

Domestication

Peter Lamborn Wilson

2004

The hunter/gatherer school of anarcho-anthropology and the anarchist critique of Civilization (e.g., Perlman's Leviathan) proposed the domestication of plants and animals as the first step toward separation and ultimately the State.

Sahlins posed the question: why would any sane free hunter/gatherers voluntarily take up the shit-work of the "primitive agriculturist" (or, by extension, pastoralist)?—the erosion of leisure, the impoverished diet, etc.? Given his premises, this unsolved puzzle hints at coercion and deprivation. With hindsight we see that domestication leads to misery. We assume it began that way.

Charles Fourier boasted that his was the first coherent critique of Civilization. He experienced his big revelation in 1799 and so invites comparison with other early Romantics such as Blake or Novalis. (All were deeply influenced by hermeticism.)

Fourier believed in an economy with elements of both gathering and agriculture, one that structurally occupies a time and space between them: he called it horticulture. Fourier associates agriculture with societies, primitive agriculturists such as the Tahitians or pastoralist "barbarians"—all these are to be preferred to Civilization. But whether for better or worse, Civilization has suppressed them all and nearly erased them. After Civilization, in the era of "Harmony," only horticulture will satisfy the Passions of Harmonial humanity for magnificent and excessive luxury (a concept that later influences Bataille's theory of Excess), as well as ecological harmony and natural beauty. (See Fourier's *Theory of the Four Movements*.)

Thus, Fourier sees a connection between passion and horticulture.

The same theory appears independently in the work of certain ethno-botanists and "plant historians" in the tradition of the great Carl O. Sauer and the Russian scientist N. Vavilov (crushed by Lysenko and Stalin).

In brief, this theory posits that the origin of horticulture lies in a kind of love affair between certain plants and certain humans in the Mesolithic or early Neolithic.

Most gatherers are transhumants rather than true nomads. As the tribe makes its yearly round and returns to the summer camp, they find that their favorite plants seem to have followed them. Plants that prefer disturbed soil thrive in the campgrounds when their seeds are accidentally dropped and perhaps fertilized with feces and midden mulch. Vavilov identified two plants that spread from Central Asia in this manner: hemp and the apple tree.

Women gatherers would've been the first to suss out the link between seeds and availability, and the "secret knowledge" would belong to an almost erotic relation between certain plants and certain women. (Some seeds may have been discovered by men, e.g., tobacco in the New World, which is usually cultivated by men.) Thus the origin of the garden as "earthly paradise."

Is it impossible to imagine something similar between hunters and animals! The first domestication of an animal, the dog, was clearly a sort of love affair (probably the work not of men or women but children). The hunter's magical relation with the game is transformed into a symbiosis, a cross-species solidarity or love, as with the Maasai for their cattle or the Saini for their reindeer. Plants and animals are all living beings and living beings eat each

other—which scarcely rules out the simultaneous and even necessary element of passion. The Rig Veda is interesting on this point.

A great deal of confusion rises out of the term “Agricultural Revolution” to describe the early Neolithic. In Fourier’s sense of the term, agriculture doesn’t appear till the end of the Neolithic and then only in connection with metallurgy and the emergence of the State. The Neolithic itself is horticultural and pre-pastoral. (True nomadic pastoralism of the “barbarian” type can only exist in relation to civilized agriculture as its antithesis, as Ibn Khaldun first pointed out.)

The political structure of the Neolithic is based on what Kropotkin would’ve called the free peasantry and the village *Mir*.

Sahlins was perhaps a bit misleading in comparing the “leisure society” of the hunter/gatherers to the work society of slash-and-burn agriculturists. A great deal of that “work” consists of puttering around in the garden. There exist wonderful accounts—for example, the Dyaks of Borneo, who grow yams and keep pigs, do a bit of the H/G for delicacies and spend most of their time (when not head-hunting) in feasting, making love, and telling long stories. (See *Nine Dyak Nights*.)

This point needs emphasis: horticulture does not put an end to non-authoritarian tribal structures of the Paleolithic type. On the contrary, it successfully prolongs them under the new economic regime. The State does not emerge amongst gardeners.

One major problem for the primitivist wing of non-authoritarian theory has always been the tragic perception that hunting/gathering no longer appears a viable economy for a crowded globe. It sometimes seems that only a vast eco-catastrophe would make widespread “reversion” possible, and this is an unthinkable thought.

A transition to horticulture however doesn’t seem quite so unthinkable. Permaculture, for example, can be seen as a logical extension or updated version of horticulture, entirely suited to non-authoritarian social organization. And agrarian radicalism remains (at least potentially) significant for vast numbers of people involved in agricultural economies. One of the sickest things about the US is its complete corporatization of agriculture, eliminating farms and farmers along with nearly every vestige of agrarianism. Even Europe hasn’t reached this stage, much less the rest of the world.

Even if our ultimate goal remains some form of victorious reversion to the primitive, it would seem that a strategic alliance with horticulturists and agrarian radicals might prove advantageous.

— March, 2004

FE note: These themes are not new to Peter Wilson. For further investigation, we recommend his essay, “Grange Appeal”, in **FE #360, Spring 2003**. Moreover, readers might want to check out the anthology edited by Wilson and Bill Weinberg, *Avant Gardening: Ecological Struggle in the City and the World*, now available from the Barn. See page 62 for details.

fifth Estate

Peter Lamborn Wilson
Domestication
2004

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/365-summer-2004/domestication-charles-fourier>
Fifth Estate #365, Summer, 2004

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net