

how much has not changed

What good, wonderful, impressive, creative products have we humans brought to this planet? The earliest art we know is found in caves where humans, a few thousand years ago, painted the world they saw. They made pictures of animals. And handprints that perhaps were the signature of the artists, 'I was here', I made this. For ages art was a very human expression of what we saw around us.

Then art became an expression of what we now call religion, we painted what we felt was around us, not visible perhaps, but there anyway. What occupied artists was the beauty we found in our gods, or in those we revere, as well as the awe we felt for the gods we feared. For more ages we painted and sculpted and built temples to express our kinship with what we saw in our existence that was eternal, larger than human, incomprehensible. Scientists have decided that among the oldest findings of humans was burials with objects in them. Of course we cannot know what they meant to humans thousands of years ago, but somehow we decided it was a sign that even then we believed there was a hereafter, therefore earliest man had an idea of the divine. We still do not really know what the pyramids in Egypt are, other than burial markers. But if that is what they were, why seal the entrance so that nobody could get in. We did get in, in the twentieth century, and then also knew that some of them had been entered before and robbed.

Today we revere 'science', a way of seeing that promises that nothing is incomprehensible any more, that with time and observation everything can be measured and described and (we think) therefore understood.

In order to observe what is, we invented instruments, machines. And as children with new toys, as soon as we can do something, we do it. We do not question the consequences of using a bulldozer, we have no thought for what might happen if we cut trees that took a few hundred years to mature in order to make furniture. We divert rivers, blow up mountains. We 'test' atomic devices by blowing up islands, with very little thought for the radioactivity our bombs blow around. It is only after we experiment that other scientists observe and measure and tell us that we have gone too far. But the deed is done.

We have made over the world in our image. We have made a world that is man-made, every tree is planted, every water run-off is planned, food is grown in neat rows to make it easier for monster machines to tend and harvest and process our food.

Perhaps to counteract the effect so much very human humanity has on us, we are rediscovering that behind the materialistic mask we are spiritual beings. We may have declared God dead in the early part of this century, but we are re-discovering other dimensions that holy men knew in the past, when the planet was another world. And by learning from a few old men who remember other times, before the onslaught of so much humanity, we distill a few truths which we share with one and all at workshops.

The so-called New Age Movement gives us a new hubris. The ever-increasing number of spiritual teachers and seers does not pay much attention to the vanishing resources of the earth, perhaps because its followers think that we, as spiritual beings, do not need the physical. Our destiny, they say, is above the earth, in another dimension. Hundreds, probably thousands of New Age sages travel the world to find elders to reveal to them what humans have always known until modern man forgot. Aren't we stealing? Workshop leaders travel to Peru to interview a medicine man through an interpreter. They learn a few words, ideas, practices. perhaps a new drug. Back home they give workshops that cost \$1500 for a weekend. The medicine man may have gotten a polaroid picture of himself and a few beads. Isn't that what you give to Indians?

This new — or newly rediscovered — spirituality is given and received as a new way to

feel good. Workshops are bursting with 'positive' energy designed to make us feel good. As long as we feel good about ourselves, about our ability to feel spiritual truths (again), what is happening to the world's other species cannot possibly be all that bad. Blithely we say, Well, maybe we have to go through some bad times, but... whatever form of deliverance you prefer. In true spirituality, we are assured, nothing is impossible. An otherwise smart woman told me in all earnest that "angels can grow an entire rainforest in a night."

I hear your groans of protest, your rejection of my negativity — the ultimate sin in this age of denial. Do we really believe that we need not worry, that a special angel will regrow an entire mature rain forest in one night? We should not worry about global warming, climate change. Someone, somehow, the stars, suddenly a new consciousness will sweep the earth clean and whole.

Years ago I thought I knew what 'spiritual' meant. Now I am not sure. To me whatever we may be, we are of this earth. Whatever is unique about us, is uniquely of this earth. I find it very hard to accept that I am different from the rest of creation. I am supposed to be more, because I have magical experiences, because I sometimes know how to invent and then make magical machines that do magical things. Yes, I can talk better than a dog, but a dog smells 60 times more nuances than I can. Maybe I can think about myself thinking, but the least beetle is 'aware', after all it maneuvers very well in its environment. I can remember, but even cells have memory.

We, humans, almost certainly were able to evolve because of multiple challenges from our environments. Civilization has been around only a few thousand years, a small fraction of the time humans have been on this earth. Maybe what we call 'civilization' is an experiment, a dead end of evolution. Perhaps when we have civilized our environment to such an extent that no challenges are left, we must seek challenges within civilization — is that what makes our cities more dangerous than any jungle ever was? The challenges that tested our survival skills in the Wild now come from within our human societies. Or, when we shall have eradicated all non-human predators, the laws of creation will raise predators from within our species. When we have eradicated naturally evolving differentiation — by severely reducing the number of species — differentiation will occur within the human species. Who knows what will happen... At present man is at war with nature, we are in the process of forcefully reducing the richness of Life itself.

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Studies have found that for a given area (say, 4000 square miles (the area of this island) the number of plant and animal species on an island is half the number of plants and animals in the same area of, say, California.

Diversity of Life determines viability. Island ecologies are more fragile than mainland ecologies. When we cut up, say, a rain forest, with roads and other 20th-century developments, the remaining 'islands' of wild life almost immediately are half as rich and varied as the original ecology — and therefore twice as vulnerable.

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The latest scam on this island is a new irradiation plant on this island, which will make it possible for us to grow exotic tropical fruit and make a fortune selling these irradiated fruit

to all the world, I cannot believe what I am hearing. Today there are very few people on this island who grow exotic tropical fruit, and even if Californians would buy irradiated tropical fruit from Hawai'i, we do not have any to sell — and it takes many years for most tropical fruit trees to mature. Maybe we can sell papayas, but surely the people who promote this Irradiation Plant know that we could not sell irradiating anything to Japan or Europe, and probably not to California. And then what? What are we going to do with the lump of radioactive stuff that will stay dangerous for the next 50,000 years?

But the Irradiation Plant is a project of the local government and big business. Why is it that big business cannot see further than a fiscal year? Who will take care of the radioactive material after this government and this big business is long gone?

Why is it that the only projects we can think of — and approve — are projects that destroy the environment? The fragile environment of this island needs to be cherished, carefully nurtured, not 'used'. Our resources are people, human beings with hearts as well as heads — not our Mother Earth, here the Lady Pele, the goddess of volcanoes, lava, and so the goddess of creation and destruction.

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A few years ago the United States population was 6% of the total population of the world, and we used 60% of the world's resources. Today Americans are between 4 and 5% of the total world population — yet we have more than half of all the lawyers in the world, we still have half the telephones in the world, we use twice the energy per person that Western European populations do, 60 times as much energy per person as a citizen of India.

In this country recycling is successful only in large cities, because the way our society is organized, any enterprise has to be profitable first, ecologically sound second. Unless someone can make a profit, nobody will want your used glass, or newspapers.

I do not buy a newspaper because there is no way to recycle that paper — but the amount of junk mail I get is enormous and I cannot control that. In this country we use 660 pounds of pulpwood (in the form of paper and cardboard), per person per year. Japanese citizens use twice that much. Each Englishman uses 60 pounds of pulpwood per person. In so-called Third World Countries the use of pulpwood is about 11 pounds per person per year. Wood for paper is mostly 'soft wood', grown in northern latitudes. In the Third World wood is used for fuel, to cook food. Most of the wood harvested in the world is used for building houses and furniture. The sale of hardwood, mostly from tropical rain forests, has increased 16-fold between 1950 and today. For many nations that is a source of good income — although it is also probably a very short-lived source of income. Indonesia, which used to have perhaps a third of the world's rain forests within its borders, sold concessions for harvesting primary forests to foreigners, mostly American — today Indonesia is still a net exporter of wood but its virgin rain forests are within a decade of being cut.

It is the primary tropical rain forests that were the home of gibbons and orangutans (the original name of these apes was Orang Hutan, also spelled Orang Oetan, which means Man of the Forest — how those two words have come to be contracted to what Americans now call 'uhrángetan' is a mystery. By the end of this century, or early in the next, there won't be many Orang Hutan living in the wild, nor gibbons (who were once common from Sri Lanka, through India, to Indonesia).

These statistics, by the way, courtesy of The Deluge and the Ark — but statistics don't tell a story...

In the state of Hawaii 80% of the population of about 1.1 million people lives on the

island of O'ahu, the city of Honolulu, and famed Waikiki. A few years ago when we had a building boom, condominiums and palaces and hotels went up everywhere, which resulted in tremendous losses of soil that ran off into the ocean, destroying the reef that surrounded the island. Many of the bays were brown, no longer blue or green. Fish went elsewhere.

Now that the building boom has bust, and efforts have been made to clean up the waters close to shore, the water is blue again in some areas — and some fish have come back, but they are not the same fish that were there before.

On this island, the island of Hawai'i, there used to be huge sugar cane plantations — possible only because the US government gave a subsidy to the sugar growers — mostly big business, of course. When the subsidy was dropped, big business hastily moved away, leaving many acres of land with chemical burdens that will take some years to leach away. Big business, of course, is not in the business of worrying about the people who worked for them all their lives, they are in the business of making a profit for their share holders. If the profit cannot be found here, they go elsewhere. In the meantime the original forests of this island were destroyed long ago, to make room for sugar cane. The sandalwood forests were wiped out a hundred years ago (in less than half a century in fact) when it was profitable to cut all sandalwood trees for sale to China. Sandalwood is a slow growing tree, very slow. Most hard wood trees grow slowly.

You can imagine the talk, what to do with all this empty land. Grow eucalyptus, some say, it grows very quickly, and it makes reasonably good pulp for making paper. Or grow Macadamia Nut trees, it takes only six years to get a harvest and they do not need much in the way of chemical 'enhancement'. But of course for six or more years there is no profit for the share holders. There is no demand for houses on this island, after all there are still several hundred sugar cane workers who were summarily 'let go' a year ago, who now have no income and not much opportunity to find other work.

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Now that it is becoming clear to many of us that we have made a mess of things, to think that we are so special because we are spiritual makes the mess unimportant. Surely, beings so spiritual cannot die out? No, we will rise from the ashes as phoenixes. God Himself will rescue us at the last moment. Or, beings from the Pleiades will come here at the last moment and rescue us, maybe even rescue the planet. We need do nothing, we need not change ourselves, all we need to do is become more spiritual. We, humans, are spiritual beings and our destiny is a spiritual destiny, in the future we will no longer need plants and animals, or even earth. As another friends wrote "even death will become unnecessary." My first response was, That means no more children. Well, no, she had not thought that far, but surely that too could be solved.

How can we deny that our very essence is of this earth? Even our so-called spirituality is a product of this planet. Perhaps in that spiritual reality the Wild is not important?

I remember, a long time ago, a filler in the science fiction magazine I used to read then. Two lines:

I wonder why we have never been visited by other intelligent races in the universe?
The answer: *no race has ever survived its own intelligence.*

What would the world be like without the Wild?
Look around you.