

my worlds

When you pass eighty you have perspective: you can look back a few generations. How were we then, how are we now. *Who* were we then and now? Honestly, I've gone through so many changes that I have a hard time sorting them out. I was innocent many times over and always rudely awakened. But one theme from the beginning seems to be that I have always lived in two worlds. In my youth the two worlds were easy to keep separate; I spoke different languages with different-looking people who had different customs, cultures. Now I live in two worlds that are equally different but more or less the same kind of people, the same language — but very different cultures.

The two worlds I live in now are my here, the world of nature, animals and plants, that I feel intimately related to. This is a world I live *in*, feel an integral part of. There are people in this world of course, family and friends, in and out, but the animals and plants are who I belong with.

Then there is a larger world that I sometimes visit when I go shopping—mostly to buy food, edibles that I do not grow myself. A world in which I drive a car, must get into the nonstop line of cars on the one road from here to "town." Not much of a town compared to many others, but busy with cars, traffic lights, left turn on a green arrow, parking lots full of the huge cars that were the rage a few years ago. An amorphous crowd that I do not know, nobody knows me, people pass each other without looking each other in the eyes. People talk into tiny gadgets held to an ear, smiling, talking to the air in front of them, laughing. From town I can see the mountains, a reminder of the island that is certainly the matrix of my "real" world.

And then there is an even larger world beyond the island. That large world has what from here seem artificial distinctions, a State, a Nation, a so-called civilization. I have few ties to that large world except through the internet, that strange medium that exists in nets of metal and glass wires woven around the globe. The national but also global large world I know mostly from reading about it, seeing little movies of here and there. A world of fantasy and fiction, illusion probably. From what I learn, a world dangerously teetering on the edge of a planet-shaking change that we, humans, caused and continue to worsen, forgetting that planet Earth is our only home. Every foray into that world makes me sad, angry, confused. I ask myself "how can we, humans, be so stupid?" We are told often enough by reputable people what the facts are, but we cling to politics and our illusionary view of who we are.

I know from my own experience that we knew very well how to live sustainably, without destroying the planet. Why, how, did we forget?

We have no big agribusinesses on this island, although secretly this is a proving ground for the chemical wizards to test their latest oddities in “genetically manipulated” plants; the island is assumed to be too isolated to infect the rest of the world if an invention turns out to be a Frankenstein. We who live here know that we aren’t so isolated at all, there are dozens of flights from and to the two airports on this island, cruise ships several times a month, freight that comes and goes by ship. We are not told about these secret testing sites— as we are not told about much that is going on in our nation, that twice removed world.

When the islands now called Hawai’i were “discovered” in 1778, scientists now estimated that at that time there were close to a million people living on these seven islands. The accounts of that first contact contain a glowing description of how tall and muscular, healthy and happy, the natives were. This island is twice the size of all others combined, so it is reasonable to assume that before the thought of cities this island must have fed at least 600,000 Hawaiians that were healthy and muscular on what they grew here—nothing was imported. Today this island has 170,000 inhabitants (very few of them Hawaiian) and we import 95% of our food. Of course the “food” we import is manufactured, too much fat, salt and sugar, with exotic chemicals added. Fortunately, the last few years, we’ve had a blossoming of farmer’s markets. The vegetables, fruit, and other food they sell may not be strictly “organic” (which does not mean much any more) but it is local, grown nearby.

A tiny story to illustrate how global we are, even on these islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. One of the men who used to fish commercially (three of my sons did that as well, 20 years ago) concluded that he no longer could compete with the big fishing “industry” that has virtually extinguished the fish around these islands. He owns a 100 ton steel fishing boat with most of the latest gadgets and gimmicks, which he put on the market. In a fairly short time it sold to people in Yemen. Until a month ago most of us did not even know there was a country called Yemen; the area we now think of as the “piracy waters.” Most of us would like to keep that globalized world far away. But in a globalized world that is impossible.

This evening in my browsing the internet came across a story about bees. A reminder that insects are 70% of all biomass. We humans forget that: we're interested only in big. Small is below our horizon, and yet it is small and simple that survives big changes. Big doesn't do half as well in a planetary change. The bee story also brought up the unusual gender inequality. One queen, many females (the workers), few males (drones, whose job it is to protect the hive) and a very few of them mate with the queen. Now bees are mysteriously disappearing, in some parts of the world more than 50% have gone already. The latest theory is that it is a consequence of our insane science of "systemic pesticides," chemicals no longer sprayed on, but *in* the plants, and so in the nectar, affecting the rate of reproduction of bees or perhaps the spontaneous rejection of abnormal bees. Yet another miracle of chemistry we are doing wrong without any consideration of consequences. Why can't we accept that any meddling in the complex planetary ecology more often than not has lethal consequences. Changing one element of a complex whole inevitably has consequences for the whole. We think we know best, but we don't. We don't know the very first truth about the planet we are a part of: *keep hands off complexities we cannot grasp.*

But writing about that simply adds to the thousands of other voices that are being ignored by the few who own the planet. Or, who *think* they own the planet and therefore think they can do whatever they damn well please. They set their own house on fire. They eradicate what gives them life. Their arrogance, hubris, gives narrow blinders, they cannot see that they are destroying themselves.

They talk good. Some people even believe them when they say idiocies like "the economy is more important than global warming." Climate change is no theory, no mirage. If anything is, the economy is an illusion of smoke and mirrors. You cannot eat gold.

When I have these grandiose ideas I watch the cat, poor Fatcat. Now again she follows me everywhere. There were two cats a few days ago, the other got run over. Paved roads, however narrow, are dangerous speedways. And who would even slow down for a cat. I thought the two cats never got along, but she is definitely mourning. She was there, singing her song, when we buried the other cat. Her world is even smaller than mine, and in a way a sub-set of mine.

The last days I have done a lot of gardening. Trying to grow corn in five gallon plastic buckets (holes drilled in the bottom), filled with good soil. The

ground is not deep enough to grow much of anything except native plants that have learned to survive on mostly a thin layer of soil over lava. Hard physical work helps my sleep, but it does not affect my dreams. My first thinking early morning is always trying to learn from my dreams. Recently they have not been very educational. And it is almost another week till a new moon — often a turning point.

The little world I cherish so much is thoroughly old-fashioned. No television in my world, no mobile phone, one radio station very occasionally, no movies, no traveling all over the world. I don't consume much. I don't socialize much. Yes, I am attached to the internet, which is a medium that allows me to choose what I see and read: a very personal medium. I realize that my children and grandchildren cannot conceive of living without a mobile phone (in America we call it a cell phone), and I cannot imagine what they talk about all day long. I'm not of this world any more; I observe from outside.

And now, last night's dream. Many of the dreams in one night are like chapters in a book. So too, last night's dream. The theme, evident at the end, was "how to survive a world gone crazy, a world getting more and more complex in ways that are not only unnecessary but wasteful." Much traveling, many people, much talk. The clue was first an image of a new table that cost sixteen thousand dollars (the amount was important in the dream, came up more than once). A table with all kinds of extensions and something electronic that no one knew how to use. The image at the end of the last dream before waking up was a simple table with four straight legs at the extreme corners, the top covered with left over squares of that tough plastic that covers kitchen counters in bright red and green. A simple design, aesthetically very pleasing; a strong and simple table. It was not new. The sturdy legs were never painted, brown with age. A table that did not pretend to be anything but a table. A table that could last for generations. Reaffirming my conviction that sustainable must be simple. Perhaps only simple is sustainable.

And so it is.

robert wolff, 11 march 2010