

CHAPTER ONE

Shake Yourself From Sleep

I CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING UP TO THE AGE OF THREE. Some people say they can, but I'm not so sure — it's surprising how easy something said about you or a photograph in an album can become embedded as a "memory." The first real memory I have, rather than one replicated by Kodak, was of a rainstorm.

Between the ages of two and eighteen I lived in the English seaside town of Margate. In the first ten years or so of our time there — an exquisitely blissful time of life when worrying was something other people did — we ran first a guest house and then a slightly more grandly titled "hotel." The guest house, one of hundreds of small and medium-sized accommodations that served the once teeming masses of East Kent holidaymakers, was located on one of the many streets that run perpendicular to the oceanfront road, leading inland toward the main shopping street. Behind our modest establishment was a concrete yard in which stood a small motor home. There may have been more to it than that, but details often get forgotten when you are three. The occasion is lost to me, but some kind of late-night party was taking place and for the sake of a good night's sleep, I had been moved, along with my older sister, into the motor home. Sleep didn't pass over me like the shadow of a cloud crossing the evening sun; this night the rain was pouring down, drumming a mighty tattoo upon the metallic roof. Things start to become unclear, but at some point I must have complained of a headache, for which I was administered a paracetamol¹ tablet — maybe just a half. Shortly after, sleep took me and the memory faded.

It's very rare that I get headaches, and usually nothing that a night's sleep can't resolve (with a slight sense of irony); nevertheless, when one does start really punching its way through my anterior cortex, paracetamol is my analgesic of choice. I can't honestly say that the rainy night in the caravan is the reason for this, but someone in the world of advertising can probably give me an opening here. Let's just say the way we perceive the world, and subsequently behave in it, is dominated by the messages we receive in our developmental years:

It is relatively easy for producers and retailers to begin a relationship with children as future consumers.... One of the basic behaviours parents teach children is to go into the marketplace and satisfy their needs through certain products and brands. In effect, children learn to find need-satisfying objects and stick with them.²

Make of that what you will, and I'm sure you already have your own opinions on the power of advertising, but for anyone who sees commercials as a fairly harmless enterprise — a sort of wallpaper behind the furniture of television programs — never forget that advertising exists to make people want things they otherwise would not have bought. To put it another way: advertising creates need out of nothing.

There is, of course, a corollary of global proportions to the dancing pixels on the television screen, the glowing billboards that flit-flit-flit past as you ride the escalator, the glossy sheets that fall from the pages of the newspaper and in your mailbox: a corollary of death that comes to the victim as easily as passing a new iPhone through the bright red beams of a barcode reader. Perhaps a little twinge of anguish as your bank balance clicks downward and into barcode-scanner red. Maybe even the tiny recognition that the person who assembled your purchase lies sprawled in the suicide nets that a factory in China installed to prevent further public embarrassment after a high number of employee suicides drew media attention.

How nice of them to save us from too much guilt.

By the time you read this, the iPhone might seem as quaint as the Walkman, the ZX Spectrum or the Raleigh Grifter: at least if you grew up in the 1970s in the same kind of environment as I did. Take a couple of moments to replace these with favorite items from your youth; then disassociate yourself from them so they just became objects from someone else's past — it's difficult, isn't it? The memories ooze through: making up

compilation tapes to listen to on the bus, writing adventure games in Basic that would never be completed, pulling half-hearted wheelies along the beach, taking care not to startle too many old ladies. The bitter white tablet that eased my headache, probably through the warm blanket of placebo, takes its place on that treadmill that is your civilized life.

I had a Walkman, a ZX Spectrum, a Raleigh Grifter, because that's what people had at the time — because that's what was advertised and gradually, through a process of mental osmosis, became a necessary cultural artifact. But I never had a DAT player, a Commodore 64 or a Muddy Fox BMX. For me, those things hold memories but little meaning. Alliance to a particular item is a personal thing; in commerce it drives rivalries between companies and increases sales, breeding brand loyalty that is the lodestone of consumer success. Once you have brand loyalty — and what a powerful cultural grip *that* is — then you have the consumer by the balls (metaphorical or otherwise), and thus iPod becomes iPhone becomes iPad becomes iLife.

And, yes, iLife does exist.

Replace toys and gadgets with clothing, home furnishings, places to live, movies to see, food to eat, jobs to do, parties to vote for, lifestyles to embrace — the whole construct of civilized life is a series of discrete packages that may change their contents from time to time, but as entities they are so fundamental to modern culture that without them we feel as if we may as well not exist. From the first blip on the TV screen we experience as babies we have been mentally programmed: the only escapes we have in the civilized world are dreamless sleep — and death.



There are times in life when you have to risk offending someone. Where I live now there is a fairly high proportion of church-goers compared to the town we moved away from in 2010. Religiously it doesn't compare with anything like a typical southern US town, and is positively heathen if viewed alongside Tehran, Manila or Salt Lake City (although I can't see the occupants of these three places ever coming to an agreement over what "heathen" means), but nonetheless the question of religion is discreetly shooed to the back of the room as soon as it is raised, because I don't actually have any. Pushed as to whether I would be attending a church service, for instance, I may say, "No, I'm not religious at all," and perhaps sense a thin veil falling between the questioner and me. That veil becomes more akin to a fortified security fence with barbed wire and snipers in a place where religion is ... well, the religion.

I can steer clear of Tehran, Manila and Salt Lake City pretty easily, but mention that you aren't a Consumer or a Voter or a Citizen just about anywhere in the industrialized world, and the snipers will be quietly releasing the safety catches. And so, perhaps with the opening salvo of this book, and certainly in the next few sections, most people reading this will not exactly be sympathetic to what I have to say.

The gunman's call for draconian measures to be implemented to lower global population and destroy civilization echoes the eco-fascist propaganda of people like author and environmentalist Keith Farnish, who in a recent book called for acts of sabotage and environmental terrorism in blowing up dams and demolishing cities in order to return the planet to the agrarian age.

"The only way to prevent global ecological collapse and thus ensure the survival of humanity is to rid the world of Industrial Civilization," writes Farnish in the book, adding that "people will die in huge numbers when civilization collapses". Farnish's call for violence, "razing cities to the ground, blowing up dams" provides a deadly blueprint for nutcases like Lee to follow.

Farnish explains his desire to see rampant population reduction in the name of saving the planet, with rhetoric chillingly similar to that contained in Lee's online screed.³

Quite a dramatic interpretation of what I actually wrote, but the message here is clear: "Don't mess with our way of life." Now that's odd because the writer, Paul Joseph Watson, would be among the first to complain about anything that suppresses human liberty — like corporations telling people what to eat and how to dress, perhaps — but as a 28-year-old, living in a large English city, brought up in an era when greed was most definitely good, Watson expresses a view that mirrors the feelings of virtually every politician, every corporate executive and close to every ordinary human being who has felt the irresistible pull of consumerism in the formative years. People don't like to hear that almost everything they have ever believed in is wrong, and they will do everything in their power to retain those beliefs.

Which makes me a heretic, at best.

But I suspect you have got this far because part of you thinks there is more to making the world a good place to live in than buying the right brand of shoes. You might think politicians don't have our best interests at

heart when they say that businesses need the freedom to grow, or that Bill Gates's reason for promoting genetically modified food is perhaps not because he can't stand to see people go hungry or that Al Gore is not entirely devoted to the idea of reducing greenhouse gases to the kind of levels that would actually stabilize the climate.

It doesn't take much of an effort to be a cynic; but to *really* question everything you may have previously held as true is, for most civilized people, a step too far. It challenges your loyalties. It denies your personal experiences. It makes a mockery of who you think you are.

It undermines you.

I apologize for the inconvenience, but all I want to show you is the truth — and that is most definitely the last time Al Gore will be playing a part in this story.

Undermining in Context

Some time ago I wrote a book called *Time's Up!*, which still underpins everything I have subsequently written, including this book. The three primary theses in *Time's Up!* can be summarized as follows (if you need a more detailed explanation then please refer to the book or its online equivalent):⁴

- 1) Because the ultimate purpose of all life forms, including human beings, is to continue their genetic line, and all we can ever know or care about is from the point of view of a human being, What Matters Is What Matters to Us.
- 2) To appreciate the level of threat that global environmental changes are posing to the continuation of humanity, and that it is the acts of a certain type of human being — Civilized Humans — that have brought about that threat, we have to Connect with ourselves, the people we depend upon, and the natural ecosystems that support our existence.
- 3) Myriad forces exist to protect Industrial Civilization — the ultimate killing machine — from human beings becoming Connected. These forces, which I have named the Tools of Disconnection, have to be undermined in order to allow us to Connect and thus make possible the continuation of humanity.

An enormous amount of cultural suspension is required to take all of that at face value. However, we have to start somewhere: in *Time's Up!* the assumption was that the reader accepted human emissions of greenhouse gases being the cause of accelerated climate change, alongside the many

other environmental impacts related to civilized human activity. That was a big enough task; this is a veritable leap of faith for which I can make no apologies. We know where we are and we have to start accepting a few home truths.



I want to spend a few moments discussing how undermining fits into the bigger picture of retaining a properly functioning global ecosystem, and thus helping to ensure the human species endures for the foreseeable future. The first thing to say is that *the continuation of the human race is incompatible with Industrial Civilization remaining on the Earth*. For sure there may be the odd civilization popping up here and there, but even the Roman Empire was little threat to the global ecosystem — whereas Industrial Civilization is taking the ecosystem down, and taking humanity with it.

Second, it's important to understand that civilization itself is not going to be hanging around for a great deal longer, regardless of how much we go about freeing people's minds so they might assist with the dismantling process. Peak oil isn't just around the corner; it is back there in the taillights, and we're driving over the cliff. As it becomes more difficult to maintain supplies of cheap and plentiful fossil energy, the engine of industry will start to sputter; before long entire chains of infrastructure will conk out. Before that even, the industrial food system will become something of an anachronism — it will no longer be possible to produce food on an epic industrial scale; and the food that is produced will price most people out of the market. Cities that rely on the importation of energy and food will feel like besieged monoliths of a burned-out age. The suburbs will have to become immobile food producers or its inhabitants will starve. The systems of global finance, mass communications, travel and even political power will operate along narrower and narrower pathways until the traffic, and the reach of that power, becomes little more than a symbolic activity.

All of that will happen, and we will go down with it, because we will still be devoted to the industrial system we so depend upon for everything we currently hold dear.

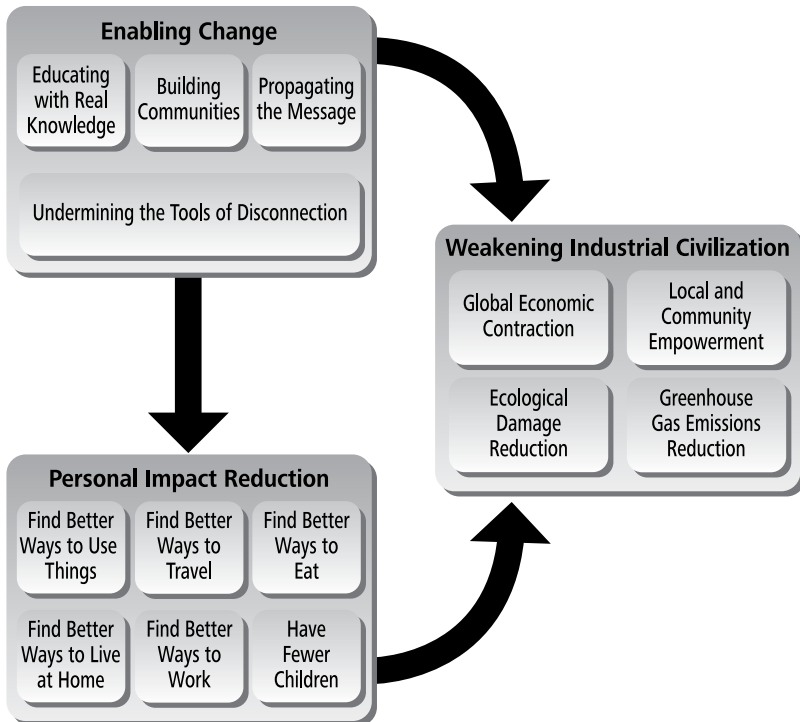
We will not let this culture go, and we will die to defend it — literally.

Alternatively, we could hollow out and allow the empty shell of Industrial Civilization to collapse under its own weight. The illustration below gives one example of how this process could work, albeit in a simplified way.

The three large boxes are only representations of different aspects of creating a viable future. As Derrick Jensen has said on countless occasions with reference to the work of activists, carers, artists, thinkers, writers, homemakers, community builders and everyone else in the milieu of a functioning society, “We need it all.” But for the purposes of building some kind of guiding model for undermining, the three boxes will do.

Enabling Change

This is where things have to start. We cannot assume there is any momentum for real change, and I think that is a fair assumption based on the complete lack of genuine progress toward a deindustrialized, non-destructive future made since the beginning of the modern environmental movement. So, to highlight the obvious major task, *undermining* is the key in enabling the change to take place, and that is predominantly what this book is about. Fitting around and complementing the undermining process are three things that have to happen, regardless of any undermining that is taking place.



Educating with Real Knowledge is about taking charge of how knowledge is used in society and what knowledge is considered relevant moving forward. I outlined some of these key aspects, or skills, in the final chapter of *Time's Up!* The emphasis on the practical application of this knowledge cannot be made strongly enough. Authors such as Ran Prieur and Sharon Astyk take this to levels I will not attempt to duplicate here.

Building Communities is both a practical and a psychological process. There are elements of community building in many of the chapters later in this book, as strengthening community is undoubtedly one of the key ways the industrial system can be undermined, as well as reducing the physical damage to the natural environment. I strongly recommend the works of Alastair McIntosh as primers in this area.

Propagating the Message is the effective communication of the information necessary to start off and maintain momentum in effecting change. Whatever medium is used — but, as we will see, some media are less subject to interference than others — we have to remain “on message,” as hackneyed and overused a phrase this may be. Change the message too much and the impact of any work carried out so far could be fatally wounded, even if these changes may seem to be well-meaning and accommodating at the time.

Personal Impact Reduction

This aspect of the model contains six things that, taken together, can change both the physical impact of an individual (and by extension the family and the community in which that individual lives) and the psychological makeup of everyone who makes a serious effort to perform such changes. The six items are not exhaustive in any sense, but they represent the kinds of changes we will all have to make — at least in the short and medium term — in order to take the pressure off the already damaged ecosystem and, as we will see later, clog up the wheels of the industrial machine. As the large arrow indicates, such change cannot happen on a significant scale without the Enabling process. Again, I have written about this at length in my first book, but here I summarize in just six sentences:⁵

Find better ways to Use Things: Reduce, repair, reuse, in that order, with the emphasis being on the absolute reduction of the number, volume and complexity of the things you are looking to acquire.

Find better ways to Travel: Transport is a major contributor to environmental degradation and the breakup of communities

so, following up on the three Rs, reduce the distance and the frequency of all journeys, along with the energy intensity of the methods used to travel.

Find better ways to Eat: Employ a combination of reducing the trophic level of what you eat (stay low on the food chain), reducing dependence on the industrial agricultural and food processing system, and using food production methods close to those in nature.

Find better ways to Live at Home: Your home is also a major cause of environmental degradation both directly (energy and land use) and indirectly (construction materials), so both of these areas need to be tackled, but without simply transferring the impact from direct to indirect (e.g., using a solar panel to produce the same amount of electricity as always).

Find better ways to Work: This will be addressed at length later on, but as a starter, consider that working in the industrial machine makes you a party to both disconnection and to perpetuation of the power of the system.

Have Fewer Children: Or, more specifically, have fewer high-consumption children; the impact of population is a combination of absolute numbers and the way those children, and subsequently adults, live. This may not be as critical a factor in the longer term.

Aside from the direct effects of carrying through these changes, there is also the small matter of preparing for what is to come later; as Carolyn Baker writes in *Sacred Demise*, “In my opinion, collapse will become psychologically intolerable for those who have no inkling of it, who are emotionally tethered to possessions, status, careers, and lifestyles that provide identity and security.”

By refusing to follow the strictures of the industrial world in terms of consumption, travel, lifestyle, career, etc., you are already on your way to coping better with whatever is likely to happen in the future.

Weakening Industrial Civilization

Both of the previous areas feed into the weakening of the industrial system, and thus the creation of a longer-term positive outcome for humanity and the wider global environment. The four items in this area are fairly loose, but their positions in the box (upper and lower halves) reflect the more

likely domino effects of, respectively, Enabling Change and Personal Impact Reduction. There is a *feedback loop* in effect here, although for simplicity I have not included it on the diagram. With Industrial Civilization being weakened, the impact of Enabling Change becomes more pronounced, and thus the amount of Personal Impact Reduction can be increased, both leading to a further increasingly rapid weakening of Industrial Civilization. Anyone who doubts the efficacy of undermining as a method of creating radical change should consider this carefully.

This is a powerful feedback effect; one that has the potential to kick in very rapidly indeed.

At this point you might begin to feel a little wary of taking part in the undermining process: after all, how comfortable do you feel committing to something that spells the end of the way of life you have not only become accustomed to, but dependent upon? So here's the conundrum: you can have a few decades of pretending everything is going to be fine, trying to ignore the destruction being wrought on the planet and the people that fuel the industrial system, and living in a way that feels comfortable to you; or you can accept that things are going to change anyway, but the sooner the system is dismantled, the better the chances of a long-term future for the human race. Just to add to this, the rate and impact of change is controllable to a certain extent because as the industrial system becomes weaker, and the aforementioned peak oil (and peaks in other energy sources such as natural gas, coal, uranium and — tragically — large rivers) kicks in, globalization will become a thing of the past. Industrial Civilization won't so much contract as break into discrete parts, some more self-sufficient than others, but all weakened to such an extent that reassembly cannot possibly take place. Thus, your efforts in undermining the system will resolve down to the part of the system you exist within — or, if you are smart, are just keeping a watchful eye on and a helping hand in, while edging further and further away from it.

I can't find a better person to describe this situation than Tim Bennett, writer and director of what I consider to be the most important movie ever made:

We can wait for the train to crash on its own and hope that it doesn't kill us, and everything else. But with the children grown, perhaps we can come together and decide to dismantle, joyfully and with conscious intent, the rusty and dangerous old swing-set of a culture that no longer serves us.

This may seem an impossible task. But if the alternative is extinction, then we have nothing to lose.

We humans once knew how to live on this planet. A few still do. And that's the good news. It can be done. We can do way, way better than Empire.

I do not know if I will survive the crash of industrial civilization or the impacts of the climate change that that civilization has unleashed. I do know this: I have a choice about how I meet it. I have a choice. We have a choice.

I can meet it with a burger in my hand, a French fry in my mouth, and a cold drink spilling onto my jeans. Or I can meet it with consciousness, integrity, and the sense of purpose that is my birthright. I can meet it on the far side of initiation, a mature and related member of the community of life, standing tall, doing my best to protect and serve this Earth that I love.

This is the course I've chosen.⁶

Connection

A state of Connection is necessary to survive planet Earth. This state is not some discrete entity that can be sketched out on a mind map or project plan — though I can well imagine some people in the Sierra Club taking on “Project Connection” with gusto and proceeding to brainstorm all the great ways we can be connected to nature. It defies such crude pigeonholing, occupying instead the part of our natural selves the civilized world refuses to acknowledge: the continuum. I have described this continuum in various ways in the past, but a simple phrase that has found its niche in popular song for at least the past four decades keeps coming back to me: “It all comes round again.”

Essentially, what you do will eventually come back to you. If what you do is inherently destructive, then however much you try and ignore it, cover it up, distract from it or even pretend it is a good thing, that destruction will come back at, if not you personally, someone, somewhere down the line. A Connected state allows us to see — no, that is too simple — it allows us to *know* that continuum. It may have taken climate scientists many decades to establish the true link between emissions and climate change, but it doesn't take a host of scientists to tell you that introducing a technological infrastructure to a desert, extracting brown tarry emulsion from deep below that desert, transporting it to a place several time zones away, exposing it to high temperatures in vast cylinders and extracting the individual

components of that formerly homogenous mass in order for them to be used in products as diverse as aircraft, trucks and ships, plastics and fabrics, inks and road surfaces — all of this is bound to have a destructive impact in the mind of the connected individual.

You don't need to analyze it; it's obvious.⁷

It is no coincidence that Connection itself is a continuum, spanning the arc across which cling the individual, the community or clan, the wider tribal entity (but, significantly, not a single civilization), the human diaspora, the entire conscious web that links all sentient organisms together and again the individual that seems to hold this collective awareness somewhere inside.

Other connections exist that may seem trivial in comparison but are no less important in the scope of humanity's great adventure. While the corporate world is hell-bent on homogenizing every aspect of human culture and simultaneously molding the symbols of humanity into nothing but swooshes, arches, four-note jingles and spotlit edifices; that nagging part of our mind keeps asking, Who am I? For a victim of Industrial Civilization, such a question is easily answered if you wear Nike, eat at McDonalds, use Intel processors and watch Fox News. You are what you wear, eat, use and watch: how elegantly the phalanx of consumer symbols slots into the modern psyche. Then again, can such a significant and deeply personal question really be answered by a machine?

Writing on the cusp of the nineteenth century in the Scottish border county of Selkirkshire, Sir Walter Scott seems to suggest we are nothing without a connection to place:

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!⁸

We need a homeland, a native land, a place that is special to us. Whether its meaning lies in the people we share it with, the memories it holds for us or the way it feeds, waters and protects us, there is — somewhere — a place we are connected to. A connection we call "Home." No artifacts of the consumer lifestyle are an adequate substitute for such a vital, personal connection.

Whether it is ecological, cultural, spiritual or something indefinable that tugs at the soul, at whatever scale of humanity we consider, Connection is always present; and when something is so ubiquitous,⁹ but without any apparent disruptive force creating these conditions, then it must be necessary for our continued existence.



Collapse and Connection

BY CAROLYN BAKER

Inherent in the paradigm of Industrial Civilization is the notion of separation. Humans, it is believed, are separate from the Earth community, from each other, and from their own bodies. Because they are “separate,” they are by definition in competition for resources and anything that brings pleasure or well being. From the separation assumption issues a distorted notion of Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” in the form of social Darwinism. Few of us understand how firmly the separation assumption has become embedded in our psyches.

However, in a chaotic world of endings, unravelling, catastrophe, or protracted demise, relationship will be a pivotal issue. For this reason, the survivalist mentality which purports to “go it alone” with an “every man for himself” attitude, not only will not serve those who embrace it, but will profoundly put their physical survival at risk. For our well being, we will absolutely require connection with other human beings in times of chaos and crisis. Therefore, cultivating a broader perspective of relationship in advance of the coming chaos may be exceedingly useful in learning how to navigate relationship challenges in the future — challenges on which our survival may depend.

Not only will we be compelled to relate differently to humans, but to all beings in the non-human world as well. Only as we begin to read the survival manuals that trees, stars, insects and birds have written for us will our species be spared. The very “pests” that we resent as unhygienic or annoying may, in fact, save our lives. One year ago, the honey bees used to circle around me on warm days when I ate my lunch outside under the trees, sitting on the grass. Today, I sit under the same trees on the same grass, but the honey bees are gone. No one seems to be able to tell us why. Maybe it’s time to ask the bees to tell us why.

If we recall our hunter-gatherer ancestors, we realize that they held a deeply intimate relationship with nature; in fact, their lives depended on that relationship. Our indigenous ancestors have revealed unequivocally that they could not survive without a deeply personal connection with nature. The Lakota gave us the beautiful expression *Mitakuye Oyasin* or “all my relations” — meaning that we are all related to every member of the non-human as well as human world. Native peoples often speak of “standing people” (trees), “fish people”, or “stone people”; as if trees, fish and rocks are persons to be communed with, not objects to be possessed.

Today, we live in civilized societies that dominate nature, and we have been taught that we need not bother communing with it. But, no matter how estranged

we may feel from nature, something in our ancient memory recalls our intimacy with it. Therefore everything we need to restore our connection with nature is already available to us.¹⁰

Disconnection

So, if Connection is necessary to our existence, how then can we bring ourselves to sacrifice a pristine forest for a shopping mall?

Recently, while sailing north on the Patuxent River — her banks dark with vegetation where just a few months ago there were only naked boughs — I saw a tall plume of black smoke rising over the forest to the east against an otherwise clear blue sky. As soon as I could gain moorings and secure my boat, I drove to find the source of this disturbing sight.

In barely five miles, I came upon a scene of mechanized destruction which drew an involuntary cry of disappointment from me. A parcel of once-rolling forest was being destroyed.

The fires I witnessed from the Patuxent were still pluming skyward later in the day, as heavy grading equipment began to level the topography, taking away nature's landscape, sculpted over the last hundreds of thousands of years to turn it into an anchor supermarket with eight accessory stores totaling 100,000 square feet — plus acres of impervious tarmac paving.¹¹

Civilization encourages us to shut the door, shut the windows, shut the blinds, shut our minds from the reality of the world. The connected world is still going on out there, but we would rather let the caustic rain of civilization wash it away and supplant it with “connections” that have been manufactured to keep us in our place. In our disconnected lives we are made to feel safe, even though we are on the edge of catastrophe; we are made to enjoy what we do, even though we have forgotten what joy feels like; we are made to experience self-worth, even though we have become worthless; we are made to feel in control, even though we have no control at all. The system has us where it wants us. And now it can use all of us like the metaphorical batteries and cogs that signify our labor and our spending, and our naive compliance in which we live our synthetic lives, from the plastic toys we grasp as babies to the flickering, energy-sapping screens that fix our attention on the advertisers' world, from the blacktop roads we populate in countless streams of metal caskets with wheels on the way to and from our designated places of valued employment, to the offices and factories and supermarkets and call centers where we spend a third of our

lives operating in order to keep the machine spinning, in order that we can be given currency that we, in our docility, reinsert into the system so it can keep growing, and taking, and killing everything it is able to reach.

And when we feel weary, we take a packaged, predetermined vacation. And when we feel hungry, we eat a packaged, predetermined meal. And when we feel bored, we go to a packaged, predetermined slice of entertainment. And when we are of no more use to the system, we are retired — and only then do we, in the moments of reflection we never had time for during our urgent “productive” years, think about what we could have been had the system not taken us at such an early age. We have become, in effect, an entirely new subspecies — for although our genetic DNA is unchanged from pre-industrial times, our *cultural* DNA is far removed from that of any other group, tribe or society that ever walked the Earth prior to the emergence of this rapacious version of a human being. *Homo sapiens sapiens* is a connected species. *Homo sapiens civilis* has had the connections ripped away from it.

With such a massive upheaval in the way humanity behaves and, consequently, the way we (refuse to) interact with the rest of life, that cultural DNA takes on a significance far beyond, say, finding a new way to extract food from forest plant matter or being fleet of foot across the grasslands of Africa. Civilization’s cultural imbalance with the rest of life has created — at least in our heads — something entirely separate from the pantheon of living things. Perhaps the term *subspecies* was far too modest; after all we were proud enough to add a second *sapiens* to our title, simply because we wanted to feel good. Wouldn’t it be much simpler just to hug a tree?

Fuck the trees.

How many channels have *they* got? How many gigabytes can *they* store? How much money can you make from them?

That’s more like it. You see, in the civilized mindset it was easy to value the tree: all we had to do was think about money, and everything else slotted neatly into place. How much money can civilization make from a tree? It depends how many it cuts down — and it’s not just the money from the wood, for that is a pittance compared to the money civilization could make from an absence of trees. The teeth of the chain cut into the arboreal flesh one last time, leaving a glorious space for — what do you want? A new parking lot, an out-of-town retail park, a blockade of oil palms, a herd of grazing cattle, thousands of acres of soybeans, an open pit coal mine, a toxic sludge lake; a city or two ...