

## ELECTRIC WORLD

We, the human species, began to make a world the way we wanted a long time ago. Probably ten thousand or more years ago. For most of those thousands of years our world sat on top of the natural world with difficulties, but without destroying too much of the natural world. It was in the last hundred or so years that we really took off, eventually leading to today's human world that is actively destroying the natural world of this planet. We invented more and bigger machines that could cut an acre of trees in an hour, and take the top of a mountain in a day. We all know that, of course, and we all know that because of the damage that we have done, and are doing, the planet is talking back at us with global warming, now climate change.

The other day, I remember it was unusually hot and unpleasant outside, I had vague thoughts of having to get air conditioning. I have lived in Hawai'i for more than forty years, more than half my life, and it never occurred to anybody to need air conditioning, Hawai'i is known for its pleasant climate. Now we have changed: most new houses are designed for air conditioning.

Suddenly it hit me that although I try very consciously and consistently to reduce my needs, and live as simply as I possible can, nevertheless I am dependent on electricity. I have changed all my light bulbs to those spiral things, I turn my water heater on a few minutes before taking a shower, and turn it off immediately after. I do a wash every two weeks, never had a dryer. But I have a computer, and although it is advertised as stingy with power, it is dependent on electricity. I cook on an electric hot plate (I don't have a stove). I have a refrigerator, the smallest I could find, but it is on more often than not I sometimes think. Without a refrigerator I would have to entirely change my eating habits. I have a wonderful water kettle, French, that I have had for ten years; it turns itself off when the water boils. How would I make tea five, six times a day without it?

I don't use much gasoline — petrol, benzine — because my little car is fairly economical compared to most enormous cars around here. But the gasoline pump depends on electricity. The stores where I buy food once a week or every other week are air conditioned and full of freezers, all powered by electricity.

We are finally beginning to realize that "oil" is a problem. In America the problem is not so much the use of oil, but the fact that we have to buy it from other countries. Our government(s) waged two wars to assure our continuing presence in the part of the world where much of the oil we use has to come from. Now we are talking about alternative fuels. Ethanol, or palm oil for so-called bio-fuel for bio-diesel. Huge rain forests have been and continue to be erased to plant thousands of square miles of palm oil. But much of whatever oil we use goes to making electricity. A modern city is unthinkable any more without a sea of colored light at night. Or we create entire industries, using electricity to make solar panels that make electricity from sunlight. Or windmills that make electricity.

This world we have created for ourselves could not survive without electricity.

Could se survive without electricity?

robert wolff, 1 june 2009