

Trafficking Anti-civ Thought Across Borders

Film Review

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In October 2010, I finally called it quits on my film *END:CIV*. By calling it quits, I mean that I decided that the film was done, and that I would not add or remove a single frame of video, tweak the audio or add any more titles. Like Coppola once said and I paraphrase, “One does not finish a film, one abandons it.” But far from abandoning it, the following November of that year, I embarked on an eighteen-month grassroots tour, where I would present my work to audiences in seventeen countries in over 150 screenings.

END:CIV as in “end of civilization” attempts to synthesize the main ideas put forth on Derrick Jensen’s *Endgame* books. The main concept being that civilization is not and can never be sustainable.

Jensen posits that civilization is an inherently violent and insane culture, with a death urge, and that if we want to continue to breathe the air and drink the water, we need to destroy this culture of civilization by any means necessary. *END:CIV* used real life situations to exemplify the viciousness of this construct. The brutal conquest of the “New World,” the Alberta tar sands oil development in western Canada; clear-cut logging in the Pacific North West and the occupation of Iraq, are used to illustrate the lengths civilization will go to, to continue to expand.

END:CIV also showcased the thriving anti-civ milieu in Turtle Island by featuring interviews with green anarchists, eco-activists, indigenous land defenders and authors. You can view the film in its entirety for free at end-civ.com.

The goal of the film was to expose radical audiences in Turtle Island to anti-civ ideas, but also to challenge the pacifist currents within North American activist culture. I did not want to make a film that would be acceptable to a mainstream audience; hence, a lot of ideas were skipped.

For instance, I did not feel the need to unpack the concept of capitalism, as I would mostly show the film to anti-capitalists. So, when I was invited to screen the film in Mexico and later in Japan, I was a little hesitant, not because I thought people wouldn’t get it, but because they were not the target viewers. In both instances I was pleasantly surprised, and the reactions were overwhelmingly positive.

Mexico has a long history of militant resistance, so I felt my emphasis on the need for a more aggressive movement, might be off-putting or even condescending. Instead, folks in places like Oaxaca and Chiapas, told me that they were happy to know that comrades north of the border, shared their sense of urgency.

The context in Japan was a bit different. A few months earlier, the meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant released a tremendous amount of radiation into the atmosphere. Dangerous levels of radioactive isotopes have spread to many areas of the island nation, and the government’s inability to properly address the situation, has kick-started a massive grassroots anti-nuke movement.

A film that questions the concept of civilization might not have been welcome in this techno-state before the disaster. But after five screenings on the Japan leg of the tour, *END:CIV* has been projected dozens of times since my departure.

The constant traveling was extremely hard on my body, and the intellectual gymnastics of the question and answer sessions were exhausting. As I suspected, the dichotomy of violence vs. non-violence dominated the discussions.

The first screening was on Denman Island in so called British Columbia. Denman is a small community comprised of a mix of retirees, back to the land hippies, Vietnam era draft-dodgers, anarchists, and travelers. Comrades there are currently engaged in a struggle to stop a coal mine directly across the water in the Comox Valley.

Organizers used the screening as a way to get the conversation about direct action going. So I understood what my role was: the out-of-towner who could broach an uncomfortable topic, and kick-off a discussion that locals may have trouble starting themselves. I played this part in most of the small communities I visited.

I've been yelled at, and reprimanded by old white guys from coast to coast! More importantly though, the film and subsequent discussions have validated a lot of things people privately suspected, but had never heard anybody say out loud.

The context in Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand) was extremely similar to that of so-called Canada. Massive extraction projects threaten many natural areas and the homes of already marginalized aboriginal Australian and Maori communities.

Alliances between environmental activists, anarchists and indigenous warriors, have created strong networks of resistance, but also have unleashed the mechanisms of state repression. [See FE, Winter 2013, "Operation 8."] The notions of colonization and genocide that I dealt with in the film were an easy sell, and in this instance, I felt like I was preaching to the converted.

Compare that to Europe, where people's exposure to native societies has mostly come from Hollywood movies. Europe was colonized and "civilized" long ago, and with a couple of exceptions, there are hardly any indigenous cultures or untamed areas left.

So, concern for the state of nature was almost absent from the post film discussions. With the exception of the UK, which has a vibrant climate change movement, from where I stood, radical movements in Europe seemed to be more concerned with the social war than with the defense of the wild.

I argued that these things are not separate, and that class warfare is also an attack on civilization. Without nature, there is no life. Our social movements have to accept that our ecological situation has to be prioritized, and that the further decay of the natural world will exacerbate all of our social problems: poverty, migration, racism, global economics, and much more.

I did stumble upon small contingents of anti-civ thought in Northern Italy and Catalunya (Northern Spain.) Sadly, the texts I saw were mostly translations of Ted Kaczynski's work. I think these scenes could benefit from the works of indigenous authors like ZigZag and Waziyatawin.

I also found that people wanted to learn more about this current of thought, but the lack of translated texts made it hard for these ideas to circulate. But I think it's high time for the anti-civ movement to break out of the Turtle Island scene, and expand the world's radical discourse beyond its anti-capitalist frame.

Franklin Lopez hosts the web site **submedia.tv**. where END CIV may be viewed and downloaded for free. It also displays his other documentaries and frequent smash-up commentaries. [Web note: this site is defunct as of February, 2017. Specific articles from it can be found on the Wayback Machine here.]



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