

# DERRICK JENSEN:

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## Vivisection: A Moderate Proposal

*This article appears in slightly different form in Derrick's forthcoming book Endgame: The Collapse of Civilization and the Rebirth of Community*

To the dismay of many of my friends, I'm not unalterably opposed to vivisection. In fact, I'd wholeheartedly support it, were vivisectors to make one minor administrative change. It would be that scientists perform the experiments not on nonhumans but on themselves and their colleagues. Scientists keep telling us how beneficial the experiments are for Science with a capital S, Progress with a capital P, and of course Man with a capital M. If the experiments really are Necessary with a capital N, the scientists should be willing to make this sacrifice (with a small s) for the greater good. In any case, because of strict regulations, according to no less an authority than Lord Sainsbury, British Science Minister, advocate of genetic engineering and owner of a very large supermarket chain, experiments generally cause no more than "moderate" suffering. If this is actually true, scientists shouldn't too much mind throwing their hats into this ring.

Now, I'm sure you can spot the problem: too many important experiments for the number of vivisectors. Just in Europe an animal is killed every three seconds in a laboratory. In Britain it's one every twelve seconds, in Japan one every other second, and in the United States one per second. I'm not sure even full-ride scholarships and high salaries will suffice to bring in enough scientists to fill this bill. But that's okay, because every problem carries within it the seed of its own solution.

The solution comes through the words of Sainsbury, or rather his existence: add another category of those eligible to be vivisected. This would, of course, be those politicians who speak or vote in favor of experimenting on live animals. Given the importance of these experiments to everything from the economy to national security to shiny-clean hair to new cosmetics, I think the politicians will be glad to serve the public in this manner.

Unfortunately, this won't entirely solve the problem: I just don't think we have enough politicians (and I'll bet you never thought you'd hear someone say that).

At first I toyed with the notion of putting vivisectors' families on the short list, but decided to keep them in reserve in case they're needed to provide "spare parts," as the xenotransplantation literature so elegantly puts it, for those humans rich enough to afford their own personal organ donors. The use of vivisectors' families should eradicate the technical and moral problems caused by the current planned use of pigs, and should also bring in some extra cash for the corporations that hire the vivisectors (and that's always been the real point, hasn't it?): some estimates put the market for pig organs to transplant into humans at \$6 billion per year, just in the United States.

But we still have the problem of numbers, don't we? Not enough vivisectionists, not enough politicians. Naturally, CEOs of companies that profit from vivisection need to go on the list, and in these desperate straits—how could we possibly live without draize eye tests?—I think we'll just need to add everyone who works for those companies, too. Certainly the stockholders. Especially the stockholders.

I suspect, however, that we still won't have enough: our culture's appetite for subjects on which to inflict "moderate suffering" seems insatiable. We need to forcefeed agrochemicals and drano to dogs through tubes directly into their stomachs, and we need to transplant the hearts and kidneys of pigs into the necks of baboons. We immobilize monkeys, lizards, cats, dogs, take off the tops of their heads. We break the necks of baboons. We addict macaques to cocaine, electroshock them if they will not use. We create superviruses that kill everyone they contact. We cut out portions of the brains of marmosets, and leave them as stupid as the experimenters themselves. We cut off the heads of live animals using scissors, then study their brains. We put live animals in freezers and let them try to claw their way out. We teach chimps American Sign Language, then put them in cages the size of cupboards: when they sign they want out, we ignore them, inject them with pesticides. We separate monkeys from their mothers, give them HIV, then put painful coils in their eyes to track where they look.

There are simply not enough CEOs and stockholders. I'll bet you never thought you'd hear someone say that, either.

But I've got a plan. Make vivisection duty mandatory for every human who supports animal testing. We are, after all, animals. It will be just like jury duty. You get a note from the county advising you your turn has come, and you are to report next Tuesday. You call the evening before to see if the experiment has been cancelled. It hasn't, but you learn they only want males. You are, so you show up the next day. You learn you'll be testing Viagra. Good, you say. I don't need it (you hasten to add) but what can it hurt? You soon find out. You take the drug. Instead of cutting off your penis, as happened in experiments on beagles, rabbits, rats, mice, and monkeys, the vivisectors (who at the very least have no testicles, else they would surely refuse each time they were told to torture another) cut open your penis and insert an electrode into a branch of the pelvic nerve. They pass a charge through for a minute at a time, causing erections. They then measure the blood pressure of the erection. Their hope is that viagra will help maintain the erection. It seems to do that, but you and everyone else concerned already knew that from many previous tests. Can I go home now? you ask, your opened-penis smarting. Oh, sorry, they say. We forgot to tell you: afterwards all subjects are sacrificed.

You're not too happy about that. But that's okay, you can say as they put the final needle in your arm. Animal experimentation is extremely important, the suffering only moderate.

-- *From The Ecologist, February 2003*

## Leaving the Comfort Zone

*This article appears in slightly different form in Derrick's forthcoming book  
Endgame: The Collapse of Civilization and the Rebirth of Community*

I regret more my mistakes of timidity than those of recklessness; actions undone more than actions done. That's certainly been true in relationships. Regrets have never come from following my heart into or out of intimacy, no matter the pain involved, but when, because of fear, I didn't enter or leave when I should have. Regrets have come when fear kept me from my heart. This is true not just with women, but everything.

Although I've always loved high jumping, I was too afraid to jump competitively until I was a sophomore in college. That year, the coach discovered me messing around on the pit and convinced me to compete. I eventually broke the school record and won the conference championship, but then graduated and ran out of time. Because I'd been too fearful to begin jumping sooner, I'll never know how good I could have been. I vowed to not allow that to happen with my life: when I run out of time, I want to have done what I wanted, and what I could.

I sometimes think timidity is destroying the planet as surely as are greed, militarism, and hatred; I now see them as two aspects of the same problem. Those in power couldn't commit routine atrocities if the rest of us hadn't already been trained to submit. The planet is being killed, and when it comes time for me to die, I don't want to look back and wish I'd done more, been more radical, more militant in its defense. I want to live my life as if it really matters, to live my life as though I'm alive, to live my life as if it's real.

Lately I've been thinking about all of this, interestingly enough, in relation to pornography, because of a story someone told me about risk and safety. A woman lived with a man who paid her decreasing attention. He often left their bedroom to go to his study to work. Or so she thought, until one day she followed him, and saw him looking at pornography. The woman on the screen, she said, "Looked a lot like me. But I couldn't compete with her, because she was silent." She ended what was left of the relationship.

To understand that story I started visiting porn sites. The part that most interested me were the counters showing the number of visitors: some sites had ten million hits. Why, I wondered, would anyone prefer, as my friend's ex seemed to, the company of photographs to that of flesh-and-blood human beings?

When I think back on my relationships, what I remember most are the particular characteristics of each woman, qualities I could neither have predicted nor projected. The way one woman's voice fell when I called in the middle of the night to tell her I'd been in a terrible car wreck. The self-conscious smile of another—unused to receiving praise—when I gave her a compliment. The way a third's breathing subtly changed when she focused her thinking. These characteristics, and the memory of them, even

United States Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps."

Fortunately, because we as a species haven't fundamentally changed in the last several thousand years, since well before the dawn of civilization, each new child is still a human being, with the potential to become the sort of adult who can live sustainably on a particular piece of ground, if only the child is allowed to grow up within the context of a culture that values sustainability, that lives by sustainability, that rewards sustainability, that tells itself stories reinforcing sustainability, and strictly disallows the sort of exploitation that would lead to un-sustainability. This is natural. This is who we are.

In order to continue moving "forward," each child must be made to forget what it means to be human and to learn instead what it means to be civilized. As psychiatrist and philosopher RD Laing put it, "From the moment of birth, when the Stone Age baby confronts the twentieth-century mother, the baby is subject to these forces of violence . . . as its mother and father, and their parents and their parents before them, have been. These forces are mainly concerned with destroying most of its potentialities, and on the whole this enterprise is successful. By the time the new human being is fifteen or so, we are left with a being like ourselves, a half-crazed creature more or less adjusted to a mad world. This is normality in our present age."

What is required of each of us is that we unmake this normality.

--From *Green Anarchy* #9, Summer 2002

Another way to put all of this is that any group of beings (human or nonhuman, plant or animal) who take more from their surroundings than they give back will, obviously, deplete their surroundings, after which they will either have to move, or they will dwindle. Our culture - Western Civilization - has been depleting its surroundings for six thousand years, beginning in the Middle East and expanding now to deplete the entire planet. Why else do you think this culture has to continually expand? And why else, coincident with this, do you think it has developed a rhetoric - a series of stories that teach us how to live - making plain not only the necessity but desirability and even morality of continual expansion - causing us to boldly go where no man has gone before as a premise so fundamental as to become transparent? Cities, probably the defining feature of civilization, have always relied on taking resources from the surrounding countryside, meaning, first, that no city has ever been or ever will be sustainable, and second, that in order to continue their ceaseless expansion cities must ceaselessly expand the areas they must ceaselessly hyper-exploit: the colonies. I'm sure you can see the problems this presents and the end point it must reach on a finite planet. If you cannot or will not see these problems, then I wish you the best of luck in your career in politics or business. Our studied - to the point of obsessive - avoidance of acknowledging and acting on the surety of this end point is, especially given the consequences, more than passing strange.

We don't have to look to the future, however, to see why civilization is unjust and needs to come down. In 1837, pro-slavery philosopher William Harper wrote, "The coercion of Slavery alone is adequate to form man to habits of labour. Without it, there can be no accumulation of property, no providence for the future, no taste for comforts or elegancies, which are the characteristics and essentials of civilization." More broadly, these "comforts or elegancies" that come about through the processes of industrial production require the expropriation of resources - called importation in polite society - from the colonies. Thus today people starve in India while former grainaries export tulips and dog food to Europe. People starve in east Africa while former grainaries export lima beans to the centers of the empire. People starve in South America while former subsistence farms export coffee to the United States to fill Americans' caffeine addiction.

Because people do not generally choose to starve themselves to death; because sane people do not generally destroy their own land-bases; and because industrial production requires the importation of resources in order to continue, trade - no matter how unequal - is not reliable enough to allow one to base one's way of life on it. The resources must be taken by force. Thus our long history of war. This was true in the beginning, about which the anthropologist Stanley Diamond wrote, "Civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home," and it's true today, when capitalist propagandist Thomas Friedman acknowledges, "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist - McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15, and the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the

those unpleasant or painful—the way one woman bit her lower lip, looked to the side, and nodded each time before she picked yet another fight—are, it seems to me, the essence of relationship. This notion—that relationship consists of attending to the particular—is true whether the relationships are with lovers, friends, family, animals, rivers, rocks, or trees.

Pornography is about anything but the particulars. Lost not only is any question of relationship with the particular woman in the photograph, but lost also is her skin's texture, her smell, her taste. The thing that disturbs me most about pornography—more than the fact that many photos cut women into pieces; more than the poses reinforcing the myth of dominant males and submissive females; more even than the degrading prose often attached to photographs—is that photographs are empty; they're abstractions. No matter how I pretend I'm sitting across from a beautiful, intelligent, babe with whom I've had a long, delicious conversation about what it would take to knock out the infrastructure of Las Vegas, the truth is that I'm alone. Looking at the pictures, I'm more sad than aroused.

And as I look at the splayed limbs, fake smiles, and artificial passion, it becomes clear that the attraction of pornography, though superficially sexual, has more to do with fear than desire. When you don't know how to connect, when connection frightens you so much, I suppose this simulation is better than nothing. Isn't it better to watch nature programs than to never see nature at all?

Maybe not. Maybe this parody of connection feeds us just enough that we stay in stasis, too frightened to attempt to connect with another yet not quite miserable enough to attempt to relate differently, not quite miserable enough to know we're miserable and lonely. I understand now the attraction of pornography. It's safe. There's no messy contact with another. No disappointment. Nothing but silence, flatness, a photograph. We're substituting imaginary experiences with the images of things for experiences with the things themselves, having already substituted the experience of things for the possibility of relationship with other beings.

These substitutions have consequences beyond romantic relationships. I recently saw an article from the U.K. newspaper *The Independent* describing our culture's feeble response to global warming. The article states that according to the best estimates of the insurance industry (not a hotbed of environmental extremism), within fifty years "the economic cost of global warming stands to surpass the value of the total world economic output." This is economic cost, and doesn't include the death of ice caps, oceans, forests, rivers, coastlines, cultures, or other parts of reality our culture is, it seems, too fearful, too closed off—perhaps by now, as we witness yet fail to perceive the killing of the planet, too heartbroken—to enter into relationship with. The author of the article, Andrew Simms, states, "A basic misunderstanding of our global governors in the IMF, World Trade Organisation and other still-emerging institutions, is to believe that abstract economic theory is more important than the real world."

This is our culture's fundamental flaw. I don't see a tree, I see dollar bills. I don't see a river, I see kilowatts. I don't see a woman—this woman—standing in front of me. I don't see anything, but I project into this space where this woman would be standing, were she to exist, what I've been trained to see. I see a temptress, maybe, or a receptacle for my sex. Or maybe I see every woman who hurt me. The ones who said they loved me, then ran away, or the ones who said they loved me, then tried to change me. I cannot give my heart to someone I don't see, so I give it to no one. I don't give it to woman, man, salmon, tree, or frog.

When we objectify those around us, be they trees, women, ourselves, or anything else under the sun, we too easily lose sight of them, too easily lose hold of the possibility of actual encounter, that joining of will and grace, as Martin Buber put it. Instead, we find little save our preconceptions, our projections already formed in a culture based on domination. It's not possible to overestimate the damage this does to relationships. Ask Indians encountered by colonists. Ask Africans enslaved. As we stand amidst the embers of a dying planet, we should ask ourselves what this systematic objectification costs not only others but us.

To confuse an object for a being is sad. That's why pictures of naked and seemingly inviting women didn't arouse so much yearning in me as sorrow. Those who become delusional enough in this direction are sometimes put away. But to confuse a being for an object is more dangerous even than sad. And even worse, when we no longer see trees, human beings, a living planet, but dollar bills, workers, resources, we may find ourselves financially well-rewarded.

I don't think life is supposed to be this difficult. When I think about how to break through my own fear and our culture's timidity, I wonder what would happen if we learned the power of the word No? No more clearcuts. No more working jobs we don't love. No more maximizing profits for corporations we don't believe in. No more big corporations. No more enslaving ourselves to fear.

Or, saying the same thing another way, what if we learned the power of the word Yes? Yes to doing what we love. Yes to living our lives authentically--not as though we're watching them unfold on a screen before us, nor even as though we're actors in a movie, doing take after take until we get it right--but yes to living our lives as though they are our lives.

I think often about how it felt to high jump: the best jumps were effortless, because I hurtled myself with all of my being at one goal, running as fast as I could and approaching not only the bar but that ragged edge of control where instinct and euphoria set me free from time and consciousness. The same is true when I write: the work is painful only when I go against my heart. There's still hard work, of course, but only because so much work goes against our hearts do we come to consider work a bad word, something other than play. The same is true of relationships. Only people

too frightened of connection—and who perceive themselves as powerless—could find it more pleasurable to interact with an object, or someone they've turned into an object, than a being.

Not reaching my potential in high jumping taught me to not let fear stand in my way of living. It taught me something else about fearlessness, too. Every jump was a leap into the impossible. We all know a person can't jump higher than his head, just as we all know the impossibility of finding love in a culture based on domination, and just as we all know our culture cannot possibly change its deathly trajectory. But if we're to live lives worth living, we must accept nothing less than this impossibility. The good news, I learned from jumping, and from relationships, is that once we get our fear out of the way, the impossible—jumping far, far over our heads, jumping higher than any human can—is dead easy.

--*From Hope, Summer 2001, and Black-Clad Messenger #19*

## Industrialism Must Go!

*This article appears in slightly different form in Derrick's forthcoming book Endgame: The Collapse of Civilization and the Rebirth of Community*

A few years ago I asked a friend, "If you could live at any level of technology, what would it be?"

My friend can be a curmudgeon. He was in one of those moods. He said,

"That's a stupid question. We can fantasize about living however we want, but the only sustainable level of technology is the stone age. What we have now is the merest blip - we're one of only six or seven generations that ever have to hear the awful sound of internal combustion engines (especially two-cycle) - and in time we'll return to the way humans have lived for most of their existence. Within a few hundred years at most. The only question will be what's left of the world when we get there."

He's right, of course. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that any social system based on the use of nonrenewable resources is by definition unsustainable: In fact it probably takes anyone but a rocket scientist to figure this one out. Similarly, any culture based on the nonrenewable use of renewable resources is just as unsustainable: if fewer salmon return each year than the year before, sooner or later none will return. If fewer ancient forests stand each year than the year before, sooner or later none will stand. This is what we see, for example, in the collapse of fishery after fishery worldwide: having long-since fished out the more economically-valuable fish, now even so-called trash fish are being extirpated, disappearing into industrial civilization's literally insatiable maw.