

Technology and the Tools of Ecodefense

"Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine." - Hank Thoreau

by Michael Lewis

Ecodefenders around the world are facing the same questions that dissenters and malcontents have struggled with throughout the history of civilization. How does one effectively oppose the society in which one is entrenched? How does the anarchist oppose the centralized government without replacing it? Does violent opposition block consideration of viable alternatives? Should we stand and fight oppressive governments or should we withdraw our economic and political support and refuse to cooperate? The questions remain the same; the answers drift with the tides of culture.

The current ecological debate and the extremes of response elicited by environmental activists have brought new questions, or at least new twists on the age-old questions, into the fore. Should we make use of the technology we decry as tools against the technocratic society that produces them? Are we being ideologically inconsistent by using computers, fax machines and automobiles to oppose the CFC-producing computer industry, the paper-producing timber beast, and the oil-producing megamachine? Should we instead eschew the use of such technology, and avoid the contradictions?

As newly liberated college students, we

struggled with these questions in the sixties and seventies, leading to responses as diverse as the culture that spawned them. Many chose violence, mainly aimed at the immoral war in Vietnam. Our object of hate was the military-industrial complex, the evil our fathers had been warned about by our greatest military leader (and worst President). We taunted, we cursed, we proffered flowers and upthrust middle fingers. We burned ROTC buildings and prompted the government to call out armed troops to restore order. And, ultimately, we died.

We have just observed the twentieth anniversary of the Kent State killings in which American citizens, temporarily disguised as soldiers, killed other American citizens, temporarily disguised as angry students. It was a shocking and sobering lesson for many of us, that such "Merry Franks" would result in such an extreme response from the authorities we so despised. We expected them eventually to strip off their ties, tie-dye their shirts and join the parade. Instead they sent us the tumbling dum-dum and instant oblivion in a pool of thickening blood.

To many who were there and who stared down that 45 caliber tunnel to nowhere, the answers were clear and no longer involved direct confrontation and intimidation. They sought other paths, other ways of expressing their opposition.

To many others, especially those on other college campuses, Kent State was a

catalyst, a call to further action, destructive, obstructive and confrontational. The evil state was opposed across the nation, and more students died, more were injured, physically and spiritually.

And the war in Vietnam came to an end. Those who chose to express opposition by withdrawing their support dropped out to the non-conformist conformity of communes, crash pads and group marriages in backwater gardens across the United States. All manner of social experiment flowered briefly in the glow of mind altering substances, withered as daily reality tarnished the golden promise, and inevitably shriveled and died. All but a few of the alternative communities live only in the memories of stock brokers and corporate executives.

In the eighties and now the nineties, the revolution birthed on college campuses twenty years ago has seen a new revival, garbed in green and desperately courted by the techno-industrial mainstream, seeking

one more means to capture the hearts and pocketbooks of the consuming public. Once again, we face two doors: Do we drop out or stand and fight? Do we remain pure in ideology, or scabble with any tooth and fang we can lay hands on? Do we accept the profferings of the evil corporations, or do we

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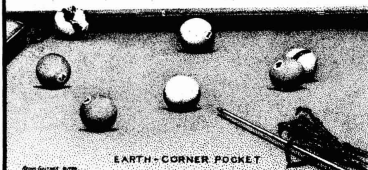
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Technology . . .

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remain poor, pure and perhaps ineffective.

Many of us espouse non-violent non-cooperation, withdrawing our economic and political support from the government and industrial complex we see as destroying the natural world. Many of us are taking this path as a natural outgrowth of our concern for the Earth. As we consider what is happening to the planet, we naturally reduce our consumption of material goods and services, thereby reducing our dependence on the destructive economy.

Some of us find ourselves in a reduced economy as a consequence of our activism. The society we oppose seems ill-disposed to hire us in its wage-slave relationship, especially if we are publicly outspoken in our beliefs. So we assume a moderated lifestyle by default rather than ideological purpose.

Regardless of our intent, those of us who seek to withdraw our support as a form of protest are haunted by the suspicion that few in the establishment pay much attention to our action. The economy seems to expand as before; clearcutting and oil development continue apace. The rest of the world seems to blithely continue, unaware of our sacrifice in its behalf. Many are content to know that at least they are not contributing to the problem, and at best they are providing an example of the alternative for those who care to see. When The End finally comes, we will be prepared to show the way.

On the other extreme, many of us feel that the military-industrial (overly) complex has so much momentum and is in such complete control of the government and economy of this country and, indeed, the world, that passive forms of resistance will be steamrollered into oblivion. This belief demands more active forms of opposition such as monkeywrenching, guerrilla theatre, ecotage, and direct action, violent or passive. Our activities are most often aimed at the tools of destruction: bulldozers, backhoes, tree-eaters of all description, ATV's, fat-tired brush beaters and whining snow machines. But whatever the activity, a firm line is drawn at any action that might threaten the well-being of any living creature.

Even humans.

The question of whether or not to use the tools provided by the technological systems we oppose occurs only to the mind

overly boxed within the confines of square human habitation. Too much fuzzy thinking has been promoted by too many writers sitting indoors contemplating their novels. The thought never occurs to the griz trapped in a box canyon by slithering dogs, or the moose facing an onrushing train in the only lane of packed snow for a thousand miles. The answer is to fight back, with every ounce of strength and every tool available.

When the wild animal is cornered, or even when the human animal stands trembling, facing the burglar who has smashed into his home and castle, questions of ideological purity are best set aside for later reflection. What is needed at this point is action, pure and simple, directed at stopping the threat before any further damage can be done to home and hearth, hide and fur. The academic detachment of the scholarly author quickly gives way to the rush of adrenaline and the primal response of flight or fight. And when cornered, no animal can choose flight.

The question is not what technology is appropriate to carry on the fight, but when is it appropriate to draw such an arbitrary line? The answer lies in the particular circumstance of each individual activist and the degree of need for effective defensive action.

When faced with the imminent, permanent destruction of old-growth forests, questions of appropriate technology are inappropriate. If a forest may be lost forever for want of a faxed message or radio-coordinated action, ideological correctness is of less importance than effectiveness of the response. If widespread, timely action is necessary to prevent irreversible damage to the Arctic Coastal Plain, foregoing the use of a computer network for philosophical justifications gives little consolation to the caribou and owls who call ANWR home.

However, when contemplating an action that is primarily symbolic, such as blockading Wall Street or protesting Forest Circus policies, an active demonstration of contempt for technology adds legitimacy to our cause. This is an opportunity to point out that enslavement to the technocratic, consumerist society is the root cause of our ecological crisis; and we must strive to drive home the point by conducting such demonstrations in the relative absence of technology. Bicycles and hiking boots, hand-let-

tered signs and flyers, crossed monkeywrench and stone club are appropriate levels of technology to display at such a gathering.

True, our opponents will point out the inconsistency of our actions, our adoption of the products of the technology we seek to curtail. The challenges, "Oh sure! You drive a car, don't you? You live in a house made of wood!" always fly at such confrontations. They are the obvious defense of those who feel the challenge of our stand. But we must not feel pressured to provide an iron-clad defense of our actions.

"Let our practice form our doctrine, thus assuring precise theoretical coherence." - Doc Sarvis

It is important for activists to understand that we live and operate in the present, and those we oppose share this moment in time, with all its technological trappings. We see the ideal, perhaps on a far distant horizon, but clearly, nonetheless. Our persistent vision of the desired end sometimes causes us to lose sight of the practicalities of the present. We must operate in the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. We are opposed by the overwhelming G.E.M. of Arizona, the four story walking Goliath of technology, that will crush us without notice beneath its carbon steel feet. We weak mammals must use every tool at hand to topple the mechanical dinosaur before it drags us all into the abyss. Then, when the deed is done, we can toss aside our despised tools and build a new world of truly free individuals.

In this light, we must always bear in mind the consequences of our actions. Bringing about the end of oil development

may indeed also cause the end of freely available, individual transportation. Restrictions on logging in the Pacific Northwest will undoubtedly raise the price of lumber and, thus, houses and other forms of human habitation. It will be more difficult for each family to live in its own detached home. As there is no free lunch on the development side, conservation also entails certain costs which, in the end, must be paid. Though we make use of technology in the heat of the moment, we must never forget that such opportunism is temporary. We seek the death of destructive materialism and the birth of a new bioregional order in harmony with natural cycles of the Earth.

By thinking through to the consequences of our actions and being brutally honest with ourselves about the motivation for our activism, we can quickly dispense with such idealistic questions of should we or shouldn't we. The answers live all around us, plain for all to see who look with unglazed eyes. We must pause periodically in our idealistic zeal to reestablish contact with that which we fight to save. We must spend time outside of artificial walls, allowing the answers to our questions to become apparent. This, after all, is what we strive to save. Let the wilderness be our guide, our inspiration, our touchstone for ideological purity.

"In wildness is the preservation of the world."

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Go to your favorite piece of remaining wilderness. Take off your clothes. Take a walk, a paddle, a climb. Ask the water, the trees, the animals, the rocks what they would have you do in their defense. Then get to work.

WILDERNESS ON THE ROCKS

For those of you who were wondering about Howie Wolke's upcoming book, *Wilderness on the Rocks*, it ain't ready. We're sorry to keep you waiting (Howie's even sorer - he's still in labor). It will be available early next year; we hope to share details in the December issue.

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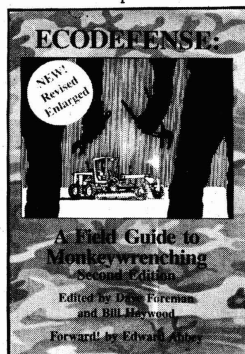
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