

The Food Court at Guantanamo

Philosophers Discover Thousands of Miles of Intellectual Dead Zones Caused by American Cultural Practices

Cara Hoffman

2007

The release of several reports this fall concerning environmental collapse has introduced us to a new and powerful way to discuss nature, one that we may have overlooked in our concern for life.

The destruction of the natural world, as it turns out, is going to be expensive. No, silly, not like you're thinking—loss of human and animal lives, loss of culture, loss of pleasure, loss of hope. Not those expenses. I'm talking about money.

It is important to understand just how acceptable and how harmful talking irrationally about money is in relation to the environment, and how this type of discourse has created a catalog of ignorance and brutality that has led to the creation of the modern torture-state.

Dr. Boris Worm, a professor from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, explained recently how the predicted collapse of the entire ocean population within 40 years would affect the world by comparing a healthy ocean to having a “diverse investment portfolio.”

The Stern report on the economic affects of global warming, released to the media in October 2006, similarly struck a nerve with the public. First, because we finally have a trustworthy source of information on environmental collapse (Sir Nicholas Stern, a chief economic adviser to the British Treasury and former chief economist of the World Bank.) And, second, because that report gives us a dire look at the economic bottom line caused by the poor investments mentioned above.

This fall also saw resurrected reports about ocean dead zones—the hundreds of thousands of miles of sea water rendered lifeless, because of industrial agricultural practices, untreated sewage and plastic debris. In U.S. coastal waters, these dead zones are expanding rapidly.

The human body, as a conduit of mutation, also made it to press somehow in several stories about rivers, wells, oceans and groundwater becoming a cocktail of hormones and antidepressants. This toxic effluent has mutated the reproductive capacity of freshwater aquatic life and caused most living things to consume sub-therapeutic levels of psychiatric drugs and estrogen on a daily basis through the unavoidable acts of drinking water, or eating plants and animals. What this will do to the human brain is a mystery.

Less mysterious is what toxic chemicals do to fetal brains and the brains of infants. This was the topic of another study which uncovered a silent epidemic of retardation, autism, and ADHD caused by daily unregulated exposure to toxins.

This exposure brought to you in part by the Clear Skies Act, a Bush regime piece of legislation that, contrary to its title, lifts restrictions on pollution.

While these reports are disturbing, the way in which they are brought to the public is nothing short of madness.

That these urgent messages are now being broadcast on every major news source is, in and of itself, a kind of evidence that any response, maybe even a revolutionary response, will be too little and way too late.

But grim as these reports are, they also contain a map of our intellectual environment, and a system of symbols we need to become familiar with in order to live in a world where the predominant aesthetic and moral code is one of absolute irrelevance to life.

Policies (read: institutional and legalized greed) that produce homogenization through extermination and then call it “extinction, die off, dead zone, over-exploitation,” have produced radically disorienting changes in our physical, social, and intellectual environments, changes that we currently have an inability to confront with logic.

If it is criminal in several European countries to deny the Holocaust and the evidence that reveals its truth, what is it to deny the indiscriminate murder of our ecosystem and the calculated murder of the human intellect?

The shining symbol of all things diabolically surreal, and the map that leads us to the monster at the heart of this bad B-movie we now inhabit, is the food court at Guantanamo Bay prison camp in Cuba. “Gitmo,” as the American military affectionately refers to it.

That there is a mall-style food court at Guantanamo is no longer news. That a torture camp, where an undisclosed number of people experience daily physical and psychological abuse, degradation and interrogation, should look like a miniversion of cheap sterile American highway sprawl is also missing its shock value.

We rarely think of private military contractors having names like McDonald’s, KFC, Pizza Hut, Subway, and Starbucks. But we should.

There is no army—no occupying force, no prison that exists without industrialized agriculture. Got to feed the troops. Fast food is the food of impoverishment and greed, the food of the war at home. The list of these contractors’ crimes is long and encompasses everything from feeding torturers in Cuba to crimes against the environment, labor, and children.

The Golden Arches, the Starbucks Mermaid, that sweet old Confederate Colonel Sanders, and those hipper and healthier slacker types down at the Subway, have never been more accurately revealed for what they represent than at Guantanamo.

Shackled, blinded, immobilized—the prisoners at Guantanamo are the physical manifestation of our own psychic state as a nation, and an indictment of every American who has supported this administration’s policies, or stood silently by while those policies were enacted.

Bush’s 2006 Military Commissions Act (MCA) codified the United States as a torture state, essentially negating the inconvenient parts of the U.S. Constitution and 800 years of Anglo-American jurisprudence as well as the Geneva Conventions.

The MCA is the logical outcome of a psychotic relationship to our environment including the human body. It is an offensive strategy laid out in black and white, a counter-jihad against anyone who even talks about resistance, no matter how ineffectually, or unfeasibly. The MCA provisions can be interpreted to make even theft and property destruction acts of terrorism, and allows American citizens to be held as “enemy combatants,” with no judicial recourse, if so designated by the president or secretary of defense.

The MCA is also the justification for running a lab like Guantanamo—where new drugs and torture techniques are tested and the government can see how the public responds to a taxpayer-funded concentration camp being operated in their name. Guantanamo ties all lunacy together. Its psychic runoff—pollution, pain, and cover-up—is causing Intellectual Dead Zones from coast to coast. We eat, drink, see, hear, smell, speak, piss, and weep all of the constituents that cause our captives’ misery, and yet we are dumb.

Though American’s recently picked their mid-term poison at the polls, the choices we are currently allowed to make still have a well defined bottom line. And, it is this: from what cup would we like to drink blood? From what plate would we like to eat ashes?

If your answer is simply to refuse this meal, they’ve been waiting for you all along. Topping the FBI’s list of domestic terrorists are environmental activists and anarchists—groups that have been subject to stepped up surveillance, infiltration, and even prior to the passing of the MCA, longer jail sentences for non-violent acts.

Being labeled public enemies speaks to the sanity and the power of our struggles—which are to maintain intellectual sovereignty, and respect for life. And, to adhere to the logic, reason, and animal instinct that gives birth to the love of autonomy and the love of a living world.

The word apocalypse does not mean destruction of the world, but an “unveiling of truths that are hidden from the mass of humankind.” There is no more important task at hand than fighting the spread of pervasive ignorance,

and acceptance of the entire natural world—human bodies included, as things economically quantifiable for the purposes of control or entertainment. An ocean, a river, a species, a generation, are not separate commodities, but intimately connected in every way.

Standing against the pervasive stupidity and arrogance of crimes against the world's body is essential in combating the false definition of apocalypse—the one we've all been taught, the one in which the world ends, and nobody pulls back the veil, nobody speaks the truth, nobody rides off, a skeleton on a white horse, for without a place for our bodies and minds, not even the poetry of our species survives.

fifth Estate

Cara Hoffman
The Food Court at Guantanamo
Philosophers Discover Thousands of Miles of Intellectual Dead Zones Caused by American Cultural Practices
2007

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/374-winter-2007/the-food-court-at-guantanamo>
Fifth Estate #374, Winter 2007

fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net