands, millions of people. And the reality of what is going on is only very slowly and hesitantly penetrating the din of propaganda and entertainment.

A house of cards, about to collapse.

Scientists warned us years ago that we did not know what we were doing; we had better be careful; we ought to think ahead: what consequences might our actions have? But, drunk with our successes, we barged on. There was no tomorrow. Our children, and grandchildren will pay the bills.

The bills are due *now*.

Obviously, we forgot to watch what we were doing yesterday, and the day before. Climate Change is here, and progressing more rapidly than cautious scientists calculated one, two, even twenty years ago. We find it hard to believe that the planet's climate can change radically.

Just as large populations are approaching an almost western way of life—it isn't fair!

The first people who will be threatened are the inhabitants of low-lying islands, coral atolls in the Pacific Ocean, who already notice the level of the sea. And when the highest point of your island is 6 feet (2 meters) above current levels, a few inches make a difference!

And yet the people of the west will tumble the farthest. We are the ones who think we 'own' the world, and that world will be taken out from under our feet.

Our so-called civilization is obviously not sustainable.

We are addicted to oil, a president says. No, we are addicted to an incredibly wasteful way of life, overeating, overspending, over-buying and over-throwing-away. We are addicted to expecting ever MORE—an obvious impossibility.

We changed ourselves over the last few centuries. Not for the better. No animals *torture* so systematically and deliberately individuals of their own species. That is a uniquely human trait,

Humans were never like that

We would not have survived for however many thousands of years if we had been as violent, ruthless, self-centered as we are today, thinking ourselves above all other beings, blinded by our own illusions.

Our current civilization conditions (brainwashes) us to see ourselves as separate from All That Is, with all the consequences of that illusion. We learn to think it normal to live in an entirely artificial environments.

Man Alone among the wreckage he made.

For many years I tried to imagine what happened to First People to make us what we have become. How could we have changed so much? Inventing not only cultures and religions, but ideas about *who* we are. We made ourselves into monsters, why?

In my own life I grew up in a calm, rich culture, then was dumped into war, and then in many worlds, most of them unrecognizable even from my short perspective, but all the time knowing, of course, that my perspective is too short. I recognized that there must have been a movement, a great stream that carried us from a few nomads who smiled to teeming masses living like rats in modern megalopolises. Our species has not improved over time.

There were movements in the last century that seemed large to us, but compared to that force that carries us along, they were eddies around the edges. New and different religions, radical politics, spirituality, nations and empires birthed and died, boundaries changed, languages disappeared and others born. Ideologies, isms. Socialism, communism (socialism extreme), fascism, existentialism, fundamentalism, terrorism, eastern gurus in western culture, the Reverend Jones in Guyana, capitalism, globalization, Neocons. But none of those movements explain the changes in us—they are symptoms of something gone wrong. We, humans, are so lost that we strike out left and right, losing sense of direction, losing any sense of community. Today's extremes are symptoms of Man lost, forgotten who he is.

I began to simplify my thinking. Not trying to find the thread that brought us where we are, but trying to be where the aborigines were and looking forward. What is it that early people (we, some time ago) had that was unique, cannot be found today?

The first thing that occurred to me—a real epiphany—was that all earlier people (including the indigenous people I know) had a close, unbreakable bond to the land, the earth. At the head of this essay I quote a Native American: I could have quoted any of many speakers for earlier people. They all thought of themselves as part of All There Is. They revered the land, the soil, the earth that supports us, and from which we have grown.

The one thing they had that we no longer have is that connection to the earth. We stepped out of the circle and lost our soul.

Only the soulless can destroy themselves.

People ask, What do you propose we do? What can we DO?

I have no idea. I don't know, and it is not up to me to know.

The whole point of this essay is to argue that it is not up to homo sapiens to create his own reality. Reality grows from the complex interactions of a planetary ecosystem. We are NOT the boss; the world we created apart from the natural world does not work and does great harm to the planet..

Oh, I am certain that we can and may have to adapt to a world without electricity, without telephones, airplanes, without chemical and electronic medicine. Just imagine what we can and will invent from within the circle—when we have learned that we cannot wreck our planet any more by overuse, over-everything!

It is not unthinkable that in the near future our own thoughtless folly brings on the crash of what we call civilization. A number of nations have access to nuclear arsenals. It seems obvious that one, and then another, will start throwing their bombs around, unaware and/or uncaring of Climate Change progressing ever more rapidly.

Chaos, the fertile womb of potential.

Whether we want it or not, we may be thrown back to how we were before. And *that was not a bad way to be!* If nothing else, I know from my own experience that Wild Man was happier than Man Alone.

One way or another we MUST step back into the circle.
That is the only way homo sapiens is going to survive.

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"A human being is part of a whole, called by us the 'Universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Albert Einstein











# Arcturus

Late one evening, after dinner with some loud and talkative people a friend and I were washing dishes. I was tired and wanted to go home; I imagine he did too. There was nothing more to say, and I cannot remember that I even thought of anything when quietly and very casually he said, "Where are you from, really?" Not thinking I said, Arcturus.

Home after midnight; fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. It was several days before I remembered my strange answer to *where are you from, really?* Arcturus, the North Star? I looked it up. No, north but not *the* north star. But to Hawaiians it is the star in their zenith, used in navigation over the thousands of miles of open Pacific Ocean. The Hawaiian name for Arcturus is Hōkūle'a, which means *Star of Joy*. But when that name first fell out of my mouth I did not know that. I did not know much about any stars. The only constellation I can recognize is the Southern Cross (now apparently called Crux), visible always in the southern hemisphere, from Hawai'i only at certain times of the year.

Charles left a few days after that dinner. At the airport I asked him what he had meant when he whispered—obviously for my ears only—*where are you from, really*. His mind was on his flight to Singapore and beyond. He looked at me briefly, "you answered, didn't you?" Yes, but *Arcturus*... He turned to me, "There's something extra-terrestrial about you." Charles, pronounced Cholls, is British. We're friends, but learned early on not to ask personal questions. When he arrived this time, his first words were "Still professe...ring?" I answered, Still spying? I know he is not a spy, but he never answered when first I asked why he travels around the world much of the time. We may not ask questions but he certainly knows where I grew up, where I am from; I know where he is from.

In the weeks after, occasionally I wondered what 'from' a star might mean. I am totally, undeniably, from planet Earth. The unpleasant science fictional idea came to me that claiming to be from a star, 37 light years away, could mean that whatever beings there are on or around that star put a recorder in a human fetus that after death would find its way back to the star, to report. A sneaky way of spying. If that recorder is still in me all it has been able to record would be tiny chunks of one person's impressions from here and there, at what to me seems a critical time for humans, and perhaps for all life on this planet. The next thought that came to me was, if such a thing can be, how many other humans have this kind of implanted recorders, innocent spies from other planets?

I've never liked science fiction that is about science in the service of war and empire. I never liked the star ship that goes where no man has gone before; beam me up; energy swords. That is a template for our modern war making, more and more gruesome and utterly inhuman. More modern science fiction that takes neuroscience to extremes I like even less. The idea of being *used* for spying by/for some unknown power disgusts me. I do like future fiction, or what-if fiction; I have written some myself. But I prefer getting to know real people and their real cultures.

What is 'culture'? Looked it up on the internet. Google found 535 million entries in 0.19 seconds. Everyone has their own idea. I use the word culture to mean not only the unique customs and values of a unique group of people living in a unique environment, but the way that group of people *sees themselves in their reality*. That is the essence of culture to me. For instance in our western culture—which has many sub-cultures, national- and religious-subcultures—we see ourselves as apart from all other life forms, superior, better, smarter than all animals, and we see our environment as something we own, something that is also totally apart from us, we can change it, use it, plunder, do what we want. There are, however, even now, cultures where people do not see themselves as different from other Life, and nature not as something that can be owned.

We in the west can barely imagine that; they cannot imagine that we cannot see their reality. Languages are good entries to how people in other cultures think, how they *can*



think. In Hawaiian there are three words for we: we—you and I, we—all of you and I, we—and one or more others but not you.

Samuel Johnson (*Lives of the English Poets*) wrote: 'Language is the dress of thought'. I would add *Language controls thought*, limits or facilitates thought. That is why colonial powers forced colonized people to speak the colonizer's language. Learning a language means learning a way of seeing the world, a way of thinking. In the US and Canada forcing (kidnapping) children to learn English gave those children the reality of the English-speaking world, and so, often losing their Native American culture.

In Malay (today's Indonesian, Malaysian) there are two words for I, me. One (used to be) talking *to* someone socially 'higher', the other used when talking *with* someone the same or lower social level. Of course age also makes one 'higher'. Even as a child I knew the Malays in our extended household as 'my other family'. From them I learned that using either of the I words was just not done. To understand that, I had to understand the meaning of two other words that are very important concepts in the Malay culture (of 60,70 years ago, the world has changed, is changing rapidly). One is *halus*, which means soft spoken, gentle, considerate, well mannered, refined, never offensive, straight hair, skin not too dark. The other is *kasar*, which means rude, loud, rough talk, rough or unruly hair that stands up, or curly hair, facial hair, yelling, bullying. To be Malay was to be halus. Chinese and white people were kasar. If I wanted to be halus I must use neither I if at all possible. I am not sure that this was cultural but I know that it was important in my relationship with the people around me. And when, many years later my family (wife and children) and I lived and worked in Malaysia I found that there as well people avoided saying *sayah* or *aku*, although in the cities both words were used freely, and seemingly without the social status distinction that the words used to have. To me not using I also fitted with the absence of 'personal pronounce possessives'. Speaking a Malay language one cannot say *my* wife, *my* children—there are no words for 'my'.

Our western culture is almost the opposite: I, me, mine, are extremely important words because our culture values the individual above society. We worship—and so, strive for—fame, celebrity, even notoriety, individual achievement. In the Malay culture (still true in the Malaysian villages of the early 1960s) for an individual to stand out was considered embarrassingly kasar. In many villages there were people who had a car. But they were careful to park the car far from the village, and their house in the village was no different than any other house. Everybody knew that the man drove to a nearby city most days, but as a true Malay he was just like everyone else.

There is a distinction between knowing *about* a culture and its language and being part of a culture, speaking the language. One of my projects in Malaysia was to study 'dietary behavior'; as a smart Brit said studying *why people eat what they do and not what they should*. People say *makan nasi* for eating, although a dictionary will tell you that the two words mean eating rice. Evidently it is almost unthinkable to 'eat' and not include rice. In the villages people rarely eat three meals a day, usually two, and those not too different. I learned that all food fitted more or less in three categories, which in Malaysia were called cooling, heaty, and neutral. Children were not supposed to eat cooling foods, and moderately heaty foods only now and then. That was one of the reasons why children often did not get enough vitamin A in their diet, and were in danger of getting a kind of blindness. Many of the foods that were considered cooling happened to also contain vit. A. (Papaya, and some other fruits are cooling, chocolate and durian (a 'strong' smelling fruit) are heaty.

When we had been in Malaysia less than two months, a team of doctors and other specialists came from America to do a dietary survey. I was asked to be their guide. After some preparations the whole team moved from one to another of the eight villages we had chosen, supposedly random, on a map. Usually I went ahead of the team. Early on the nutritionist asked me to set up an invitation to "an average family's dinner." I tried to explain that as soon as she would walk into any house to share dinner, it was no longer average. People would go all out to make a special meal. She shrugged that aside, and said that it was my job to assure the averageness. We would be in that village only two days so I did not have much time to get to know many households in order to choose an 'average' one. Malay culture is very egalitarian, so households differed mostly



in income, but that does not show. I asked around, found a willing family, who invited the nutritionist and me for 'dinner'. I had mentioned to the nutritionist that people generally only had two meals a day and that they were not that different, she shrugged that off also. As I had expected at least three neighbors had helped prepare a truly royal meal. Rice, of course, but yellow (saffron or turmeric) rice. And an array of side dishes. Some meat, some fish, many vegetables, sauces. I knew of course that an 'average' meal was plain rice and one or two side dishes, a soupy sauce, and hot spices. The hostess whispered to me that she knew that white people cannot tolerate hot (as in hot chillies) food, so she had made it very mild. The nutritionist sat down in the only chair, we sat on mats on the ground. She turned to me, "Now serve me an average dinner." I told the hosts that the lady wanted to be served the kind of meal they might have every day. Consternation. I quickly added, Not too much of everything. Oh yes, they understood. The lady was small, not tall like other white people. The lady never smiled, never made comments about the amazing and wonderful scents of the steaming foods. Very tentatively one of the women brought out her best (maybe her only) deep dish, put one scoop of rice on it. Looked questioningly: more? No response. The woman hesitantly put another scoop on the plate, then the choicest pieces of seven, eight, nine side dishes, nicely arranged around the rice. She kept looking up at the stony face of the nutritionist who gave no indication of anything at all. The feeling in the little house got tense, as everyone (a whole house full of people, I am certain most of them neighbors) kept looking at that face that showed absolutely nothing. No approval, no friendly smile. When the plate was full, the hostess questioned, *Enough?* I translated. No answer. The hostess stood up, and softly approached, gently handed the full plate to the nutritionist. She took the plate, reached down into a bag she had brought with her, brought out a container. With a kind of spatula—untouched by human hands—slid the entire meal into the container, closed it tightly. stood up, walked out without a word. Needless to say we were speechless. Long minutes dragging out to an eternity of disbelief, shame, anxiety. There was nothing I could say, this was truly the ultimate *kasar*. Finally a child said *Let's eat*. I softly asked *Now can we have hot pepper sauce?* That lightened the mood a little. We ate a truly gourmet meal with little appetite, chewing mechanically, downcast eyes. I apologized, said something like 'I did not know...' People mumbled as they went home. I thought about how to leave some money, the village obviously had spent good money on this meal, but there was no way to do that honorably. The next day the nutritionist flew back to America to weigh, measure, analyze 'an average dinner in rural Malaysia'. Probably wrote an article in a very scientific journal. That was not the only clash of cultures of that team of American doctors and scientists I had to guide. There were worse examples of *kasar*: insulting a whole village. I must confess I got exceedingly tired of having to apologize everywhere we went. Being inconsiderate and unusually aggressive must be added to the meanings of *kasar*.

Later, back in America, discovered that scientists saw 'subjects' in their own country with the same disinterest and disdain. And I learned that 'average' does not have much more veracity or meaning here. Very different cultures cannot help but clash, as we should have learned in our wars but didn't.

I am, of course, not unique in knowing more than one culture from the inside; there are many people in today's world who are truly multi-cultural. Many people grow up in one culture, one way of seeing reality, and the emigrate or are forced out to become a refugee in another country, another culture, another way of seeing reality. If one has to shift from one to another quickly it is a schizophrenic way of being. In my life I have drifted to a cultural identity other than the one I am forced to live in. Our western culture (in one of the many sub-cultures) is extremely dominant and almost impossible to escape from.

I became a hermit in order to be able to live as I need to live, as part of all that is, with plants, trees, animals as they are: free beings, never pets. I need to live as a part of the rich mosaic of life. Rocks, and sky, wind, "all my relations," as Native Americans said. Life, the earth, the universe. a circle and I am in, part of, that circle.



That way of being seems unacceptably ancient, old-fashioned, to most people around me. They live in a reality that is based on money, politics, governments, laws, rules of man. To me that is illusion. A very stressed structure that we erected on top of, but almost entirely apart from, Mother Earth. Nature in the western reality is background. Plants are for eating or flowers that we cut and bring inside the house. Animals are pets or pests, tolerated or removed. Trees are for building houses, for making paper, for shade, or for fruit. Everything natural valued for its usefulness. If not useful, a pest, a weed, wild, chaotic, to be erased. But plants and trees have a reality other than their utility for us, they are related to me and you: the same chemicals, we breathe the air plants make breathable.

Of course I am forced to live in the modern reality as well. I use electricity, I have a computer, much of what I eat grows around me, but I do have to shop occasionally, which means driving a car, using money. I've arranged my life to shop twice a month—but for that I have to have a refrigerator. A stressful, schizophrenic way of living where I choose hourly, sometimes for a whole day, which reality I can or must live in. The reality we humans have made and are maintaining with great effort I must exist in, but there I'm only half alive. When I come home from a shopping expedition, after putting stuff away, I change clothes, wash my hands and face with homemade soap, walk around talking to my plants, maybe feed the ducks an extra ration. Only then can I relax and *be*, knowing myself an integral part of all that grows and is around me.

I have known other cultures, very different ways of being, living in different realities. I grew up in a little town where most but not all people were Muslim. Chinese had little shops where they sold literally everything. Very few white people. Almost all the kids at school were different shades of brown. I never felt very different from the other kids and was accepted as one of the mixed group. In our (then) little town the siren went off every day a few minutes before noon. Everything stopped. Cars, carts, bicycles, pedestrians. Muslims rolled out their prayer mats or rugs, facing west (we were east of Mecca). Non-Muslims stood or sat silently for a few minutes. The noon prayer is short, after a few minutes prayer mats were rolled up, traffic resumed. I always looked forward to those moments of silence, quiet, peace. Everybody, Muslim, Christian, Chinese, Hindu, Buddhist, stood still, nobody talked. That was the way it was, nobody questioned it, and I think it was important to everyone to stand still, pray or meditate or just relax for those few minutes.

My parents were European intellectuals, good people certainly, but we never talked about God. My best friend said *Inshallah* all the time. When I was maybe ten or eleven I asked him, what is that God you are always calling. He looked at me with astonishment, then said, "Well, God is everything. Everything that you see around you, the trees, the clouds, the rains (monsoon season). Everything, all our thoughts, our actions, are..." Yes, I could accept that easily. That made sense. All the marvels of nature, the weather, sickness and health (my father was a doctor), all kinds of Life. Yes, all that is miraculous, wonderful, some people call God. At that time, before WWII, the Muslims where we were always stressed that their religion was not the Egyptian kind, it was their own kind of Islam. I did not know what that meant, but I accepted that their kind was *better*. Women were never veiled, and women certainly were not less than men. It was (and still is) the women who were the entrepreneurs, who had little or big businesses. Indonesia had a woman president. Recently read that the Saudis are spending billions to establish madrasahs all over the world, certainly in Southeast Asia, to teach their extreme Wahhabi Islam. Now many Malaysian and Indonesian women go veiled, or at least wear a flimsy head scarf.

That culture was very different from the European culture of the first half of the last century (yes, I am a very old man). What still stands out in my memory is the warm and



never questioned hospitality of the people. Strangers were always welcome, given a cup of tea or coconut water. My parents knew that when I was fourteen I was perfectly safe traveling by myself across Sumatra to spend a long vacation with a doctor friend of my father, a trip of three days and two nights by a series of buses. Anyone and everyone would give me a mat to sleep on, tea, and food. I have read that in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, some countries in Africa, this is still true.

A true story: a woman takes her four year old child to a modern clinic. It seems strange to her that a dozen sick people sit indoors in the same room while waiting for a nurse to call them to see the doctor. "So that everyone can get everyone else's sickness," she told me when I asked her about the visit to the clinic. Finally they see the doctor, who examines the child, tells the nurse who tells the mother that the child needs an injection. The mother explains to the four year old girl what injections are, why it is important, *it might help get you well*. The child says, No. Mother and child walk away, no argument. To me that speaks of respect for the child. As it happened, the girl got sicker and two days later she changed her mind. The mother patiently brought her back to the clinic. The child got the injection; she got well.

A culture that accepts children as whole beings, that accepts that children may have preferences and choices, gives a security that western children don't know. Western culture produces adults who are insecure—'you have to fight to get ahead', 'the world is a dangerous place'. Many cultures produce adults who are secure in knowing that there is a whole village, a large group of people, a tribe, a clan, where I will always be accepted for who and what I am. I have written about a village in Malaysia where I saw a man hiding, flitting from tree to tree. *Oh yes*, the people said quite casually. *He is our thief. He steals things*. And, I asked, what then? *Nothing. Usually he cannot use what he stole so he leaves it somewhere and we take it back*. The people accepted that for some reason the man liked to pretend to steal. No big deal; of course he is still 'one of us'. In Malaysia at that time there were two insane asylums, as they were called. Neither of them had any Malay patients. Malays accept 'crazy' people as they accept anyone else.

I once traveled with a woman from the World Health Organization (WHO) translating her lecture about the importance of getting enough vitamin A, which is in many ordinary fruits and vegetables. Children whose diet is short of vit. A can become blind. The nice lady from the WHO mentioned that a very good source of vit. A was spinach. A woman in the audience said that *the child does not like spinach* (in that language there is no word for *my*). The speaker then enthusiastically explained that it was quite easy to chop the spinach very fine, mix it with the rice, and the child cannot taste it. The mother shook her head, *But the child does not like spinach!*

About ten days later I visited the same village. The woman asked me whether there were other vegetables or fruits that contained that magical *wittah* (vitamins). I told her that papaya and carrot would be good sources, and sweet potato, squash, even eggs. The little girl was listening intently. The mother asked her whether she liked carrots (they do grow in the tropics although they don't grow big). The girl thought for a minute, then said, *Not sure have ever tasted carrots... but would not mind spinach if it is not too much, or every day. I like eggs, and melon...* I explained that all vitamins are good for us if we get them regularly, not necessarily in huge quantities or every day. But regularly and enough. The little girl stood up, stood straight, and said, looking seriously at me, "We will work something out and next time you come we talk again." We all smiled.

Compare that with our western culture. Babies are born in a hospital, spend the first few hours, or days, in an airtight box, without human touch. Many babies fed from a bottle, what touches their lips is not a mother's nipple but a piece of plastic. Babies sleep in a crib, alone. Soon they get their own bed, their own room. I don't doubt that western mothers and fathers love their babies, but the relationship is different. We find it normal



to force children, and adults, to do what experts or authority decide must be done. We don't ask, we don't negotiate.

Malay societies were (the world has changed) not very hierarchical. As adults would ask children whether they wanted a shot, or want to go to school, so also in the villages no adult would tell another what to do. Villages had a Kepala Kampong, literally 'head' of the village. But no Kepala Kampong would ever tell a villager what to do. He (possibly she) was *the face and voice* of the village, the person who had no authority over, but displayed the qualities of the village to the outside. There were villages where a rich man lived; he took great care to park his car far from the village and his house was no bigger or fancier than others. Everybody knew he had a car and that most days he drove away to do what he was doing in a nearby city but in the village he was no different.

Our western culture is hierarchical. Whole ladders of authority are assumed necessary to *control* people. Our culture is about control, today often forceful control. We call ourselves a democracy, but all that means is that we elect who controls us; authority is from the top down. No wonder all we can think of is war, and if war does not work, more war will. Even if we declare that the purpose of an occupation is 'nation building' what we do is train army and police—as if that is what makes a modern state. The very first thought we have any more is force, more force, more police, more armies, more bombs. Doesn't that begin with forcing children to do what a parent or teacher orders? No child is asked whether s/he wants to have an injection, we never talk with children as if they have likes and dislikes, or opinions. To me that feels like a lack of respect for who we consider below us on the ladder. To people of this culture it is the norm that we respect those above us, who have more knowledge, more power, more money. All too often that means we dislike, at best tolerate, those below us. We have many hierarchies, a racial hierarchy we may deny but is there nevertheless. People who have different religions, different life styles. Compared to indigenous cultures ours is hyper hierarchical and perhaps therefore split into many parts.

The same emphasis on force is to be found in the ever more aggressive ways we change the earth, dig up the earth to get at the resources to make the energy we need to enforce. We need always *more*, which means more aggressive ways to dig out the resources to make more power. We remove whole mountain tops to get at coal. We dig ever deeper ever more damaging holes in the ground, now even under water, to get oil. We insist on forcing straight roads on nature which has no straight lines. We force people to a way of life that goes against all we know about humans and nature. And it begins at birth. We go against our human instinct by isolating a newly born human, rather than surround her/him with love, human skin. Being carried, touched, 24 hours a day as a baby is the first step to a very different kind of adult.

Nineteen men hijack four passenger planes. Two planes deliberately fly into the two towers of the World Trade Center. Another flies into the Pentagon building at ground level (?). The fourth crashes presumably because the passengers overwhelmed the hijackers, or, I read recently, maybe we shot it down. Our almost immediate response is to interpret the horror as an attack on our nation (why did they choose the World Trade Center, they could have attacked any of the hundreds of tall buildings in New York) and in revenge we attack with all our considerable might the country, halfway around the world known to be the hiding place of the man who planned it. Two years later, with even greater force, we attack another country that has nothing to do with the attack on the WTC. What that shows the rest of the world is that ours is a nation of warlike, short-fused people whose sole response to any force is immensely greater force. We put more people in prison than any other country in the world, with longer sentences than anywhere in the world. Isn't it obvious that our culture is centered around the idea of forcing our will on people, inside and outside our borders, as well as on the planet itself.



We bankrupt ourselves to prove to the world—and ourselves?—that we have the power and the will. Strange, but undeniably, we cannot think any other way any more. There is no thought of alternatives or consequences. Force, and if at first it does not work, more force.

To quote Evo Morales, President of Bolivia (Big Think, Oct. 2010): “*Mother Earth can exist without humans; humans cannot exist without Mother Earth.*”

Modern man forgets or even disbelieves that. Yes, we are clever, we can create artificial little worlds, like the Space Station. The energy needed to shoot one rocket to transport a man or woman to, and bring another back from the Space Station is enough to power 17,000 American homes for one year—probably the equal of what a whole city in a poor country uses for a year. Clever? Perhaps. But asymmetrical. To me it seems irresponsible.

How can the recorder in me report such a thing to beings in the neighborhood of a star 37 light years away? Does force, forcing ideas and illusions, make sense? No, not at all. It must be a universal law that force always and inevitably makes counterforce. Whatever you push pushes back. How can a culture, the overwhelmingly dominant culture of a single species, get away with forcing its ideas on other beings. How can we get away with forcing enormous changes to the planet. Isn't it obvious and inevitable that the planet must force back.

And that, of course, is exactly what is happening. Climate change, unheard of floods, storms. Our destruction of environments is causing a serious depletion of biodiversity. But, what is most telling, we, homo sapiens, are too busy forcing our will to be able to be able to think about changing our ways when it is more and more clear that if we don't change our ways now it soon may be too late.

For certainly forty years I have wracked my brain to understand how we, humans, went from the ways of primitive man and indigenous completely sustainable cultures to today's culture we have made ourselves, unrelated to laws of nature. How can we have changed so radically? How can we have so completely forgotten that we are part of the planetary ecology, not its master. When, and why, did we come to think that we are separate, not the same as all other Life. How can we imagine that we can *own* the planet, and *own* other life forms?

Our species had many different ways of being, thinking, feeling, organizing itself, wildly different diets, points of view, languages. Our unique ability to adapt to new and different environments made possible our amazing spread across the planet. Different adaptation to the snow and ice of the arctic, to deserts, to high mountains, small islands, but of course always sustainable. Then there came a time when different life styles were dictated by an infinity of religions. How to explain *religion* to Arcturians?

From what little scientists have been able to learn, or assume, of earliest man, even thousands of years ago the dead were buried with treasures, food, weapons, presumably to help them do well wherever and whatever 'after' early man imagined. Evidently early man had an idea that life, living, is mysterious, magical, spiritual. From First People and many indigenous peoples we know of the many gods they knew. I am not at all sure that *gods* is the right word. They were icons, the essence of. Hawaiians are very aware of whose name can be translated as The Lady Pele, the essence of volcanoes, hot lava that destroys but also creates new land. Her lover, Kamapua'a, he with a pig face, is the essence of what is green and growing. Up in the mountains of this island, which is a very alive volcano, there are places where a sharp line shows Pele's and Kamapua'a's territories. The landscape literally changes from one extreme to the other at a line. Hawaiians did not worship what we call gods, but knew—and still know—them as the embodiment of something very real, greater than human, the great forces of the planet. Hawaiians, all who live here, accept that The Lady Pele does what she does. From hour to hour we



don't know which way lava will flow or where the lava will suddenly explode out of the ground. We must accept. We are constantly aware that the volcano, lava, as well as the green of growth are powerful realities of the planet we are part of. It is a deep spirituality, the awareness and acceptance that there are forces in nature unknowable, mysterious, miraculous perhaps, and very real.

As I understand The Lady Pele I understand the many gods of Hinduism, and indigenous spiritualities elsewhere. Hindus may burn a candle, leave some food, for one of the many *gods* whose favor they seek. Buddhism, of course, never talks about and denies the existence of God or gods.

The idea of a Creator, a something we give a name, and a gender, is a very different concept. Often it is the ultimate force to be feared, a supernatural power Who knows every life, every action. Every sin. Homo sapiens must have changed radically when told that he better be very aware of what he did or not do, every false step, every forgetting of a required prayer, was chalked up. With God came what we call morality, a set of instructions that must be narrowly followed in order not to land in Hell after death (eternal burning, pain, suffering) but rather in Heaven (different religions describe Heaven differently). In all religions that recognize an Almighty God, Heaven and Hell are eternal, forever-and-ever. However appealing the descriptions of any or all heavens may be, to be there forever strikes me as unbelievably boring. The concept of an all powerful, all everything God overwhelms, and denies a more earthbound spirit in all things.

What is perhaps the most obvious fact about religions based on a single creator God, is the different interpretations, and endless interpretations of interpretations, of the original words of the Prophet or Messenger over time. The vicious fights within a religion are often more bloody than between religions. In many of the main religions God has become not only the greatest but also the origin of force. In His name endless wars have been, and are being, fought.

Words have become dangerous weapons. An oft quoted statement is, *In the Beginning was the Word*, meaning the Word of God, the ultimate truth. That may be, but the words that are supposed to be derived from that Truth with a capital T, have degenerated into what can only be called lies.

Do beings on or around Arcturus have religion or spirituality? Do dogs, or even apes, have spirituality? I cannot know. The more I think about it, the less I understand because we humans have moved truth, what is, from the touchable truths of Nature to some force 'up above', a force so all-powerful that it is unknowable except through the intermediary of one or another of thousands of men (always men it seems) who claim to have been chosen to know the unknowable, or speak His word. There are and have been too many of these outstanding men. Most humans do not choose of course but live by the words their parents, their clan, their group accept as the truth. And so we fight endless crusades, excuses perhaps for our violent nature.

But I cannot think that way. I know that originally, even ten thousand years ago. we were not violent—we would not have survived as a species if we had constantly fought with each other. If fighting was called for it was with huge dangerous animals, not fellow humans.

Hawaiian culture has 'gods' as we call them. They are not gods, one could say humans who are the essence of natural forces. The Lady Pele the personification of volcanos, very hot flowing lava, destruction but also creation. Kamapua'a is the personification of growing things, of green, of plants and trees. Yes, I understand The Lady Pele, and Kamapua'a; I don't worship them, I know they do not dictate a morality, but I see, feel, the spiritual in natural phenomena like immensely hot fire, the unstoppable flow of lava, and the equally unstoppable force of growing life.



Then I remember that the core morality—ultimately perhaps the only morality—of all religions is the Golden Rule, *do unto others as you want others to do to you*, and the many ways to say that. But is that morality or just plain good sense. It seems so obvious. All humans must know that; for all I know cats and dogs know that. The primitive people I knew most certainly knew that because they were far ahead of us in being very aware of consequences. They knew to leave the growing part of a plant that had edible leaves or fruit, so that plant or tree could make fruit next year. They knew to hunt just enough to live on, but leave enough not to endanger the survival of the kind of animals they hunted—small monkeys, a kind of small lizard, birds. They felt very strongly about *not disturbing nature more than absolutely necessary*. They knew the consequences of cutting large areas of jungle and planting a plantation of all rubber trees. That would destroy the soil. But is it morality to know consequences?

That would make modern man utterly immoral, despite our claim to believe in one of the many religions. We continue to do violence to Mother Nature, to our neighbors, our children, ourselves, apparently without ever thinking of consequences. If not immoral—and I think that it is—it certainly is stupid.

Yet we are so impressed with ourselves and our brains that can figure out how to apply force that we are firmly convinced that we are infinitely superior to any other being on this planet. So impressed that we no longer question that we, and only we, own this planet and can do with it what we want. We have a hard time thinking ourselves part of anything other than a tribe of others like us. Scientists are now observing and measuring the entire universe. We think we know how it all started and how it got to be as we see it now, but we cannot think consequences.

Not that long ago people could not imagine *not* being part of all life, *not* being part of nature. We never thought of ourselves superior to anything. Dying out, of course; by now most likely extinct. And yet it was only half a century ago that I knew them in a jungle in Southeast Asia, now almost certainly no longer jungle. They are the reason for an obsession that has engaged me half my life time. Famous travel writer Peter Matthiessen in one of his books, *The Tree Where Man Was Born*, writes about an unexpected encounter with five pygmies in East Africa. He writes, "The encounter in the sunny wood is much too simple, too beautiful to be real, yet it is more real than anything I have known in a long time. I feel a warm flood of relief, as if I had been away all my life and had come home again."

That is how I felt also. Coming home to who, what, we humans were, not all that long ago. Anthropologists have written about them that their way of life may date back 15,000 years. They survived because they fitted in their jungle. Other First People fitted in the snow and ice of the arctic, or the desert that spans Africa. I like the term First People, because that is what they are/were. In my travels—there were many years that I was paid to travel widely—I met many other, usually small, groups of people who had the old ideas about who they were. They knew themselves part of the whole that is this planet. Most of them were not nomads but had an ancient kind of agriculture, sustainable for a thousand years. They had old and simple cultures, a sustainable, peaceful way of life. The earth was sacred, their *mother*. Many had unique and clever inventions, none of which were harmful or toxic to humans or other life. Polynesians, and probably Malays before them, had boats that traversed thousands of miles of open ocean. They knew how to read the many different waves and currents of the Pacific Ocean that covers one third of the surface of the earth. At night they were guided by stars.

It is suddenly in the time frame of how long we have been human that we began to use the brains we had all along in new ways. *We began to think of ourselves differently*. I think it began when first one and then everyone imagined the concept 'owning'—the most unnatural imagination we ever had. But however it began now being apart,



superior, owners, is at the root of our modern identity. We know ourselves unique, different from all life forms, the masters/owners of the planet.

What changed us? Why? What is it that made us so convinced that we are different from animals. I have read thick books, listened to learned scientists. Scientifically we are remarkably *not* different from animals, I learned

. The same chemicals, the same DNA, same bones, same skin, same muscles, same nerve tissue—of course all in different proportions. Horses and other hoofed animals walk on their nails, others on their fingers, on pads of skin tissue, we and apes walk on our whole foot. The difference, scientists say, is in how we use what we have. Animals also use tools, invent tools, but we do it better and learn faster. Animals obviously communicate with each other, and some with us. Our many languages are more sophisticated and we invented written languages—which, by the way, significantly reduced our capacity to memorize, to remember. More than a few anthropologists have written that memorized histories are more accurate than the historical written records. Yes, animals take care of their young, have male roles and female roles, animals fight their neighbors. But we fight wars much more effectively, and for entirely different reasons: with calculation rather than rage. Today and certainly tomorrow we will fight who we declare 'enemy' with robots. Our warriors will sit at a desk, halfway around the world, we don't get killed, only enemy civilians get killed. *Enemy* is a flexible word, we apply it depending on the basis of what our current foreign policies are.

Life eats life, that is true at all levels of Life. But we, humans, grow genetically manipulated food without really knowing that it has no ill effects on us or the environment over the long run. We do know that GMO plants infect ordinary, nature-evolved grains but we do not know what the consequences of that will be over the long run. What is worse, evidently we don't care. We now manufacture food that we know is *not* healthy, for reasons that have nothing to do with sustainability or health, but only profit.

After much thinking, reading what philosophers have said about our species, I have come to think that perhaps the most important thing we have added to what early human brains had is *an ability to imagine what never was*. We have developed the ability to think imaginary realities. Many animals have territories, we imagine nations, whose borders are lines on a map. We imagine hierarchies, government, and then different ways of governing. I think the first really big imagining that changed us was the idea of *owning*, a concept never before known by man or beast. Owning plants, animals, eventually owning other people, owning resources yet to be found, owning all the water from one river. Owning gets stretched to insanity. Owning land, owning nature, owning the planet.

The primitive people I knew owned nothing; the idea of owning the pot they all used to cook in, or a hut they built, was strange to them. Owning land was literally unthinkable. Modern man not only made it thinkable but over the last hundred or so years it has become the (illusionary) bedrock on which we have created what we speak of as 'the world'. Today's society is entirely based and run on imaginary concepts, all man-made. The need for a leader, possessions, money, laws, justice, wealth—all totally man-made illusionary ideas. Therefore we now have as many versions as there are men who can imagine these things: different styles of governing, different kinds of justice, freedom, rights, resources.

Our thinking now is so disempowered that we cannot think any more about living without *imagining* how to live.

Some people accept that much of what we do is not sustainable. Some people know that we should burn less, or no, coal and oil. But all we can think of is other ways to generate the power we need to enforce our will on the planet. We can no longer imagine living without the millions of inventions we rely on. This entirely man-made world that



we created on top of the planet is now seriously endangering the planetary ecology, and so our own survival. We deny that we, homo sapiens, are part of all Life, part of the biosphere, part of the planetary ecology.

But of course that cannot be denied. All the heavy remolding of the earth's crust we can do cannot prevent nor survive an earth quake, a hurricane, a tsunami, a volcanic eruption. Scientists measure, observe, that the earth is rapidly warming which results for instance in melting polar ice and glaciers which of course affects and effects climate. We know what causes and has caused global warming, namely our thoughtless and profligate poisoning of the atmosphere that we share with most life on this planet. But for now profit is more important than adapting to a changing earth, More important than survival? Profit is one of those elaborate imaginings that has made a few humans enormously *wealthy*: the accumulation of money, a most illusionary concept, leaving most of the almost seven billion people that now live on the planet *poor* (the opposite of wealthy). The ancient, simple, aboriginal and indigenous people knew no wealth, no poverty. Hard for modern man to imagine, but true.

I am old, close to the end of my lifetime and so, close to an end to whatever strange ties I have with a faraway star. I assume that if there are life forms in the neighborhood of Arcturus they must be brainier than we are. That must also mean more real. It takes brains to see illusions and see through them. Ultimately thinking must be solidly anchored in what is real. I know there is only one reality. Not the one we make, the many we imagine, but the reality of the planet, the planetary ecology. I find it easy to imagine beings, Life, everywhere in the universe. That is more than imagining. It is so obviously impossible to think that we would be unique. There must be one real reality, the reality of the stars, planets, of energy, matter, and life.

I must accept that my species has gone crazy, imagining things that cannot be and knowing that our imaginings are seriously affecting all Life on this planet but unable to stop imagining things that endanger the planet and so, ourselves. What I cannot understand is that the few who rule us cannot see what they are doing. How can people who must be smart *not* see consequences. Evidently their imaginary world view is able to push aside ordinary, simple, consequences. Is it possible that one species with an unique ability can literally, physically, change the planet which is their only home? As cancer cells: explosively increasing their number while eating their host, and so eradicating themselves.

If there are Arcturus beings they are almost 37 light years away. A light year is a measure of distance. One light year is just under 10 trillion (ten million million) kilometers, or six trillion miles (6,000,000,000,000). Supposedly, nothing in the universe can travel faster than light, so even if we could travel at the speed of light it would still take us 36.7 *years* to get from our little planet to around the enormous, orange, star Arcturus (many times larger than our sun). Then I remember a tiny piece of information. I read somewhere that in Einstein's relativity theory two particles can communicate from one end of the universe to the other 'instantaneously'. I've tried desperately to find that on the internet, but have never been able to ask the right question. That idea appeals to me. Why not? I may not be able to travel very far in space, but why not communicate in a common now?

This is a real story. About half a century ago my family and I were living in Duluth, Minnesota. Cold, a very hilly place, with ice and snow in winter. We loved Duluth, the thick pine forests all around, the enormous lake (Lake Superior) that some winters iced over so thickly that you could drive a car on the ice. I had an interesting job on a research project with a generous Government grant. At some point I was asked to teach psych 101, beginning psychology, at the Duluth branch of the University of Minnesota. I



accepted, thinking I would teach psychological knowledge and ideas. It turned out that was not what a university teacher does. The students all had to have the text book. I also was given that text book, but the teacher version that contained detailed instruction on how and what to teach when, and a schedule of tests. If on a certain day the students were to study chapter 4 from page 80 to 84, my job was to explain that material only. All the tests were multiple choice. It was lifeless and immensely boring; almost certainly equally boring to the students. So one day I announced a surprise test. Loud protest. I told them, No, not about today's material, or even yesterday's. A free form simple question that they could answer as they wished. In writing? Yes, in writing. My test was this: Imagine a world that goes around its star as the moon goes around the earth—always with the same side of the planet to the sun. One side always light, the other side always dark. Where could people live there and what might be their psychology? Dead silence. Some students wrote a few lines, a few did not. The next morning I had a call from the main university. Did I? Yes, I did. Some students had complained to their parents, the parents had called the University. At the end of that day I was fired for not staying within the boundaries of the text book and the required schedule of tests. Then, yesterday, (50+ years later) many news sources reported that a planet had been discovered that indeed rotates around its sun always facing the same side to its sun. I sat up, read it again. So, I was not crazy after all, the question was a real possibility. But no, I was not fired because of the question but because I had stepped outside the rules. The rest of the article stated that the planet was measured to have the right combination of temperature and size to possibly have an atmosphere and water—making it possible for people like us to live on that planet. Evidently scientists who look for life elsewhere are looking for a planet that could be colonized by us. We cannot think of 'life' except in the same shape and development as we? How limited, childish almost, such thinking seems to me. Of course, the scientists added, the only place where *people* could survive on that planet was in the narrow band between always light and always dark. Yes, I knew that 50 years ago. I still think my students would have learned more thinking about my question than memorizing the names and numbers of the text book. But, that is higher education.

To me, life is all that is anti-entropic, and therefore everywhere in the universe. Entropy is the theory, the idea, that all the enormous energy of everything in the universe eventually and inevitably is running down. Like water that begins in the high mountains as a fierce stream of ice cold melted snow and ice, then runs through brooks, streams that make a river, which by the time it gets to the world ocean is at best sluggish, almost still. Very little energy left. I think of Life as the eddies around the edges of that stream where water swirls upstream. I don't doubt the veracity of the Second Law of Thermodynamics

. My thought is that Life, all Life, is a necessary aspect of entropy: anti-entropy. But I am not an Einstein, don't take my word for it. I know from my observation that on this planet Life, in all its many forms, is an energy that is renewing, not decaying. It is up, not down. And I find it utterly impossible to think that our little planet would be unique in an enormous and unthinkably complex universe. If there is Life here, there must be Life everywhere. Different chemicals, different forms, different shapes, different everything, but that same anti-entropic principle.

My understanding of modern physics stops at the Chaos theory. That makes complete sense to me. But physics is two or more theories beyond Chaos already. That branch of what we call *Science* is a world of mathematics that deals with concepts like the square root of minus one—a concept as illusory as the pieces of pieces of questionable values that banks sell to investors.

Reality to me is what it was for the ancient people I knew, and for many islanders, for rice farmers, for hunters in the wilds of South America—a reality that you can touch



although it may well bite you back. It is a reality you can feel and know, definitely not illusionary. Into that reality I cannot fit an idea that humans are somehow basically different from other life forms. *All my relations* as the Native Americans used to say. The four-legged, the feathered, the water beings are all my brothers and sisters, cousins, a tree, the smallest flower is related to me, to all of us. The beings of Arcturus must know that reality, even when the life forms may be unrecognizably different; it must be the same Life.

Fiction writers know that imagined persons in an imagined setting acquire a certain reality by the second or third chapter. The people in the book begin to write their own stories. That is because even in fiction there must be a kind of internal reality that is reasonable. It is logical, understandable.

The modern world of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century seems to have gone far beyond common sense. Politicians who say one thing and then the opposite a few days later appear to believe their own lies. Even more confusing, we the people agree with the first lie and again with the second. How can that be? This is the slippery world of politics. I know modern people who seriously believe that a word means what the speaker *intends* it to mean. I find it very hard to live in such a loose, vague world.

My reality is anchored to the hardness of rocks and the many moods of wind, to the reality of trees I can touch, to cats and ducks who are the same tomorrow as they are today. Our ability to imagine makes humans able to believe anything it seems. A majority of Americans do not believe in Darwin's observations, what we came to know as Evolution. Those unbelievers cannot believe that we might have any relationship to apes, let alone other life forms. We are so divorced from Mother Nature, the reality of the planet, that millions of people believe that an economy can grow forever. Our culture is based on the idea that there can be always *more*, on a planet that demonstrates clearly that death is an essential part of life. Some doctors believe it is possible for humans to live and never die. Even redwood trees, turtles, whales, have limited life spans. It is in that fantasy world that we can ignore the severe loss of biodiversity, a direct consequence of our thoughtless destruction of life in our frantic search for more fossil fuel. We've lost all knowledge of wholes. The whole of an ecology. What we call factory farming is mono-culture, a thousand acres of one crop, corn, or soy beans. Needless to say whatever pest there is that likes corn will be drawn to those thousand acres to feast and multiply. That kind of agriculture must rely on tons of pesticide, or more modern genetically manipulated corn that is so changed that it repels pests. Such corn is made to be infertile. The company that farms cannot save some corn for next year's crop but must buy seed for the same thousand acres every year. Furthermore one kind of plant, or tree, on a large area of land destroys the soil, so the soil must be fertilized with artificial fertilizer—from the same company who makes the GMO corn, of course. Humans all over the world always knew to grow in little clumps, for instance corn, beans, and pumpkin. The simple farmers I knew in Asia told me "what one plant takes out of the soil, another puts back in." That is how I grow vegetables, and it works miraculously. I do not need pesticides, nor fertilizer, and have luscious vegetables. But a thousand acres of one crop is easier to harvest with machines, huge monster machines. So, the farmer needs machines and the chemicals to deal with pests and restore the soil. All that is very expensive. Farming has become an industry run by large corporations. Not only destructive but unsustainable.

Once when I went to see a small group of aborigines I had not met before, they asked me how I had come. I told them how I had to drive around a place where there had been a big slide. I described an earth moving machine "that does the work of a hundred men." *What do those hundred men do*, they asked. We no longer think that way. No conse-



quences. Twenty million people out of work—and so, without income—because our factories are “outsourced” to countries where labor is cheaper. We no longer see the connection.

We only think of profit. Using our ability to imagine something that never was, but not smart enough to consider consequences. Makes me wonder whether this ability to imagine things that never were is a dead end evolution. Often—misleadingly I think—evolution is presented as a tree. From simple roots, simple life forms, growing up to more complex life forms. At the very top of the tree the apes—the most complex mammals—then homo sapiens, humans, several steps above chimpanzees. Scientists have found some possible in-betweens, but always with a question mark. Nor have we explained our cousins, Neanderthal Man, with whom we shared parts of southern Europe for at least 40,000 years. We, Cro Magnon Man, probably were the more aggressive of the cousins; we survived, they didn’t.

I live on a few acres of almost wild land. Wild meaning grown as it grows without human interference. There are chickens here. We don’t own them, they appeared. For many years I have observed chickens and because they have a relatively short life span I have seen many generations. In the beginning all the chickens were black and dark brown. Roosters were not only louder but more visible because they all were black with deep red and gold feathers around their shoulders. Then, about four years ago, one day an all white hen appeared. The white hen was visibly more aggressive than the black hens. There have been mixtures of course. Now there is one almost all white rooster, who has been busy raping (that seems to be what roosters do) black hens. There are a few white hens with some black feathers, more dark with a few white feathers. No grays as I had expected. Over the years I have collected feathers that are two-colored: black and white. Only seven in four years. But roosters with the strangest combinations of colors. Almost checkered red and black shoulders and white tail feathers, or red and white shoulders with black tail feathers. I admire Mother Nature’s endless variety. But it is obvious that whiteness is not doing well, most of the hens are dark again. At the moment there are only two all white hens in a flock of perhaps a hundred chickens. It is the roosters that show the strange combinations of colors. There was one rooster who was black in front, shoulders red and gold, one white and one black tail feather, the little tuft at the root of the tail a strange orange. Mother Nature tries everything. I started looking at hens that had combs and other hens that didn’t. No white hen ever had a comb. Among black and brown hens it is getting more common. Mixing of colors in the same species is supposed to follow the laws of Mendel. The white hen did not have one white, one black, and two gray chicks. In fact there never have been gray chickens.

From Mendel to Darwin, from mixing colors to Evolution. Why do we represent it as a tree, as if it must be always better, more complex, with us at the top, evolution’s master work: homo sapiens at the top. Maybe evolution is three dimensional, sideways, up and down, back and front. What if we are not at the top of the tree, but at the end of a sideways branch. It is tempting to think that our vaunted brains are wonderful, our ability to imagine what never was—which also allows us to lie; no other species can do that—is amazing and clever, but either we have not learned how to use this novel ability safely, or we are an evolutionary mistake. A species that acts like a cancer: exploding our number, eating our host.

Some scientists expect that after a collapse—whatever form that will take—the planet will go through a surge of rapid evolution, creating more new species in record time. That has happened a few times before, we know. An interesting example happened on the Hawaiian Islands. Because these islands are so isolated, so far from the nearest continent, it probably took millions of years before plant seeds blew here on strong winds, or floating on pieces of wood. Coconuts could float and be pushed here by a



storm. Scientists have found that only one bird species found its way here, Honey Creepers. Magically that one species found different ways to survive, adapted to different sources of food, so that today we have 47 now considered distinct species. Evolution can be unusually fast *if needed*. Perhaps homo sapiens can evolve very rapidly to one or more new kinds of humans that can live on a much hotter planet and hopefully any new species of human can see consequences and act responsibly.

The idea 'from Arcturus' still bothers me. Obviously I am not *from* anywhere but this earth. And the idea that somehow, somewhere, a recording device goes back to Arcturus feels more and more like a silly story, certainly not science and not even fiction. How about an other idea that is not quite as nonsensical perhaps. Reincarnation it is called. In places like India but surprisingly also in many other parts of the world it is taken for granted. Something —call it a soul, I prefer seed—survives the death of a body and plants itself, or is planted, in a newborn, or a fetus. I have known children who remembered things they could not possibly have remembered, but the children insisted it was real. There have been cases recorded, checked, that proved the children right.

I've had a few experiences like that myself, not in childhood but as an adult. Once I participated in a group effort to learn meditation. I think it was the second session when the leader had us do what is called *regression*. Think back six months, think back one year, two, five years—not as fast as I write it here, but slowly, time between each thinking back. Then a few minutes pause, take a deep breath, and the exercise again. My last five years had been difficult, unpleasant, so when she started over, Think back six months, one year, etc. I decided to think back six, seven, ten years. All of a sudden I found myself in what felt like a 'nothing place'. No time, no up or down, not cold not hot, not light nor dark. Clearly heard a cry in that nothing place: *What a shame, I am so young...* Almost immediately I saw, in my mind, a dark heap that, when I looked closer, was a horse fallen on a man. The horse was trying to get up, its legs cramping, but it was hurt and lying almost on its back. The man, young man, almost under the horse, obviously dead or dying. Immediately I came out of whatever that vision was, shocked, perturbed, did not know what to make of that powerful, very real-feeling vision. Waking up not exactly 'heard', but a name, very clearly a name came into my head. First name, middle initial, last name. The other people in the group had completed the second round of their exercise. I asked to be excused, I did not feel well, had to go home. Saturday afternoon. The whole rest of that Saturday and Sunday doing anything but meditating, every now and then I saw or heard little views of Misha's life (I heard that name). An old woman he thought of as his mother. A chair with a very tall back. A road, on one side a field with frozen stubble, on the other side snow; very cold. A hallway with an enormously high ceiling, four or five men standing around, all dressed in coats that reached well past their knees, red with gold trim, high boots, shivering cold, debating in a language I did not know. Very animated, but friendly, not aggressive. They were enjoying the dispute. As soon as I had come home on Saturday afternoon had written down the name as I heard it, Mikhael J. Lermontov. I tried to draw the scene of the fallen horse, the young man, the coat. Later I also did a portrait of him from the inside—as he thought he looked. On Monday I went to work, still disturbed by the strange thoughts I could not quite get rid of. Tuesday during the noon hour had a yoga class. After doing the asanas we always had a short period of meditation. As soon as I closed my eyes I smelled the strong smell of wet wool with a background of wet horse (in the tropics we don't have that heavy wool). That afternoon went to the University Library, wondering whether the last name of the young man existed. Over the weekend had accepted that he must have been Russian, but the last name did not seem quite Russian. I had never had much interest in Russia, Russian history. Imagine my surprise when the name not only existed but the first, middle, and last name existed exactly as I heard them—except that I had



written the middle initial for Yuryevich as J. In Dutch (my mother tongue) that sound is written J, in English Y. In the first book I picked up found out that the name was Russianized, the young man's forefathers was supposed to be a Scott called Learmont, brought to Russia by one of the Czars in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Other books had other stories. I took several books home. He died in a duel, sitting on a horse, when he was 27 (1814-1841). His death was 'a mistake', one book said. The other dueler had not meant to kill him, perhaps shot the horse. He was a promising (now famous) poet in the time of Pushkin, early 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was raised by his grandmother. He and the other group of poets, artists, were Cossacks wearing long red coats.

How could I have experienced that? I could verify everything I had seen, experienced. I always knew that it was not I who experienced dying and all the other pieces of memories, but that somehow I was experiencing someone else's experiences.

I spent at least two years reading what I could find on reincarnation from the eastern and western point of view. Early Christians believed in reincarnation, some sects of Christianity still do. Of course I came across the Tibetan science of recognizing a reincarnated holy person in a young child. All very interesting, but not scientific in a western sense.

At one point during those years I thought perhaps what we call *mind* is not in our brain, but somewhere around the planet. Our brains are a kind of radio that we learn to tune in to a point of the world mind that is our own unique address. That would explain what I experienced as my *happening* to tune in, if only for a moment, to another address of that world mind. People who think reincarnation is real say that knowing past incarnations helps knowing who we are now. My getting flashes from other addresses on that world mind would then not be accidental, but might help me understand who I am now. Following that way of thinking indeed gave me useful insights. Once I gave myself permission, so to speak, to drop into other addresses of that world mind I had several other brief, but often powerful, detailed, experiences belonging to a man or woman who lived in the past.

The sad story of a woman who lived 35,000 years ago. She is looking down at a small bay where a few people are getting into a boat, soon to flee because they know the island is soon to 'disappear' (they did not know how). Her daughter was getting in the boat. I knew who and what the woman was in her society. In the governing 'ring' she called it, she was the clasp. She had no power, she was trained not to have opinions, just "knowing." She knew what was called "all knowledge" which she knew a dangerous thing to have. When the Ring decided something she must give the knowing how that decision would work out. She knew her function, her status, to be essential, but she suffered from having knowledge that to many others sounded like judgment. Her training had made her aloof, unapproachable. Her only child, the daughter now leaving, had been raised by others and thought of her (I even knew the woman's name: Meretreixa) as evil. Looking down on the people fleeing the island—or perhaps peninsula—she felt immensely sad, knowing that it was her knowing that had awakened the people to leave, including her daughter.

Now, how could that all have come to me in one flash? Later that day I made a portrait of her. One shoulder was lower than the other, in her youth she had a spear wound in the shoulder. It had healed, but the left was noticeable lower than the right shoulder. How could I know these details of that complex story that I only partially understand—how did I know that it was 35,000 years ago? Mysteries I cannot explain. But for a short time I 'was' that woman.

I still, very tentatively, can accept the idea of a world mind that we access through our brain as a possibility, it would explain worldwide and over time changes, but as an explanation of experiencing another person's experience it does not fit. Most of the mostly very brief, sketchy experiences I had of others long dead gave me one moment of



another life, but always an important, strongly memorable moment. If nothing else, the simplest explanation is that I lived those lives... And 'the simplest possible explanation' is a valid scientific principle. Yet, even now I am not convinced that reincarnation is, or is not.

But, if possible, would it not also be possible that reincarnation could be between different parts of the universe? Why not. I am quite convinced that Life is not unique to our planet. How could anything be unique?

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Once I gave myself permission so to speak to drop into other addresses of a world mind I had several other brief, but often powerful, detailed, experiences belonging to a man or woman who lived in the past; never as long ago as 35.000 years, nor as close as the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

One of these occurred on an airplane. Cannot remember from where to where. We flew high above the clouds, I could not feel us moving, no wind, no rough weather. It was not dark and not bright either. Suddenly I felt being someone else, or sharing his feelings. A young man, a boy. His thoughts confused, hopeless. He was in pain not localized anywhere. Barely aware of his body. A woman had thrown a stone at him which had hurt his head, bleeding on his ear. He was lying in mud, was very cold. His life had been very hard, all the people in a small village (I thought it must have been the Middle Ages, the year thousand or shortly after). He slept in a pig pen to keep warm. He could not remember parents. He was alone. He was on his belly, his left arm awkwardly bent under his chest, his head hurting. As he felt life leaking out of him he reached out his right arm, open palm, in front of him. He felt Jezus touching his hand as he died. I briefly felt his exaltation—and then nothing. It felt too real to be my own imagination. I never added details, as I do with imagined people in a book I am writing, this came all in one package. It was a glimpse of a real life a thousand years ago.

And then there is this. Not a memory, just something that I read in a book and that made an indelible impression. I almost think I must have been there. Every time I want to tell someone this little segment I get tears in my eyes and can barely speak. Not quite a wrong number, but something strange.

I have no lived in Hawai'i for more than half my life. I am deeply tied to the land and people of these islands. I have studied the history of these islands. I'll try to make this short. The first people who found these volcanic island came in the double hulled canoes of all Polynesians from what is now the Marquesas islands, about our year one. They must have found barren islands, not much grew here. But they survived probably with a basic Polynesian culture. Around the year 1200 there was a second inflow of Polynesians from Tahiti who brought a "higher: Polynesian culture. They introduced the idea of an aristocracy (they of course). Close to the time that one chief was able to subdue all other chiefs on all islands, in 1776 Captain Cook "discovered" these islands. One of his captains wrote several pages in the official diary about how beautiful, well-muscled, obviously radiantly healthy, these tall brown people were. Captain Cook landed on this island. Scientists have calculated that at that time there probably were between 800,000 and a million Hawaiians on all islands. No cities of course. This island is twice as big as all others combined, so I am guessing that this island supported up to half a million people. As in almost all other lands that were "discovered" the local population had no immunity for all the diseases the discovers brought with them: the common cold, measles, syphilis, and many others. About 70 years later, in 1850 the first census was done. There were 50,000 Hawaiians left. In 1820 the first missionaries arrived, from Boston. Puritans, dressed in all black wool covering every inch of skin except face and hands (the women wore gloves). Their sons were able to "buy" land from people wo did



not know the concept of owning land, nor knew money. These men, as in all colonies, judged the local population lazy, so they imported foreign workers, at first from China and Japan. They became very wealthy from their "plantations" growing sugar cane, arranging a good price on mainland America. Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they formed a small group (a dozen or so) men who designed a republic for these islands. The ruling King, Kalākaua had returned from a trip around the world (that took more than a year at that time) coming back with treaties from all countries in Europe *and the US* recognizing and guaranteeing the independence of his kingdom. An aside: earlier an Englishman had "taken over" the Kingdom in the name of the British King. When the King heard about this (some months later) he laughed and denied any claim on these islands. That is why the Hawaiian flag has a small British flag in the upper left corner. Then the sons of the missionaries took advantage of the presence of an American (small) warship in the harbor of Honolulu to borrow a small company of Marines to overthrow the Kingdom, then, after the unexpected death of King Kālakaua, ruled by his sister Queen Liliu'okalani. The new leaders of the Republic first wanted to put her to death, finally locked her up in two rooms of her palace. Her subjects were eager to rescue her, but she did not want to endanger the few Hawaiians left and she felt sure that the American president, as the British king, would restore the monarchy once he heard of this coup.. Needless to say the Hawaiians were never consulted; they had no vote in the new republic. After more than two years imprisoned in her two rooms Queen Liliu'okalani was allowed to make the long trip to Washington DC. At that time by boat and train. In Washington she was first ignored and when she finally got to see the president, he did not restore the monarchy as she had expected. In fact the US annexed these islands shortly thereafter. For an annexation you must have a plebiscite. That was done. Thirty thousand Hawaiians voted NO, The votes were shipped to Washington where they were "lost" until they were magically found again during the administration of president Clinton, who officially "apologized" to the Hawaiian people, 100 years too late

When the Queen came back to Hawai'i she went to all the islands, The story I read describes the masses of Hawaiians on this island hundreds of them standing near the pier, awaiting the boat. When the boat was close enough they could see who they still thought of their Queen on an upper deck, dressed all in black with a dark purple hat. Standing ramrod straight, looking to the people. When the gangplank was put in place the Queen, alone, slowly walked off the ship. As she set foot on land all the hundreds of Hawaiians as one went down on their knees their heads to the ground. They shuffled a little making a path for their Queen who slowly, in deathly silence walked among her subjects. No sound except the occasional sob. A loaded silence!

That image, the dethroned Queen regally walking in total silence through all who still thought of themselves as her subjects—I cannot even write about that without tears streaming down my face. I see and feel it so clearly. Maybe I was there?

The Kingdom of Tonga is still independent. The first missionaries there were Church of England.

New Zealand now is independent again, and the Maoris play an important role in all affairs.

The Marquesas are part of French Polynesia, a "province" of France. Their missionaries were Roman Catholic.

Hawaii is a State of the United States. We have two industries, tourism and the military. This island now has a population of 180,000 and we import 95% of everything we eat and everything else. Two hundred and thirty-six years ago this island supported up to half a million of strikingly tall healthy brown people. Living sustainably of course, importing nothing from anywhere.



My point of view, I know, goes well beyond the artificial, even arbitrary, boundaries of our dominant western culture. As a psychologist I know that with current science we have not come close to understanding all facets of who we are. There are many people who accept some of my beliefs that fall outside the usual currently commonly accepted boundaries of western culture. Why accept that we have only five senses? People talk about young souls and old souls. Old souls would be people who have had many incarnations and so have learned many lessons. Why not reincarnation across the universe, exchanging points of view between sapient (aware, conscious, literally 'wise') beings from different star systems? Maybe the ease with which I have been able to be a man in different cultures has something to do with my once 'being' a being of Arcturus. Has that colored the many points of view I have learned and left behind in this life. I don't know, but think it is a possibility. I disliked the idea of spying, but I like the idea of learning from one incarnation to another. One of the important meanings of life, to me, is learning. Learning to be a better human; why not learning to be a better sapient being?

All that is of course not science, but my attempt to make sense of experiences I knew to be as real as when they were experienced by someone not me. I always knew that I was not them but somehow I could re-experience the reality of another.

It helped that my training as a psychologist began in Europe where psychology was not based on observing and measuring behavior but based on the ideas of Freud, C.G.Jung, and many others that we humans are able to be aware of, can study, our own experiences and that we learn from looking and listening *inside*. Over many, many years I believe that I have come to know myself well. I know what I feel and why. I take seriously my experiences, my dreams, ideas that come into my awareness unasked, even if they do not fit easily in the accepted, western, idea of who we are. I try to understand others by *standing in their shoes*, a concept that Americans abhor— several people have told me that is unAmerican. I don't know why that is but I don't understand many other widely held American ways of thinking as well. For me, I must deal with others without judging. For that I need to know how others feel, and why. What is the context of what they say or do. I need to know the important aspects of their culture, or sub-culture. I am sure that I cannot assume that I have the truth and everyone else is wrong. How could I?

When meeting wild animals, any animal, we and they can sense *intention*. If my intention—showing in my behavior, in body language, how I hold myself—is fear, an animal senses that. Similarly, we sense the intention of animals. I have met tigers in the wild. My intention was always interest, curiosity; I never feared. Every encounter was as the first, when I was eight years old: *I looked at the tiger, the tiger looked at me, the tiger smiled*. Other tigers have looked at me, I am certain they read my interest, attraction almost, they looked and disappeared. Tigers and many other wild animals have that ability to move just enough to blend into the background, or move without disturbing a single branch. Snakes I cannot read, I stay out of their way—so far, there are no snakes in Hawai'i. Meeting a strange dog I stand still, smile, maybe slowly reach out my hand, palm up. I can tell, anyone can tell, whether the dog is angry, afraid, curious. And so with people. I have never been afraid of 'wild' people, natural people, although they may look fearsome. But I have been afraid in big cities, where I felt, sensed, despair, unfocused anger and aggression in men but also in women. Being afraid does not do any good. In difficult situations walk slowly, or stand still, talk softly. I try as hard as I can to project my harmlessness and my genuine interest in all people, animals, all Life. For me that has worked.



I am fascinated with people's names, try to guess where they are from. I'm intrigued with languages, communication. Not the science of linguistics, but communication as an important portal into a way of being. Of course communication is more than words. I communicate with animals, and many of them communicate with me. In the last century several women (almost all of them women!) have patiently, over periods of years, studied species of apes, large mammals like elephants and dolphins, in the wild, in their own natural home, not in a zoo. I am certain that what they learned about and from these animals involved learning to communicate. I have noticed that many animals are as curious about us as we are about them. But if the first reaction they get from us is a gun shot naturally their curiosity vanishes—if they survive. They will avoid us, fear us, attack if they can. A few years ago I read a story about 'gangs of rogue elephants' that seemed to deliberately trample on human gardens. Most un-elephant like behavior. It turns out that these were groups of young elephants, surviving in a group when their mother had been killed for ivory by poachers. They learned early that Man was a ruthless killer. They grew up not in the normal elephant family group but in the company of other bereaved young elephants. No mother and aunts had taught them what it is to be an elephant, how to survive as an elephant. Isn't that a story that can be told about all too many humans? Children who grow up without a father who is in prison who never learn what being an adult male can be. Neglected children. Boys (and girls) who learn to be bullies and never taught that bullying does not achieve anything useful.

I have lived very consciously among plants and animals in the natural state. Some years back, in the village of Volcano, a month after I had moved into a rented little one room cabin, the owner came by with his Hawaiian uncle. As *Anakala* got out of the car and looked around, he said with surprise, "this place looks different, it is alive again; it was not before." Then he turned to me and said, "the plants must love you!" I love them, of course.

I have written about my communication with plants; of course not in words. It is real. A green thumb, yes—but it is not my thumb that communicates with plants.

You may think—you may have thought pages ago—that I take this supernatural stuff too seriously. I thought that myself. The fact is, however, that much of it turns out to be real. It may be beyond what scientists and ordinary people (who is *ordinary*?) accept as real. But it works. After one month living in a place *Anakala* noticed a difference. When I allowed myself, tentatively at first, to go along with what I then called intuition it was almost scary to discover that my intuition was often right on. Driving on a very fast freeway without conscious thought I found myself slowing down; around the next corner was a speed trap. I was ready to go shopping, had my hat on, my wallet in the pouch under my shirt. As if someone pulled me, turned back in the door and sat down on my sofa. Not two minutes later the phone rang, long distance, a total stranger called me about a book, bought six copies (that was when I had to sell the book myself; badly needed the money). On my afternoon walk I find myself drifting to the gate just as a friend drives by to see whether I am home. Now I have almost forgotten to think of that as intuition, I just follow that inner whatever-it-is, and more often than not it works.

I did not discover that myself; I noticed the aborigines, the very primitive people I knew in Malaysia, lived that way. Every time I went to a settlement I had not been before they 'knew' when there was no reasonable way for them to know. They expected someone when I happened to have the time, could make the arrangement at home. Of course there was no way I could tell them I was coming: my free time was irregular, no phones. They knew some things from dreams. To me most amazing was that they did not think it at all amazing that all humans and perhaps some animals know things they cannot know. That was their reality.



It took me many years to finally accept that perhaps, possibly, there might be something to that knowing. And then found that what it took was not learning a new skill, but giving up, letting go, the conditioning of my culture, western civilization. I met people who knew this all along. Children often *know*. It is a talent that we suppress. We tell children not to imagine things, not to confabulate to use a big word.

It is we, adults, who imagine realities that are bizarre, unnatural, dangerous. It is we who imagine crazy things like owning land, owning the planet. Talking with animals and plants is not imagination, it is real. In my world and the world of the ancients it is normal.

All I can say is, try it some time. Many people know who is calling before picking up the phone or looking at caller ID. It is not at all unusual to have a hunch that someone is coming to visit. Again, it is not a matter of learning a new skill, but rather letting go of conditioning. I find it fun to explore beyond the boundaries. And I don't need expeditions and fancy instruments that measure or enlarge. All I need is my awareness. And nature, natural plants and animals, and people wild and tamed. The awareness inside myself constantly learning how to fit into the mysteries and miracles of Mother Nature.

My life, an almost constant yearning for what is past, reflecting on villages and the wonders of nature, looks very far from today. Recently saw a lecture of Stewart Brand, the man of Whole Earth; his latest book: *Whole Earth Discipline: An Ecopragmatist Manifesto*. He talks about today and tomorrow. Today more than half of the almost seven billion people on earth live in cities. More and more of them not in high rises but in what we used to call slums. Now these cities within or on the edges of mega cities have names. They are where villagers come to escape village life. Brand and others see these very rapidly growing improvised cities, seething with initiative and creativity, as the future.

The future is also a rapidly warming planet with very stormy weather. The floods in Pakistan and Australia, droughts in Africa, may be what our future looks like. Another aspect of our future is the collapse of modern industrial brutal capitalist civilization. All civilizations crash, some rapidly, others over a century or more. This one is likely to collapse (is already collapsing?) rapidly. All collapses are ugly, this one may be particularly ugly because it is world wide.

All these futures are aspects of chaos, the womb of all possibilities.

My humble thoughts are that we must learn from the past that we are not the designers of life on this planet. The grandiose structures we imagine are illusions. We ignore, or have forgotten, the simplest of wisdoms: ***all actions have consequences***. Force inevitably makes counter force. We are not the boss.

All I can do is live my own life. It has been exciting at times, difficult often, fun occasionally, full of falling and getting up again always. I've learned to accept that words that come out of my mouth without thinking, thoughts that pop into my head, may mean something; at least they are worth investigating. If, when I am tired and irritated, I unthinkingly flap out that I am from Arcturus, I can't just throw that away and forget about it. It is too bizarre to throw away. At the time I probably knew that Arcturus was a star, or something in the universe, but little else. I learned about Arcturus, the most important star to Hawaiians and other Polynesians. Every now and then, over the years, I have thought about what it could possibly mean to be *from Arcturus*. I cannot even remember *when* it was that Charles asked me where I was from, really. It was that 'really' that changed the meaning of the question. I now have a few ideas about that odd question and my much odder response.

I am old, have far outlived all statistical expectations. Old age changes perspective. Thinking about death, my death, has become a regular and almost comfortable thought. When I die I may find out that nothing was as we think it is. Or, there won't be an awareness to know an after. Or, if an awareness does continue beyond death, it will learn



that the real reality beyond our planetary reality is so unrecognizably different that *where I am from* is a meaningless concept. And after I die I might find out that, of course, there is reincarnation—maybe not for everyone, only for those who choose to try another life. And it is possible that when I die my 'I' disappears as a dead leaf dissolves back into the earth. One of all the things we have in common with all Life is death. Death is the big unknowable. I think of it as either an adventure or nothing, not being. Why not think it an adventure?

Probably, we humans who are so proud of our smarts have only begun to think, to know. There is a whole universe yet to learn. It's been a trip exploring the edges, new as well as very ancient knowings. They have turned out to be more real than the manmade reality my fellow humans force me to live in.

Finally, after all these years, I must confess that I still have no idea why I saw, heard, felt, picking up the death and later snapshots of the life of Misha Lermontov, and the sad scene with Meretreixa. I am not like Misha, now that I know something about him. I have only vague understanding of the kind of person Meretreixa was. Other so-called past life experiences were equally unexplainable. Now, at an obscenely old age I feel more attracted to the world mind idea than the thought of jumping from one life into another. But, time will tell. If there is series of lives I shall know that. And if there is not there won't be an I to know that.

And so it is—for now.

robert wolff, august 2012



# The Last World

In my writing I usually use the word *world* for the man-made structure we, humans, have created on top of the Earth. As if we are apart from the planetary ecology. The world we made uses the planet as ground and resource. We have covered huge swaths of the planet with asphalt and concrete for roads, airports, cities, factories. We've dammed rivers, moved mountains, destroyed more than half of the rain forests, and built ever taller buildings in our mega cities. And so, homo sapiens has significantly changed the surface and dangerously polluted the soil, water, and air of the planet. It seems we cannot stop cutting forests that not only makes deserts but destroys the habitats of millions of plant and animal species. This reduction of biodiversity may well be a greater danger than global warming. We, humans, imagine ourselves the owners of the planet. In fact, of course, we are part of all Life on the planet, lice in the pelt of a living globe. Our imagined separation from the biosphere is dangerous because it immediately affects ourselves. We live an illusion, carving up the planet as if it were a block of dead flesh. We deal with air pollution using air conditioners that require more energy, generated by burning more coal and oil that makes more pollution. The immense pollution of the air has set in motion a warming that manifests as a noticeable climate change. Globally the thick layer of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other gases that prevents the earth from reflecting more and more of the heat into space; the greenhouse effect. Climate change manifests as warmer temperatures overall, droughts but also flooding, more extreme storms, and even more and more ice and snow in some parts of the world because the melting of glaciers and the poles emits more water into the atmosphere which has to come down somewhere else.

The loss of biodiversity has not made the news; even climate change is hotly disputed by hyper conservatives in the United States even when its consequences are all too obvious. The serious loss of biodiversity however affects the planetary ecology. The planetary ecology has been fairly stable on the whole for many centuries, allowing our species to grow in number and in ways to grow more food, more technology, allowing a fair percentage of humans to live as emperors in earlier ages could not dream to live. It is obvious that we who flaunt our wealth and power all over the world influence how other groups of people live. The so-called developing countries want to have cars and cell phones and bigger houses and more food. All the things that are causing the global warming and its effects on the planet, and so also us.

It is bad enough that we have let it get this far, much worse that we are evidently unable to stop the relatively few corporations that deliberately blind us to see what we are doing. Like children we build sand castles, denying that high tide will wash it all away. High tide comes twice a day.

More than half of all Americans deny that climate change is real, even when it is quite obvious that it is here. Of course the poor experience climate change first; the rich already



protect themselves from the natural as well as from the man-made world, the artificial world of politics and economy, of money and power, of :security, meaning more oppression. Today's earth is lethally asymmetrical. Richer rich and poorer poor. One nation spending more on wars and war making than all other nations combined. Another wealthy nation has encouraged the use of solar panels on private homes to such an extent that they now produce more electricity than they can use. In neighboring countries people starve from a shortage of food. Our modern world grows more than enough grain to feed the almost seven billion humans, but 30% of that grain is used to feed animals for slaughter, an important emitter of CO<sub>2</sub>. We do very little to change our ways.

The last world before the collapse; go back to START



We, civilized (spoiled) humans, cannot think of our own mortality, let alone the fragility of our species. I prefer to look straight at what is real and inescapable, with open eyes and a calm mind. In the real reality life means growth, and growth is not possible without death. On our planet plants and animals eat plants and animals to grow, and rotting plants and what animals defecate makes plants and animals grow. The circle of life and death. What we, humans, defecate is considered 'dirty,' and much of what we make is not biodegradable. We make plastics oil that may survive intact for 50,000 years. The oceans already have great islands of floating bottle tops and other objects that kills birds and fish that consider it food.

In a closed ecology, as this planet, there is no *always more*, eternal growth, the root of our economical thinking. It is foolish and not smart at all to think that we can have ever more without end.

Today, at the very end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the world is in economical crisis. The rich are enormously richer than they were ten years ago; the poor are poorer. The United States has always prided itself on what we call The American Dream, which I understand to mean that anyone can become rich and famous by hard work, perseverance and luck. That dream may have worked a hundred years ago; it no longer does. You can only move yourself up to an exalted place in society by climbing on the backs of the rest of us.

I hesitate to use statistics because statistics change and can be used to prove almost anything. However, it is safe to say that a very tiny percentage, considerably less than five percent, of Americans own half the wealth of the country. This very small number of people also earn a very big slice of all incomes of the country. The US continues to be responsible for one quarter of all the CO<sub>2</sub> spewed into the planet's atmosphere — no longer number one, China has passed us by a percentage point. But China's population is four times the US population and it is 'going green'. We are not. We spend more than half of our total budget on wars and 'the military', planning wars far into the future, with ever more inhuman death dealt to whoever we name enemy in the future. One nation, 4% of the global population, spends more on war making, which we call defense, than the rest of the world. combined. It is bankrupting us.





*"The great danger in the world today is that the very feeling and conception of what is a human being might well be lost."*

Richard Wright to Jean Paul Sartre, circa 1940  
in *Richard Wright, a Biography*, by Constance Webb © 1968

Does anyone remember Richard Wright? Famous author. Not many Americans probably know of, or remember, Jean Paul Sartre, the Frenchman closely associated with Existentialism, a philosophy—a way of thinking, a way of seeing reality—that swept Europe in the years after WWII. The US even then too busy fighting communism to think about other ways of thinking..

Has 'the feeling and conception of what is a human being' been lost, now, 42 years later? To me it seems clear that who we think we are has changed quite radically within my life time. Who today believes that humans are basically peaceful, cooperative, kind? The most common descriptive word for who we think we are is *confused*.

Yes, confusion is obvious. The War on Terror upended the known world. The virtual collapse of the world's economy is but another sign of a global confusion coming with great shifts in wealth and poverty. possibly the collapse of the world culture. No confusion of course for the people who believe in the kind of capitalism that has blossomed such poisonous inequalities.

So, now we have different kinds of humans. The great majority of humans are poor, and what we call uneducated. Uneducated means unschooled in the truths, half truths, and lies, of western civilization. Of course all people have always learned to survive in the circumstances of their environment. All remaining indigenous peoples know and have always known how to survive, how to cherish a sustainable way of life. We learned centuries ago that by giving the natives the privilege of our education we weaned them off sustainable living, forced them to want to live as we do. We taught them to value money and intrigue, cheating and force. We made sure they knew who is the boss.

Just finished reading, again, *Children of the Forest; Africa's Mbuti Pygmies*, by Kevin Duffy, © 1984. As all aboriginal people everywhere the Mbuti have a culture, a way of living, that has not changed for thousands of years. They call themselves the 'children' of the forest, not because they are child-like, but because they are a part of the Ituri Forest that spans a large part of Africa at the equator. They are the forest's children, as



the trees are and as the animals and plants they eat. All are an integral part of the forest. The first lines of the Preface of the book read:

“Try to imagine 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 life includes—for about four hours of work per day—a ready supply of food, along with good fellowship, music, dancing, singing, and a pride and pleasure in one’s family. For those so inclined, free love is openly enjoyed and even ritualized among the young people, yet marriage, when it occurs, is generally monogamous and permanent.”

Sounds good? Too good to be true! That is how all aborigines, First People, hunter/gatherers, nomads, lived. That is how we humans lived before we became ‘civilized’. Laurens van der Post, another who writer has written about aborigines, the San he calls *Bushman of the Kalahari Desert*. In one of his books he tells what happens when a ‘Bushman’ is caught in the web of civilized laws and is put in jail. The Bushman dies. Doctors cannot find a cause of death. Van der Post writes that the Bushman cannot be tamed.

We, civilized humans, are tamed. In this country we talk loudly and often about our liberty, our freedom, but even a superficial consideration shows that we are far from free. We are forcibly tamed in an immense web of laws, rules and regulations, enforced by ever more armed and trained to ruthless enforcers. We pretend we have a government by and for the people. Today it is neither *by* nor *for* the people.

My obsession, I admit, is trying to understand how we got from the free humans we were until perhaps ten thousand years ago to who we are now. We tamed ourselves, but why? Duffy asks the little people he lived with for almost a year whether they wanted to become as he was, having things, being able to travel all over the world, being able to read, eat fancy food from all over the world. The Mbuti pygmies answered with a laugh. No, they had no desire to leave the forest, their life, their joy and dance. A few times I too asked the people I knew, the Sng’oi (also written Semoi, or Senoi) the same question. They always smiled, did not answer for a while. Once they said, “and you, you have to leave because of what you call work. What is work? Do you have time to live?” Another time someone said, “in your world you have many things but you also have bad diseases, and everywhere you go you leave a disaster.” A young woman said, “you say you can have sex only with your wife, that is unnatural.” Actually she said *that is a sickness*—there is no word for unnatural in their language.



So, what happened ten thousand years ago? Scientists call this cultural evolution. Evolution not only of physical form and function, but a change in culture(s) over time. Evolution is not a gradual process. Evolution happens in steps, a change and then adapting to the change. Another change, and another time of adapting. These 'changes' are like the mutations we know of our physical evolution. A mutation is a usually slight change probably random, an accident one could say, but a slight change that turns out to give an advantage to the survival of a species. Mutations happen all the time, most of them are odd, not important, don't make a difference. But every now and then an oddness in one way or another is an advantage, makes the species resistant to a disease perhaps so that more people who have that oddness survive. Cultural evolution would be a change in how one person happens to make a seemingly minor change in how he thinks, how he lives, and others see an advantage and follow the new life style.

A recent example of such a cultural 'odd' change. The people of three adjoining countries in central Africa, at the southern edge of the Sahara, grew food, of course. Lentils, probably peanuts, and a few other crops. The custom was to cut trees to maintain a field of plants. We do the same. That part of Africa is dry, but now and then some tree would sprout in a field of lentils, say. One day a farmer decided he would let one of those sprouts grow into a tree, maybe lentils would grow anyway in the shade of a tree. Surprise, his crop thrived. In fact, his harvest doubled, with the next tree he let grow tripled. After a year, two years, his neighbor decided he would let trees grow also. He also produced twice as much as before. Word spread. Then the farmers who had allowed trees to grow noticed that it was easier to dig for water; apparently the underground water table had risen. Allowing trees to grow had other advantages as well, of course. The practice spread to the neighboring country, and to a third country. Niger, where it began, inspired farmers in Mali and Burkina Faso. Mark Hertsgaard, journalist, talked about this in one of those little movies I watch<sup>1</sup>. He ends his story with saying that from a satellite the border between Niger and Nigeria, a straight line, is clearly marked: Nigeria, which has oil, and perhaps because of that pays no attention to agriculture, looks yellow from space. On the other side of that straight line Niger is green. Hertsgaard stressed that this was not the work of a foreign NGO (non-governmental organization) but a spontaneous change that came from the farmers themselves. They not only increased their harvests two or three times but the water table rose 15 meters, 45 feet. My own guess is that it will also significantly change the soil from sand to more fertile soil. It is obvious that a seemingly insignificant change in agriculture may have far-reaching effects.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://fora.tv/2009/07/22/Food\\_Security\\_and\\_Climate\\_Change#fullprogram](http://fora.tv/2009/07/22/Food_Security_and_Climate_Change#fullprogram)



Now forty years ago, I began to look for some of those cultural mutations that could have changed us from joyful nomads to the overwhelming, complicated and very different humans we are now. One of the most obvious differences between First People and modern humans is how we think of nature, how we think of ourselves in relation to the biosphere. Our civilization considers nature as resource, and as a stage, a background to our manmade world. The wild is frightening to us, we need a garden. Planned and planted by us. As real estate agents say here when selling a house on a totally bare acre, “now *you* can plant trees where *you* want them.” Omitting to say of course that even in the tropics it takes ten or more years to grow a tree and trees need soil, they don’t grow on lava rock. Yes, the neighbor has a green almost forest hiding a modest house, because he did not clear cut the land but chose carefully where to cut one tree to have enough space for a small house, and a driveway that curls around trees and bushes. First people on all continents, as well as most indigenous people, know themselves to be part of the planetary ecology, part of the forest, or the ice, or the ocean all around their small island. They are part of all Life. We think we own the planet, some scientists think they own and so can create Life.

That is an enormous difference that must have started with a simple cultural mutation. Perhaps one nomad who figured out a way to stay in one place and encourage food plants to grow around him. That first man (or woman?) must have done well enough to convince other nomads to settle down near him. They domesticated (tamed) plants, then animals, then themselves. We now must work ‘in the sweat of our brow’ to build a more permanent shelter, improve the crop, breed better animals. We no longer think or feel part of the biosphere, after all we use it, we change it, we *improve* it. The beginning of agriculture, which scientists usually date to about ten thousand years ago.

And as always, one thing leads to another. Where nomads have no leader, no rules other than the few laws of nature, we develop hierarchies. Some people are above other people, some people tell others what to do. Suddenly men thought themselves better than women. A very peculiar idea when you think of it because the first and only law of Life is survival. It takes a woman to make offspring, the man’s physical part is minor. One man can, and sometimes does, impregnate many women. A man is needed to protect a pregnant woman, although in hunter/gather societies women are quite capable to take care of themselves, women are not smaller than men, or weaker.

It seems to me that the first cultural mutation that set us on a very different path is how we thought of ourselves in relation to our environment. We stepped out of the circle. Not a physical mutation but a change in our brains that led to an endless series of other changes. I think of that first psychological mutation as a right hand turn. With that we changed our path. We all know where that path has led us. Very close to seven



billion humans who have, during the last few hundred years, attacked and destroyed nature to such an extent that now the planet is talking back. We have set in motion what we call global warming, a process that I strongly suspect can no longer be stopped, let alone undone.

In the manmade world we have constructed on top of the planet we are suffering an economic near collapse, politics that inevitably, it seems, breeds wars—a dangerous process when you consider a few rogue countries with lethally destructive weapons.

Cultural mutations happen all the time, as physical mutations do. There is one other cultural mutation that I think is important because it makes our modern economy and modern politics possible. Humans have acquired, or perhaps discovered, that we have the unique ability to imagine what never was. Humans, as all animals, perhaps even plants, learn from experience. Imagining things, ideas, pictures, not or minimally based on experience, seems a uniquely human talent. We can lie. Animals cannot lie. Plant cannot lie. The planetary ecology cannot lie.

We can imagine what is not provable, we imagine what is not true, not real. I am fairly certain that early humans could not lie. The people I knew couldn't. The Mbuti pygmies couldn't. But lying is what advertising makes possible, and advertising morphs into propaganda. It is what made the financial almost-crash and will make what some economists say will be the next and perhaps final crash.

Lying has become one of the mainstays of politics as well as trade. What worries me almost more than lying is that words no longer have a fixed value. To many people what you say, the word, is less important than what you mean. But we humans have forgotten how to perceive intent. Animals, probably plants, are very good at perceiving intent. We who have become so used to relying on words have largely lost that ability. Most of us perhaps have had experiences meeting strange dogs. Dogs sense our intent. Dogs know whether we are afraid, whether our first reaction is to hurt or kill it. Surprisingly many modern humans have lost that sense.

In my dreams future humans will use mind to mind communication, which is not in words but exchanging whole gestalts<sup>2</sup>. That makes lying impossible, until of course future humans have a mutation that allows them to block mind. Evolution is random, both good and bad. Sometimes the bad is hidden for generations.

To me it seems that our survival requires remembering thinking ourselves part of nature again, part of all Life, part of the planetary ecology. Not nature as a resource to be plundered at will, but Mother Earth, the stuff we are.

But I have learned that that may be impossible. Modern humans have been so conditioned to believe that we, our minds, can fix anything. There are thousands,

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<sup>2</sup> **Gestalt**: an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts.



millions, of wonderful people who have very creative ideas to 'fix' this and that. But fixing means repairing what is breaking down. Alternative fuels for alternative cars. We can no longer imagine a world without cars. Without electricity, without enormous factory farms, meat factories. We cannot accept that our way of living is what is endangering the planet and so our own survival as a species. The only way to fix our way of living would be to accept that we are not the boss, we are not so smart that we can control Mother Earth. When we accepted that our brains are so smart that we can 'design a better planet' as IBM promises. Until we can understand that that is arrogance, hubris, we will not survive.



Not long ago I studied how our brain works. The chemistry of it, but also what thinking is, and how that happens. We actually have two brains, a left and a right 'hemisphere'. The two parts are connected only at the bottom, a rather flimsy bridge. The more I read about left brain and right brain, the more it struck me that our modern thinking is overwhelmingly left brain. First people and many indigenous people are predominantly thinking with their right brain. We badly need another mutation that allows us to use both halves of our brain. Logical thinking balanced by thinking in wholes. The left brain has given us an I, and the arrogance to think that we humans are so special that we can own the planet. The right brain feels at home in the chaos that is nature, thinks we, not I. The left brain makes war, thinks hierarchies. The right brain knows compassion, caring for all life. Is it too much to ask that we nurture right brain thinking to balance the overwhelming hubris of the left brain?

The following is a clear summing up of what I have read in the scientific papers I struggled through:

### The Left Brain

The left brain is associated with verbal, logical, and analytical thinking. It excels in naming and categorizing things, symbolic abstraction, speech, reading, writing, arithmetic. The left brain is very linear: it places things in sequential order — first things first and then second things second, etc. If you reflect back upon our own educational training, we have been traditionally taught to master the 3 R's: reading, writing and arithmetic — the domain and strength of the left brain.

### The Right Brain

The right brain, on the other hand, functions in a non-verbal manner and excels in visual, spatial, perceptual, and intuitive information. The right brain processes information differently than the left brain. For the right brain, processing happens very quickly and the style of processing is nonlinear and non-sequential. The right brain looks at the whole picture and quickly seeks to determine the spatial relationships of all the parts as they relate to the whole. This component of the brain is not concerned with things falling into patterns because of prescribed rules. On the contrary, the right brain seems to flourish dealing with complexity, ambiguity and paradox. At



times, right brain thinking is difficult to put into words because of its complexity, its ability to process information quickly and its non-verbal nature. The right brain has been associated with the realm of creativity.

Left brain thinking describes our current way of thinking very well.

Right brain thinking is a surprisingly accurate description of the thinking of First Man and of many indigenous people.



The poor of the planet know that something is happening, plants and animals are disappearing, winters are shorter but possibly colder, there are droughts and fierce storms everywhere. Apparently the elite of the elite does not see, or does not want to see, that their ruthless plunder of the planet's resources is not without consequences. They—and we who did the dirty work for them—have destroyed and continue to destroy habitats all over the world which makes a serious depletion of biodiversity; the greatest threat to the planetary ecology. By promoting a life style of profligate wasting and polluting we have changed the upper reaches of our atmosphere, which is causing the melting of polar ice and glaciers of the planet. Enormous changes in the planet's ocean. And other changes that may well make our earth unfit for humans as we are now.

The super elite, with enormous wealth and power seems utterly uncaring of the fate of billions of humans. They must be intelligent, yet they continue to amass more riches by continuing all the things they did for the last 60 years apparently without a thought for the morrow. What do they think a human being is? I cannot even imagine.

Probably Wright and Sartre were right, we no longer remember who we are. Extreme Muslims think they must destroy 'the West'. Extreme Christians believe in the (soon?) coming end time when they, the chosen few, will be lifted up to heaven, while all the rest of us will painfully perish in an earthly hell. Extreme capitalists believe perhaps that they, somehow, will survive the coming collapse of the planetary ecology, or perhaps they don't think about tomorrow at all.

That leaves the great majority of humans without a clear idea of who we are.

I know who we were once, and not that long ago. I have written of a small group of primitive humans who survived to the middle of the last century. Several writers have written of their encounters with other primitive humans elsewhere that survived into the middle of the last century. All writers describe First People very much the same: closely, intimately, connected to their unique environment, a jungle, a desert, the arctic, an island. Knowing themselves part of nature, with never a thought of controlling nature, always aware of the importance of caring for nature, maintaining what they rely on. All of these different groups were described as joyful, singing, dancing, content, sharing, cooperating — thinking *we*, not *I*. No leaders, no rules other than the laws of nature, no hierarchy, and within their own environment wonderfully intelligent and creative.



In contrast, today's humans in the West—and more and more in the rest of the world—depend on machines and gadgets, living under manmade rules: millions of laws, controlling everything in sight and everything imaginable in the dark, highly hierarchical societies with leaders and subleaders and sub-subleaders. We in the West say we value freedom, liberty, democracy, but we are far from free. We are not joyful any more, instead of singing and dancing we watch entertainment by professional singers and dancers. In fact modern humans live in worlds in which they are entertained 24 hours a day. Entertainment that is advertising that is propaganda. News has to be entertaining. Sport is not something a person does, but entertainment. Perhaps most of all, modern western humans are utterly devalued when it becomes clear that their livelihood is not Nature, and not valued as much as the profit made by owners. We are slaves, supported when it fits the boss, thrown away when the boss has no further use of us.

The saddest aspect of who we are is our divorce from nature, from anything that is natural. We live in a world of plastic. Soon we will be made by machines ourselves. We have come a long way indeed from the truly free 'savages' as we like to call our forebears.

Today's human is tamed. Domesticated. Told what to believe, what to do, where to go, what to see, hear, say, how and for whom to vote. We have become clever and crafty tool makers who lustily torture and kill each other. We, who are so proud of our brains, have used those brains to make weapons, poisonous drugs. We redesign the planet for profit. How many human lives does it take to make a million dollars? A billion? We now think in trillions.

The first hundred thousand or more years after our birth on this earth we were human. We were few, lived in groups, hard working, hard playing, living each day. We were alive, creative, joyfully part of all Life everywhere. We knew ourselves part of the all of our immediate part of the planet. We loved freely. We did not live as long as we do now, but we lived knowing and accepting the rhythms of being. Is it important to know that we did not create great palaces, cathedrals, we had no computers or books, we could not read. Since our minds were not cluttered, we remembered, passing on what we remembered to our offspring. That transmission over time is more reliable than the written word. We avoided conflict, because conflict kills. Perhaps we knew intuitively that what a person does has consequences and the consequence of violence is always more violence. Our ancient forbears lived hard lives, they were tougher than modern athletes. We walked, made fire which meant gathering sticks, built our own little shelters. We didn't 'own' anything. The idea of *owning* had never occurred to us yet. Any excess energy was used dancing and singing. Much more sustainable than anger, rage, fighting. We knew things that today are not even thought of; today we have forgotten who we were.

What changed we did with our brains. Think *operating system*, OS. We used to have an OS that was specialized to flexible adaptation to an environment for the purpose of survival of all of us, the species.

Today's human OS is even more specialized, it has erased survival and substituted wealth/power, fame. Focused on the individual. But individuals are not sustainable. In fact, the modern OS prevents us from even considering survival of the species.



Fortunately, the original operating system that made us survive as a species for thousands of generations must still be hidden somewhere in our DNA if not our brains. We can still switch to being we-humans.



In the new beginning there are no words  
The Final Silence  
Waves of Realities

Listened to a radio station the other day. I rarely do, this station (won't say the letters) is hellbent on being neutral, and 'up'. They must use stopwatches to assure that when someone talks about climate change they must give an equal number of seconds to a climate change refuter. The voices never change, a sort of jolly positive tone of voice that has no personality. The same woman the same dark sexy voice that of course loses all sexiness in two minutes. Another woman speaks sentences with intense ups and downs that do not belong. A man's voice utterly neutral, reading a script. All of them cutting off interviews in mid sentence. All topics in the same voice: interview with a dancer, murder and mayhem, betrayal, suicide bomber.

That has almost become one word: suicidebomber. That ugly word means of course someone who gives up his (or her) own life in order to get close enough to kill as many of the 'enemy' as possible. We have an endless variety of guns and machines that are more lethal from far away, even unmanned weapons that supposedly can seek out individuals and then send a missile to kill one man. It stands to reason that killing one man with a powerful explosive will destroy an area around the man, including all people who happen to be in the neighborhood. We call that collateral damage. "We don't count enemy dead" a president said. But those who don't have the huge apparatus and the money to have tanks, supersonic bombers, and unmanned killer planes, can use themselves as a weapon. The concept is not new. In WWII there were the Japanese kamikaze fighter planes that accelerated while diving onto a floating monster weapon machine. One pilot in one fighter plane could disable a battleship, a billion dollar investment.

What made me turn the radio off was the insouciant way 'suicide bomber' was said. Rain today, the number of unemployed went slightly down, a suicide bomber attacked a church and caused much damage and thirteen dead—all in the same neutral but *positive* voice. A suicide bomber is a man, or perhaps a woman, who thinks that in giving his/her life in a 'Holy War' makes him/her a Martyr, and martyrs are given a green mantle which allows them to go straight to heaven.

On one of the alternative news programs I watch on the computer saw a long piece about suicides among American soldiers at a rate considerably higher than the population as a whole. At the end a psychiatrist saying, "100% of people in a war, on all sides, have PTSD, post traumatic stress disorder." PTSD may lead to young men and women deliberately giving up their own life because they cannot live with their own experiences of the reality of 'war'



which has become the almost random killing of whoever is in your sight who might be an enemy.

Humans by nature are not killers of their own species. No other species makes elaborate war on its own kind. Animals, even our closest relatives the chimpanzees, kill others of their kind in rage, but not at the behest of higher ups who stay home and fight from behind a desk. America at the end of 2010, in deep depression (okay, recession) with probably at least one fifth of all workers out of work, spends 59% of its budget fighting two open, and a few secret, wars, maintaining a thousand bases all over the world and planning for unending wars, planned far into the farthest future. Our weapons and munitions industries sell to the highest bidder. Half of all scientists, I read a few years ago, is designing ways for ever more lethal weapons for these future wars. When close to 60% of our budget goes to war-related enterprises I cannot help but think what we could do with those billions to patch our own country's infrastructure, employing a suffering work force, greening our nation. Very few Americans question the necessity of eternal war.

Who, what are we fighting? Our leaders say we are protecting the 'homeland' from terrorists. This president no longer uses the words War on Terror, but he seems determined to continue fighting terrorists where they are to be found. Guess what, every 'terrorist' we kill inspires a dozen new eager young people to die as martyrs.

Action-reaction, force-counterforce. In an asymmetrical world we fight asymmetrical wars, and strange as it may seem to hawks, in the end force never wins. Force cannot suppress suicide bombers; force breeds suicide bombers.

I was 18 when the Germans invaded the Netherlands, then Belgium, to get into France from the north instead of directly across the German-French border, enormously fortified by the French. I was a student recently arrived in the Netherlands. I learned what it is to live in a country occupied by a foreign army. Probably in the first few months of the Occupation I found a little bar in Amsterdam called La Cubana. I am allergic to alcohol, don't drink and avoids bars. But this bar appealed because it had a large warning across the door "Out of bounds for German personnel." When I entered I discovered why: the owner, talented jazz piano player, was black. I've always loved jazz, ordered something non-alcoholic, and sat down to listen to piano, drums and flute. Spell binding. I talked to the piano player, who after only a short question and answer session let me in on a secret. They did not encourage just anyone to come in. But now that he knew that I was 'all right', I could come back any time. He had me stand up and announced to everyone that I was a new friend, saying my name (not my real name, I never used my real name in the war). There were perhaps a dozen people there, they smiled, some of them came to talk to me after. Later, each time I came in he would insert one phrase of my favorite jazz piece to let everyone know that I was one of them. "What is your favorite?" I chose Rocking Chair, which never became very famous, hard to find today.

I had been in Holland for less than a year and felt very much a stranger, an outsider. However, the people I got to know in La Cubana accepted me as I was, no question asked. In that they were like the people in our household in Indonesia I thought of as 'my other family.'



With these people I no longer felt a stranger. I belonged again to a group of people my parents would not have approved of, as they never approved of my feelings for *my other family*.

Jack, his music, the little bar, was my entry into the world of Resistance. There was no organized Resistance until some years later, but it began very early in a bar that was 'out of bounds', as well as in some churches, in singing groups, bike clubs, farmer coops, and more. If it had not been for La Cubana I would have never met the fascinating people I got to know. Communists and the underworld of prostitutes, thieves and scoundrels (never 'real criminals'), people I wouldn't have met studying medicine. People who were used to being invisible, being sought, being at the bottom of society—and people I could always count on once they accepted me. The Resistance began with people who were used to resist. It was only later and reluctantly that the staid burghers of Holland joined.

A need to resist was there from the beginning, manifesting in funny ways. Early in the war suddenly everybody was wearing something orange. The Dutch Royal House is the House of Orange. We knew that but the Germans didn't. Until the inevitable Decree from the German High Command: *from this day on it is forbidden to wear anything orange*. A week later everybody wore something white—the Queen's on-in-law liked a white flower in his lapel. The German High Command forbade the wearing of white. A few months later all of a sudden we all wore a match stick with the 'head' up in lapel or pinned on. A Dutch saying is *Kop Op*, literally head up, meaning don't let them get you down! At that time got off a train in Utrecht, a central city for the trains. All trains were scheduled to arrive there on the half and whole hour so that passengers could change trains without having to wait for connections. Swarms of people running in all directions. Everybody it seemed wearing a matchstick with the head up. Announcement on the public address system: By order of the German High Command *from this moment on it is forbidden to wear a match stick with the head up*. As a wave it went through the hundreds of people: we turned our match sticks head down. Now the meaning of that silly match stick was even stronger, of course. *We resist!*

Needless to say as the Germans got madder, more cruel, more oppressive, we resisted more. The resistance grew, groups found each other, some leadership developed locally, later from people who had fled to England and were dropped from the air to give leadership to the growing Resistance. It was never called that in Holland, by the way. I use 'Resistance' because it is used in English.

Being a university student in Holland, at least at that time, was very different from what it is at an American university. We had no classes, we studied on our own, usually with friends who studied the same subject. We were given the outline of what was required to pass the exam in a subject, books to read, things to do. The two degrees I worked for each had a number of subjects I had to pass by exams, usually in a meeting with the professor, one on one. I studied very seriously but also had time for resisting.

I did many things. Late in the war I was a courier for what by then had become the organized Resistance. I carried a gun and an important message for a woman who would wear a red scarf, standing in front of a railway station. There were words I would say, words she had to answer. But there were *two* women with red scarves standing not far from each



other in front of the railway station. I could not make a mistake, of course. They both looked unconcerned, to all observers looking as if they were waiting for their boy friend. I closed my eyes and relied on some inner guidance. My guidance worked. I chose the right red scarf. The terror came after.

In the very beginning of the Occupation, magically, a big 'black market' in food and clothes emerged almost overnight. Morphing into a blacker market in doctored identity cards. The line between legal and illegal was very thin. Doing something the Germans did not want us to do was patriotism. Gradually, without much of a transition, what had been petty black market trading became serious resistance. As the war got meaner, we became fiercer. I cannot escape seeing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the same way: the greater our presence—after all, we occupy those countries—the more suicide bombers, IEDs and other weapons of the 'insurgency' as we call what we 60 years ago thought of as Resistance.

Occasionally, but more and more often, the ethics of being in the Resistance began to worry me. It was becoming clear that the Resistance was being organized and used by the Allies to train a guerilla army. Did I want to be part of that? I was not cut out to be one of that kind of warriors, with a gun, strict discipline, very strict security, but it seemed to me at the time I had no choice. Perhaps there was no choice. Not only for patriotic reasons, but for sheer survival. As danger-filled as my life became, outside of the Resistance it would have been worse. At least I shared the dangers of those days with people I would want as my friends and who I could count on.

Things got uglier. I was trained with guns in basements where we could practice with live ammunition only if there was a loud truck going by, or perhaps a siren screamed. When a loud plane flew over we could shoot with real bullets to paper targets. The tasks I was asked to do became more dangerous.

I was caught by the Germans, I escaped but that is another story. The second time I was caught with many others, I escaped with bullets flying around me (aimed at me), but I escaped.

The Resistance became a full-fledged army of guerilla fighters. I knew one person above me, and a few below me. Nobody else was supposed to do what I did, what I was. I learned to move around, never staying in one place very long. In each room I stayed I imprinted where the door was, and an emergency exit, where my shoes were, my pants, my wallet, before I went to sleep, so that if I had to I could get out of there in one minute and leave no trace. I lived without anything personal, no pictures, no books, no mementoes. That was a habit that persisted for years after the war. I became the invisible man. And now that I think of it, I still am.

Traveling had become difficult and dangerous. The Germans checked identity papers at almost every railway station, and in many trains. The flimsy false IDs that had worked for me in the beginning were no longer good enough; I got better ones. Of course if my superior gave me a project, I had to go. Now I was a kind of soldier, after all. On one of those trips I carried six handguns, to be delivered just before nightfall. A few days earlier had guarded a weapons depot, located at the end of a cul-de-sac in a big city. There was only one door, the entrance. No peep hole to see who might be on the other side of the door, but when I heard a



certain rhythm of knocks I was to open the wide wooden door (have faith, trust fate, I told myself) to let in yet another farm cart with guns underneath bales of hay. The allies dropped guns and ammunition from planes flying slowly and low on farm land on moonless nights. Someone from the farm would then bring the latest shipment to warehouses like this one. After delivering the handguns I stayed with a family I had once stayed before. As I write this I hesitate to mention the city... even now, 60 years later. They were good people, and I knew they were also in the Resistance, and they knew I was. Of course, we never talked about that. They also usually had food, which was a treat, many people were beginning to go hungry.

Ever since that war I have suffered the 'guilt of the survivor'. Give it a fancy name, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD.

This morning saw one of those documentaries about the increasing number of suicides among returning men and women who fought one or more tours in the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan. The mother of one them said her son had told her he was not raised to be a killer, but he had to kill. Now he felt he must kill himself. Then a few psychiatrists talked about PTSD, which had other names in other wars. As one psychiatrist said at the end: *All wars effect all people with unresolvable problems for the rest of their lives.*

The next day came across a news item in Common Dreams. Suicide among surviving World War Two veterans—my generation, people over 80—have a suicide rate twice that of younger returning veterans.

I had to accept years ago that my PTSD will evaporate only when I die. For many years I was able to hide my PTSD from myself and the many people who did not want to hear. Then it exploded unexpectedly years after the war. All memories that I had so carefully stuffed away came up at the same time. My head was bursting, I was screaming, sobbing, falling, crawling, vomiting—having to hide from my family. How to explain? I sought help from a psychiatrist, another therapist, religious people. Most could not, cannot, understand.

Wars, killing, torture, have become the new norm. Sanitized and popularized on the Media with a capital M. Everybody has seen movie clips. But a movie is not real, blood in a movie is not blood, the smell is missing, the heat, the press of bodies, the shock. War, terror, torture, debts and riches, may be the norm, but it is not normal. Humans are not competitive by nature, nor are they killers of their own kind. How could we possibly have survived if we had not cared for each other for at least a hundred thousand years.

Now Christians (and Muslims?) are fighting yet another Crusade.

Jews, Christians, Muslims all proclaim there is only one God. Jews say they cannot even say his name, Christians call Him God, Muslims Allah. Is it words then we so furiously fight about? Interpretation? Rabbi Hillel, who lived at the time of Jesus, was approached by a non-believer who said he would convert if Hillel could explain his entire religion while standing on one leg. Hillel stood on one leg and said *What is hateful to you, do not to your fellowman. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.*

So what are we fighting about? Disagreeing about the commentary. Or are we really making wars for oil, for money, for the military / industrial complex that needs wars so that they can make more stuff to be blown up. A so-called civilization fighting for dominance,



while the planet is gouged out everywhere to provide the raw material for the energy we put into making explosives; we make expensive exotic extraordinarily complicated weapons whose sole purpose is to be blown up. At the same time we ignore, deny, that we are causing climate change. Summer temperatures of over a hundred degrees Fahrenheit on the US east coast, floods that cover one fourth of Pakistan, melting of all glaciers—the source of rivers all over the world... Normal fluctuations?

It seems to me that we, homo sapiens, are committing suicide. A suicidal species; is that possible? Goes against nature, against what the essence of 'life' is. Do we still revere life, or worship only profit? Blindly continuing to do what we ought to know cannot be done.

The Sixth Extinction scientists call it. Extinctions on a large scale, extinction of perhaps most species, is not unusual. Scientists know of at least five previous big extinctions. The last 65 million years ago when dinosaurs dominated a planet that got rid of them and many other species besides. The sixth, is different in that it is so unquestionably caused by one species, and it is happening much faster than any of the previous extinctions. If we are as smart as we think we are and yet we continue on this path, isn't that suicidal?

Homo sapiens means wise human. Surely an arrogant misnomer. We who must know what we are doing and yet go on destroying our home cannot be called wise.



Am reading a little book that is not little inside. Spencer Wells, *The Journey of Man, a Genetic Odyssey*<sup>3</sup>. The history of humankind from the first Eve, who lived probably 200,000 years ago, almost certainly in Africa. The first Adam lived 59,000 years ago, also in Africa; Adam is revealed on page 55. The whole 'journey of man' is done with the modern science of molecular biology. I must admit that I have read parts of this book at least three times now, now understand the science 'sort of'. But writing about it is another matter altogether. This history of our species is basically about our DNA, the double spiral of molecules that is sometimes referred to as the blue print of who each of us is. All cells in all life forms have DNA, but shorter, simpler. Ours is the longest, although 98% identical to most of the apes. Every cell in our body contains a copy of that DNA, so it is minuscule. When a sperm fertilizes an egg a new DNA is created in equal parts of half of the male and half of the female DNA. So, these enormous strings of molecules get copied and copied and copied. Occasionally the copying is not perfect. In fact, very often the copying is not perfect. The result is that quite frequently a 'mutation' occurs. A tiny glitch in one or more of the pieces of the spirals. Usually these mutations are not of any advantage or importance, but now and then a mutation gives an advantage at a certain time in a certain environment. That is how humans today can seem so diverse although all descendants of that first pair. Differences like skin color, hair, eyes, all the obvious differences we have imagined whole cultures around, are genetically minor differences. All humans can interbreed — and probably almost all have. The differences in vision, teeth, resistance to some diseases, are responses to our apparently

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<sup>3 3</sup> Spencer Wells, *The Journey of Man, a Genetic Odyssey*, © 2002

[http://www.ted.com/talks/spencer\\_wells\\_is\\_building\\_a\\_family\\_tree\\_for\\_all\\_humanity.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/spencer_wells_is_building_a_family_tree_for_all_humanity.html)



unending ability to adapt to all the different environments this planet provides. From sea level to 20,000 feet altitude, from the arctic to deserts, from jungles to tiny islands.

Above all, what I am learning from this book is that our history goes back really only sixty thousand years, which is not very long in geological time. In previous writing I have used one or two hundred thousand years, but our genes tell a different story. Our species has only survived one minor ice age by moving to warmer climates. Then, as soon as we could, we moved to parts of the planet hitherto inaccessible to us. Humans came to western Europe maybe 30,000 years ago from Central Asia (not from the south). There we found cousins, Neandertal Man. He disappeared, we survived until today. We know almost nothing about Neandertal Man. Is he the artist who left those sophisticated colored drawings in now dark caves in southern France and Spain? We don't know. All we know is that we probably, perhaps, did not interbreed, and that we survived. They did not.

The most mysterious finding of the book is how humans came to Australia. Australia is the most isolated continent on earth, probably even a hundred thousand years ago separated from all other land, and yet human remains have been found in what once a lake that are dated variously as 45,000 and 60,000 years ago. Getting to Australia must have required a considerable sea voyage. Australia's isolation evolved its own unique life forms, different from mammals, but Australian aborigines are fully human. And Melanesians? The black original population of New Guinea and several island groups of the South Pacific (Fiji, New Caledonia, the Solomon Islands) — the book makes no mention of them. We in Hawai'i know that Polynesians were sea farers several thousand years ago, crossing the enormity of the Pacific Ocean (one third of the planet's surface) in their canoes.

This genetic history is much shorter than we thought. Humans apparently crossed over from the extreme east of Asia over the bridge of islands in the arctic to the Americas less than 20,000 years ago. That is according to most anthropologists and archeologists about 800 generations. That does not seem much for the changes we have made to the world and to ourselves in 800 generations. But when I look back at my own life—I am not quite 89—the world and humans have changed enormously. For one, there are 3.7 times as many people in the world today than there were the year I was born. In fact it seems that in the last four generations we have changed more than many other four generations before us. History is speeding up. Population growth and planetary deforming and destruction, closely related, in a race to the end?

And yet, in this country more than half of Americans do not 'believe' in climate change, as if there is anything to believe. It is a scientific observation, that is becoming more visible every day. 'We the people' are yearning for a past that never was. What we want is a world not so complicated and confusing. And, strangely, denying who we have become and what we are doing and have done we just hasten the changes that are now inevitable. We are ruled by international corporations who are out to make as much money as they can in as short a time as possible. They must know what they are doing to the planet and so, what they are doing to our species. So, why this utterly inconsiderate amassing of imaginary assets, money? Money buys power. But what can power do other than destruction?

Of course, at the other end of a widening gap, there are individuals and small groups with



the most creative and positive ideas to change how we live, change who we are. If I were looking at Terra from another planet, I would look at these trends and try to guess an outcome. I don't know enough to make a bet. But after reading Spencer Wells' book I have a sense of the huge waves that play in Life, all Life. Swells and deep valleys. We who think we rule the planet are surfing these waves. We've become clever before we learned to consider consequences. Or, worse, we have become so arrogant that we think we can design a better planet, as IBM advertises.

In another book, *The Sixth Extinction*, the authors, Richard Leakey (son of the famous Leakey) and Roger Lewin, document that after each of the previous extinctions there were periods of immense creation of new species. Not 'creation' by the hand of God, but creating in the sense of an unusual amount of mutations in a short time. These waves of destruction and creation are apparently what this planet does. Perhaps all planets do. What all life does: life and death and new life.

So, I conclude that the race to the end we are now in may mean the eradication of many species—a accelerating decline of bio-diversity is already happening—followed by a new era of accelerated speciation (making new species). Humans may survive the coming warmer planet, which in the past has always led to another ice age, but in a different shape, maybe a different brain, different capacities, talents. Who knows.

For now time all I can do is live this day. Now and here. Come back from a faraway planet looking at human history beginning however many hundred thousand years back, guessing about tomorrow. The more we learn the less we know. Eventually we will learn to live in the chaos, surfing the huge waves of Life, smaller waves of life times. And, who knows, some people say we come back and back to dip into the waves here and there, all the time learning to be who we can be. Accepting the chaos, caring for each other. Compassion: literally feeling with



My current bedside book is a novel, *The Last Aloha*, by Gaellen Quinn, © 2009. Turns out not a good bedside book. It is the story of Hawai'i—Honolulu—in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when a cabal of second generation missionaries, now millionaire sugar plantation owners, overthrew the monarchy that had been recognized by many if not all of the nations of that time. An ugly, evil story of intrigue, manipulation, and of course lies and lies and lies. I have read many books about the history of these islands, so I knew the story. Reading it with more detail and in the form of the story of a young woman who becomes the confidante of the last Queen is more powerful. I have admired Queen Lili'uokalani for a long time. She was adored by the Hawaiians, those who survived after Captain Cook 'discovered' these islands and brought with him measles, syphilis, the common cold and all the other diseases an isolated population has no immunity for. The Hawaiian population went from at least 800,000 in 1776 to 50,000 in 1850 when the first census was held. A true population crash, not



at all unusual wherever our intrepid white explorers explored. In Hawai'i 'The Missionary Party', sons and daughters of the first missionaries, now no longer missionaries but rich capitalists, schemed and betrayed the Monarchs and the Hawaiian people. The last King, and after him his sister, the last Queen, fought to save their people, but they lost. Queen Lili'uokalani was a devout Christian, she fought her own battle to forgive those who dethroned her, humiliated her. She was confined in a few rooms, charged for crimes she could not have committed, eventually got house arrest for many years, finally released. She died a few years before Hawai'i became a State of the United States. The overthrow in 1893, annexation in 1899, and statehood in 1959, all were against the laws of the United States, and later against International law. Even then a society that prides itself on law and order had no qualms about forgetting laws and morals when it was more convenient to do what we must have known was illegal and immoral. We do the same today.

Last night, before I finally could fall asleep I could see so clearly what I often write about: *consequences*. How a small lie grows into common knowledge. How someone with the best intention can be 'bought' by those I can only think of as evil men.

That made me think of my own life, the consequences of what I did or not do that made me who and what I am now. A long, often exciting, sometimes desperate life has many moments of choices, changes, that have far-reaching consequences. Karma says there are doings and not-doings in previous life times that have consequences in a later life.

As I wrote in a novel, SPIRAL, I can see the tapestry that is the whole of human live times, the many threads, some long, some short, that weave it. The colors of the thread change. A thread breaks causing a bump in the tapestry. The tapestry—the reality of all todays—is made from all the threads that went before, with their knots, their colors.

Then it occurred to me that the tapestry is three dimensional, it is not flat, but a sort of cable of Life on this planet, it includes all life forms, all evolution, not just humans. I must assume that cable will continue in some form shape and color, even without the human thread, or with a different kind of human thread which is its own multi-colored threads.

Almost everyone I know worries little about our collective future, realizing that all we can really worry about is our own, and that only occasionally, and only perhaps. Living can only be now.

Considering consequences means seeing the past and what a little chink in my own past can do to my future. For myself I see and understand perhaps only some of the doings and not-doings in my own life and how they have made my now. But when I see what is happening to my family, my friends, strangers all over the world who are suffering unbelievable disasters that can only be the consequences of what a few people did or did not do long ago, I cannot help but wonder. How is it possible that one species—and only a *very* few individuals of that species—can amass such power and evil intent to change the whole planet? How is it possible that a very few individuals can fool, betray, lie to the great majority of their fellows?

That question obsesses me because I know, and have known, many many people for whom betrayal and lies are unthinkable, impossible. I learn every day about people who do the



most astonishingly wonderful things for the good of humankind. People who have original, creative ideas to improve the lives of many. People who stand and speak up to the liars. People who are able to create little enclaves where life is good. At the same time very very few people are amassing so much power that they can destroy large parts of the world, and are doing just that. It makes no sense. No sense at all.



One of the important things I am learning from the book is to see humankind as a species in a larger time frame. We, humans, left Africa around 60,000 years ago. The first 40,000 of those years we moved around the world. Come to think of it, we still do; ours is a restless species. Many perhaps most of the earliest voyages were caused by a changing climate, the end of an ice age, the earth getting warmer, colder. More land less ocean gave us paths to explore and settle. The book suggests that in these last 60,000 years we have evolved different skin colors, different kinds of hair, different eyelids, and why not different ideas about who we are.

Now add global warming, climate change. foreseeing huge movements of populations — more than the millions of refugees from various regimes we saw in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Shouldn't we then expect a blending of all differences, as is happening in many centers of population. It is probable that a very large number of individual humans will not survive on a planet diminished by loss of biodiversity, shortages of food, loss of water, enormous storms (hot but also cold), droughts and floods. The study of our DNA suggests that there was an earlier disaster, a small ice age, that reduced the number of all homo sapiens to maybe twenty thousand. Today we are almost seven billion, seven thousand million. Again back to twenty thousand with a variety of colors, hair and eyes?

Life and death not only of individuals, but of species, of the planetary ecology. The rhythm of Life: growth and decline, abundance and lack, day and night, sunshine and rain. And volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, hurricanes. In that large stage we came on stage, did our bit, stage left.

How to ride the tiger? As a flea in his pelt. Capturing fire probably started by lightning, using the trees downed in a storm. Doing what all life forms do: go with the flow. What was unique is that homo sapiens ten thousand years ago decided he (not she) could and ought to control nature, control other people. No we must learn that that does not work. We must relearn to go with the flow. Making our man-designed order in the chaos that is the ecology of the planet does not only not work, but it is destruction.

After many pages of the last chapter of *The Sixth Extinction* in which the author(s) go around and around about why we should care about the many species our ruthless exploitation of the planet has and continues to extinguish, on the penultimate page he (they?) says "We should be concerned because, special though we are in many ways, we are merely an accident of history. We did not arrive on Earth as if from outer space, set down amid a wondrous diversity of life, blessed with a right to do with it as we please. We, like every species with which we share the world, a product of many chance events, leading back to that amazing explosion of life forms half a billions years ago, and beyond that to the origin of



life itself. When we understand this intimate connection with the rest of nature in terms of our origins, an ethical imperative follows: it is our duty to protect, not harm, them. It is our duty, not because we are the one sentient creature on earth, which bestows some kind of benevolent superiority on us, but because in a fundamental sense *Homo sapiens* is on an equal footing with each and every species here on Earth. And when we understand the Earth's biota in holistic terms—that is, operating as an interactive whole that produces a healthy and stable living world—we come to see ourselves as part of, not as a privileged species that can exploit it with impunity, etc...

After a paragraph discussing that we really do not know what may have caused the first five extinctions—we theorize that the fifth was caused by a large something from space hitting the earth—the last sentence of the book is:

*For the sixth extinction, however, we do know the culprit. We are.*



In front of this window in the crook of the tree lives an orchid—*oncidium*—that unfolds its flowers slowly. For at least a week there was one bright yellow flower. A second flower appeared one morning when I had almost given up hope. Five days later a third, four days later a fourth. Just now went out to look at it close up. There are actually six flowers out, one hidden behind another and an equal number of buds. The close look also reveals the exquisite design and subtle brown against the bright yellow. Such beauty not meant for me, but to appeal to insects or birds, or even to repel another kind of animal. But why not for me? I have the ability to appreciate beauty. Is that a unique ability that we humans have, or is it learned perhaps?

Maybe all of us think now and then that there is a 'real' reality behind what we see. Some call it a spiritual reality, but that is not what I mean. I'm thinking of the reality of the universe or even a universe, one among many. A universe of immense distances measured in light years, the distance light travels in one human year which is the time it takes the earth to make one full trajectory around the sun. Light travels at a little less than 10 trillion kilometers per year, a bit more than six trillion miles. A trillion is a one with twelve zeroes. It takes more than 42 years for light from the nearest star to reach us. Other stars are billions of light years away. When a great lens can see a whole cluster of stars that we cannot see with the naked eye, what we see is actually what was there millions of years ago. For all we know that cluster of stars no longer exists or has spread; or coagulated—we cannot know for another million years. When I think of that universe I shrink. We who think we are so unique, so unsurpassed, so smart, are literally seven billion almost nothings in our universe. If our species can indeed damage this planet enough to warm the planet so much that it could endanger our own survival as a species, it might make the news on Saturn, a much larger planet in our own solar system. But beyond our solar system it would be irrelevant. The destruction of life forms would not change the path of the earth around our sun.

If there is intelligent life on other planets—and I cannot imagine that there would not be—they may have noticed a burst of energies coming from here: waves of energy from electricity,



radio, television, the internet, artificial light, all of it radiating into space. And maybe after a short time, not much more than one or two of our centuries, equally suddenly a cessation of radiation of human-made energies. A flash in the pan in the universal reality.

Even in the reality of our own planet the rise and fall of a species is nothing new. It has happened a million times probably, and will continue to happen when a species for whatever reason disturbs the biosphere sufficiently to make a difference.

To be honest I find it hard to imagine the extinction of home sapiens. The damage we have already done to many ecologies of the planet, the changes we have already made to the surface of the planet, the plant and animal species already extinguished, has undoubtedly started a process that cannot be slowed down in a few years, let alone stopped. As a consequence we won't be able to grow enough food tomorrow for the 7,8,9 billion humans.

Yet I fantasize that some of our offspring will be able to adapt to a planet that, compared to today's planet, will be impoverished. In fact, I am certain that what made our ancient forebears live in harmony with (not on) a wild planet is still within us.

From the point of people in western societies we have come a long way, away from that primitive past. Yes, indeed we have come a long way but at a price. By moving ever farther away from nature, our own nature, we have become artificial beings disconnected from our bodies, our brains, our nerves. We are like boats with roaring engines and no rudder pretending to be in charge. In charge of the engine, faster faster, but without a rudder the engine rules.

We don't like to hear what we call *negative* words; we are desperate for hope. We tell ourselves that surely we can get out of this mess, tomorrow will be better, or the day after. A sickness cannot be cured until we recognize that it is a sickness. If the sickness turns out to be terminal, why not recognize and accept. It is probably unthinkable to consider anything but up, up and away for our kind. Surely between the scientists and the politicians, between the big corporations and the religions, we'll find a way to cool this planet without having to change our way of life. Wasn't it Einstein who said "You cannot solve a problem by doing the same things that caused the problem." The future is born today and today is the consequence of yesterday and all the days before. Nobody can deny that today is not very happy. Our world — the one we ourselves created — does not work well for most, except for a very few who seem to have taken the reins. Too many of us are not connected — to the world, to a community, to another. Tossed about by a wild sea wearing insufficient life vests.

I must remember that of the almost seven billion humans today only a very small minority is responsible for the destruction of the earth, the pollution of the planet's air and water. The great majority of us lives in poverty, without the amenities westerners think essential: piped clean water, sewers, electricity, food sold sealed in plastic, schools, governments, police. Life expectancy has gone up but in the American empire the rich live longer than the poor. The planet's poorest may not have television or internet, but they sing and dance around a fire, they have drums and musical instruments. They share and care; they would not survive if they didn't.

How is it possible that a small minority can threaten the survival of the great majority. Can a



few bad apples destroy all apples? A few unthinking children play with fire. The fire eats the garage, the house, the neighbor's house, the wind carries it to a shopping center further up the road, and so the whole town burns down. It has happened, except that the children are not innocent minors but smart and ruthless adults who are playing with money. I suspect that they know quite well what they are doing; getting as much loot as they can before the meltdown. What do they think 7,8, 9 zeroes in a computer will buy then?

It takes a few bacteria or a bit of virus to kill a human. Those tiny organisms don't think, otherwise they would know that by eating their host, as it is called, they are killing themselves. Apparently we aren't any smarter than bacteria.

Ah, ecologies are fragile! Our bodies, also a kind of ecologies, are fragile. The mind influences the immune system, functioning of the liver influences how we feel. Mind, body, organs, taste and vision — it's all related, interrelated. And we, homo sapiens, have feelings and ideas that seem so unphysical but nevertheless part of the whole that is a person. We can be happy and sad, joyful and depressed, we have hope and despair, grandiose ideas and small fears. Fears very much influences how the body-mind-spirit-feeling functions.

Maybe the world-as-we-know-it will implode on December 20, 2012. But we have a fierce will to live. We'll adapt to a changed planet. Challenges? Of course, life is a challenge. The first law of being is to live. And so we shall.



This long monologue began with the last world.  
Now the last word.

Linguists have calculated that of the 5000 languages surviving in 2001 most will have disappeared by the end of this century. I've read estimates of how many might survive: perhaps five hundred. English seems to have become the world language. That is, English is even now the most spoken second language. It is often possible to guess the native language of even a fluent English speaker. But in addition there are quite a few countries where English — their version of it — is the country's first language, the language of schools, newspapers, the news. India comes to mind. In many European countries English is taught as a second language in all schools. I think China has that policy.

My first English teacher frequently reminded us that English is "The most difficult language to learn because its spelling has no relationship to how a word is pronounced." There are still quite a few words I know the meaning of, but don't know how to pronounce because I have never heard them spoken. I know that in spoken English the stress comes on the third syllable from the end — authori**T**ARianism —but like all rules in English, there are exceptions. I am continually surprised that so many people obviously don't know or have forgotten the differences between to and two and too, or there and their.

More confusing and sometimes terrifying is that so many words seem to have lost all meaning. We glibly talk about liberty and freedom, for instance, when it is more than obvious



that in a modern society we have very restricted liberty. And I know many people who insist that a word means whatever the speaker meant it to mean. To them words have no fixed meanings. Politicians do this all the time. Words in the service of propaganda. A word like 'security' has come to mean an infinity of measures to invade privacy, control what we can and cannot carry on a plane, where we can go and not go, what we can see and not see. Words like democracy, freedom, God, have become virtually meaningless containers for what often are lies.

Language, the seemingly endless varieties of language humans have developed, is without doubt one of the distinctions between us and the beings from whom we evolved, apes, all animals. Written languages another step in our evolution. But somehow we have polluted this gift, this important achievement. Words are no longer to be trusted because we, humans, have the unique ability to lie. We can speak untruths with the intent of influencing listeners to our advantage. Not just between two humans, but lying has become an essential part of our civilization. Advertising is how we can sell more. And advertising morphs unnoticed into propaganda. There are important industries that have researched what words to use in what contexts to influence people to buy, to act, to believe what the speakers want the listeners to buy, act or believe.

My dream is that in the new world, the one after the collapse, we may have rediscovered our ability to sense intention. Or even mind to mind communication that does not allow lying. We all have this ability. Mothers and other adults talk with babies; there is no question that the babies understand intention, meaning. It is only later that we learn not to use that kind of communication any more. Use words, parents say. Learn your name; this is a nose; say *nose*. Hand, cheek, mouth. By the second year our brains are developed enough to make those sounds to mean objects. At the same time parents and adults begin the process of domesticating very small humans. Functions that are 'dirty', cannot be talked about, given a softer name, sheeshee and doodoo or whatever the local hide words are. Politics have become a Babel of half truths, misleading quotes, and outright lies. We use words for praise and condemnation. We have added so many names to shades and blends of colors that we have lost meaning. And isn't that what words are about?

We have come to think naming something describes the something. I find naming interfering with my knowing. Someone asked me recently "What is that?" I answered that this plant likes shade, it does not like direct sunlight, it grows slowly, needs moisture, it has few roots that wander far to find the right food... "No, I mean what is it, what is its name?" It is one of many kinds of anthurium. She walked away, all she wanted was a name. Does that tell anything at all about that plant?

Words dug the hole we are falling in. After the last world, let's start without words. Communicate mind to mind so that we cannot lie.

Why not?

## **silent humans**

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