

AGRICULTURE

As the non-closure and variety of Paleolithic living gave way to the literal enclosure of agriculture, time assumed power and came to take on the character of an enclosed space.

Formalized temporal reference points — ceremonies with fixed dates, the naming of days, etc. — are crucial to the ordering of the world of production; as a schedule of production, the calendar is integral to civilization. Conversely, not only would industrial society be impossible without time schedules, the end of agriculture (basis of all production) would be the end of historical time.

Representation begins with language, a means of reining in desire.

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JOHN ZERZAN

constitute our nature, our whole being physically, intellectually and morally.”

We are thus left with a decidedly submissive logic predicated on an externalized value, defined both in submission to an abstract Platonic authority, nature or wildness, as well as through resentment toward the domesticators and civilization; we have the same self-diminution with respect to Good and Evil. This leaves one with the same deference to reification that has characterized all of civilization, precipitated its creation, and crippled the majority of critical theories waged against it.

Suggested Further Reading

Gone to Croatan

Ishmael by Daniel Quinn

A Forest Garden Primer by Silvia Wilde

The Technological Society by Jacque Ellul

Tools for Conviviality by Ivan Illich

The Persistence of Manichaeism

“the primal war: the refusal and resistance to domestication wherever and whenever it has imposed itself on life and the world.”

- Kevin Tucker, “Agents of Change: Primal War and the Collapse of Global Civilization”

Both wildness and domestication, then, seem to be vague predicates referring more or less ambiguously to Platonic Forms. Domestication gestures at a certain social and ecological relationship, but suggests that an exertion of power is the primary problem. Wildness refers to some will of or essential rightness of Nature. Domestication and wildness, then, refer primarily to moral categories, diametrically opposed, and AP insistence on using them has the function of framing the world as a cosmic battlefield between essentially opposed forces.

In this way, Tucker has not departed categorically from classical anarchists, in that he frames the struggle of anarchism in a Manichaean schema that sees wildness, nature, and humanity in a moral-cosmological struggle with domestication, civilization, and the capitalist state. It is replete with a Rapture event, the Collapse, that replaces Revolution; and a resentment aimed at “the domesticators”, who are our nouveaux-bourgeoisie. Tucker, in spite of significantly different particulars, is thus in the basic logic of his thinking in alignment with Bakunin, who understood anarchism as the struggle of natural authority against artificial authority, the former not being oppressive because its laws “are not extrinsic in relation to us, they are inherent in us, they

Agriculture by John Zerzan (1988)

Agriculture, the indispensable basis of civilization, was originally encountered as time, language, number and art won out. As the materialization of alienation, agriculture is the triumph of estrangement and the definite divide between culture and nature and humans from each other.

Agriculture is the birth of production, complete with its essential features and deformation of life and consciousness. The land itself becomes an instrument of production and the planet's species its objects. Wild or tame, weeds or crops speak of that duality that cripples the soul of our being, ushering in, relatively quickly, the despotism, war and impoverishment of high civilization over the great length of that earlier oneness with nature. The forced march of civilization, which Adorno recognized in the “assumption of an irrational catastrophe at the beginning of history,” which Freud felt as “something imposed on a resisting majority,” of which Stanley Diamond found only “conscripts, not volunteers,” was dictated by agriculture. And Mircea Eliade was correct to assess its coming as having “provoked upheavals and spiritual breakdowns” whose magnitude the modern mind cannot imagine. “To level off, to standardize the human landscape, to efface its irregularities and banish its surprises,” these words of E.M. Cioran apply perfectly to the logic of agriculture, the end of life as mainly sensuous activity, the embodiment and generator of separated life. Artificiality and work have steadily increased since its inception and are known as culture: in domesticating animals

and plants man necessarily domesticated himself. Historical time, like agriculture, is not inherent in social reality but an imposition on it. The dimension of time or history is a function of repression, whose foundation is production or agriculture. Hunter-gatherer life was anti-time in its simultaneous and spontaneous openness; farming life generates a sense of time by its successive-task narrowness, its directed routine. As the non-closure and variety of Paleolithic living gave way to the literal enclosure of agriculture, time assumed power and came to take on the character of an enclosed space. Formalized temporal reference points — ceremonies with fixed dates, the naming of days, etc. — are crucial to the ordering of the world of production; as a schedule of production, the calendar is integral to civilization. Conversely, not only would industrial society be impossible without time schedules, the end of agriculture (basis of all production) would be the end of historical time.

Representation begins with language, a means of reining in desire. By displacing autonomous images with verbal symbols, life is reduced and brought under strict control; all direct, unmediated experience is subsumed by that supreme mode of symbolic expression, language. Language cuts up and organizes reality, as Benjamin Whorf put it, and this segmentation of nature, an aspect of grammar, sets the stage for agriculture. Julian Jaynes, in fact, concluded that the new linguistic mentality led very directly to agriculture. Unquestionably, the crystallization of language into writing, called forth mainly by the need for record-keeping of agricultural transactions, is the signal that civilization has begun. In the non-commodified, egalitarian hunter-gatherer ethos, the

they pretend that cyanobacterial nigh-omnicide does not exist; they focus instead on the interconnectedness of trees and mycorrhizal fungi.

The effort to cease being anthropocentric, then, ends up merely recapitulating anthropocentrism by picking and choosing the aspects of the nonhuman world that humans want to emulate. And why should we be afraid of this evaluation, as Nietzsche said, for is the act of living not one of moment-to-moment evaluation? APs, like all Platonists, seem to fear that a lack of objective, transcendental value would entail either a total devaluation of the world or else a complete arbitrariness about what has value — if we do not enshrine Nature, wildness, Life, or something as the Good, and especially if we show that Nature et al. sometimes do pointless and destructive things, then it follows for them, that there would be no good reason we should not just continue to monotonously and immiseratingly denude the biosphere. But this conclusion does not necessarily follow.

The cyanobacterial annihilation of most life was one articulation of life's possibilities, just as the present civilized annihilation of much of the organic is another — as a unique, evaluating being, I am fully prepared to say, unhesitatingly, that I prefer certain assemblages to others. Such an act could be called anthropocentric in its refusal to defer to some imagined, unified will or objective value of biocentrism or Nature; but I would call it simply a unique, entirely perspectival and personal evaluation, as it defers to neither an imagined totality of nature nor to any variation of humanism.

rapture the canon of your law in Nature [...] In your pride you wish to dictate your morals and ideals to Nature, to Nature herself, and to incorporate them therein [...]"

The idea of living according to some abstracted idea of life, biology, or Nature—be it Stoicism, biocentrism (Tucker's other preferred term), universal love, or wildness—places one in a peculiar ethical paradox. One wants not to be anthropocentric or in line with The Culture, opposed as these are to Nature, and so one attempts to give oneself over to the way of Life or the Universe. But Life is not actually a coherent, consistent entity that always strives toward the Good, in spite of Tucker's assertion that Nature plays the part of protagonist: though at times its acts are "unpredictable and chaotic", we can count on its consistency as "The only thing they will do for sure is catalyze the life cycles of all living things."

In contrast to Tucker's Platonic portrayal of it, the biosphere is a complex of biota and abiota that are not only often beautiful, rich, stable, and fertile; but also often indifferently destructive and contradictory. Cyanobacteria, the first photosynthetic organism, may have wiped out most life on Earth 2.3 billion years ago by filling the world with atmospheric oxygen, then toxic to most organisms, and went on to create a 300 million year ice age during which even the ocean surface may have been slush. Paleontologist Peter Ward, noting that several similarly apocalyptic events have happened, has put forth the Medea Hypothesis, suggesting that multicellular life is essentially self-destructive and therefore periodically annihilates itself. When philosophers talk about aligning themselves with Nature or Life,

basis of which (as has so often been remarked) was sharing, number was not wanted. There was no ground for the urge to quantify, no reason to divide what was whole. Not until the domestication of animals and plants did this cultural concept fully emerge. Two of number's seminal figures testify clearly to its alliance with separateness and property: Pythagoras, center of a highly influential religious cult of number, and Euclid, father of mathematics and science, whose geometry originated to measure fields for reasons of ownership, taxation and slave labor. One of civilization's early forms, chieftainship, entails a linear rank order in which each member is assigned an exact numerical place. Soon, following the anti-natural linearity of plow culture, the inflexible 90-degree gridiron plan of even earliest cities appeared. Their insistent regularity constitutes in itself a repressive ideology. Culture, now numberized, becomes more firmly bounded and lifeless. Art, too, in its relationship to agriculture, highlights both institutions. It begins as a means to interpret and subdue reality, to rationalize nature, and conforms to the great turning point which is agriculture in its basic features. The pre-Neolithic cave paintings, for example, are vivid and bold, a dynamic exaltation of animal grace and freedom. The neolithic art of farmers and pastoralists, however, stiffens into stylized forms; Franz Borkenau typified its pottery as a "narrow, timid botching of materials and forms." With agriculture, art lost its variety and became standardized into geometric designs that tended to degenerate into dull, repetitive patterns, a perfect reflection of standardized, confined, rule-patterned life. And where there had been no representation in Paleolithic art of men killing men, an obsession with depicting confrontation between people advanced with the

Neolithic period, scenes of battles becoming common. Time, language, number, art and all the rest of culture, which predates and leads to agriculture, rests on symbolization. Just as autonomy preceded domestication and self-domestication, the rational and the social precede the symbolic. Food production, it is eternally and gratefully acknowledged, “permitted the cultural potentiality of the human species to develop.” But what is this tendency toward the symbolic, toward the elaboration and imposition of arbitrary forms? It is a growing capacity for objectification, by which what is living becomes reified, thing-like. Symbols are more than the basic units of culture; they are screening devices to distance us from our experiences. They classify and reduce, “to do away with,” in Leakey and Lewin’s remarkable phrase, “the otherwise almost intolerable burden of relating one experience to another.” Thus culture is governed by the imperative of reforming and subordinating nature. The artificial environment which is agriculture accomplished this pivotal mediation, with the symbolism of objects manipulated in the construction of relations of dominance. For it is not only external nature that is subjugated: the face-to-face quality of pre-agricultural life in itself severely limited domination, while culture extends and legitimizes it.

It is likely that already during the Paleolithic era certain forms or names were attached to objects or ideas, in a symbolizing manner but in a shifting, impermanent, perhaps playful sense. The will to sameness and security found in agriculture means that the symbols became as static and constant as farming life.

Regularization, rule patterning, and technological differentiation, under the sign of division of labor, interact to ground and advance

the [...] wildness around them.” and “wildness that flows between living beings” - at times, it is even composed of divisible units, “pieces of wildness”.

- And though Tucker agrees with me that “There is no ‘Nature’, alone and isolated outside of our grasp”, he does not shy away at times from describing wildness as some elusive, essential substance of the world, perhaps independent of any given being as when there is “a war against looming wildness”, one fought against “the state of wildness”, being lost as “there isn’t enough wildness left [...] wildness is running thin”.

Wildness, then is anything from a propositional attitude to a quintessence of life that is definitively out there, capable of being tapped into or destroyed. I have had occasion on Free Radical Radio to point out that, at his most metaphysically adventurous, Tucker sounds like nothing quite so much as the Classical Stoics, quoted in the epigram, who believed in, among many other things, living well by aligning oneself with Nature. I have noted in those same episodes how Nietzsche so effectively ridiculed this notion:

“You desire to LIVE ‘according to Nature’? [which is] boundlessly extravagant, boundlessly indifferent, without purpose or consideration, without pity or justice, at once fruitful and barren and uncertain [...] how COULD you live in accordance with such indifference? [...] Is not living valuing, preferring, being unjust, being limited, endeavouring to be different? [...] In reality, however, it is quite otherwise with you: while you pretend to read with

The Elusive and Sacred Wilderness

“When we learn to open ourselves to wildness [...] the organic anarchy of our beings will flow.”

“That spirit is what connects an individual to the [...] wildness around them.”

“wildness that flows between living beings”

- Kevin Tucker, *For Wildness And Anarchy*

“Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul [...] and how all things act with one movement; and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things that exist”

- Marcus Aurelius, Stoic Emperor of Rome

As a foil to domestication, Tucker frequently evokes “wildness”, which exhibits the same slippery qualities of seeming to define decidedly different things. With possible self-transparency and hesitation, Tucker often deploys the word with a vanguard and rearguard of qualifiers and negative descriptions. Nevertheless, the positive descriptions or gestures shift freely between vastly different ontological realms. As above with domestication, I briefly explore a few here:

- Sometimes, wildness seems to refer to a feral, unsocialized state or act: “we fear the wildness we are born into [...] such a savage, primal state”.
- Though Tucker expresses an allergy to “new age oneness”, he nonetheless also seems to be positing some kind of universalizing force or essential connective substance as when he refers to “that spirit is what connects an individual to

symbolization. Agriculture completes the symbolic shift and the virus of alienation has overcome authentic, free life. It is the victory of cultural control; as anthropologist Marshall Sahlins puts it, “The amount of work per capita increases with the evolution of culture and the amount of leisure per capita decreases.”

Today, the few surviving hunter-gatherers occupy the least “economically interesting” areas of the world where agriculture has not penetrated, such as the snows of the Inuit or desert of the Australian aborigines. And yet the refusal of farming drudgery, even in adverse settings, bears its own rewards. The Hazda of Tanzania, Filipino Tasaday, !Kung of Botswana, or the Kalahari Desert !Kung San—who were seen by Richard Lee as easily surviving a serious, several years’ drought while neighboring farmers starved—also testify to Hole and Flannery’s summary that “No group on earth has more leisure time than hunters and gatherers, who spend it primarily on games, conversation and relaxing.” Service rightly attributed this condition to “the very simplicity of the technology and lack of control over the environment” of such groups. And yet simple Paleolithic methods were, in their own way, “advanced.” Consider a basic cooking technique like steaming foods by heating stones in a covered pit; this is immemorally older than any pottery, kettles or baskets (in fact, is anti-container in its non-surplus, non-exchange orientation) and is the most nutritionally sound way to cook, far healthier than boiling food in water, for example. Or consider the fashioning of such stone tools as the long and exceptionally thin “laurel leaf” knives, delicately chipped but strong, which modern industrial techniques cannot duplicate. The hunting and gathering lifestyle

represents the most successful and enduring adaptation ever achieved by humankind. In occasional pre-agriculture phenomena like the intensive collection of food or the systematic hunting of a single species can be seen signs of impending breakdown of a pleasurable mode that remained so static for so long precisely because it was pleasurable. The “penury and day-long grind” of agriculture, in Clark’s words, is the vehicle of culture, “rational” only in its perpetual disequilibrium and its logical progression toward ever-greater destruction, as will be outlined below.

Although the term hunter-gatherer should be reversed (and has been by not a few current anthropologists) because it is recognized that gathering constitutes by far the larger survival component, the nature of hunting provides salient contrast to domestication. The relationship of the hunter to the hunted animal, which is sovereign, free and even considered equal, is obviously qualitatively different from that of the farmer or herdsman to the enslaved chattels over which he rules absolutely. Evidence of the urge to impose order or subjugate is found in the coercive rites and uncleanness taboos of incipient religion. The eventual subduing of the world that is agriculture has at least some of its basis where ambiguous behavior is ruled out, purity and defilement defined and enforced. Lévi-Strauss defined religion as the anthropomorphism of nature; earlier spirituality was participatory with nature, not imposing cultural values or traits upon it. The sacred means that which is separated, and ritual and formalization, increasingly removed from the ongoing activities of daily life and in the control of such specialists as shamans and priests, are closely linked with hierarchy and institutionalized

viruses into a host, seizing control of its body, I am moved similarly to see a kind of ecstatic and violent act of life overcoming itself.

I of course agree with Tucker that there is a horrific dimension to many of our human-nonhuman relationships; certainly, he is getting at something important. To tease out what this horror is more empirically and less morally, we might paraphrase permaculturist Toby Hemenway’s definition of agriculture: the process by which ecosystems are annihilated and turned into human beings and their domesticates, resulting in an economic surplus that encourages the creation of rulers to oversee it, slaves to harvest it, bureaucrats to measure it, guards to protect it, and an ideology to rationalize the whole disgusting process. And there our focus is revealed: it is not the hazy act of domestication, inveigled as it is with co-evolution and symbiosis and fraught with vague and moralistic condemnations like dependence and control; rather, it is the social and ecological relationships that emerge from certain forms of power exertion that are problematic. The recent anarchist interest in M. Kat Anderson’s *Tending the Wild* and the likes of permaculturists like Hemenway, Mollison, and Fukuoka seems to be a healthy recognition of the fact that high levels of human-nonhuman co-creation, control, coevolution, and interdependence are not only inescapable but also not necessarily undesirable, as they need not engender the massive biotic denuding, exploitation, and alienation that characterize civilization.

A Foucauldian analysis of power, normally understood in terms of inter-human relationships, seems equally applicable to ecology: exertions of power characterize all interactions and are inescapable - indeed, Stirner and Nietzsche seem to have understood beings as iterations of force and the act of being alive as consisting of exertions of power, the cessations of which is one's death. Rather than run from power, control, and dependency, drawing nonsensical, life-denying barriers around them; we might instead acknowledge and seek to understand our power over other organisms, how we are shaping them and they us. It is not that "everything is bad, but that everything is more dangerous", and we may thus move toward a "hyper—and pessimistic" awareness of what our power means and how it can be more life-affirming.

Other takes on ecology contrast with Kevin's moralistic one - that seeks, Platonically, to carve nature into joints, the good and the bad - and refuse this dualism. Permaculturist Bill Mollison famously argued that everything gardens, that is, every organisms exerts power to create a favorable environment for itself: the bacterium *Lactobacillus*, for one, shits lactic acid that favors itself and its conspecifics but inhibits the growth of many competing molds and bacteria—this act is power, this act is an effort "to control the world [...] and dictate its relationships." Former Animal Liberation Front member Rod Coronado spoke in an interview conducted by Tucker of being inspired by the way predators exert a domineering presence. Nietzsche saw life as continually overcoming itself, always surging forth in new forms. When I envision the ichneumon wasp injecting its eggs and mutualistic

power. Religion emerges to ground and legitimize culture, by means of a "higher" order of reality; it is especially required, in this function of maintaining the solidarity of society, by the unnatural demands of agriculture. In the Neolithic village of Catal Hüyük in Turkish Anatolia, one of every three rooms was used for ritual purposes. Plowing and sowing can be seen as ritual renunciations, according to Burkert, a form of systematic repression accompanied by a sacrificial element. Speaking of sacrifice, which is the killing of domesticated animals (or even humans) for ritual purposes, it is pervasive in agricultural societies and found only there. Some of the major Neolithic religions often attempted a symbolic healing of the agricultural rupture with nature through the mythology of the earth mother, which needless to say does nothing to restore the lost unity. Fertility myths are also central; the Egyptian Osiris, the Greek Persephone, Baal of the Canaanites, and the New Testament Jesus, gods whose death and resurrection testify to the perseverance of the soil, not to mention the human soul. The first temples signified the rise of cosmologies based on a model of the universe as an arena of domestication or barnyard, which in turn serves to justify the suppression of human autonomy. Whereas precivilized society was, as Redfield put it, "held together by largely undeclared but continually realized ethical conceptions," religion developed as a way of creating citizens, placing the moral order under public management.

Domestication involved the initiation of production, vastly increased divisions of labor, and the completed foundations of social stratification. This amounted to an epochal mutation both in

the character of human existence and its development, clouding the latter with ever more violence and work. Contrary to the myth of hunter-gatherers as violent and aggressive, by the way, recent evidence shows that existing non-farmers, such as the Mbuti (“pygmies”) studied by Turnbull, apparently do what killing they do without any aggressive spirit, even with a sort of regret. Warfare and the formation of every civilization or state, on the other hand, are inseparably linked.

Primal peoples did not fight over areas in which separate groups might converge in their gathering and hunting. At least “territorial” struggles are not part of the ethnographic literature and they would seem even less likely to have occurred in pre-history when resources were greater and contact with civilization non-existent. Indeed, these peoples had no conception of private property, and Rousseau’s figurative judgment, that divided society was founded by the man who first sowed a piece of ground, saying “This land is mine,” and found others to believe him, is essentially valid. “Mine and thine, the seeds of all mischief, have no place with them,” reads Pietro’s 1511 account of the natives encountered on Columbus’ second voyage. Centuries later, surviving Native Americans asked, “Sell the Earth? Why not sell the air, the clouds, the great sea?” Agriculture creates and elevates possessions; consider the longing root of belongings, as if they ever make up for the loss. Work, as a distinct category of life, likewise did not exist until agriculture. The human capacity of being shackled to crops and herds devolved rather quickly. Food production overcame the common absence or paucity of ritual and hierarchy in society and introduced civilized activities like the forced labor of

Domestication, then, as Kevin deploys it, is a margarine-word, a word “whose function is to circulate, not to mean”. It is used less to convey information than to indicate the user holds a certain moral position. This residue gleams clearly in certain moments, as when Kevin writes: “The one message that I hope people can learn from the history of domestication is that humans, like any other animal, aren’t meant to control the world around it [sic] and dictate its relationships.” There are things we must not do, and one of them is to control the world around us; but the phrase “control the world” is as vague as “domestication”.

We co-create one another’s worlds: my phenomenality is inseparable from myself—it constitutes me—and I am therefore a multifarious being composed of every other being that I encounter. Intimacy and symbiosis are co-creation, meaning that creatures are continually shaping one another. But this cocreation is not a lack of control or a surrender of power, it is a simultaneous competition and cooperation of powers. Do we not all control each other’s worlds, as we are the constituents of one another’s worlds? Where does symbiosis end and domestication begin?

I have written elsewhere in greater length and depth that power, control and interdependence as well as more one-sided dependence are rampant among nonhumans: orchids sexually deceive their pollinators, parasitic barnacles castrate their hosts and hijack their reproductive organs, and leafcutter ants engage in quasi-agriculture. Through co-evolution and symbiosis, species are constantly shaping and influencing each other.

I thus cannot take seriously the idea that power, control and dependency are what problematize inter-organismal relationships.

- Though Kevin at times appears very conscious of the accusations of religiosity that have fallen on AP, he nonetheless endorses Chellis Glendinning by saying “the original trauma of domestication is a deep wound”. Here, domestication is perhaps our Fall.
- Elsewhere, he seems to agree with Zerzan’s “cosmic change”, describing it as relating to metaphysical erasure or transformation: “Domestication is the destruction of the soul.” or “Domesticated plants and animals replace wildness.”
- Domestication also seems at times to be naturalized, synonymous with socialization, as when “Our submission to the system is our domestication”, described as “the internalized system: the cop, missionary, politician, economist, and worker in our heads”.
- Most mundanely, Kevin often refers to dependency, perceived dependency, and control to characterize domestication.

How is domestication so many different things? If it is, then is it actually a useful term? At times, domestication is even contradictory things, as when “Our own self domestication has not changed who we are[!]” - so it does not seem to create or prescribe different metaphysical categories, after all - or “domestication is not some monolithic and irreversible event in the past, but a constant reality that we recreate daily through our own lives” - and so it is therefore not an original trauma or Fall, which is a decidedly singular event.

temple-building. Here is the real “Cartesian split” between inner and outer reality, the separation whereby nature became merely something to be “worked.” On this capacity for a sedentary and servile existence rests the entire superstructure of civilization with its increasing weight of repression. Male violence toward women originated with agriculture, which transmuted women into beasts of burden and breeders of children. Before farming, the egalitarianism of foraging life “applied as fully to women as to men,” judged Eleanor Leacock, owing to the autonomy of tasks and the fact that decisions were made by those who carried them out. In the absence of production and with no drudge work suitable for child labor such as weeding, women were not consigned to onerous chores or the constant supply of babies. Along with the curse of perpetual work, via agriculture, in the expulsion from Eden, God told woman, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and that desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” Similarly, the first known codified laws, those of the Sumerian king Ur-Namu, prescribed death to any woman satisfying desires outside of marriage. Thus Whyte referred to the ground women “lost relative to men when humans first abandoned a simple hunting and gathering way of life,” and Simone de Beauvoir saw in the cultural equation of plow and phallus a fitting symbol of the oppression of women.

As wild animals are converted into sluggish meat-making machines, the concept of becoming “cultivated” is a virtue enforced on people, meaning the weeding out of freedom from one’s nature, in the service of domestication and exploitation. As

Rice points out, in Sumer, the first civilization, the earliest cities had factories with their characteristic high organization and refraction of skills. Civilization from this point exacts human labor and the mass production of food, buildings, war and authority. To the Greeks, work was a curse and nothing else. Their name for it-ponos-has the same root as the Latin poena, sorrow. The famous Old Testament curse on agriculture as the expulsion from Paradise (Genesis 3:17–18) reminds us of the origin of work. As Mumford put it, “Conformity, repetition, patience were the keys to this [Neolithic] culture...the patient capacity for work.” In this monotony and passivity of tending and waiting is born, according to Paul Shepard, the peasant’s “deep, latent resentments, crude mixtures of rectitude and heaviness, and absence of humor.” One might also add a stoic insensitivity and lack of imagination inseparable from religious faith, sullenness, and suspicion among traits widely attributed to the domesticated life of farming.

Although food production by its nature includes a latent readiness for political domination and although civilizing culture was from the beginning its own propaganda machine, the changeover involved a monumental struggle. Fredy Perlman’s *Against Leviathan!* *Against His-Story!* is unrivaled on this, vastly enriching Toynbee’s attention to the “internal” and “external proletariats,” discontents within and without civilization. Nonetheless, along the axis from digging stick farming to plow agriculture to fully differentiated irrigation systems, an almost total genocide of gatherers and hunters was necessarily effected.

The formation and storage of surpluses are part of the domesticating will to control and make static, an aspect of the

The Vagaries of Domestication

It is seductive to talk of domestication in anarchist theory: it applies ideas of domination we have already come to understand in a new dimension. The idea that our present crisis is caused by dominating Nature - or burying the spirit of wildness, as you prefer - implies, when it is not already explicitly stated, that we might exit this nightmare by simply learning how to stop dominating and somehow negating those who refuse to stop. It is thus a recapitulation of egalitarian tendencies of thought that consider liberation to be tantamount to the elimination of power. It is easy to talk to anarchists about power; for many, it is already a placeholder for bad. Indeed, Tucker, at the 2014 Philadelphia Anarchist Bookfair, summarized anarchist theory as the search to identify and eliminate power; green anarchy’s contribution, he continued, has been identifying that power with agriculture, with domestication - it is a pleasingly elegant, readily comprehensible critique that implies the familiar Manichaeic theme.

To effectively avoid doing something, one needs to know clearly what it is; but when it comes to defining domestication, APs have been vague, tending toward moralistic, quasi-religious, and maudlin language. John Zerzan has defined it at his most sober as “the attempt to bring free dimensions under control for self-serving purposes” and elsewhere, with metaphysical adventurousness, as “a cosmic change” - sacred lines are being crossed, one is to understand. Kevin Tucker has been more erratic, either clearly defining or vaguely gesturing at domestication in a wide variety of ways:

manifestation of it, nor can it stop at critiquing every aspect and manifestation of all extant and historical civilizations.

Instead, thoroughgoing critical theory must effectively critique all possible forms of domination, exploitation, and alienation - it must provide a moment-to-moment practice of critique that allows for perpetual yet always provisional analysis leading to potentially immediate action. In doing so, it allows one to be critical not only of present civilizations, but also possible future iterations of domination and exploitation, the reemergence of alienated lifeways and modes of thought, and the inadequacies of present and future partial liberation theories.

Anarcho-Primitivism (AP) - in spite of contributing importantly to the anti-civilization critique - fails in this regard because it does not break free of the speculative Platonic tendency, that essentially civilized mode of thinking. AP therefore seeks totalizing truths that render the world absolutely knowable, recapitulating an ideology of control and measurement; draws sacred moral lines where they do not exist in the biosphere; posits objective and transcendental values and entities, reifying aspects of our phenomenality; and succumbs to the same dualistic logic that has characterized classical anarchism. I will examine only a few specific instances of these issues here, due to constraints of scope: the vagaries of domestication, the mystification and sacralization of wildness, and the Manichaeism that motivates and unites both.

tendency to symbolize. A bulwark against the flow of nature, surplus takes the forms of herd animals and granaries. Stored grain was the earliest medium of equivalence, the oldest form of capital. Only with the appearance of wealth in the shape of storable grains do the gradations of labor and social classes proceed. While there were certainly wild grains before all this (and wild wheat, by the way, is 24 percent protein compared to 12 percent for domesticated wheat), the bias of culture makes every difference. Civilization and its cities rested as much on granaries as on symbolization. The mystery of agriculture's origin seems even more impenetrable in light of the recent reversal of long-standing notions that the previous era was one of hostility to nature and an absence of leisure. "One could no longer assume," wrote Arme, "that early man domesticated plants and animals to escape drudgery and starvation. If anything, the contrary appeared true, and the advent of farming saw the end of innocence." For a long time, the question was "Why wasn't agriculture adopted much earlier in human evolution?" More recently, we know that agriculture, in Cohen's words, "is not easier than hunting and gathering and does not provide a higher quality, more palatable, or more secure food base." Thus the consensus question now is, "Why was it adopted at all?"

Many theories have been advanced, none convincingly. Childe and others argue that population increase pushed human societies into more intimate contact with other species, leading to domestication and the need to produce in order to feed the additional people. But it has been shown rather conclusively that population increase did not precede agriculture but was caused

by it. "I don't see any evidence anywhere in the world," concluded Flannery, "that suggests that population pressure was responsible for the beginning of agriculture." Another theory has it that major climatic changes occurred at the end of the Pleistocene, about 11,000 years ago, that upset the old hunter-gatherer life-world and led directly to the cultivation of certain surviving staples. Recent dating methods have helped demolish this approach; no such climatic shift happened that could have forced the new mode into existence. Besides, there are scores of examples of agriculture being adopted-or refused-in every type of climate. Another major hypothesis is that agriculture was introduced via a chance discovery or invention as if it had never occurred to the species before a certain moment that, for example, food grows from sprouted seeds. It seems certain that Paleolithic humanity had a virtually inexhaustible knowledge of flora and fauna for many tens of thousands of years before the cultivation of plants began, which renders this theory especially weak. Agreement with Carl Sauer's summation that, "Agriculture did not originate from a growing or chronic shortage of food" is sufficient, in fact, to dismiss virtually all originary theories that have been advanced. A remaining idea, presented by Hahn, Isaac and others, holds that food production began at base as a religious activity. This hypothesis comes closest to plausibility.

Sheep and goats, the first animals to be domesticated, are known to have been widely used in religious ceremonies, and to have been raised in enclosed meadows for sacrificial purposes. Before they were domesticated, moreover, sheep had no wool suitable for textile purposes. The main use of the hen in southeastern Asia

The second tendency - a perpetual minority that has been called or has called itself perspectivism, egoism, existentialism, nihilism, and other names - considers phenomenality, lived experience, to be prior to and to take precedence over any such reifying speculation. Knowledge and value come from phenomenality, are felt in the flesh, and are always instrumental and provisional rather than aiming at an imagined ultimate, objective reality disembodied from moment-to-moment existence. I will in this part of the essay analyze Anarcho-Primitivism from this perspective; in part two, I will argue that this second tendency is an essentially anarchist mode of thinking.

Exiting the Madhouse: Moving Toward a Truly Critical Theory

"Man, your head is haunted [...] I regard those persons who cling to the Higher... almost the whole world of men, as veritable fools, fools in a madhouse."

- Max Stirner, *The Unique and its Property*

The madhouse is civilization and the fools are those who, not only in their actions, thinking, and language; but also, unfortunately, in their critical theory, spend a great deal of their activity reproducing it every day.

History is rife with examples of critical theory that purport to liberate humans (and, rarely, nonhumans) from domination, exploitation, and alienation. Nearly all of them, however, criticize "particular forms of enslavement merely in order to substitute other forms of enslavement". In order to be consistently and thoroughly liberatory, then, a critical theory cannot simply effectively critique one aspect of civilization or a particular

Excerpt from *Corrosive Consciousness* by Bellamy Fitzpatrick (2017)

“The primal war is a spiritual war. It began as the spirit of wildness was buried [...]”

- Kevin Tucker, “Egocide”

“To be sure, to speak of spirit and the good as Plato did meant standing truth on her head and denying perspective itself, the basic condition of all life”

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*

The history of Western philosophy can be divided, very crudely but nonetheless meaningfully, into two broad strands depending on assumptions, or lack thereof, about lived experience. One tendency - calling itself in various incarnations Realism, Christianity, scientific materialism, and so forth - begins not from the real of our lived experience but instead with a presupposition about what the world is really like, positing something greater, deeper, or truer than what we feel. It follows from a presupposition like this one that our lived experience is only a pale reflection or echo of what is seen as the fundamental truth. This speculative, reifying mode “finds its origin in Platonic philosophy and has been dominant from the very beginning.”

I will call this mode of thinking, broad and varied as it is, Platonism for the purpose of this essay, as I think its roots are meaningful and highlight its tendency towards reification and morality.

and the eastern Mediterranean—the earliest centers of civilization—“seems to have been,” according to Darby, “sacrificial or divinatory rather than alimentary.” Sauer adds that the “egg laying and meat producing qualities” of tamed fowl “are relatively late consequences of their domestication.” Wild cattle were fierce and dangerous; neither the docility of oxen nor the modified meat texture of such castrates could have been foreseen. Cattle were not milked until centuries after their initial captivity, and representations indicate that their first known harnessing was to wagons in religious processions. Plants, next to be controlled, exhibit similar backgrounds so far as is known. Consider the New World examples of squash and pumpkin, used originally as ceremonial rattles. Johannessen discussed the religious and mystical motives connected with the domestication of maize, Mexico’s most important crop and center of its native Neolithic religion. Likewise, Anderson investigated the selection and development of distinctive types of various cultivated plants because of their magical significance. The shamans, I should add, were well-placed in positions of power to introduce agriculture via the taming and planting involved in ritual and religion, sketchily referred to above. Though the religious explanation of the origins of agriculture has been somewhat overlooked, it brings us, in my opinion, to the very doorstep of the real explanation of the birth of production: that non-rational, cultural force of alienation which spread, in the forms of time, language, number and art, to ultimately colonize material and psychic life in agriculture. “Religion” is too narrow a conceptualization of this infection and its growth. Domination is too weighty, too all-encompassing to have been solely conveyed by the pathology that is religion.

But the cultural values of control and uniformity that are part of religion are certainly part of agriculture, and from the beginning. Noting that strains of corn cross-pollinate very easily, Anderson studied the very primitive agriculturalists of Assam, the Naga tribe, and their variety of corn that exhibited no differences from plant to plant. True to culture, showing that it is complete from the beginning of production, the Naga kept their varieties so pure “only by a fanatical adherence to an ideal type.” This exemplifies the marriage of culture and production in domestication, and its inevitable progeny, repression and work.

The scrupulous tending of strains of plants finds its parallel in the domesticating of animals, which also defies natural selection and re-establishes the controllable organic world at a debased, artificial level. Like plants, animals are mere things to be manipulated; a dairy cow, for instance, is seen as a kind of machine for converting grass to milk. Transmuted from a state of freedom to that of helpless parasites, these animals become completely dependent on man for survival. In domestic mammals, as a rule, the size of the brain becomes relatively smaller as specimens are produced that devote more energy to growth and less to activity. Placid, infantilized, typified perhaps by the sheep, most domesticated of herd animals; the remarkable intelligence of wild sheep is completely lost in their tamed counterparts. The social relationships among domestic animals are reduced to the crudest essentials. Non-reproductive parts of the life cycle are minimized, courtship is curtailed, and the animal’s very capacity to recognize its own species is impaired. Farming also created the potential for rapid environmental destruction and the domination

world, as everyone knows, suffers from malnourishment ranging to starvation itself.

Meanwhile, the “diseases of civilization,” as discussed by Eaton and Konner in the January 31, 1985 New England Journal of Medicine and contrasted with the healthful pre-farming diets, underline the joyless, sickly world of chronic maladjustment we inhabit as prey of the manufacturers of medicine, cosmetics, and fabricated food. Domestication reaches new heights of the pathological in genetic food engineering, with new types of animals in the offing as well as contrived microorganisms and plants. Logically, humanity itself will also become a domesticate of this order as the world of production processes us as much as it degrades and deforms every other natural system.

The project of subduing nature, begun and carried through by agriculture, has assumed gigantic proportions. The “success” of civilization’s progress, a success earlier humanity never wanted, tastes more and more like ashes. James Serpell summed it up this way: “In short we appear to have reached the end of the line. We cannot expand; we seem unable to intensify production without wreaking further havoc, and the planet is fast becoming a wasteland.” Physiologist Jared Diamond termed the initiation of agriculture “a catastrophe from which we have never recovered.” Agriculture has been and remains a “catastrophe” at all levels, the one which underpins the entire material and spiritual culture of alienation now destroying us. Liberation is impossible without its dissolution.

cycles. Pigs live on concrete floors with no bedding; foot-rot, tail-biting and cannibalism are endemic because of physical conditions and stress. Sows nurse their piglets separated by metal grates, mother and offspring barred from natural contact. Veal calves are often raised in darkness, chained to stalls so narrow as to disallow turning around or other normal posture adjustment. These animals are generally under regimens of constant medication due to the tortures involved and their heightened susceptibility to diseases; automated animal production relies upon hormones and antibiotics. Such systematic cruelty, not to mention the kind of food that results, brings to mind the fact that captivity itself and every form of enslavement has agriculture as its progenitor or model. Food has been one of our most direct contacts with the natural environment, but we are rendered increasingly dependent on a technological production system in which finally even our senses have become redundant; taste, once vital for judging a food's value or safety, is no longer experienced, but rather certified by a label. Overall, the healthfulness of what we consume declines and land once cultivated for food now produces coffee, tobacco, grains for alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs, creating the context for famine. Even the non-processed foods like fruits and vegetables are now grown to be tasteless and uniform because the demands of handling, transport and storage, not nutrition or pleasure, are the highest considerations. Total war borrowed from agriculture to defoliate millions of acres in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, but the plundering of the biosphere proceeds even more lethally in its daily, global forms. Food as a function of production has also failed miserably on the most obvious level: half of the

over nature soon began to turn the green mantle that covered the birthplaces of civilization into barren and lifeless areas. "Vast regions have changed their aspect completely," estimates Zeuner, "always to quasi-drier condition, since the beginnings of the Neolithic." Deserts now occupy most of the areas where the high civilizations once flourished, and there is much historical evidence that these early formations inevitably ruined their environments.

Throughout the Mediterranean Basin and in the adjoining Near East and Asia, agriculture turned lush and hospitable lands into depleted, dry, and rocky terrain. In Critias, Plato described Attica as "a skeleton wasted by disease," referring to the deforestation of Greece and contrasting it to its earlier richness. Grazing by goats and sheep, the first domesticated ruminants, was a major factor in the denuding of Greece, Lebanon, and North Africa, and the desertification of the Roman and Mesopotamian empires. Another, more immediate impact of agriculture, brought to light increasingly in recent years, involved the physical well-being of its subjects. Lee and Devore's researches show that "the diet of gathering peoples was far better than that of cultivators, that starvation is rare, that their health status was generally superior, and that there is a lower incidence of chronic disease." Conversely, Farb summarized, "Production provides an inferior diet based on a limited number of foods, is much less reliable because of blights and the vagaries of weather, and is much more costly in terms of human labor expended."

The new field of paleopathology has reached even more emphatic conclusions, stressing, as does Angel, the "sharp decline in growth and nutrition caused by the changeover from food

gathering to food production.” Earlier conclusions about life span have also been revised. Although eyewitness Spanish accounts of the sixteenth century tell of Florida Indian fathers seeing their fifth generation before passing away, it was long believed that primitive people died in their 30s and 40s. Robson, Boyden and others have dispelled the confusion of longevity with life expectancy and discovered that current hunter-gatherers, barring injury and severe infection, often outlive their civilized contemporaries. During the industrial age only fairly recently did life span lengthen for the species, and it is now widely recognized that in Paleolithic times humans were long-lived animals, once certain risks were passed. DeVries is correct in his judgment that duration of life dropped sharply upon contact with civilization. “Tuberculosis and diarrheal disease had to await the rise of farming, measles and bubonic plague the appearance of large cities,” wrote Jared Diamond. Malaria, probably the single greatest killer of humanity, and nearly all other infectious diseases are the heritage of agriculture. Nutritional and degenerative diseases in general appear with the reign of domestication and culture. Cancer, coronary thrombosis, anemia, dental caries, and mental disorders are but a few of the hallmarks of agriculture; previously women gave birth with no difficulty and little or no pain. People were far more alive in all their senses. !Kung San, reported R.H. Post, have heard a single-engine plane while it was still 70 miles away, and many of them can see four moons of Jupiter with the naked eye. The summary judgment of Harris and Ross, as to “an overall decline in the quality-and probably in the length-of human life among farmers as compared with earlier hunter-gatherer groups,” is understated.

African famine of the mid-1980s, and the extinction of one species of wild animal and plant after another.

Returning to animals, one is reminded of the words of Genesis in which God said to Noah, “And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hands are they delivered.” When newly discovered territory was first visited by the advance guard of production, as a wide descriptive literature shows, the wild mammals and birds showed no fear whatsoever of the explorers. The agriculturalized mentality, however, so aptly foretold in the biblical passage, projects an exaggerated belief in the fierceness of wild creatures, which follows from progressive estrangement and loss of contact with the animal world, plus the need to maintain dominance over it.

The fate of domestic animals is defined by the fact that agricultural technologists continually look to factories as models of how to refine their own production systems. Nature is banished from these systems as, increasingly, farm animals are kept largely immobile throughout their deformed lives, maintained in high-density, wholly artificial environments. Billions of chickens, pigs, and veal calves, for example, no longer even see the light of day much less roam the fields, fields growing more silent as more and more pastures are plowed up to grow feed for these hideously confined beings.

The high-tech chickens, whose beak ends have been clipped off to reduce death from stress-induced fighting, often exist four or even five to a 12” by 18” cage and are periodically deprived of food and water for up to ten days to regulate their egg-laying

topsoil is already gone forever. The ecological imbalance caused by monocropping and synthetic fertilizers causes enormous increases in pests and crop diseases; since World War II, crop loss due to insects has actually doubled. Technology responds, of course, with spiraling applications of more synthetic fertilizers, and “weed” and “pest” killers, accelerating the crime against nature.

Another post-war phenomenon was the Green Revolution, billed as the salvation of the impoverished Third World by American capital and technology. But rather than feeding the hungry, the Green Revolution drove millions of poor people from farmlands in Asia, Latin America and Africa as victims of the program that fosters large corporate farms. It amounted to an enormous technological colonization creating dependency on capital-intensive agribusiness, destroying older agrarian communalism, requiring massive fossil fuel consumption and assaulting nature on an unprecedented scale. Desertification, or loss of soil due to agriculture, has been steadily increasing. Each year, a total area equivalent to more than two Belgiums is being converted to desert worldwide. The fate of the world’s tropical rainforests is a factor in the acceleration of this desiccation: half of them have been erased in the past thirty years. In Botswana, the last wilderness region of Africa has disappeared like much of the Amazon jungle and almost half of the rainforests of Central America, primarily to raise cattle for the hamburger markets in the U.S. and Europe. The few areas safe from deforestation are where agriculture doesn’t want to go. The destruction of the land is proceeding in the U.S. over a greater land area than was encompassed by the original thirteen colonies, just as it was at the heart of the severe

One of the most persistent and universal ideas is that there was once a Golden Age of innocence before history began. Hesiod, for instance, referred to the “life-sustaining soil, which yielded its copious fruits unbribed by toil.” Eden was clearly the home of the hunter-gatherers and the yearning expressed by the historical images of paradise must have been that of disillusioned tillers of the soil for a lost life of freedom and relative ease.

The history of civilization shows the increasing displacement of nature from human experience, characterized in part by a narrowing of food choices. According to Rooney, prehistoric peoples found sustenance in over 1500 species of wild plants, whereas “All civilizations,” Wenke reminds us, “have been based on the cultivation of one or more of just six plant species: wheat, barley, millet, rice, maize, and potatoes.” It is a striking truth that over the centuries “the number of different edible foods which are actually eaten,” Pyke points out, “has steadily dwindled.” The world’s population now depends for most of its subsistence on only about 20 genera of plants while their natural strains are replaced by artificial hybrids and the genetic pool of these plants becomes far less varied.

The diversity of food tends to disappear or flatten out as the proportion of manufactured foods increases. Today the very same articles of diet are distributed worldwide, so that an Inuit Eskimo and an African may soon be eating powdered milk manufactured in Wisconsin or frozen fish sticks from a single factory in Sweden. A few big multinationals such as Unilever, the world’s biggest food production company, preside over a highly integrated service system in which the object is not to nourish or even to feed, but to

force an ever-increasing consumption of fabricated, processed products upon the world.

When Descartes enunciated the principle that the fullest exploitation of matter to any use is the whole duty of man, our separation from nature was virtually complete and the stage was set for the Industrial Revolution. Three hundred and fifty years later this spirit lingered in the person of Jean Vorst, Curator of France's Museum of Natural History, who pronounced that our species, "because of intellect," can no longer re-cross a certain threshold of civilization and once again become part of a natural habitat. He further stated, expressing perfectly the original and persevering imperialism of agriculture, "As the earth in its primitive state is not adapted to our expansion, man must shackle it to fulfill human destiny." The early factories literally mimicked the agricultural model, indicating again that at base all mass production is farming. The natural world is to be broken and forced to work. One thinks of the mid-American prairies where settlers had to yoke six oxen to plows in order to cut through the soil for the first time. Or a scene from the 1870s in *The Octopus* by Frank Norris, in which gang-plows were driven like "a great column of field artillery" across the San Joaquin Valley, cutting 175 furrows at once. Today the organic, what is left of it, is fully mechanized under the aegis of a few petrochemical corporations. Their artificial fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and near-monopoly of the world's seed stock define a total environment that integrates food production from planting to consumption. Although Lévi-Strauss is right that "Civilization manufactures monoculture

like sugar beets," only since World War II has a completely synthetic orientation begun to dominate.

Agriculture takes more organic matter out of the soil than it puts back, and soil erosion is basic to the monoculture of annuals. Regarding the latter, some are promoted with devastating results to the land; along with cotton and soybeans, corn, which in its present domesticated state is totally dependent on agriculture for its existence, is especially bad. J. Russell Smith called it "the killer of continents...and one of the worst enemies of the human future." The erosion cost of one bushel of Iowa corn is two bushels of topsoil, highlighting the more general large-scale industrial destruction of farmland. The continuous tillage of huge monocultures, with massive use of chemicals and no application of manure or humus, obviously raises soil deterioration and soil loss to much higher levels. The dominant agricultural mode has it that soil needs massive infusions of chemicals, supervised by technicians whose overriding goal is to maximize production. Artificial fertilizers and all the rest from this outlook eliminate the need for the complex life of the soil and indeed convert it into a mere instrument of production. The promise of technology is total control, a completely contrived environment that simply supersedes the natural balance of the biosphere.

But more and more energy is expended to purchase great monocultural yields that are beginning to decline, never mind the toxic contamination of the soil, ground water and food. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says that cropland erosion is occurring in this country at a rate of two billion tons of soil a year. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that over one third of