

Revolution?

Have only lately discovered a few web sites that have movies. The best one, for me, is LinkTV.org, a television station on cable (I think channel 9410), but they have little movies on their web site about brown and black people, world music, and news from every kind of Mideast TV station, Arab, Farsi and Israeli. The program is called Mosaic. And if you thought all Muslim women have to cover everything, except their eyes, you should see some of the announcers! Excellent, all translated in English. From LinkTV I got to Explore, which only has a few movies to view; I think they sell DVDs mostly. Then FORA, which has a few documentaries. And Ted.com which has interviews with all kinds of interesting people, most of it very upbeat and modern. There I listened to a man, Clay Shirkey who talked about how the world has changed in terms that I can relate to.

<http://www.ted.com/talks/clay_shirkey_how_cellphones_twitter_facebook_can_make_history.html>

There were others who had similar ideas. What I put together of the talks I heard is that there were plateau changes in the globalization of the world, times of sudden and great changes in how we, humans, live and organize ourselves.

For instance, the invention of printing presses, which gave us the printed word. And so, made information available to the masses if they could afford it and could read. A big motive to learn to read and therefore the invention of grammar for hundreds of languages that were only spoken (and therefore more fluid and alive! — my comment). Spoken languages did not need a written language. I know a few written languages started much earlier, maybe thousands of years ago in Egypt, China, elsewhere, but available only to a few. Gradually, the written word became the Word, and literacy increased up to the 20th century with the global creation of written languages — many of them by missionaries who wanted to translate the Bible, which means by amateurs. So too in Hawai'i, where a missionary proudly wrote to his bishop in New England that he had "created a simple alphabet for a simple people." He omitted many consonants, so that now Hawaiian, which made a recent renaissance, lacks letters for important sounds in the written language.

The next major shift came with the invention of telephone and telegraph (the order of these inventions I got from the speakers), which made the contact between individuals over distance possible in the "now."

Then the addition first of photography, then movies, television that made possible the much greater spread of information about other places and people. But, as with printing presses, almost all of it from the top down. We thought there had to be institutions, corporations, that owned the Media, as we call them, to run radio and then TV. Run by experts, specialists.

The corporations that own the Media decide what we should see and hear, and thus they influence us. The “experts” collect and shape what we think of as information. In reality it has proven to be an immensely successful way to brainwash us. TV was developed as entertainment; humans never had entertainment, we interacted with each other, danced together, slept together. The “news” we get from the main Media is very often not what is really going on, but what “experts” in journalism and interpretation write for distribution through the Media. It must have been obvious to most of us that much if not all of what we get on TV is advertising, invisibly morphed into propaganda. In my view the Media, certainly in this country, give us an almost entirely false idea of other people, cultures, countries, the world. The Media sold us on the need for always MORE — they want us to think there can be always more. Wake up everybody, there cannot be always more in a closed ecosystem. By digging oil and coal out of the earth at an ever faster pace we take from the planet what it produced over millions of years. That is plunder. Not smart at all.

The latest “revolution” many speakers now talk about is the internet (which is the web of copper and glass phone lines that spans the world), and now also communicating through the air. I think everyone I know has a cell phone and uses it all the time. I am too old to understand what they have to say to each other, and I find cell phones ridiculously expensive. I have one, at the insistence of my children, “for emergency only,” but I almost never use it, or even turn it on. But now cell phones and texting allow “news” to come from individuals who are where news is happening, uncensored, not from the top down, but really person to person. This is an entirely different way for us to understand and see what is happening when it is happening. Not filtered, not edited, not padded for entertainment.

What intrigues me about this development is that it is approaching the way humans lived in small communities; in peace and harmony much of the time. I was fortunate to grow up in a non-western country with a very non-western culture (and language). That gave me, from my earliest childhood the insight that there were more than one way to see reality, that one reality was not better, or more moral, or more this or that, than another. Just different. Western so-called civilization, which is really a culture, has spread all over the world more and more rapidly, culminating in the 20th century. The 21st century is shaping up to be very evidently the revolt of much of the rest of the world against that unwanted and brutally ruthless western invasion. It has been very difficult for peoples and cultures to resist the way that western ideas have been imposed globally. In America we pretend not to know what “colonial” is, and the word “capitalism” is hardly ever used, but those two man-made constructs are the deepest root values of western culture.

Today, corporations own the world and rule the world. Even supposedly communist countries have "state capitalism" which is no better or worse than what we like to call free market economies. Competition is supposed to make everything work better and cheaper. It is almost never better and always more expensive

Competitive is a way of being that no species can survive. The planetary ecology cannot tolerate one species dominating all the rest of what is. Ecologies work by balancing the strengths and functions of *all* life forms. Ecologies work best with a great variety of species. Then western man came, afraid of the wild, needing to build his own world based on some idealized ideas of what we ought to be, what the world ought to be. The planet as we found it was too wild, so we must tame Nature, and so ourselves.

But creating a world was much more difficult than we, in our naivety, imagined. In Hawai'i, for instance, (we did that all over the world) we madly introduced plants from all over the world, not thinking that with the plants came other little plants, little animals, bacteria. Wholesale slaughter. Introduced species (intentional or accidental) almost always destroys one or more native species. The first visitors brought diseases that nobody here had a natural immunity to. Scientists estimate that in 1778 there were 800,000 to a million people living on these islands. Eighty years later there were barely 50,000. There were 37,000 Hawaiians left in 1893. Now there are a bit more than a million people again — but they are very different people. Hawaiians are a very small minority. Even white people are a minority! This is a mixture of races and nationalities that has no majority.

After World War Two Europe had to reclaim bombed cities, destroyed economies. There were not enough workers for all the jobs, so people were encouraged to come from other countries. Nobody considered that those foreign workers might want to stay, have families, children. Now Europe has an immigration problem. We, humans have an almost childish urge to jump in and do, change things, without a thought for the morrow.

Did you know that more than half of the electricity we so greedily use in the U.S. comes from burning coal? That is one of the reasons why we, 4% of the world's population, are responsible for 25% of the CO₂ we spew into the atmosphere — which, after all, all humans must share —and CO₂ is the main cause of global warming, now manifesting as climate change. This increase in CO₂ is also causing severe changes in the world ocean, covering two thirds of the surface of our planet. We who think ourselves so smart that we can create our own world, cannot see even one generation ahead. Is that smart or stupid?

We think we must learn from books. My understanding of societies, comes from observation and *experience* of human communities and animal and

plant communities. Chickens — far descendants of tyrannosaurus rex — are fiercely competitive when I feed them. But their tribes are essentially cooperative and therefore peaceful. Here, where chickens are almost wholly wild, roosters don't fight with each other; hens do. Roosters crow, and not only the rising sun, but all through the day and every now and then at night. I have come to think of crowing as just announcing "I am currently over here, where is everybody else." A kind of locator call. But they have many other voices. They have an enticing sort of click-clock that says "Wow I have found a really luscious piece of food" that attract hens. He pretends to peck, but doesn't really have anything very wonderful to peck at. But he does attract hens that are nearby. For one purpose only, procreation. He has another voice when he loudly announces to everyone who listens that he is standing guard for a hen who is laying an egg. Hens too have many voices. All that tells me that they communicate almost continually. Left alone they don't fight. A hen who has a brood of small chicks fiercely defends the food she finds for her babies from other hens, but any rooster is allowed to eat the food. This is so even across species. Ducks will defend their food from hens, but not from roosters.

Plants communicate with each other, strange as that may seem. Some plants like to grow around other plants. The most well-known of those relationships is tomato and basil; they love each other. But plants and trees also have their dislikes and have ways to discourage plants they do not get along with.

I am convinced that our idea of early Man as Cave Man is pure Hollywood: an apish looking man dragging his woman by the hair, a club in his other hand, is utter nonsense. We would never have survived for at least 100,000 years if we had been the predators we like to imagine ourselves to have been. We may have been carrion eaters long before we learned to hunt after inventing weapons. And, of course, no predators are as stupid as humans are. Predators never eradicate prey, that would mean their own demise. Our killing of all large predators has been as crude, cruel and unnatural as our own "ethnic cleansing" all over the world which has marred much of modern history.

These last weeks I have come across IBM advertisements that proudly announce that they are, or are planning to, "build a better planet." Modern man at his most arrogant. As if our planet is "built." I know people who seriously believe we must "design" a better world, scientifically. Wake up, people! Human societies are not designed, nor is the planet built. We must learn to be honest with ourselves.

It takes an enormous and never ceasing effort to control people — or nature. In the end, I am certain, it can't be done. Human societies are as all

plant and animal societies (ecologies): they grow, they are not planned, certainly not designed. Americans think perhaps that their society was designed by the men who wrote, and refined, the Constitution. But I am sure that the signers of the Constitution would not recognize the society that grew.

This planet, our only home, is an ecology. Ecologies are a chaos in which everything is related, connected, to everything else. Think spider web, but three-, four-, maybe more-dimensional. Evolution is not directed, there is no higher or better, but a constant adjustment to small and large changes. The roosters here have the most flamboyant colors, black, gold, orange, red, in every combination imaginable. I don't think that hens are seeing one rooster as more desirable than another because of his colors. The alpha rooster here is a real gentleman. By far the biggest, but not loud, not pushy, he is modest. His presence keeps other roosters away. What hierarchy there is is age and size, it seems. I have come to see the gorgeous colors of roosters, and the strange and interesting mixes of chicks, as a sign of Nature's whimsy. Nature tries anything and everything. If it survives, good. If it does not survive, never mind. The number of combinations is endless.

I don't see humankind as the top of the tree of evolution. We are a branch as all the other branches. We may be Nature's experiment with a certain kind of brain development that allows us to imagine what is not immediately based on perception. I have come to think that the one thing that makes humans different from all other animals is that we can *imagine* — and so, we can lie. Animals and plants cannot lie. Primitive people could not lie. Read any account of a primitive culture and it is obvious that they cannot lie. They learn to lie when westerners ask questions they do not understand. Many people who "study" primitive tribes see these people through western glasses. Take me to your leader. Hmm? Primitive people do not have leaders. Anthropologists always ask about "relationships. "Who are you married to, how many children do you have, who are your parents." That is not how aboriginal and even indigenous people think. They do not have concepts like marriage, monogamy, "owning" children. But they want to be friendly and will answer what they think the stranger wants to hear. I remember once asking the aborigines I knew who was the "head" of their little settlement — that is a concept of the Malays, and even to them the "head" of a village is not a leader in our sense: in the Malay culture it is unthinkable that anyone would tell another what to do. The aborigines looked at each other, at me, to the ground. After what seemed like many minutes a woman spoke up, *I am the head*. They all gratefully nodded. Yes, she is the head of this little group. A few hours later it turned out she had just come there from somewhere else a few days ago, but she had seen another "stranger" and knew that we ask the most incomprehensible things and strangers expect answers. To the aborigines the idea of being the head of something, a leader, is meaningless.

Their children are not property, they do not "belong" to anyone. They identify with and are raised by their village, group, extended family (usually very extended). They are nursed by their biological mother but if there are other nursing women the nursing children will make the rounds.

Culture is something most of us are not aware of, unless we have lived in or with people from a different culture. America is a western culture, but in many ways quite different from other western cultures. One of the differences that I notice, for instance, is that Americans seem to think that showing all your teeth is smiling. The first thing children learn is to show teeth when somebody says "smile for the camera." Showing teeth in many cultures is a sign of aggression. And Americans don't touch as much as most other people I know. We don't even shake hands, as Europeans do. Certainly not hold hands as they do in Asia. A long time ago I read research of "personal space." Americans feel most comfortable about 18 inches from each other. In Arabian countries personal space is half that. What we call "kissing" that Arab men do is not kissing, it is getting close enough to smell the other person's scent. Hawaiians and other Polynesians rub noses. In America people use deodorants to cover their natural human scent. What's wrong with having a unique scent? We really have the most bizarre ideas. I always feel sorry when I see a toddler struggling to walk bow-legged with an enormous blob of diaper between her/his legs. Toilet training! Left naked and to themselves all children everywhere learn that quickly all by themselves.

But I digress, as I too often do.

Yes, I am excited about the latest revolution in human to human contact, because I feel that is the only way we could ever save ourselves from the dehumanized world we have made for ourselves. I'm all for ignoring, bypassing, doing away with experts, rulers, bureaucracies that kill us.

I have been in what for me is "the" war, also called the second world war, in Europe. Five years under German occupation. I have been captured and escaped, I have been hungry (at the end of the war I weighed a little more than half my normal weight in normal years). I know what it feels like to be bombed, shot at. And I have known times when there was no government at all. And I assure you that life went on without a hitch. People organize themselves. There is no perfect "design" for human groups, a world or a planet cannot be "built."

In the late 50s, perhaps early 60s of the last century the American government did extensive research to find out how they should prepare for "disasters." At that time they were thinking of nuclear disasters. They interviewed thousands of people who had gone through great disasters. I cannot remember the location of these disasters — one of them was Houston, I think, where a boat load of something had exploded — but I remember the

findings. The government wanted to know how to make experts, they wanted to organize police, ambulances, hospitals. What they found was that in a disaster of any magnitude police is not where they are needed, ambulances cannot reach where they are wanted. But people, ordinary people, instantaneously did what needed to be done where they were. A grandmother dressed wounds, a thirteen year old boy directed traffic. The research was suppressed, for understandable reasons. Today we think that police and armies are needed to "control." What an enormous misreading of the truth about what it is to be human. Leave us alone, we can manage very well by ourselves, thank you. Leave nature alone. A plantation destroys. Monoculture — growing one kind of plant in long rows, acres and acres — so impoverishes the ground that you must use enormous amounts of fertilizer (chemical) to use the ground again next year. And of course a field of all the same thing attracts not one but armies of pests. We then must destroy with toxic chemicals that may kill pests the first year, and give us cancer. We, humans, are not the clever, wonderful, unique, creature they tell us we are. If anything we are not clever at all because we are so arrogant.

Did you notice that the emphasis of government "education" has shifted almost entirely to teaching and tests. We've forgotten that what is important is not teaching but learning. Children learn to walk and talk by themselves. Schools have become places where parents park their children when they go to work. Schools keep kids away from the excitements the world has to offer to any healthy child. We ignore that schools have the function of preparing children to live in a basically unfriendly, dangerous, very complex bureaucracy. Children have to be taught to be experts in something, taught to be aggressive if they want to be "successful" (meaning rich). They are taught what money is. But they are rarely taught the facts of life, the *real* facts. Sports and tests teaches competition. Have we forgotten that cooperation works much better? Soldiers have to be taught to kill — and then after two or three or more tours in a war they come home with delayed stress syndrome. Not much delayed either. Humans are not killers by nature. Humans have to painfully learn to march in step, to dance with twenty or more other dancers doing exactly the same thing at the same time. All that is utterly unnatural.

I sometimes think that I wasted half my life doing what I was expected to do, earning degrees, a career, up and up, and of course earn money to provide for my family in a style they wanted to get accustomed to. About the real world I have learned infinitely more from chickens and plants. I have learned more from aborigines and other indigenous people about what humans are really about than I ever learned in learned books about human nature. I have learned more about communication and culture from strange

and wonderful languages than I ever learned from books and courses in linguistics and anthropology. Learning is what life is about. What I have *experienced* myself sticks with me; things learned from books are flimsies I no longer need to remember (like the latin name of plants...)

It is exciting to know that all over the world individual people are speaking up, and to each other, bypassing official channels. That is the only way we can survive, I am convinced.

Of course, many governments, including ours, are doing their best to "control" this new wave. Blood will be spilled because governments and bureaucracies own the bigger guns. Yet the only hope I can see for our survival as a species is the re-emergence of humans as they really are. We are perfectly capable to work out ways to live with each other in small communities. We've done that for the first 100,000 (some say million) years, and we still do in the few places where governments don't reach. It is only in the last ten thousand years or so that we have learned to want to control the land that feeds and shelters us, plants and animals, and of course inevitably control each other and ourselves. Hierarchies have become the norm: men better than women, power better than compassion, force trumps almost everything. All B.S.! We've been taught that tamed is good. Tamed is unnatural, and tamed leads to headlong doing without considering consequences.

Tamed we are led to our own extinction.

My hope lies in untamed, wild. Not wild as in crazy, but wild as natural, how we all were before we thought we were the masters of the planet. Wild as the planetary ecology that we are a part of. We cannot own land, or each other. We are part of All There Is.

We talk a lot about freedom, but the only truly free people I have ever known were the most primitive. They were joyful and free in a way we can barely imagine. If you own nothing more than you can carry easily, when you eat what grows around you, when you know your environment so intimately that you are one with it, when you build a small shelter with material you find around you (snow blocks in the Arctic, bamboo in tropical jungles), what is there to worry about? No calendar, no appointments, no jobs, no money, no clock, but real people that you sleep with in a huddle, everybody touching. They dream and live their dreams. They communicate with a few or no words. They sing little tunes. They dance, sit around the tiniest little fire, eating the last shreds of a baked monkey one of the boys shot this morning. It took some getting used to, but I tell you it is a good life!

People need people — not institutions, laws that require police and prisons to enforce, authority to tell us what we must do, what we cannot do, worst of all how we must think.

We badly need this new maybe-revolution of person to person across artificial boundaries on somebody's map.

Mother Teresa said "*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.*" I would only add that "we" is not only us humans, but all Life. We all belong **in** the planetary ecology. We belong to Life just as dogs and jaguars and fleas, even bacteria, belong to Life.

and so it is...

robert wolff © june 18, revised august 1, 2009