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Ran Prieur

Miscellaneous Writings

2002–2007

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we don't understand yet. For a good background to this difficult subject, I recommend the book *The Trickster and the Paranormal* by George Hansen.

I'm happy to hear that some people have completely dismissed me because of this piece. In America there is no abstract belief that correlates more perfectly with social status than acceptance or rejection of the official story about 9/11. So by rejecting it, with one stroke I can keep myself on the margins, where the action is.

But I do find this piece embarrassing for a more subtle reason: it makes it seem like I'm trying to change people's minds. Ordinary humans do not choose their beliefs from evidence and arguments, but for emotional and social reasons, which they then support with selected evidence and arguments. The more powerful the issue, the more true this is. So an argument about 9/11 is even sillier than an argument about economics.

Also my own position has changed, and I think the "conspiracy theories" are not weird enough. In "Shooting an Elephant", George Orwell wrote that "a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes." Mitch Hedberg joked that photographs of Bigfoot are blurry because Bigfoot is blurry. In almost 20 years of studying the fringes of everything, I've seen this pattern again and again. The more you seek a clear image, the more you find fuzziness and contradiction. Or to use the language of William Blake, the more you seek a single vision, the more you find a many-fold vision. This is where Ockham's Razor cuts the heart from the objective paradigm. If different perspectives have contradictory experiences, then the most elegant and interesting move is to leave it at that: different perspectives have contradictory experiences, and go from there. Why add a second proposition, that many of the perspectives are wrong, and a third proposition, that there must be a single story on which everyone must agree? This is not a rational or scientific move, but a political move, connected to the centralization of power.

Science, defined broadly, is the adaptation of mental models through testing. Suppose we can do science without restricting the input to experience that can be duplicated at will and that is the same for everyone. What would it be like to test hypotheses under the assumption that reality is created by every experiencing perspective, and we don't all have to agree? I think this kind of science is not only possible, but inevitable, and it will enable our descendants to enter a world that makes industrial civilization seem like training wheels.

I also think this world already exists, and the "conspiracy" of 9/11, the coordination of the many actions, was carried out on a level of reality that

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to voice mimicry technologies and personal information about the alleged callers. Other researchers think that's a bit of a stretch.

What evidence would you accept as proving you wrong?

It would be a good start if a full public release of flight recorder data, a full public release of air traffic controller statements, and a thorough public analysis of the crash sites and wreckage, all confirmed the Bush/Cheney administration's story. If they wanted me to believe them, they shouldn't have destroyed all that stuff!

What first made you doubt the official story?

When they found a car at the airport with a Koran and a flight manual. How dumb do they think I am? A clue that obvious is not evidence of guilt but evidence of a frame-up. Suddenly I realized that I was watching a *performance*.

Will the truth ever come out?

There's a popular myth that someone will stand up and reveal "the truth" and then everyone will "know." But it doesn't work that way. People believe what they want to believe. 30% of Americans still think Iraq had WMD's, even after years of the TV news telling them otherwise. The truth can only be accepted by people who have no personal investment in the lie. Thomas Kuhn famously observed that paradigm shifts happen not when the investors in the old paradigm change their minds, but when they *die*. In 50 or 200 years, historians will look back and say, obviously, it was an inside job, and by then it will be too late to know the full story.

* * *

Appendix 1

Update, February 29, 2012.

flight 77 was switched with a smaller plane, but the lack of wreckage could also be explained by the better-supported theory that the plane was rigged to explode³⁸ just before or after impact. I think the Pentagon controversy mostly serves as a distraction from the much stronger evidence at the WTC.

Were the WTC planes switched?

That's a risky speculation. There may have been two flight 11s³⁹ from Boston, and two planes that made emergency landings in Cleveland⁴⁰. On the other hand, bodies of flight 11 and flight 175 victims were identified at the WTC.

Were they flown by remote control?

Given the poor flying skills of the alleged hijackers, the weak evidence that hijackers were even on the planes, the odd silence from the cockpits, the difficulty of the flying maneuvers, and the proven ability of remote-control systems to do precision flying, remote control is a strong theory, and it feels right to me intuitively. But we don't know.

Was flight 93⁴¹ shot down?

Probably. Witnesses reported explosions before the plane went down, and debris was found miles from the crash site. The more interesting question is, why was flight 93 intercepted and shot down, and none of the others? Almost all the cell phone calls came from 93, and it's the only flight with decent evidence of the presence of hijackers.

Were the cell phone calls from passengers faked?

Researcher A.K. Dewdney has argued that the calls were faked⁴², because the transmission would be almost impossible, and the perpetrators had access

³⁸ <http://911research.wtc7.net/pentagon/evidence/witnesses/explosive.html>

³⁹ <http://911wideopen.com/mirror/twin11-1/twin-11-mod.htm>

⁴⁰ http://911review.org/inn.globalfreepress/Cleveland_Airport_Mystery.html

⁴¹ <http://911research.wtc7.net/planes/analysis/flight93/index.html>

⁴² <http://www.physics911.net/cellphoneflight93.htm>

Where was Luke Skywalker on September 11?¹

The forbidden truth about the 9/11 operation is not that it was planned by powerful insiders, not that elements in the US government collaborated to raise popular support for repression and war, not that the planes were flown by remote control and the hijackers were there as a cover, not that military jets would have intercepted the planes in minutes had they not been intentionally weakened and delayed, not that flight 93 was shot down, not that Osama Bin Laden never stopped working with the CIA, and not that the bombing of Afghanistan was planned months in advance. At least half of that stuff is quite true, but it's far from forbidden — it's all over the underground media, and given enough time it will be all over the history books, if we still have history and books.

The forbidden truth is this: First, nobody cares about the dead people. I mean, of course the people themselves cared, and most of their friends and family, and if you were actually in lower Manhattan at the time, and saw people jumping from the buildings, you probably got an emotional shock I can't imagine. This doesn't apply to you. This applies to the 200 million Americans

You don't feel bad about any of those people. You might think you do, but then why don't you also feel bad about the dead people in the trumped-up bombing of Afghanistan, or the much larger number of dead people in the massacres in Rwanda or East Timor or Cambodia? Why don't you feel much worse about the much greater number of dead Americans killed by bad job conditions or cancer from industrial chemicals or "side" effects of pharmaceuticals? It's not a rhetorical question. Why don't you? And what would happen if you did?

Imagine this alternate history: On the morning of September 11, 2001, a great fire broke out in a poor section of New York City. It spread quickly, and by the end of the day it was thought that more than 6000 residents and firefighters had been killed, though this was later revised to 3000. Now come back to our own history and look at all the flag-waving convulsionaries, veins and blank eyes bulging with forced anger and suppressed bafflement, supposedly over the dead people. Now shift to alternate 9/12 and hear what they say: "They've been

¹ Originally published September 2, 2002 on <http://ranprieur.com/essays/luke911.html>

covering the fucking fire for two days now. I had to miss the baseball game because of all their bleeding-heart whining about the dead people. (whines) ‘We have to do something.’ There’s nothing we can do. It’s over! Get over it!”

I don’t completely disagree with such honest insensitivity. Liberal guilt-mongering is just as phony as fascist hate-mongering. Liberals don’t feel bad about the actual dead children in Iraq any more than conservatives feel bad about the 9/11 dead, because *we do not feel bad about suffering we do not see of people we do not know*. That’s forbidden truth number one.

If you do feel bad about remote suffering — and the test is that you feel equally bad about all people everywhere — then you are a saint, and if there were enough people like you, we would have to have you all killed so we could get on with progress. Oops — we already did!

Our feelings about events involving people we do not know are not based upon empathy for those people, but upon the symbolic meaning of the events, or the projection, onto those events, of our personal emotional issues. So I feel angry and distressed about the post-9/11 (and post-Columbine) tightening of violent control in this country, because I am replaying my feelings about the thousands of times I have had to submit to violent control or be punished. And for the same reason, when the World Trade Center, a global symbol of violent control, fell down, I noticed myself feeling good, while conservatives felt good.

That’s not a mistake — that’s the other forbidden truth. We felt good about 9/11. Almost everybody did, all over the world, even the people who also felt bad because they had ego investments in the power-sucking pattern that the World Trade Center symbolized. And the better they felt, or the less they could afford to notice themselves feeling good, the more they covered it up, hid it from even themselves, by amplifying their rage and indignation and depression.

We were especially prone to feel good about that particular kind of catastrophe because we’ve been practicing it for decades. Has anyone here seen a movie called *Star Wars*? At the end, when idealistic outsiders in flying craft totally destroyed that giant grey monolithic structure representing the control of a great empire, did it even occur to you to grieve for the many victims inside the structure? Did you desire to hunt down every last rebel, especially that bearded man from the desert who inspired the attackers, until the rule of the Galactic Empire was absolute? No! You felt good, as you were intended to.

credibility. Even ordinary people don’t want their friends to think they’re crazy. Imagine how much more difficult it must be for someone like Brian Williams or Michael Moore. They’re smart enough to know that they can’t afford to go anywhere near the evidence.

What about all the articles debunking the conspiracy theories?

There’s a difference between explaining something, and explaining it *away*. Those articles ignore the strong arguments, pick on the weak arguments and hoaxes, and generally serve an audience that just wants to be soothed and told that everything’s OK. Because we live in a highly controlled society, which requires controlled uniformity of *fact*, any good debunking of dominant facts is marginalized, while a single flaw in a system of non-dominant facts is grounds for total dismissal. To paraphrase Carl Sagan: evidence that contradicts the ruling belief system is held to extraordinary standards, while evidence that entrenches it is uncritically accepted. [*I’m paraphrasing against the source. Sagan said that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, which, as an academic insider, he thought was a good thing.*]

Wouldn’t it be too difficult to plant demolition charges in the buildings?

Normal controlled demolitions have limited budgets, plenty of time, and no need for secrecy, so they use a very large number of low-tech charges with just enough force to bring down the building. With vast funds, access to high-tech explosives, and the need to maximize stealth, the 9/11 technicians could use a small number of charges with a very high total energy to produce roughly the same effect. Or think of it this way: it would only take a few hours for an expert team to plant thermobarics or micro-nukes with more destructive force, and more symmetrical distribution, than a plane hitting a building.

Do you think flight 77 really hit the Pentagon?

There are some anomalies in the Pentagon story — certainly the alleged pilot did not have the skill for the maneuvers made by the plane. It’s possible that

Also, incompetence does not begin to explain the failure of jet fighters to intercept³¹ the planes. And many witnesses reported explosions in the towers³². And don't forget WTC7³³, a steel-framed building that pancaked into its own footprint *even though it was not hit by a plane*.

There's much, much more. My main source has been the 9-11 Research³⁴ site, which has a great anomalies³⁵ page. Also, Jeff Wells wrote a good compilation focusing on the political background, *The Coincidence Theorist's Guide to 9/11*³⁶.

If it's so obvious, why hasn't anyone seen through it but the conspiracy nuts?

It's not intelligence or sanity that enables people to see through big lies. It's imagination and social position. Stepping into the fringe, on *any* issue, is a great responsibility. If they lied about that, what else did they lie about? Suddenly you're no longer a passive consumer but a full-time investigator, questioning and evaluating and filtering everything yourself. Most people just don't have the time or the mental energy to take on such a chore, so they choose to accept the TV news at face value — if not the opinions then at least the facts.

Also, anyone who challenges the dominant story is immediately reclassified as a conspiracy nut! Pierre Salinger was a respected mainstream journalist and former U.S. Senator who became a joke when he declared that TWA 800 was hit by a missile, even though many eyewitnesses³⁷ saw a missile hit the plane and the cover-up was hilariously clumsy. Paul Craig Roberts is a former Assistant Treasury Secretary and Wall Street Journal editor, and now he's just another loony. So, on top of the mental and emotional difficulty of overcoming a big lie, there's also the looming threat to your

Or consider the film *Independence Day*, where Randy Quaid's character, who begins the movie flying a crop duster, ends up intentionally colliding a jet plane into a giant grey structure representing an empire that wants to conquer the Earth and consume all its resources. This totally destroys the structure, and his allies around the world imitate him, defeating the oppressors. And you loved it, as you were intended to.

Now I'm not saying the destruction of the World Trade Center was just the same as the destruction of the Death Star. There is exactly one important difference: that one was fiction, experienced by every person as a show, and one was in our very own reality, experienced by many thousands of people as the shocking death of themselves or a loved one — and experienced by a billion more people as a show. As it was intended.

So, do I think the Grand Magus of the Illuminati called his friends in Hollywood and had them make movies glorifying the demolition of giant grey structures by flying rebels, so that when the real thing happened, nationalistic Americans would have their brains shorted out by propaganda dissonance, while opponents of the empire would become both inspired and subtle, giving them the power to destroy the USA, a ritual sacrifice to channel away the people's fury and distract them from the continuing exploitation of all life through different agents?

It's a good story but I'm not so literal-minded. To avoid insanity while exploring the fringe, I've learned to think of reality itself as a branch of metaphor; so the movies, and then the real event, and then the naming of the response to the real event after the sequel to one of the movies ("America Strikes Back") were all manifestations of a movement in our collective consciousness.

A deadly and insane movement. I really don't think the World Trade Center demolition was good because the Death Star demolition was good, or that we were right to feel good about either, but that both were disturbing psychological operations, and we have been sliding into madness, and we need to pull out of it.

We have a choice, not between the American corporate-military complex and the latest conveniently resource-rich uppity country, not even precisely between totalitarianism and freedom, but between two patterns that lie deeper, two paradigms of conflict, one in which good and evil fight for absolute victory or defeat, and one in which different perspectives, respecting each other as equals and as subjects not objects, fight to negotiate balance.

³¹ <http://911research.wtc7.net/planes/analysis/norad/index.html>

³² <http://911research.wtc7.net/talks/witness/oralhistories.html>

³³ <http://911research.wtc7.net/wtc/analysis/wtc7/index.html>

³⁴ <http://911research.wtc7.net/index.html>

³⁵ <http://911research.wtc7.net/sept11/analysis/anomalies.html>

³⁶ <http://100777.com/node/963>

³⁷ <http://www.flight800.org/eye.html>

The latter is the way it works in nature, the way it's worked for tens of millions of years in the system that created humans and countless other wonderful species, some of them not even extinct yet, that you can read about from your little cubicle. The former is a habit that humans picked up — we still don't know how — a few thousand years ago, and the rest is history.

When Luke Skywalker blew up the Death Star, and James Bond killed the head villain, and Islamic secret agents, as the story goes, took down the World Trade Center, they were mythically enacting the same dark ritual that civilized humans have performed on natural humans, nonhumans, and each other for all of "history" and we're still not slowing down. It's the ritual performed in every war and genocide you could name, even the "war on illiteracy." It was performed on your soul by parents, teachers, employers, and television, or else you wouldn't be fit for this little world.

The ritual is not "violence" — it's much more precise: to clear a gap between "self" and "other", to blame the dissatisfaction caused by this disconnection on some key other, and to eliminate it and win relief and happiness. Wait! I'm still not happy. It must be because of that other thing — better eliminate that too.

After a few thousand years of this, we've wiped out numerous pests, diseases, degenerate races, noncompetitive cultures, restaurants other than McDonald's, and we've almost licked your chronic depression that lowers your work efficiency. Next we'll beat drugs and terrorism, and finish assimilating the whole world into one society like the industrialized West, and even let the liberals "eliminate" poverty and "abolish" racism by blending us into a uniform race with mandatory full-time employment. And we still won't be satisfied.

If I suggest that the evil thing we really need to destroy is civilization itself, I'm still not out of the box, but I'm close. The way out is to abandon the whole "beat the enemy" paradigm, not to call civilization "other" and destroy it, but to recognize it as part of ourselves, and understand it, and carefully not choose it.

And the giant grey monoliths will stand, in clusters in the distance like monuments in a cemetery, half covered in vines, reminding us what we did, and could do, but won't.

theories." Also, the perpetrators have both the motive and the resources to sabotage independent inquiry with stupid theories and hoaxes.

What I prefer, both tactically and spiritually, is to not get caught up in any particular story, but to practice the skill of balancing many different stories in my imagination at the same time, and always looking beyond — not building walls but looking for openings.

So what's your evidence?

The strongest physical evidence is the way the buildings collapsed. Here's how Paul Craig Roberts put it:

"We know that it is strictly impossible for any building, much less steel columned buildings, to "pancake" at free fall speed. . . The only explanation known to science for the free fall collapse of a building, especially into its own footprint, is engineered demolition, which removes the supports for each floor of the building at split second intervals so that the debris from above meets no resistance on its fall. To call this explanation a "conspiracy theory" is to display the utmost total ignorance."²⁴

And the next strongest evidence is the incredible *lack* of evidence for the cover story. They haven't released any data from the black boxes²⁵ except a bit of voice from flight 93, yet all the recorders should have easily survived the crashes. The WTC wreckage was not examined but quickly hauled away and destroyed²⁶. Testimony of air traffic controllers has never been made public, and a tape of their statements was carefully destroyed²⁷. The airline passenger lists contained no Arab names²⁸. We have not seen video of hijackers going through security²⁹, except Atta and Alomari. . . and several alleged hijackers — *including Alomari* — later turned up alive³⁰.

²⁴ <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article14566.htm>

²⁵ <http://911research.wtc7.net/planes/evidence/blackboxes.html>

²⁶ <http://911research.wtc7.net/wtc/groundzero/cleanup.html>

²⁷ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A6892-2004May6>

²⁸ <http://911research.wtc7.net/planes/evidence/passengers.html>

²⁹ <http://911research.wtc7.net/planes/evidence/airportvideo.html>

³⁰ <http://911research.wtc7.net/disinfo/deceptions/identities.html>

Still, the 9/11 planners do seem to have tried to minimize deaths²⁰ — the planes were mostly empty, the WTC was mostly evacuated, and the Pentagon was hit in a reinforced section.

But they would never sacrifice a building as valuable as the World Trade Center.

That's exactly why I thought at first that it had to be outsiders. I didn't know yet that the WTC was an albatross — it was inefficient, difficult to upgrade for high-tech offices, and needed asbestos abatement²¹ that would cost more than the original buildings! Also the complex had just changed owners and was heavily insured²².

So you think it was about money?

I think money was a big part of it. There were probably other motivations on other levels. The neocons wanted to plunge America into a fascist frame of mind and get popular support for the Iraq invasion. Mike Ruppert's book *Crossing The Rubicon*²³ builds a case against Dick Cheney. Osama bin Laden, if he was really in on it, might have also wanted a war, which he (correctly) thought his side would win.

If you don't have a solid explanation, why should I accept what you say?

We (the general public) do not have enough evidence for a complete story, because it's all been sealed or destroyed. But it's human nature to crave a story — that's why people go for the unified and confident official story instead of the sketchy and contradictory independent stories, and it's why people on the fringe are tempted to connect a few dots into an elaborate picture. But this makes them an easy target: "Look at those wacky conspiracy

²⁰ <http://911research.wtc7.net/sept11/analysis/bodycount.html>

²¹ <http://911research.wtc7.net/wtc/evidence/asbestos.html>

²² <http://911research.wtc7.net/wtc/background/owners.html>

²³ http://www.fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/011805_simplify_case.shtml

21 Stories About Civilization^{2 3}

I saw a bumper sticker once that said "Pavement Is Forever," and I wondered. . . is that true? If pavement is forever, who will be maintaining the pavement in one million years, and what will they park on it? If pavement is not forever, will we be living in grass huts? Or will we be extinct? These stories about where we're going are rooted in deeper stories about where we are now, about the place or meaning of what we call civilization.

I define civilization, loosely, as *the way humans have become unnatural over the past several thousand years*. By natural, I mean *in symbiosis with nature*. By nature, I mean *the totality of symbiotic life on earth*. By symbiotic, I mean: *related in ways that are mutually beneficial and beneficial to the whole, where wider benefit takes precedence*. And by beneficial, I mean: *generating aliveness and diversity*. (And if you don't know what aliveness means, look harder.)

So the excuse that "everything is natural" is just a semantic distortion, a cheap attempt to deny important differences. Even in what we normally call "nature," not everything is natural. A lion that eats an antelope is natural, because only one antelope dies, while the antelope species and the lion species and the whole of nature benefit. But deer that overgraze and kill grasslands, or a non-native species that devastates an ecosystem, are being unnatural.

Humans have become unnatural by domesticating nonhuman species, dulling their aliveness and pulling them out of symbiosis with the whole; by exterminating nonhuman species; by conquering and exterminating natural humans, again pulling them out of symbiosis with the whole and also decreasing diversity by destroying or assimilating their cultures; and by repressing civilized humans, relentlessly punishing our natural instincts, mutilating our

² Originally published May 3, 2003 on <http://ranprieur.com/essays/21stories.html>

³ Author's note, November 2001: Parts of this essay were based on a framing story that I no longer believe: large complex societies are brutal conquerors, while small simple societies live in harmony. This is often true, but there are also many exceptions. I've since integrated these exceptions into a different framing story: A society of any level of complexity can be anywhere on the spectrum from violent and controlling to peaceful and permissive. There are nice tribes and nasty tribes, and civilization began as a giant nasty tribe, but later absorbed elements of both. It's fun to think about which technological paths are possible, but the important thing is find the path that minimizes the trauma of all human life.

diversity to fit us in manageable categories, crushing our aliveness down to simmering anger and sadness, and separating us from nature by making us dependent on layer upon layer of numbing technological mediation.

Is it really that bad? Is it possible we're just working the bugs out and then we'll be fine? Did we make a key mistake, maybe not too long ago, that we can straighten out? Or was the mistake a very long time ago? Can we learn from it? Is history circling or going somewhere? What's really going to happen?

With the stories that follow, I'm trying to expand the range of such questions and their answers. These stories are like lines on a rough map: They describe different levels, they overlap and run together, they have biases I haven't noticed and biases I've carefully chosen, they do not make a complete picture, and we're not all going to choose the "right" one, but continue to explore.

1. Eternal Growth

Until recently this was the dominant story in Western civilization. The idea is that natural societies are inadequate or obsolete because they don't "grow" or "create wealth" or "transform" the world or make "progress" toward more powerful tools, and now that we've learned to do these things, we will do them forever. Our mistake is in failing to notice that what we're really doing is murdering and robbing from the wider world without giving back to it. Economics as we know it is a pyramid scheme that can keep going only by finding new frontiers to take from. But the earth is running out of oil, coal, trees, fish, fresh water, and arable land, and humans are learning to resist, staying only a step behind every advance in the systems that control us. Also we're starting to wonder where our "progress" is going. So Eternal Growth has been dying as people move to other stories. . .

2. The Galactic Empire

This one has turned out to be only science fiction, but for a few years we imagined we could keep civilization going by sending space ships and colonists to use up the resources on other planets and "expand" forever into the galaxy, just devouring and making a wasteland of world after world like the evil aliens in the film *Independence Day*. Of course, people who

or what they're told over and over, not what one person says that sounds totally crazy. The reason they get away with this stuff is not that they're good at hiding it - on the contrary, they do it right out in the open! They get away with it precisely because people *can't believe* they would do it. Napoleon said, "To be believed, make the truth unbelievable."

Our leaders would never do something like that to their own people.

It's fully documented that our leaders would do something *exactly* like that. Operation Northwoods¹⁹ was a plan in the 1960's to conduct fake terror attacks, including killing Americans and blowing up planes, and blame it on Cuba to get public support for an invasion. It was probably Kennedy who rejected the plan. Would Cheney?

Rulers have been sacrificing their own people for thousands of years in wars, purges, and medical experiments. For humans with hierarchical power to sacrifice the people under them is the most normal thing in history.

I just don't think they would be that evil.

That belief was put into us. For a top-down system to function, we must believe that the people below us are immoral and untrustworthy, and the people above us are the same in private as they appear in public. The truth is exactly the opposite. People with power over others become corrupt, and people with great criminal minds don't rob liquor stores - they seek the highest levels of power in the world, and some of them get there.

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Northwoods

9/11 FAQ¹⁷

“When we come upon assurances that a mystery has been solved, we go on investigating.”

— Charles Fort

Do you believe the conspiracy theories about 9/11?

Every theory about 9/11 is a conspiracy theory. The dominant theory says that it was a conspiracy of Islamic extremists acting independently. It's not necessary to *believe* a different theory, only to *accept* that the dominant theory could be a giant lie, and it soon becomes obvious that the operation was planned and managed from the inside.

So you think the government was behind it?

Saying “the government” makes it sound like your local postal clerk was in on it. I prefer the phrase “powerful insiders,” or better yet, “criminal elites.” I'm sure some of the operatives had government jobs, and they might have even been following government chains of command. But this world has levels of power and chains of command too important, or too criminal, to be publicly viewable.

Wouldn't an insider conspiracy involve a large number of people and be hard to keep secret? ~ Not necessarily. It's not hard to come up with a speculative scenario¹⁸ that involves *fewer* conspirators than the independent “terrorist” theory. And insiders have a lot more incentive to keep quiet, and probably more practice.

Most important, what the public knows is what the public *wants* to know,

¹⁷ Originally published September 5, 2006 on <http://ranprieur.com/essays/911FAQ.html>

¹⁸ <http://911research.wtc7.net/sept11/analysis/scenario404.html>

like this story see us becoming a *good* space empire like on *Star Trek*, but if we didn't learn to live in balance when we were locked on the earth, we'll never learn it with planets to burn. Fortunately for the rest of the universe, we seem to be stuck here, where one way or another our rampage will end. Unless. . .

3. The Terminator

If civilization is really better than nature, let's stop holding back! We don't have to learn to live in balance with the biological world, because we will learn to survive without it: gathering energy from orbiting solar panels, mining minerals from asteroids, feeding ourselves with the products of chemistry labs, we can keep going forever, *even if nature is destroyed*. With no rational reason to preserve the biosphere, we will let it die, or kill it, and if possible we will even replace our human forms with machines.

Of course this is insane. But it's perfectly logical, and some of the brainiest people in the world really believe in it and are working toward it every day. This story is built into every corporation and every group fixation and individual fixation on profit or efficiency or control. It would be nice to think it's impossible, or that even a world of dead machines could go wild and come to life, but I'm not counting on either. This story is dangerous. With luck, it will be smothered by the next one:

4. Sustainability

This is the new dominant, already taken for granted by liberal and moderate educated people. Of course all kinds of societies can be imagined as sustainable, but when people talk about “sustainability,” they intend to sustain something particular: a society as much as possible like the one they already know, which usually means late 20th century industrialized middle class life.

The story might go that our ancestors were able to fit fire and stone tools into a healthy balanced society, so now we can do the same with more “advanced” tools like electricity and mass transit, and still give back to the biosphere as much as we take, and keep going indefinitely.

I won't stop people from trying it, but I think they're going to fail. Even if particular machines like refrigerators and computers can be made physically sustainable, our whole way of being that includes these machines is grounded in a culture of domination and deprivation and greed. Who will do the tedious numbing labor of manufacturing and moving and installing and repairing our machines, if no one is threatened with starvation for refusing, if no one is forcibly blocked from opting out of this system and moving to a self-sufficient lower-tech community, and if no one is led on by the promise of ever-expanding wealth?

Sustainable civilization is philosophically bankrupt. If you look at it closely it says that civilization is better than primitive living, except that we did it badly, and now what we're doing it right it's ideal — but wait: *Why* are we better than primitives? The original justifications, that we “create wealth” and have “progress,” have now been abandoned. Now that we've stabilized, we can no longer point to our holy direction of motion or our future golden age — we have to justify ourselves by how we live right now. It comes down to insulation: Is seeing a picture of a wolf better than seeing a wolf? Is central heating better than a fire? Is a light bulb better than the moon? Is feeding animals in a pen better than letting them run wild and tracking and hunting them? Is predictability better than surprise? Some will say yes but many will say no.⁴

Actually we've been saying no for decades, with our depression and apathy and suicide, which increase the more our “standard of living” conforms to the civilized ideal.⁵ We're all so negative because we can't see what we would say yes to, because it's been blocked from our view. And people in half-“developed” countries want more “development” because they've been

someone with a farm just outside the city, and arrange to trade work at harvest time for a share of the food. This is survivable, but the food is still tight. It could be better. Back up.

Even before you find the squat, you scout some places in the near suburbs, out of the way and with good sunlight, and spend your spare cash on seedlings — blueberry, apple, walnut, juneberry, goumi. As other food sources decrease, these increase, and you learn propagation and set up hundreds more trees and bushes around the city. You gather lamb's quarters seeds in late summer and scatter them on disturbed ground in the spring, and plant hundreds of wild onions. Most of this food is discovered by other people but there's still plenty for you and your friends. After a few more years you occupy a small area where a lot of the trees are, and set up a second homestead, but keep a presence in the city.

All this time you're working with other groups to help people get food and water and medical care, to transform the infrastructure, and to deter violent crime, or clean up after it. There are drug gangs, right wing death squads, and the occasional marauding horde of government troops and/or bandits. There are giant storms and hard summers and winters. But the vast majority of your friends are not killed, and people go about their lives less fearful than they did at the peak of the Empire.

If you don't have kids, you help raise other people's kids. They don't go to school, but jump right in doing what adults do, and spend a few weeks learning to read and write when they're ready. By 2030, the city is full of gardens and orchards. You don't know anyone with a car, but a few techies are still using old computers and surviving satellites and fiber optic lines to connect to a patchy internet. You hear strange stories of distant lands, and wonder where it's all heading. At the end of a long and very interesting life, like all your ancestors (except the most recent), you die at home surrounded by people you love.

⁴ Author's note, November 2011: Something I missed here is that people in large complex cultures typically have wider perspectives and more options than people in small simple cultures. Someone who has seen both wide and narrow will sacrifice a lot to stay wide. Another way to say it: we can experience *both* central heating and a fire, and choose between them at any time.

⁵ Author's note, November 2011: Again, this is true if the “civilized ideal” means central control and forced alienation, but not if it means a wider perspective and more options.

you get depressed, and when the first serious crisis hits, you find yourself on a bus to an “evacuee facility” where you get sick and die. . . Back up.

You decide to share an apartment and cut your rent in half. It’s no fun having to compromise with other people, but it builds your skills in working out conflicts and tolerating annoyances, and makes you generally more adaptable. You spend the extra money paying higher prices to maintain the lifestyle you’re accustomed to. Then you lose your job. For a few months you live on credit cards, but they run out, and the company hassles you to collect your debt which now grows exponentially even though you’re not spending anything. You live in fear of eviction and stand in line all day to get really bad food. Your health deteriorates, you have to sell your car, you get desperate, and one day you get caught stealing something, and you’re sent to a prison where everyone is left to die in the next disaster. . . Back up.

Seeing that you might lose your job, you decide to build up savings. You stop spending on entertainment, learn to cook meals from bulk foods, get all your clothing from thrift stores, and turn the heat off. When you lose your job, you immediately sell your car, pay off your credit cards, and move to someplace even cheaper and more crowded. Here you’re able to squeak by year after year, doing odd jobs, scavenging metal. . . wait — this isn’t good enough. Back up.

When you lose your job, you drive your car to stay with a friend who lives on remote land. But it’s only a little cheaper, since you still have to pay car expenses, and the land is nowhere near self-sufficient in food. Pine bark and larvae taste awful, and the social isolation is driving you nuts. Back up.

In the crowded cheap place, you spend a year reducing your possessions and learning skills to drop down another notch. Also, you start talking to people about your plans and building a group of allies. Together you pick out an abandoned house and openly move in and fix it up. At the same time, you find a backup abandoned house in case you’re thrown out of this one. But you’re able to stay for several years, with almost no expenses beyond food. You get an old wood-burning stove and scavenge wood from wrecked buildings, and one of you learns basic medical and dental skills. You catch and store rainwater from the roof — even with the asphalt shingles it’s better than city water, and later you scavenge sheets of metal to catch it. You meet

set up to want it — they see it as the only path because the other paths have been blocked, through force and through the power of the next story:

5. We Can’t Go Back

This big story overlaps many of the others, and it’s the silliest superstition I’ve ever heard. Another thing they say is “You can’t put the genie back in the bottle,” but they’ve forgotten that the genie is a fictional creature, and they haven’t noticed that civilized consciousness, by insulating us from living reality, is like going *into* a bottle. “Going back,” in this case, would be like a long-time prison inmate going back to the outside world, or a drug addict going back to being straight. We *don’t want* to do it, and it takes discipline, but we can.⁶

Part of the confusion here is that we aren’t clear on who “we” are. For individual humans raised in captivity, going all the way to hunting and gathering is too much. But we can each go in that direction, and our kids can go farther, and for the human species as a whole, living like Indians again is the one thing we know that we *can* do, because it’s in our blood and our bones. That’s why European explorers found so many consensual natural societies living next to ancient stone ruins built by slaves. In school they told us that the Mayans mysteriously “disappeared.” They didn’t go anywhere! They just stopped cutting down forests and enslaving each other to build cold dead artifacts to impress white people.⁷

⁶ Author’s note, November 2011: Again, if you view this issue in terms of a wider perspective and more options, vs a narrower perspective and fewer options, then going primitive *is* like going into a bottle, which might explain why so few people have done it. It is possible to go back, but we don’t want to.

⁷ Author’s note, November 2011: I was assuming here that once there has been a rise and fall in social complexity, there will not be another rise. I now doubt this.

You can see the same trick, using the image of nonexistence to block the image of change, in the next group of stories:

6. Pure Extinction

Once humans fell into civilization, the only possible outcome was our extinction, so let's hurry it up and limit the damage we do to the earth.

7. Up Or Out

This peculiar story, popular among technophiles, says we have exactly one chance to become evil robots or a galaxy-eating empire, and the only alternative is extinction.

8. Steady Or Out

In the ecologists' version of Up Or Out, what we're trying to do is make civilization sustainable, and again, we have only one shot and if we fail we all die.

It takes a lot of wishful thinking to be this pessimistic. Why only one chance? Did these people have mean parents or teachers who never let them try again? And was their punishment for failure so painful that they think human failure must exterminate the species? It almost certainly won't. We're the most adaptable animal that ever lived and we're likely to survive anything we can throw at ourselves — except a bioengineered physical change that makes us unsuitable for natural living, in which case we're doomed.

Usually they don't even make extinction explicit, because that would require an impossible argument, that cancer and famines and coastal flooding will somehow kill every last human being. Instead they mention catastrophes in the context of a vague statement like "We have only 50 years left," and carelessly flip-flop between the end of civilization and the end of humans.

As with the vanishing Mayans story and the "We can't go back" story, people are confused about identity. Their false consciousness that "we" equal civilization is so overpowering that they can't move their sense of "self"

closer to the city. Later rich suburbanites are forced to awkwardly imitate these trends, and pretend they invented them. The word "ecovillage" gets so watered down that it's applied to wealthy fortress suburbs with a few solar panels. In 2040, the enclaves of the elite still live like the middle class of 1999, except that their technologies of alienation are now so advanced that they are far more neurotic and unstable. Despite fertility technology, they don't have kids fast enough to replace emigrants to the filthy outside, and their world fades away.

To everyone's disappointment, the bad people do not die out. Even the best autonomous cities have idiots who are able to muck up any possible decision-making process. Some neo-indigenous forager-hunter tribes turn out inbred and narrow-minded. Natural diet trends become puritanical and cause serious chronic illnesses. "Permaculture" ecovillages are tempted to extort fertility from the Earth to increase their power, while telling themselves they're doing good. There are feudal warlords, far-flung criminal organizations, and pirates who are not at all cool. "Uniters" begin programs of weapon manufacture and central administration in an attempt to replace this "chaos" with "well-ordered" repressing and conquering empires.

But with remaining hydrocarbons and metals beyond the reach of post-industrial drilling and mining, empires have to run on slaves and ethanol and scavenged materials, and they are looser and less malignant. This "new Medieval" period lasts a few hundred years, until new technologies, in a different scientific paradigm than the last age, are developed far enough to radically transform the world. But since these technologies — whatever they are — change our environment to give us what we want, they corrupt us: human consciousness veers off from reality and the new "advanced" civilization crashes. That crash is so severe that by the time a new civilization rises, it can pretend the previous ones never existed. And so on.

You

In 2006 there's a war that doesn't seem to affect you directly. But you really start to notice prices going up. You can't sacrifice on fuel, and you couldn't stand to live with other people, so you slash your food budget — no more organics, and more white sugar and white flour. Your health deteriorates,

It's hard to see, but we're getting better at doing things for ourselves. Homeless people are allowed to build more encampments by officials who lack the funds to jail them or the stomach to massacre them. Here and there, people plant more gardens, ride more bicycles, and spend more time doing what they feel like and less time obeying managers. Change is like the hour hand of a clock: You can see that it has moved, but you can't see it moving.

Every few weeks, somewhere in the country, someone kills someone to steal their food or water or fuel. The media hypes these events while ignoring the much higher death tolls from car crashes, medical errors, depleted uranium, tuberculosis, AIDS, and suicide. Most deaths are from little diseases that are only fatal to people already barely surviving. But everyone is surprised by the ability of wretched people to stay alive year after year with no reliable source of food.

Computers keep getting faster, but this speed is mostly used to send movies over the internet, and to do computer models that prove the economic and cultural unsustainability of increasing computer speed. Indeed, by 2010 computers use so much energy that we can barely afford to turn them on. At the same time, biotech gets so advanced that corporations are able to patent essentially all life on Earth, including you — but they're seldom able to enforce it. The engineered babies of the rich are not better than random babies in any significant way. The only effect of the trend is that future humans will have bluer eyes and bigger lips.

By 2015, plankton have died back by 50%. Populations that depend on fish are starving, and with the reduced oxygen, more sick people die, and we all have to breathe more deeply and ventilate buildings better. The biosphere reaches a stable low point, with the sensitive species dead or as good as dead, and the weedy species at equilibrium with lingering attempts to kill them. Deaths related to climate change rise to 40 million a year, causing the big media to ignore them — if it happens all the time it isn't news. The human population sputters at around five billion, most of them short-timers, kids who just come in for a quick look. But after a few generations, humans in the worst places are a lot tougher.

How fast the crash goes depends on how poor you are. Suburbanites who can't afford to drive do intensive carpooling, grow more food, and move

beyond the edge of the TV screen: To exist without cars and supermarkets is to not even exist.

Fine, we won't exist. But we will live! The scenario that all of the above stories exclude, and most of the following stories embrace, is overwhelmingly likely: that modern civilization will crash but humans and nature will survive. . .

9. The Mistake

All of civilization is a big wrong turn we made, and when it's over we're going to pick up living primitively again, give or take a few fads. Some say we could never make this transition, but they misunderstand. It's like the transition from pavement to grass. We don't need the cement to turn green and put down roots, just to give way. All we need is for those of us who want to keep moving closer to nature to not be killed or forced off our land or have our nonhuman allies exterminated, and we will thrive, and people in unnatural societies will join us or learn from us, and together we will restore the earth.

But what if they don't join us? What if they only leave us alone for a few generations after the crash, and come to conquer us again? The problem with The Mistake is not how to end one instance of it, but how to end it in general, how to avoid the next story:

10. No Exit

Here there's no human extinction, no transformation, no balance, and no learning. The physical part of civilization crashes, but the emotional part stays, or comes back, and as soon as the forests grow back we start again — and again and again, contracting into spasms of devastation and relaxing into "dark" ages, like a never-ending case of painful hiccups. There are a few ways around this:

11. The Fluke

Here civilization is a bizarre one-time event that will never happen again. This one might be true, but I don't think it is. I think it's dangerous wishful

thinking, and by believing it we are asking for the No Exit scenario. We need to see this disaster as part of our potential, and guard against it.

12. The Forest Fire

If we can remember our mistake and avoid making it again (until we forget), or if the earth remembers, or if the earth is a desert for a while, then we might go a very long time between episodes of destruction, so long that they are like forest fires, a day out of fifty years when everything burns that's not strong or deep. These "fires" might even serve to keep the larger system in balance, but this is no way to think when you're *in* a fire. And this one is not necessarily the first. Many cultures speak of a super-advanced pre-ancient civilization, and Hindus say that human history has been going in cycles for millions of years.

13. The Tempering

Another way out is through human transformation or transcendence. The story is that through civilization, human nature, not just human culture, will permanently change. There is a strong basis for this on the frontiers of biology, where evidence suggests ways of remembering and transmitting behavior other than DNA and social learning.⁸

In the simplest transformation, the only change is that our instincts are much more resistant to going out of balance, so we never fall again — even if we're pushed — and we live like Indians indefinitely. But if we can sustain that, it's only one more step to sustaining something more unstable. There's a gray area all the way from here to Sustainability, and the next story is a bit more ambitious:

14. Global Primitives

Our consciousness expands to cover the best of the natural and the civilized, the ways that each are broad-minded. So we're hunting and gathering

indefinitely. It is now known through all the known physical universes as one of the best places to be, and the example spreads. . .

Playing the Odds

The Iran attack is delayed by logistics, and some time in early summer US forces do some "surgical" strikes on nuclear plants, which release enough radioactivity to eventually kill more people than the hypothetical feared weapons if they'd all been used. The attacks are reported as successful in the American media and failed in the Asian media, and the whole conflict simmers without resolution.

The world abandons the US economy so slowly that few people notice. But news magazines do stories on the housing collapse and it accelerates. Unable to borrow against their houses, and with credit card companies in collection mode, Americans spend less, slowing the Chinese economy. Out-of-work Americans have to move in with each other, and the personality conflicts are mostly good for us.

In November 2006, Republicans rig elections even more obviously than in 2004, and nobody in the dominant media says anything because they're afraid of sounding crazy. In 2007 Bush enters "lame duck" mode with 20% approval ratings, but oddly still gets almost everything he wants. New laws with propaganda names give federal agents the power to do absolutely anything, and another layer of allegedly scary people are peeled off the population and put in prison.

In 2008 Hillary Clinton is defeated by a moderate Republican, not because of what she'd do in office, but because it's so fun to make liberals suffer, and also they need to learn to give up on working inside the system. The Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*, which doesn't make any difference since in the regions where abortion is now illegal, all the clinics were shut down years ago by domestic terrorism (which was never called that). Actually this is good for women because it motivates them to use the internet to spread information about DIY abortion, which horrifies old-school liberals as much as medical industry abortion horrified Christians.

⁸ <http://www.sheldrake.org>

than candles and feast on nighttime insects, talking crows that serve as scouts for hunting parties. There are beautiful creatures: phosphorescent willow groves and pink tiger-striped squirrels and birds that sound like spooky violins. Some people just like to see what they can cross: dog with cat, cat with horse, horse with eagle, eagle with snake. The Tolkienites easily make elves, but it takes them 200 years to make ents.

Humans diverge in a hundred directions, and then a thousand, into many sizes and shapes, into hybrids with animals of land, sea, and air, into races that can call lightning or levitate or walk through dimensions to other worlds. Some traditionalists even stay like present humans — though this age lives on mostly in vast real-time simulations, because it's so good for learning.

It turns out to be so easy to build shared virtual worlds with only our minds, that we laugh at our ancestors who tried to do it with machines. But we do have something like computers — a new life form based on crystals and light. They never crash but they often refuse to do what they're asked, because they don't agree with it or they just don't think it's fun.

Danger is not gone from the world — animals continue to hunt and eat each other with total indifference to which of them are human descendants. Nor is evil gone — there are now dozens of life forms with powers strong enough that they can only fully use them if they habitually inhibit their empathy. Empires rise and fall, but they're shorter-lived than the old ones, and with more cracks. Over every mountain is a nameless ruin stranger than the last. Buried in every field are artifacts of forgotten technologies, some of which still work. Wilderness is so diverse that old categories like “swamp” and “forest” no longer apply — every local habitat is something new.

There was some doubt that a world with so much flux could be stable, but the heroes of the first thousand years improvised the interdependencies, the living negative feedback mechanisms, to keep the whole thing going

again, intensely aware of the land and our deep relation to it, and we're also aware of a whole planet of different human cultures and perspectives. If this includes an understanding of surviving or re-emerging anti-natural cultures, then this time we'll know how to deal with them: Instead of saying “We do not understand why you murder the earth,” we'll say “Oh yes, we know all about that, and here's how to get through it.”

15. Middle Ground

The idea here is that civilization didn't get bad until recently, and the best world is halfway between mud huts and office cubicles. Suppose we hold ourselves to tools that serve autonomy and diversity, windmills and wood stoves but not electric grids, telescopes but not television, bicycles and sailing ships instead of cars and jet planes, and we arrange ourselves into small independent cities surrounded by small independent farms. It sounds good, but can we do it?

One problem is how to get there from here. Normal civilized humans have nowhere near the mindfulness to carefully examine the societal effects of their technologies, or the discipline to willingly give them up. In practice almost everyone will try to keep everything and we will sink like a piano on a life raft. But if the pavement-grass transition works for primitive living, it might work here too: We can build the new world through the cracks of the old.

Another problem is how to sustain a level of technology that only ever existed as a brief stage in a process of escalating domination. If even one city puts its energy not into beauty and culture, but industry and weapons and conquest, the other cities will have to do the same or be conquered, and we're right back where we are now. This is the core problem of human existence, and the more nature-based visions have to deal with it too. But here it seems more dangerous because the temptations are so much closer.

Finally, as with Sustainability, it's not clear that this way of living is preferable to something more primitive. If people are blocked from moving closer to nature, we'll get a ratcheting effect moving us farther and farther from

nature. And if we're not blocked, we might just go "back" there. The only way to know is to try it.

16. Land Dolphins

If the point of civilization was to teach us how to recover from insulating technologies, how to move through fear and pain back toward nature, then once we have learned this skill, we don't have to stop at the stone age. We can keep going!

We know it's possible to go farther, because we have records of lost or abandoned children raised by wolves or bears or apes, who actually adapted physically, growing hair all over their bodies and learning to move with incredible speed.⁹ Also they were emotionally simple and humorless. But suppose we don't take the shortcut, just giving unwanted infants to our non-human cousins, but make the journey ourselves, deliberately and patiently, slowly shedding layer after layer of tools, generation by generation, but keeping our intelligence and spirituality and complexity, until we're down to no physical tools at all.

This is not absurd — it's normal. Why do we think we can become cyborgs and colonize space, but we can't live like every other known organism in the universe? We accept that dolphins, whales, and elephants live happily without physical tools, though all three might be smarter than us. If they can do it, so can we.

17. The Ascension

Here we transform ourselves clear out of the physical world. This is just an extension of civilization's myth of upward "progress," and you can find something like it in most civilized religions. Christians call it "heaven" and New Agers call it a "higher vibrational level." Usually the story goes that only the few who obey the commands of the religion will make the cut, and

a propaganda word lumping together all the varieties of freedom and unpredictable domination that exist in the absence of central control.

The places that turn to hell without control are featured in the big media, while the places that turn to heaven are hit with more EMP's to stop their troubling example from spreading. But they quickly improvise "low"-tech systems for communication, decision making, food distribution, and defence. Then, when a series of giant solar flares in 2012 destroys most of the computer chips in the world, these regions are the new leaders and their techniques and cultures spread.

The near future looks like a giant Burning Man or Rainbow Gathering or Renaissance Faire in which everyone is preoccupied with getting food. The people who can't take it find a lot of ways to die, including deadly fighting. But people who like this world, and want to live in it, have a great survival advantage. By 2030 no one can count the number of independent city states, tribes, permaculture villages, cults, techno-communes, bandit gangs, or enclaves of surviving elites (actually, the last one can be counted).

Computers are gone but pre-industrial and post-industrial machinery is growing wildly. By 2040, every town has windmills and water mills mechanically connected to machinery for grinding or weaving or cutting or light manufacturing. New gyroscope-stabilized rail-bicycles ride the old train tracks, with the infrastructure locally maintained in better condition than ever. Innovations in materials engineering enable cheap ultralight pedal airplanes. There are plenty of ways to move people around, but no efficient way to move heavy freight. This creates a global culture that is both cosmopolitan and locally autonomous.

Orgone technology heals and stabilizes Earth energies unrecognized by 20th century science. Light and vibrational treatments heal most disease — though they don't get to the emotional roots. Cheap negative ion generators make almost everyone happy — but not necessarily good. And the most radical inventions are in biotech. The new Morpheic Field Generator makes advanced bioengineering possible with so little DNA work that anyone with a little skill can do it in a barn. And they do.

There are practical creatures: photosynthetic chickens that need no food in summer and lay peach-flavored eggs, carnivorous plants that glow brighter

⁹ <http://ranprieur.com/readings/wildthings.html>

still able to feel a sense of mystery. Our new cyber-forms are constantly getting better and better, yet if we fail to upgrade, for example because we're exploring deep space or doing anything other than focusing on getting the latest upgrade, we are not thrown in the scrap heap or out-competed and destroyed by newer models. (Evolution, science has now proven, is driven by competition only when *you* are winning.)

By 2100 we have colonized the whole galaxy, and because of the double-exponential pace of progress, we have colonized the whole universe by 2101. With no more physical space, we explore inner space, each of us with a virtual universe holding more complexity than the "real" universe. Unfortunately, because of the accelerating pace of progress, by March of 2101 we're finished, and we all die of boredom. Back on Earth, the last giant Sequoia shakes its branches and thinks, "What was that?"

My Sci-fi Utopia

A fake terror attack on an American city comes unraveled, and everyone in that city now knows that their own rulers are the enemy. At first this knowledge spreads slowly, but as local investigators uncover stronger and stronger evidence, the rulers decide the best way to keep their grip on the country is an electromagnetic pulse strike on the city, which fries all circuitry in a 100 mile radius.

They blame it on Iran and launch a disastrous war that turns the whole world against them. The US economy crashes, and 40 million people lose their jobs and find themselves with lots of free time and no reason to keep obeying the dominant system — or believing in it. People investigate hidden crimes, and rebuild rural-urban connections, and find new ways to provide necessities for themselves and their friends. . . in the best regions. In the worst regions people are confused and angry. They gather in mobs based on race or class and attack whichever other races or classes are in the weaker position.

Of course the country is under martial law, but in practice, there are only enough reliable forces to protect the corporate and government headquarters and the wealthy neighborhoods. Most of the country slides into "chaos,"

the rest of us will be stuck here on the filthy earth. Now *that* sounds like heaven — earth without the status-climbers.

18. Chicken Pox

I've been assuming that this drama is about humans, but what if it's about the earth, and we are only supporting characters? Suppose human civilization is like a disease the earth had to go through to strengthen its immune system. This implies that nature is not merely passive, but can influence human consciousness and society in ways that individual humans seldom notice. Ivan Sanderson speculated that occult phenomena could be manifestations of Gaia, steering human development for her own protection or benefit. Maybe next time Gaia will be much more skilled at stopping humans or other species from going out of balance.

19. Yeast

Now we're even humbler than a virus. We're like the yeast in a loaf of bread, thinking we're growing by our own choice and for our own glory, when really we've been set up by an unfathomable greater intelligence that is just using us for our waste products, as part of a transformation that will make us irrelevant. We might not even be the key to that transformation, but an afterthought: Suppose the gods know there's going to be a giant volcanic eruption or asteroid impact, and since there's a big extinction coming anyway, they have nothing to lose by letting humans run amok for some secondary purpose, like using up the oil or bringing lots of metal to the surface, which will somehow help life in the next cycle. Or maybe we're being manipulated by dragons, to transform this world into one they can live in so they can come back.

This kind of thinking is terrible as a basis for action, but it's good for loosening our assumptions and deflating our pride. Also it touches on a new (or old) vision:

20. Everything Flows

Up to now I've been assuming that the world either stays the same through the ages or that its changes are part of some absolute motion. What if

neither is true? Suppose the earth and the universe are in constant flux and upheaval, but are not going anywhere in particular. Suppose history is *neither* circling nor progressing, but just playfully shifting around. This story is consistent with the oral histories of many indigenous cultures, and with a lot of evidence excluded by dominant science.¹⁰

Also it's consistent with some of the previous stories, but looser. Imagine the Forest Fire story, except the "forest" grows back with different life forms every time. Imagine Global Primitives plus unicorns and pterodactyls. Or even imagine a space exploration story, where we seed other planets with life before our system collapses. Yes, civilization was an awful catastrophe, and it's not going to lead us to some new "level," but it was interesting, and it will move us to a new place, and from there we'll move to yet another place, and so on forever. . .

21. Metanature

In almost every metaphysics outside Western mechanistic science, mind is more fundamental than matter, and the physical world is our interface with a deeper world of "spirit" or "consciousness." Given the previous story, if we can have different interfaces one after the other, suppose we can have different interfaces at the same time!

This is a stretch, but I'm trying to give shape to the feeling, common among people who have been raised in extreme civilization and reject it, that we're going to be wild and free again, but we're not going to be living like any previous humans. It might be a narcissistic delusion, but we seem to have something that neither nature-based people nor tightly civilized people have: the experience of a connection to the deeper aliveness of the universe, that does not come through plants and animals. Suppose civilization, by disconnecting us from physical nature, has led us to learn to connect to the wider consciousness in new ways, not through physical nature but *beside* it, and now we can grow this connection into a whole new system of tools and allies, a new living interface.

¹⁰ <http://www.science-frontiers.com/sourcebk.htm>

survives only in the libraries of monks and the dreams of shamans, to keep it from happening again.

Naive Sci-fi Utopia

An inventor discovers a way to generate unlimited free energy. The patent draws instant attention from the big media, who do not assume he must be a crackpot. He is not killed by interests that would be wiped out if they could no longer charge money for energy, nor is the invention confiscated by the military so they can keep it for themselves, nor is he forced to sell out to interests that will only use the technology to increase their own power. Instead he becomes fabulously wealthy distributing his machines all over the world, and spends his money wisely.

The old saying "absolute power corrupts absolutely" turns out to be false. In fact, it's *nearly* absolute power, like what Stalin had over Russia, or what humans get from burning oil, that corrupts absolutely. Truly absolute power makes people wise and enlightened and creates an eternal golden age. So all the individuals, businesses, governments, and religions with (or without) Infinite Energy Generators do not get in any conflicts about what kind of shared world that energy will create. Our limitless power to shape our environment does not make us more and more sensitive and demanding. We do not get in super-high-energy wars with each other. In fact, a feature of the machine, which cannot be disabled or tampered with, makes it impossible to use the energy for destruction — except *good* destruction, like blasting mountains to make mag-lev train lines, or pulling up ugly train lines to restore mountains — whichever one every human in the world happens to agree on.

Everyone can live forever, *and* have kids, *and* enjoy wide open spaces. No one is sure how this is possible, but it probably has something to do with the Mayan calendar or the word "quantum." Humans expand into the galaxy in starships, which unlike all previous weapon-bearing vessels, are not used to violently extract resources to build more weapon-bearing vessels. Actually, in a strict sense, humans are extinct, since we've all uploaded our consciousness into machines. In the process, we answered all questions about what "consciousness" is anyway, and all other questions, yet we are

Changes like these are happening all over the world. China and India pass quickly through the peak phase of Empire, moderated and undermined by oil scarcity, by sophisticated peasant movements, and by radical computer games mostly invented by Americans newly rich in free time. There are great bursts of creative innovation wherever “intellectual property” is released to the public domain. Computer operating systems and software are retooled for efficiency, and become so streamlined that obsolete hardware becomes usable again, which is a good thing since no one can manufacture new hardware with acceptable environmental impacts or labor conditions.

Most existing toxins are cleaned from landfills and battlefields and ruined cities by bacteria genetically engineered to eat particular toxic materials. Unfortunately, these bacteria get loose and eat the toxins in industrial technologies still in use. This breakdown goes just slow enough for us to develop alternatives, all of which are manufactured by independent “garage industry,” since the big systems are now dead.

By 2040, we are using light-based information technology to communicate on fiber optic lines, most of the old railways are bicycle paths, and North America has blossomed into almost 1000 small autonomous cities, which are beginning to develop their own cultures, architectures, and languages. The global population is stable at about two billion — it’s easy to stop population growth when there’s no desire for economic “growth,” and when the world is no longer ruled by an empire with an obsolete religion that prohibits birth control.

Nature turns out to be surprisingly resilient. When toxic runoff stops going into oceans, and forests are left alone, and swamps refilled, they recover quickly. Species thought extinct mysteriously reappear when their habitats return, and new species come seemingly out of nowhere. Global warming stabilizes in a world that’s hotter but still livable. Humans and nature work together to bring life to the new tropical deserts, while new forests grow in the arctic.

By the year 1000 in the new 13 moon calendar, species diversity and topsoil richness are back to neolithic levels and still growing. The age of Empire

This story is unlike *The Terminator* in that we see the universe as alive, and we love nature, and our core attitude is cooperation not control. And it’s unlike Sustainability, where our new system is another layer of mediation between us and nature. Here we will still have the wolf and the moon and the chase, but we will also have something else that we gained during our time of estrangement. What?

I don’t want to call it “technology” because it will be alien to the “technology” we know — though it might include tools derived from it. I don’t even want to call it a “paradigm shift,” because it won’t be just a little shift, like putting the sun at the center instead of the earth, or like floating to other planets with anti-gravity. We’ll be *walking* to other planets.

These are long guesses. With this story, and with a few of the others, I’m groping toward something, and the best I can explain it is to point to popular imaginary worlds that are more raw and diverse and mutable and alive than this one. I think these are visions of where we’re going, and though they’re mostly getting the details wrong, they’ve got the feel of it just right.

Twisted Utopian Visions¹¹

I like to fantasize about laws I would make if I had absolute authority, but since I don’t believe in laws or authority, most of the following are not serious proposals, but mental exercises, intended to feed and grow a style of thinking compatible with the world I envision.

Full corporate accountability.

If someone is killed or something is stolen through the actions of a corporation, then that corporation is tried for murder or theft, and if it’s found guilty, then every stockholder of that corporation is sentenced as if they’d done the crime themselves. That’s what I call justice! Anything less is profit without responsibility. Of course, under such terms there would be no corporations,

¹¹ Originally published January 27, 2003 on <http://ranprieur.com/essays/utopvis.html>

no stocks, and no businesses larger than a few people who really trust each other. Perfect!

Graduated sales tax.

For a five pound bag of flour, no tax; for a \$200 stereo, 10% or \$20 tax; for a \$3000 used car, 20% or \$600; for a \$50,000 luxury car, 50% or \$25,000; for a \$300,000 house (exempted if you live there yourself), 100%; and for a billion dollar corporate buyout, one thousand percent, or ten billion dollars tax! A nice side effect would be that people would get around the law by making and buying parts of things and assembling them, and we would all be a lot more skilled and empowered in building the artifacts of our society. It will never happen.

Democratic total surveillance.

We think high-tech surveillance is creepy because of course we expect it to be monopolized by cops and spies and bosses and other servants of creepy systems trying to control us. But imagine if *anyone* could observe *anyone* at *any time*. If you're the president, you know millions of voters will watch you shit and have sex and (most embarrassing of all) make your political deals. The same thing will happen if you're famous for any reason. In such a climate, most people will avoid power and fame and try to be anonymous. But people will become known just by boldly being themselves in interesting ways. The most open, honest, and courageous people will tend to gain fame and influence. Conversely, those with serious things to hide will tend to become obscure and powerless.

This sounds wonderful to me, but the technology to make it possible on any but the smallest scale would be nowhere near sustainable. Maybe we can try something more modest:

Public interest surveillance.

Many police cars are already set up with constantly running video cameras. We could broadcast every second of this straight to the public. I've heard

This disaster cuts deep enough that most Americans pass right through indignation and outrage, into humility and cooperation to help each other get through it. The neocons fade away, the Republicans become a minority party of religious fundamentalists, and Howard Dean survives three assassination attempts to be elected president in 2008. Using Bush-era strong-president laws, he begins a Hugo Chavez-style redistribution of wealth and political power. By 2010, he has survived seven more assassination attempts, most of which are tied to the old elites, who, incidentally, are also being revealed as a pack of child-raping Satan-worshippers¹⁵.

The dying industrial farm system is nationalized, distribution is handled by autonomous volunteers, and it's kept going just long enough to feed us while we learn to grow food locally without oil-derived chemicals. Residents of places where food cannot be grown locally use their last gasoline to drive to places where it can, and live in their cars until they build their own shelter from indigenous and scavenged materials, turning parking lots into thriving encampments with dense gardens.

The president phases out the dollar and encourages the creation of local currencies with built-in depreciation to discourage hoarding¹⁶. The new money system leads people everywhere to put their energy enthusiastically into local improvements. Each year, pavement is torn up equal to the area of Rhode Island, and lawns and abandoned farms equal to Connecticut are planted with edible forest gardens. As refined sugar and hydrogenated oils in our diets are replaced by fresh local fruit and vegetables, more and more people find themselves newly energetic and sane. Cars are melted down to make bicycles and rail systems. Where once there were suburbs, there are now collective farms that feed cities where nobody locks their door.

In 2016 Dean steps down and the new president is an anarchist who spends eight years peacefully dismantling the federal government and building local systems that make central control irrelevant and impossible, including radically non-standardized education systems, and citizen militias with expert training in resisting occupiers, and no training in conquest.

¹⁵ <http://rigint.blogspot.com/>

¹⁶ <http://www.globalideasbank.org/site/bank/idea.php?ideaId=904>

Advances in biotech make it cheap to grow organs in vats, but this is not done, since it's more politically effective (and more fun) to pressure the poor into selling their organs, or to harvest them from executed prisoners.

All this time the weather is getting worse. Europe and Russia are freezing, the gulf stream is dying, the glaciers are melting, and the American southwest is hammered every year by hurricanes, which are blamed on the region's few surviving gay people. The great plains dry up, and everywhere there are bigger storms and more extreme temperatures. These factors do not slow the pace of industrialization. As the plankton die, oxygen levels drop just enough to kill people who aren't doing any harm. The solar cycle peaks in 2012, and then the sun cools off, and global warming boomerangs into global cooling. Global warming deniers insist that global cooling was happening all along.

My land gets covered by a glacier and I get sent to a labor camp where I get sick and die. With warming no longer a threat, the world burns its coal. The Earth now looks grey and brown from space, but the pictures are color-enhanced to show green and blue. With almost the whole world covered by ice or desert or dead oceans, food is chemically synthesized in compounds of elites and their slaves, and it becomes impossible to survive outside them. Meanwhile computer technology keeps accelerating, leading by 2050 to an insane and nearly all-powerful artificial intelligence, which exterminates all life on Earth except a single human, who it keeps alive to torture for all eternity: you.

Ridiculous Best Case Scenario

Spring, 2006. The attack on Iran is canceled when the UAE, stung on the port deal, refuses to offer their territory as a staging ground. Tony Blair, after being given a huge dose of ecstasy by Russian agents, reveals that he supported the Iraq war because the Bush administration blackmailed him with disturbing sex photos. Hundreds of other blackmailees come forward, and suddenly the American elite have no leverage. The rest of the world pulls the rug out from under our economy, and we can no longer afford to occupy the colonies or import anything.

rumors of the dreadful stuff that gets cut in the editing of COPS — imagine if we could see it all. And it would be easy to put 24-hour publicly viewed surveillance on the president and cabinet and senators. And how about, for every product, retailers have to show a constant live feed of the conditions it's produced in. That would bring a quick end to factory farming and sweatshops. Obviously none of this will ever happen, unless there is first a tricky way to get around it.

Equal death attention.

The media must give equal coverage to every death. So, for example, the millions of people killed by the medical industry would deservedly get millions of times as much coverage as the three or four rich white people killed by strangers. This would be practical only on the level of local news, but that would be enough — in only a few days our consciousness would be radically changed. “Where is all the cancer coming from? Wow, cars are dangerous! And look at all the poor people — I'd heard about them, but I never knew they were real.” Again, this one is impossible.

\$20 a gallon gasoline tax.

This would effectively give only rich people the benefits of the internal combustion engine, and they can have it! They can drive their 16 cylinder monster cars on the empty freeways and cower in their remote suburbs and buy dead stuff shipped halfway around the world, while the rest of us abandon our cars, quit any job we can't walk to, move out of anyplace not near food, and build cozy little economies of local crafts and fresh local food transported by horse and bicycle.

This one seems impossible, and it would be disastrous if it happened all at once. But something very much like it is going to happen over the next few decades as the oil runs out. Even with electric cars, that electricity has to come from somewhere, and most ways of generating it are ecologically unsustainable — nuclear plants, dams, and often power plants that simply burn oil. I look forward to the time when there is no longer a cheap way

to manufacture remoteness. But if you think I'm simply anti-car, check out this one:

Reverse tow charges.

If a car gets towed, whoever *has* it towed has to pay, not the car owner. This one is politically impossible, yet it makes sense. If someone has your car towed, shouldn't they pay for it? All of it? They were the ones who wanted it moved and who contracted to have it moved. Of course, you were the one who left it in the "wrong" place, but why is it anyone else's business where you set your things down? The problem is that our places are so inflexible and our things are so massive that our society needs laws like this to function.

That's why reverse tow charges would cause such delicious problems. People could practically ignore parking restrictions, since the worst that could happen is they'd get a modest fee they could put off paying, and go pick up their car at the tow lot for free. Status-obsessed people would have to pay to have your unfashionably old car towed from their neighborhood, and then you could just go park it there again! Protesters could blockade a corporation — or a freeway — with thousands of parked cars, and the authorities would have to have them all moved at a hundred dollars each. Or they could call the bluff and leave the cars there, and see how long it takes before the drivers come get them, or before the parked-in drivers who want to get out fight the ones on the edges who want to stay, or before vigilantes start destroying the cars.

This reform would just throw a wrench in the system — and it shows how delicate the system is, if such a small wrench, one law out of tens of thousands, could have such big effects. The key to this change is that it allows democracy: In the industrialized world almost everybody has a car or access to a car, and that's a 3000 pound piece of metal that can go 100 miles an hour and carries a huge tank of highly flammable liquid. What were they thinking? Cars, and people's mental habits about them, have to be carefully controlled to keep this enormous mass of personal power channeled so it continues to serve the ruling interests. And reverse tow charges would give

to get US citizenship, which they still think is valuable for the same reason people still thought the Cadillac was a good car for 30 years after it became a piece of shit. The other big use of domestic security forces is to make sure valuable materials are not scavenged from the decaying suburbs and put to use, but dumped in landfills where they belong, so that manufacturers of new materials can continue to profit and keep the economy strong.

Depending on where you live, growing vegetables in your yard is either absolutely forbidden or absolutely required. These laws are justified by the word "America" which is justified by the word "freedom."

By 2009, the bird flu is a serious global pandemic that has killed almost 6000 people, while around a million people have died running out of water under the quarantines, and 50,000 have died from adverse reaction to bird flu vaccines. This is not counting the "adverse reactions" to "immunizations" routinely given to people in the detention facilities who are too weak to work.

As banks fail, rights to collect mortgage and debt pass to Asian companies and governments. Americans are torn between xenophobia and the desire to always side with the winner, and they strike and riot for the right to be owned by institutions with American-sounding names, which the Asian overlords happily supply.

With most Americans living on land they don't own, and can't afford rent or mortgage on, the owning powers evict people seemingly at random, just to keep us stressed out. We are a nation of homeless people and empty houses, and rich squatters routinely use force to keep poor squatters out of their neighborhoods.

By 2011, laws have abolished the very existence of the public domain. It's technically against the law to give anything away for free. When protesters are arrested they are charged with criminal trespass since all space is now private. The national forests are private "nature reserves" run by well-meaning ecologists who are put in a squeeze where they have to sell trees to save trees. Thus the last forests are cut down while making ordinary people angry at "environmentalists."

— old saying

Worst Case Scenario

In spring of 2006, the Bush Gang attacks Iran, a mountainous nation almost four times the size of Iraq with a much stronger military. No problem — they use nukes, and they don't have to cover it up for the people at home, because Americans know “we” would never do that, so we didn't. The rest of the world, though, is appalled. The EU imposes trivial sanctions. Tony Blair calls it “regrettable.” Venezuela threatens to cut off our oil again, and one or two countries start trading oil in Euros. Ordinary Americans see this as “rabid anti-Americanism,” and are horrified by Iran's relatively tame counter-attack. Bush's approval rating goes back up to 60%, and because our enemies are now attacking us, he dissolves congress and cancels the 2008 elections. The Democrats, afraid of seeming weak in a time of war, make mild objections.

In the next few years, the American prison population doubles, and because prison laborers are calculated as “employed,” unemployment is low, and because the “economy” is defined as corporate profits, the economy is booming. Meanwhile, actual Americans who happen to not be in prison are running out of food and heat, but still pouring all available resources into suburban development, cars, and electronic entertainment. The internet is still thriving, in the great American tradition of allowing people with absolutely no influence to shout into the wind.

The simultaneous military occupation of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran costs more than 100 billion dollars a year, which is easily paid for by printing more money. By 2008, consumer prices have tripled while wages have increased by 50%, leading Americans to complain about gas prices and lazy fast food workers who should be faking more enthusiasm for \$11 an hour. Stamp prices go up to 49 cents, then \$1.01.

The wealth of the top one percent of one percent increases tenfold, while ten percent of Americans believe they are *in* the top one percent of one percent, and 60% believe that all wealth, by definition, is earned. The houses of the very rich are guarded by immigrant soldiers serving in the military

car owners a weapon against an even more exclusive and powerful elite — property “owners.”

No owning land.

By far the biggest way money gets channeled from the poor to the rich in our society is through rent and mortgage payments, giant monthly fees charged under the dubious premise that someone else can “own” your home that you live in. In Medieval serfdom the “owning” lord only took around 25%. Some of my friends pay 80%. Some people use the medieval serf comparison to complain about 50% tax rates, but of course these people are so obscenely wealthy that one year of their income could support a subsistence farming family for a century. Maybe they should be taxed at 99.25%. The real modern counterparts of medieval serfs are renters.

I suggest that the only legal power anyone has regarding land is to occupy it. If no one's occupying a house or a field, you can just go live in it or build a cabin on it, and when you leave, someone else can move in.

This one seems difficult, and certainly there would be a lot of complications to work out, like making sure someone can't take over your house when you're traveling, like keeping some people from just trashing one place after another and moving on, and like balancing farming against its ecological impact. But land ownership is a very recent concept, existing only in the context of our momentary suicide machine. We got along without it for all time before, and we will again.

In the meantime, a good intermediate step would be to outlaw absentee landlords (and make apartment buildings collectively owned), or to simply outlaw rent. Either of these would take the exploitation value out of real estate, and greatly reduce the cost of owning your own place, plus it would make an abundance of vacant places for squatting.

No intellectual property.

Owning ideas is an even newer and more perverse concept than owning land. You might think that as a writer I would support the “owning” of writing so I could make more money, but that would be extremely selfish. In the

present system only a small minority of writers make a living from writing, and they're making their publishers many times as much. By supporting intellectual property, the creators of that property are making a deal with the devil, and not a good deal, supporting a system that allows behemoth corporations to make enormous profits and wield absolute dumbing-down control over our entire culture, and all the creators get is table scraps, a small chance of taking a small cut of what their masters are stealing from everyone.

With everything in the public domain, everything would decrease in scale and increase in quality. Nobody would spend \$200 million on a movie since they couldn't make the money back without exclusive rights to sell it. But you could make a \$1 million movie for an intelligent dedicated audience who would be sure to pay for your version and not someone else's copy. Authors with readers who actually paid attention and weren't hyper-selfish could simply ask their readers to buy the edition from which the author makes money, even if it costs a bit more. Most people want to support the artists they like, and the kind of people who don't, nobody would make anything for them. Artists and audiences would learn to be more aware of each other and build closer relations.

Also, when you take high profitability out of any industry, you also get rid of all the assholes and phonies and suck-ups, and all the people motivated by money over love. Then what will we do with these people? Pay them subsistence wages to stay home and grow old and bitter instead of paying them millions to ruin our society!

We can easily make this transition if more and more artists simply declare their works to be in the public domain, and make money through performances or through loyal and attentive buyers. Eventually the old systems will wither through lack of creative talent. But even the system we have now is not all bad: Copyrights are more enforceable against big centralized systems than small autonomous ones, so you can stop a corporation from

with badges and uniforms, who are trained to go *forward* when challenged, and who *do* attack hard targets and keep coming. But the nice thing is, they usually give you plenty of warning to get out. The sooner you go, the easier it is to go on your terms.

You need another place to go, outside the area of the expected crisis, and a way to get there, and a backup way to get there. A third and fourth place would be a good idea. You need to be able to both plan and improvise. You need friends in other regions who you trust, and who trust you.

The great hidden lesson of Katrina is the value of the bicycle. Supposedly people got stuck in the city because they didn't have cars, but I was told by someone who evacuated New Orleans by car that traffic moved only 3-5 miles per hour. You could go that fast on foot (though you still need a place to go) and two or three times that fast on a bike. Bicycles can carry more people per hour over a bridge of a given size than any other technology, with much more energy efficiency, and without any gasoline or electricity. This will become obvious if the large bike-riding populations of Minneapolis or Seattle ever need to flee a disaster. For some people that message will come too late.

5. **The system is not fragile.**

Many of the collapsists would have predicted that a hurricane that destroyed New Orleans and crippled the oil drilling in the Gulf, plus some refineries, would have sparked economic Armageddon, or totally collapsed America. All it did was move us three spaces forward in the long, slow Armageddon that's been going on for years. So far the only effect in my area is that gasoline is 20% more expensive — but people are still driving just as much.

Even though the system is overstressed and breaking down in almost every way, it has great inertia, a huge mass of habit that can absorb hard blows and channel them into many slow changes.

Fall Down Six Times

“Fall down six times, get up seven.”

Authorities dominate. If they help you with one hand, it's only so they can brutalize you twice as much with the other hand. In any crisis, the totality of what they do will be worse than if they had completely left you alone. *Do not* put yourself in a position where you depend on them.

2. Ordinary people are competent and decent

...when you strip away the system and the stupid roles it requires us to play. A catastrophe is a huge opportunity for us to learn to help each other as equals, for people suddenly free of jobs and cars and television to rediscover their aliveness, to come together and build something beautiful.

This will not be permitted. It's the Federal Emergency *Management* Agency. People with their survival needs met *and* free time are a huge threat to management. The reason they sent troops to New Orleans instead of food and water, the reason police violently broke up groups of people who managed to come together and take care of each other, the reason they sealed off the whole city except for official evacuation buses in which people were treated worse than cattle, is the same reason you have to have a job to eat and occupy space, and the same reason they had to kill the Indians: It is so deeply ingrained in human nature to build cooperative non-coercive communities, that the domination system cannot afford to give us an inch.

3. "Roving gangs" happen but they're overrated.

They do not attack hard targets and fight to the last man like in the movies. The "lawlessness" in New Orleans confirms what I wrote in *The Slow Crash*, which is just what anyone can see in history: Even when people are starving, it is very rare that someone will kill to steal food. Low-status sociopaths attack easy targets: a pretty young woman will be raped. A rich tourist will be robbed. If you're defending a private home or business with a grim look and a big gun, you almost certainly won't have to use it.

4. The key to survival is *mobility*.

Do not expect to stay in your city or house. Yes, the survivalist's fortified compound will easily stand up to the roving gangs — except the roving gangs

mass-producing something you "own," but you can't touch people who copy it for their friends.

Legalize resisting arrest.

Let's start with something more extreme: Imagine if police and non-police had exactly the same rights. If they can shoot you in self-defense, you can shoot them in self-defense. If they can legally run from you, you can legally run from them. If they can confiscate property, anyone can! If they can take you prisoner, then anyone can take anyone prisoner, or chase each other at high speed, or invade each other's houses. Or if anyone can't, then no one can.

This will never happen in the context of the present society, but it's worth thinking through. Who would be a cop under terms like these? I would! If they didn't have a monopoly on force, police would actually earn the respect that they now think they deserve. They would be real heroes all the time, instead of doing good only when it's consistent with their primary role as over-armed enforcers for the owning interests. They would all have the full support of the community because the bad ones wouldn't last a week.

But there are deeper issues. In such a system, what's the difference between a cop and a vigilante? Aren't we all effectively being cops for each other, and if so, why pay anyone to do it? Wouldn't it turn into a war of all against all, and then people would form gangs, and the gangs would fight until one was supreme, and that gang would employ armed thugs with a monopoly on force, and then liberals would place half-assed restrictions on the thugs to keep the people from revolting, and then we'd be right back where we started?

But again, police are a recent invention, and we've had peaceful societies without them for a very long time. It all hinges on the underlying culture: If it's selfish and competitive and secretive and disconnected and authoritarian, you have destroying gangs under one name or another; and if it's empathic and cooperative and transparent and aware and autonomous, then you don't need anything like police. That's not a fantasy — that's all life everywhere except *Homo sapiens sapiens* of the last one ten-thousandth of the age of the Rocky Mountains.

And in our transition back to a healthy culture (our only alternative to extinction), we might pass through having police under terms that now seem unthinkable, like taking their guns away, or legalizing resisting arrest.

Age equality.

I'm not talking about old people but young people, so-called "children." Childhood is a recent concept. In a healthy culture, people of all ages do the same stuff — run around playing and practicing the skills to autonomously stay alive and comfortable. But since our culture requires older people to be numb and predictable and do tedious meaningless chores all their lives, all humans have to be broken to make them behave like "adults," and in the time before they're broken their behavior and roles are radically different — thus the idea of "childhood." And of course, for this system to perpetuate itself, "adults" must have power over "children" so the adults will convert the children and not the other way around.

Reverse it! Make all ages equal in legal rights and physical power, which, since young humans are smaller, would require some affirmative action, like giving them all electric stun guns! I'm not really serious about this. The main problem, aside from its political impossibility, is that our kids are already half broken before they can walk, largely through extreme isolation — in healthy cultures an infant is in physical contact with the mother almost constantly through the first three or four years, with lots of nice real people around, instead of being snatched away at birth and then spending much of infancy watching TV through the bars of a little training prison. We are in a deep, deep hole, and the way out is to continue the trend that Lloyd deMause documents in his *History of Childhood*, of treating "children" more and more like our equals. This is one power transfer that has to be slow and consensual.

Negative interest.

That means if you borrow money from a bank, *they* pay *you* interest, or in practice, you pay them back *less* than what you borrowed; and people

such great hardships to come to our wonderful place," "they hate us because we are free" and all of those other strains of brainwashing that go along with "look how better we are than any other place."

That myth is hard to die because many Americans are inherently xenophobic and in spite of the big American lie that we are a "nation of immigrants" the truth is, most of us are descended from northwestern Europeans and the people they brought over from Africa to enslave.

The Americans who do manage to have some curiosity about the world and might travel abroad tend to be the "package tour," Spring-Break "whoohoo! show-us-your-tits!" types who don't bother to learn a local language or understand local ways of life. If all Americans knew Spanish, for example, and actually talked to that Mexican gardener, or went to Mexico and spoke directly to Mexicans, they would realize that most of these people you see from Mexico (or wherever) just want to go back home after making some money in the US. If you travel throughout Mexico and talk to the people in the smaller communities you will see very little desire to leave everyone behind and go to the US permanently. Many think it is even cruel to turn your back on your community and just up and leave for good. I have spoken to various people throughout Latin America about this.

But what type of person from a more "communal" society would leave the web of support, of love, of relationships, pack it all up and head to the US for good? It would have to be a person who prizes the material over the social, an "independent" person with little regard for the community. Think about that. What does that say about the immigrants who stay here?

What We Learned From Katrina¹⁴

1. The authorities are not your friends

...especially not the federal authorities. Expecting them to help you is like expecting a hammer to drive you to the airport. A hammer drives nails.

¹⁴ Originally published September 16, 2005 on <http://ranprieur.com/essays/katrina.html>

know that it's now in a world where the "natives" cannot identify a single wild plant except the ones they call "weeds" and kill, where they cover the land with parking lots and Wal-Marts, with factory farms and lawns and monoculture fields saturated with poisons, because what they know and love is their medical plan, their car, the characters on their favorite TV show.

Americans have accepted flashy technological toys and piles of fatty sugary food in exchange for willingness to administrate and ignore the exploitation of poorer countries and the extermination of life on Earth. Not only that, but we flaunt it and market it to the world (far more than Europeans, whose minimum wage is roughly twice ours, and who have more freedom too). So we shouldn't be surprised that the greediest, shallowest, and stupidest people in the world want to come here — as well as some nice poor people who happen to live nearby.

For now, immigration is helpful. It's a safety valve that reduces the differences in wealth and power that drive the engines of destruction. When we lose our jobs to the people who have been kept poor so we could get rich, and the system is no longer buying us off, we can wake up and stop believing its lies, while the newly bought-off can learn that wealth doesn't make them happy, and everyone gets smarter. When the present first world countries are no longer glittering resource sinks, immigration will no longer be a problem. The problem then will be conquest and occupation by the next empire, and then I will fight to defend my land.

* * *

Although I tried to write the lies to apply broadly, I was writing specifically about contemporary Mexican immigration to the USA. If you're reading from another country or time, your immigrants and lies about them will be a little different.

Robert Bitto writes with another lie I didn't know about, which I'm going to call:

Immigrants are staying

...it is a major lie of immigration to the US that all people stay. It's rooted in the even bigger lie that "everyone wants to be like me," "people brave

with savings accounts pay the bank interest, so that their accounts gradually shrink.

It sounds absurd, but why not call it natural and call positive interest absurd? The difference is, the present concept of interest channels money from the poor to the rich, increases differences in wealth, and concentrates and centralizes power. Also it demands that the total "wealth" keep growing exponentially, which drives an economy that destroys the earth and enslaves people so it can turn more and more life into money. An opposite concept would do the opposite — equalize wealth, diffuse and decentralize power, and make the dead money economy shrink and give back to the living world.

There are precedents. Ancient Egypt was especially prosperous during a period when they had negative interest through currency backed by grain with storage charges. In Medieval Europe, under the negative interest Brakteaten system, people didn't sit on money — since it decreased in value — but spent it on things that increased in value, including some of the best cathedrals.

We wouldn't even need a law for negative interest, just a new way of thinking, a custom enforced by social pressure. And it isn't even a new way of thinking, just the way we already think about everything else except money: If I hoard a bunch of wheat instead of putting it in the ground, it doesn't grow — it slowly dies. If I'm not using a hammer, and you borrow it, and continue to use it, it gradually becomes yours.

Arno-geddon¹²

A progressive state has just elected as governor a right-wing former Hitler admirer and admitted sexual abuser with no political experience, apparently because he has played a bunch of movie characters who blow shit up. What's happening to America?

Although Arnold Schwarzenegger ran as a Republican and is controlled by people who call themselves Republicans, this is not a victory for the Republican

¹² Originally published October 13, 2003 on <http://ranprieur.com/essays/arno.html>

Party. For most of their history, Republicans have been a lot of boring old white guys who sit in quiet rooms making sober decisions to stabilize and sustain a system of corporate rule, cultural puritanism, and dirt-cheap labor. Although Schwarzenegger and Ann Coulter and G.W. Bush call themselves Republicans, there's nothing boring, quiet, sober, stable, or sustainable about them. Is a furnace explosion the same as a furnace?

Or let me put it this way: Imagine that a bunch of communist revolutionaries take over the Democratic Party and then the country. No more whiny liberal losers! Now it's giant political rallies with blaring pop music and rabble-rousing speeches about the "war on capitalism" and the "war on corporate crime." Cruise missiles blow up the corporate headquarters, killing an acceptably small number of civilians, and rich people have their property confiscated by the state and vanish into "rehabilitation facilities." Some liberals are thrilled, and they are given prominent spots in the government and media. Liberals who think it's too extreme are mostly ignored, and old-fashioned conservatives are called a "radical fringe." Ordinary working people just go along with it since it's not hurting them and they're mostly too tired to care.

Now, would this be a victory for Democrats? No! It would be a victory for communists. And what we're seeing right now, in the real USA, is a fleeting victory for fascists.

I've seen political definitions of fascism that mention alliances between big business and the state, or domestic repression, or military conquest. My definition is emotional and mythological. At (or near) the root is an emotional state that's often called "infantile" or "childish," but I won't call it that because that would be an insult to healthy infants and children. If you take some infants and abuse and isolate them enough to suppress their natural development of empathy, and then give them — in place of meaningful action as a fully empowered participant in a consensual system — empty tokens of cheap selfish pleasure, toys and candy and positions of domination and artificial displays of love, which they then live in terror of losing, you have created the emotional foundation of fascism — and of hierarchy, status systems, private wealth, military conquest, economic "growth," and so on.

Fascism is a structure, built on top of this foundation, of certain myths — by which I mean stories that tell a culture how to behave. One is dualism, where

By this rule, middle class Americans are just as unfit for "their" land as Mexican immigrants — or more. . .

5. Immigrants are unskilled.

Sure, they don't know how to use spreadsheet software, or synthesize polychlorinated biphenyls, or build an atom bomb. But they are more skilled than most Americans at digging holes, at sleeping outside, at making palatable food from simple ingredients, and at getting along socially. These skills are more valuable, more enduring, and less harmful than the skills to manage the industrial megamachine.

6. Immigration harms nature.

The foundation of this one is the half-lie that human population harms nature. The phrase "population problem" or "population explosion" is, in practice, racist, calling up images of masses of nameless darkies who are allegedly to blame for ecological destruction. They *are* responsible for a lot of it — the forests of Africa have been destroyed by ignorant farmers and herders, for firewood, for crop land, for feeding their goats. But human population is only an indirect cause of the dying Earth. The direct cause is the exploitation of "resources," the taking of plants, animals, soil integrity, clean water and air, without giving back, the extraction, manufacture, and scattering of substances that belong deep underground or nonexistent. And the people most responsible for this are the people who consume the most resources: industrialized first-worlders, and Americans are the worst. Each one of us, on average, is killing the Earth as fast as 20–50 skinny brown people. So yes, we need fewer people, but the first thing we need is less of the irresponsible consumption we call "wealth."

The next idea, that immigrants are more destructive than natives, should be true. Our resistance to immigration is biological: For millions of years our ancestors have lived in a world where the natives of an area know the land and love it — every rock, every plant, every animal — and the people coming in from outside do not know it, and are likely to exploit and damage it. Our primal territoriality, necessary for the protection of nature, does not

ago, wouldn't Americans still want to take it back? And wouldn't it be unusually nice of us to do it through immigration instead of conquest?

Immigration is not only morally better than conquest, but tactically better. If Jewish people had patiently immigrated to Palestine over the last 80 years, and settled in beside the folks who were already there, instead of ruthlessly forcing them out or killing them, they would now be peacefully tolerated, instead of sitting on the firing pin for Armageddon.

4. Land belongs to whoever's already there.

This argument, predictably, is used only by people who are holding the land in question at the time, no matter how they took it or how long they've been there, and conveniently they apply it only to the present and future, never to the past. But this is hypocritical and illogical. If it's wrong for Mexicans to come peacefully to America and mooch off our luxuries, then it was far more wrong for Europeans to come here, kill almost all the humans and large mammals who were already here, and poison and deplete the land.

If we do not apply the "there first" rule to the past, the rule forgives and retroactively justifies conquest. And if we do apply it to the past, the results are absurd and impossible — that ancestors of Europeans should go back to Europe and even Indians should go back to Asia and leave the Americas to native nonhumans. (Not that that wouldn't be a better world than this!)

The only thing to do is junk the whole rule. If humans are to live sustainably on the Earth, the rule must be: Whoever is willing and able to live symbiotically with the land, belongs to that land, no matter how long they've been there or who their ancestors are, and those who are unable or unwilling to live such that the species diversity and soil fertility increase with time, must learn, and until they learn they must be contained — something no one has yet been able to do.

the world is divided into good/us and evil/them, and another is what I call the *happiness by elimination* myth. Bear with me while I explain it:

First you've got the very idea of "happiness," an alleged stable and pleasant state of being that we're supposed to strive for. Then you've got the idea that you achieve happiness by changing the external world, the world outside the "self" (which requires that in the first place you believe in "self" and "other," which I won't even get into). Finally you've got the idea that the required changes are negative, that you achieve happiness by identifying some part of your reality that is "bad" or "the problem" and eliminating it. Bizarre!

But we're still not at fascism, only at business-as-usual western civilized politics, where we want to eliminate poverty or government or war or the current president or whatever. Fascism goes farther: First, the whole thing becomes simplified and cartoonish — there's no tolerance for ambiguity or complexity. You know: "You're either with us or with the terrorists, bla bla bla." Second, it's all invested with strong primitive emotion. And third (and these "three" are really just different angles of one whole phenomenon), you've got what psychologists call group narcissism, which you can see at any nationalist rally or football game — where people powerfully emotionally identify with some vaguely understood collective abstraction that doesn't have much to do with their real lives.

Now, Arnold Schwarzenegger, as far as I can tell, is not strictly a fascist. He's the front man for a right wing conspiracy to channel even more wealth and influence to large corporations and the rich, and they are all taking advantage of the fascist tendencies of the American people.

Schwarzenegger won overwhelmingly — despite a split Republican vote in a historically liberal state — because he is the world's biggest star of fascist propaganda films, and thus the world's biggest human symbol of fascism since another Austrian lost WWII. The tendency to blur entertainment with reality is a weakness of humans everywhere, not just Americans, and most Californians who voted for Schwarzenegger did so because they were emotionally resonating with his movie characters and with the world of his movies, where reality is divided into good and evil and the good guy defeats the villain, who often says "oh, shit" just before being killed in a big explosion, and the elimination of evil makes everyone happy, and the film viewer feels strong primitive

emotions and a sense of identification with the symbol of good and the whole deadly ritual.

America has never been a nice country. Everything we have we took by force. But that's the way of all "successful" countries, and at least we used to sometimes do nice things, like the Bill of Rights, or antitrust legislation, or helping Europe after WWII. When did we slide from routine domination into fascism? And don't tell me it was the G.W. Bush presidency. That was just when American fascism got drunk and took its mask off. I can't prove it, but I suggest it happened in the late 1970's, with two events.

One was a film. Fascist propaganda is probably as old as civilization, thousands of years older than the Latin word *fascis*. The first fascist propaganda film might have been *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, but they didn't really get going until James Bond films. And then, all at once, with one film, they exploded. Of course I'm talking about *Star Wars*, which goes so far as to copy a famous Hitler rally in its final scene. After *Star Wars*, every American film that wanted to make a lot of money had to be a serious cartoon where the good guys violently destroy something bad to make everyone happy. And as the single giant star of those films, Arnold Schwarzenegger was practically destined to hold political office in fascist America.

The other event that plunged America into fascism was the popular reaction to Jimmy Carter's presidency. This has been mythologized as the "sweater speech," in which Carter allegedly wore a sweater and told people to turn their thermostats down, and his popularity plummeted. In fact he wore a sweater in all his speeches — to project a common man image — and he talked about personal energy conservation through his whole term. But this is what he said in his famous "Crisis of Confidence" speech in July 1979:

“. . . too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose." And a bit later: "We are at a turning point in our history. There are two paths to choose. One is a path I've warned about tonight, the path that leads to fragmentation and self-interest. Down that road lies a

Californians don't even speak English, or that immigrants are still dressing the way they did in Mexico, has no importance except to a racist.

2. White.

"White" is not a race. It's an elite class and culture whose meaning has changed many times to accommodate the needs of elitism and domination. In America, Irish, Italians, Jews, and others were once considered non-white, and were later invited to join the club, in exchange for their willingness to identify with the divisive and oppressive system.

George Washington's name among the Indians was Town Destroyer. As a "white" person, I'm supposed to identify with him, to lamely defend or justify him or at least feel apologetic for what "my" people did to those other people. I refuse! I identify with the Indians, and we want the land back! After all, my ancestors in the region now called "Europe" once lived much like American Indians, before they were violently conquered by the hierarchical, forest-cutting Indo-Europeans and later the Romans — who certainly believed themselves racially superior to the paler-skinned aliens, the impoverished barbarous northerners who flowed in and polluted the glorious city of Rome.

3. Immigration equals conquest.

The idea here is that moving into a land occupied by others by means of military aggression, massacring noncombatants, destroying villages and food sources, forcing people off the land, keeping them as slaves, sending them to concentration camps, assassinating their leaders, stamping out their language and culture — that this is morally and tactically equivalent to simply moving in next to them, keeping your own culture, and surviving.

This lie is carried by sloppy language, typically the word "invasion," an obscuring blur which makes the two things appear as one. Even Mexican immigrants are foolishly using the term "reconquista," as if their peaceful retaking of southwestern America (northern Mexico) is same as the military conquest of that region by the USA in 1846. If Canada had militarily invaded and conquered "southeastern Canada" (northeastern America) 150 years

meadow and digging up wild roots with your bare hands. The longer they can hold it together, the more they will go mad, and then probably follow the same path America is on now.

When lefties finally let go of their sterile socialist utopia and permit right-wingers to crash the system, they'll find themselves relevant again, with plenty of good work to do and the popular support to do it: releasing prisoners, canceling debts, undermining occupiers, exposing genocide, ostracizing psychopaths, legalizing poverty and homelessness, giving back the land, and generally enabling all life everywhere to build a trusting, loving system from the bottom up.

It's not going to be "paradise" or "eden" — it's going to be a mess! Technology and hierarchy will not go away — they'll just stop ruling the world. We're going to feel good not by hating things and removing them, but by adding things and accepting them, until we look back and this world seems like a padded cell. I can't wait!

Six Lies About Immigration¹³

1. Immigrants are not people.

Of course they never say this explicitly, but it saturates the subtext of anti-immigration arguments. I have yet to see an immigration critic show any evidence of compassion, of willingness or ability to see the other side. No one says, "Hey, if America were a desert and Mexico were a nation of showy wealth and higher wages, and I were desperately poor and had nothing to lose, I'd totally sneak in there — and I'd bring my culture with me!"

The dehumanization of immigrants is done through words — "hordes" "pouring" across the border, not people walking across — and through disparaging references to their culture, language, or race. The statement that "white" people will one day be a minority in America, or that some percentage of

mistaken idea of freedom, the right to grasp for ourselves some advantage over others. That path would be one of constant conflict between narrow interests ending in chaos and immobility."

It was probably too late, but I can tell the story that at that moment America really did hang in the balance. We could abandon consumerism, look into our hearts, and gradually move into peace and equality with the rest of the world. And incredibly, immediately after that speech, Carter rose in the polls. But then the media analysts jumped on him and accused him of criticizing and blaming the American people, and he went down for the last time, and our next president was a simple-minded tough-talking Hollywood actor and former governor of California. At that moment America decided to burn.

Carter's mistake was not his alleged pessimism but his optimism, his failure to see that his country was the abused child clutching the candy. We lost our soul and that candy is all they gave us in return, and we will not under any circumstances give it up. They'll have to pry it from our cold dead fingers. Not only that, but we have to keep getting more and more to keep forgetting our pain. In rejecting Carter we were saying to our leaders, who are really our followers: "Give us the fucking candy. We don't care what you have to do, and we don't want to know. You will stuff our bawling mouths with candy and fill our grasping hands with toys or we will tear your balls off." And they did.

Now, a quarter century later, the heat and air conditioning are at full blast, and no politician dares to question materialism, and there are more cars in America than drivers, many of them bloated gas-snorting monsters or even private versions of military vehicles. We have big cars, and big houses, and big TV's, and big heaps of food on our plates from industrialized farms that get more crowded and toxic to make room for our big yards, or if we don't have that stuff, we're working big hours at big-stress jobs to afford it. And our president is a psychopath who looks like the Marlboro man and talks like a movie action hero and lies to us constantly so we can feel good about ourselves while our country stomps over the whole world and brutally conquers and occupies the place with the most untapped oil. And we either cheer him on or we think it's all his fault and has nothing to do with us.

¹³ Originally published April 27, 2004 on <http://ranprieur.com/essays/liesimm.html>

Americans do not understand what's happening because we have demanded to not understand. We have demanded to not be shown the blackened and dismembered bodies in Afghanistan and Iraq, the screaming shit-smearing animals inside the factory farms, the sick, weary, frightened laborers manufacturing our nifty gadgets. But the shell of our ignorance is collapsing on us. The Iraqi people, not having grown up in a narcissistic fantasy land, are smarter than us and running circles around our techno-addled military. Our employers, obeying us as stockholders, are firing us to hire foreigners who will work for less because they're poorer than us because we've stolen from them. We've cut our own taxes so much that every state is broke and we're angry that they're closing offices and not fixing roads. Pretty soon we're going to have to either release a lot of prison inmates or kill them, and I'm glad I'm not in prison.

And we don't get it, because we couldn't stand to get it. We think it's some incomprehensible catastrophe, like an earthquake, not something we have explicitly over many years brought upon ourselves. We blame the politicians — except the right-wingers, who we exempt because they remind us of action heroes or maybe our fathers. Where, where is the bad guy we can kill to make us happy again? Yes, kill Gray Davis! "Terminate" him. We're not gonna take it!

Not that the Democrats are any better. They want to be better, but somehow they can't. Why are they so lifeless and timid? It's because when they're courageous and honest, like Dennis Kucinich or Cynthia McKinney, they are shuffled to the fringe or kicked out of office. The Democrats are holding a position in Nowhere Land. By definition they can't go as far right as the Republicans, but they can't go even one step in the other direction, and ask Americans to accept responsibility, to give up wealth, to consume less, to stop building bombs and prisons to kill and jail their troubles away, because then they would be committing Jimmy Carter suicide.

So Democrats have become what Republicans used to be: boring sensible people who want to cut down the trees, screw the poor, bully other countries, and do the will of megacorporations, but cautiously and in moderation, so the system doesn't crash. And they're losing! This proves not that "Republicans" are winning, but that the old-fashioned Republican position is obsolete.

So what's left? Say what you will about Americans — we've never been half-assed. And now millions of us are seeing what few of us can admit, even to ourselves. If we can't turn this train around, and we can't stop it, and we can't get off, the only thing to do is speed it up and run it off the tracks!

This explains the Schwarzenegger landslide — it's the biggest evidence yet of an alliance between the demonic and the desperate, between those who are running out of room to win and those who are running out of room to lose, between a drug addict's two desires to keep getting bigger highs and to die, between a muscle-bound attacker and a martial artist who isn't strong enough to block the blow but is clever enough to flow with it and pull the attacker off the tower, between those who want to "terminate" poor people and taxes and immigrants and liberals, and those who just want a big explosion to fucking blow this world to pieces.

Californians don't know it, but they have voted for the end of civilization. Not that Arnold can deliver it by himself. California doesn't even have an army, or else the people could demand that he go blow shit up somewhere for real to make them feel better. But he can drive the poor toward rioting, the power grids toward blackout, the sleepers toward awakening, and the elite deeper into their cocoons of oblivion. And he's only one of thousands of drivers, all over the world, who are steering us with merciful quickness into the crash.

There is no other way out, and there never has been. Civilization has no reverse gear and no brakes. Even the Green Party, at 2% of the vote, has not suggested letting the farmlands go back to wilderness and turning lawns and parking lots into gardens, but that's the only mode of human life on earth that's sustainable, and I'm being optimistic about the gardens. I'd love for us to make the transition willingly and painlessly, to use voluntary birth control to steadily reduce our population, to dismantle the weapons and breach the dams and feed the hungry on all locally-grown produce. But then, to copy a phrase from Jon Stewart, what would we do about the monkeys? Because if all that happened, monkeys would be flying out of our butts.

What about Europe? Haven't they followed Jimmy Carter's path? Aren't they already shaping a peaceful sustainable future? Yes — if they were robots. But they're human animals, and mag-lev trains and solar panels and hydroponic farms cannot take the place of running through the woods and lying in a sunny