

PROGRESSIVE AND REACTIONARY ATTITUDES TOWARDS
TECHNOLOGY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE, 1937-
2013.

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by Michael Gordon Ralph Potts.

Student Number 21428772

Department of English, University of Canterbury

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Abstract.

In this thesis I trace the origins, morphology, and attributes of a particular strain of anti-materialism in the Western literary and cultural imagination of the second half of the twentieth century. I demonstrate that this strain relies on what Raymond Williams termed “organic form”, the fallacious belief that human society can and should follow a set of rules which can be objectively deducted from nature. I argue that this anti-materialism should be placed within the context of a long established anti-enlightenment tradition. Through an analysis of such writers as George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, JRR Tolkien, Edward Abbey, James Howard Kunstler, Chuck Palahniuk, Brian Aldiss and others I show how a common feature of this anti-materialism is a distrust of, and reaction against, modern technology. More specifically, I am interested in this thesis with examining the way in which this reaction allows for a curious confluence and convergence of progressive and reactionary tendencies. I argue that anti-technologism is a distinct and detectable mood in Western literature, and I trace its origins and influences. Without claiming to provide a functionalist analysis, I consider the role of anti-technologism in Western literature which I see as broadly facilitating an exploration and discussion of themes of cultural vitality and cohesion in the increasingly cosmopolitan and technologically advanced societies of the West. In pursuance of this, I focus in each chapter on a particular aspect of anti-technologism, to draw out its defining characteristics. By reference to other fictional and non-fictional texts I analyse and situate these characteristics to show how anti-technologism is the survival and mutation of earlier dogmas.

INTRODUCTION.

In the summer of 2011, *Adbusters*, a radically anti-consumerist magazine with an alternative Left, politically progressive editorial line (perhaps best known for starting the “Occupy Wall Street” campaign) ran excerpts from the newly translated work of Finnish environmentalist, Pentti Linkola. *Adbusters* introduced him as a radical voice on the environmental crisis whose work is “intentionally provocative”.¹ Sandwiched between shots of industrial landscapes with a slogan asking “Is this the West?” the excerpt fitted in well with *Adbusters’* avowedly anti-corporate, anti-materialist and anti-consumerist stance. Modern civilisation and overpopulation, the excerpt declared, weren't just causing environmental damage, but cultural homogenisation and loss of diversity as well:

I’m not just talking about the suffocation of life due to the population explosion, or that life and the Earth’s respiratory rhythm cry out for the productive, metabolic green oases they so sorely need everywhere, between the areas razed by man. I also mean that humanity, by squirting and birthing all these teeming, filth-producing multitudes from out of itself, in the process also suffocates and defames its own culture (Linkola, excerpt from *Can Life Prevail?* 55).

Provocative indeed. But what the introduction didn’t inform its readers of was that whilst Linkola shared their concerns about the environment, corporatization, cultural identity, and overpopulation, he arrived at this position not from an alternative Left analysis but instead from the Far Right and a belief that inequality and exclusion were natural and democracy and

¹For *Adbusters* and the launch of the Occupy movement see Jeff Sommer: “The War Against Too Much of Everything” New York Times. December 22, 2012. Web.

egalitarianism a sham. Rather than locating the source of the problem in exploitation, neo-colonialism, and inequality, Linkola, in the excerpted book, blames technology and liberal democracy which combined (he claims) have allowed overpopulation and fostered materialism, even as they weakened cultural identity. His website summarises his views: “Linkola is one of the few voices who advocates (1) No immigration (2) Downsize population (3) Kill defectives (4) Stop rampant technology” (Linkola “Ideas”). Hardly a creed that would usually merit inclusion in a progressive publication.

Linkola, then, is no ordinary environmentalist, but rather a Far Right extremist for whom environmental degradation is a result of the degeneracy of the multicultural modern world.² How was it, then, that such extreme right wing views were being aired without context or analysis in a supposedly progressive, anti-corporate magazine such as *Adbusters*? How did a publication that would never normally countenance giving such extremely regressive views a venue justify printing Linkola's “A Demographic Plan” which included the assertion that “the quality of the population must in all cases be taken into account” and therefore the right to have children must be “denied to homes deemed genetically inadequate” (59)? This is by no means an isolated or even particularly unusual case; I cite many more examples from literature and popular culture throughout this thesis where the most extreme reactionary ideals are explored within a putatively liberal, progressive setting. In every case, as I show in this thesis, it is antipathy towards technology and technological modernity that provides the justification for this otherwise inexplicable transfer of ideas from one end of the political spectrum to the other. What is it, then, about antipathy towards technological modernity that seems to license the

² Indeed, as Adam Carter observes, “despite its claims that it is interested solely in unifying a variety of perspectives against the modern world” *Arktos / Integral Tradition* (Linkola's publishers for the English language market) publishes Far Right and Fascist literature with an emphasis on neo-paganism, and has links to notorious neo-Nazis in Britain, Sweden, and New Zealand (Carter NP).

discussion and dissemination of extreme reactionary views within a progressive milieu?

This question and the underlying issues and complexities have fascinated me for several years now. Born in 1972, I grew up against a background of widely held concern over militarization, environmental degradation, overpopulation, and social disintegration. As I started to develop a personal interest in these issues, I began reading *The Ecologist*, which billed itself as "The Journal of the Post-Industrial Age" and was one of the most influential publications dealing with such matters at the time (Wilson). Whilst it didn't strike me as unusual at the time, *The Ecologist* combined a progressive, broadly New Left stance on environmental, defence and business issues with what I later realised was a highly reactionary stance on societal organisation, one that blamed technology for its disruptive effects and was concerned above all else with the idea of social stability. Reviewing the collection of articles from the journal republished in *The Great U-Turn* (1988), for example, shows articles on "The Ecology of War" and "Can Pollution be Controlled?" next to "Education: What For?" which argued against universal education, and "The Fall of the Roman Empire" which argued that "foreign influences were undoubtedly the first cause of the changes which overcame Roman society" and drew numerous parallels between the fall of ancient Rome and modern Western civilisation (Goldsmith 9). The more I considered it, the more this disparity intrigued me and my initial researches led me to Meredith Veldman's *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: 1945-1980* (1994) which first got me thinking seriously about unacknowledged influences and the cross-pollination of ideas and beliefs from conservatism to the newly emergent ideologies of the post war period.³

³ I use both conservatism and reactionary interchangeably in this thesis to refer to an ideology and worldview which is distrustful of the idea of either revolutionary or progressive change, is concerned with themes of national and cultural identity and purity, and is preoccupied with the idea of social stability.

In the research that follows I identify a tradition of cross-pollination of ideas between progressive and reactionary ideologies that coalesced around a theme of resistance to technology in the literature of the second half of the twentieth century and I develop an analysis of a mood in twentieth century literature which I define as "anti-technologism". With reference to the works of such writers as Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Edward Abbey, James Howard Kunstler, Brian Aldiss and others, I argue that anxiety or antipathy regarding technology and technological society is often a displacement of concerns and anxieties regarding the stability of modern mass society under liberal democracy, and the perceived threat of cultural and physical degeneration.⁴ I put forward the hypothesis that technology comes to serve as a kind of marker or metaphor for mass society under liberal democracy as it allows distinctions to be drawn between the supposedly natural and native, and the supposedly artificial and foreign or degenerate. Such a dynamic, I propose, draws on well-established and deeply conservative anti-materialist ideologies, as analysed by Zeev Sternhell in *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (2010).⁵ I do not claim to offer an exhaustive analysis of the trajectory and manifestation of such reactionary ideologies into the Post World War Two era. Instead, my thesis argues that such ideologies survive in literature even in an increasingly progressive era, and it delineates one particular manifestation of this.

⁴ In talking about "modern mass society" and "liberal democracy" I am referring in the first instance to modern Western democracies, but also to the discussion of how such Western democracies should respond to global problems as well. The anxieties and responses which first occurred on "home territory" as it were, are, as I see it, applied and projected on to a global stage. Thus, concerns about a growing population of the poor and "unfit" in England or America, for example, initiates a set of anxieties and responses whose basic form and dynamic is then replayed on a worldwide scale.

⁵ Following Sternhell, I use "anti-materialist" here not in an epistemological or ontological sense, but rather a cultural and political sense to refer to an ideology that rejects materialism and material possessions as a measure of progress. Thus, both communism and laissez-faire capitalism were rejected in traditional conservative ideology because they were in large part materialist philosophies which were predicated on increasing the availability and accessibility of material goods to the greatest number. In contrast, conservative ideologies typically stressed spiritual and hierarchical values with a strong geographical bent (that is, attachment to place).

For these reasons, I situate my thesis with reference to studies concerned more with intellectual and ideological history than those explicitly concerned with technology and its representations in literature. An example of this latter type of analysis would be Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) which deals with the idea of the intrusion of industrialism as represented by the machine in American literature. More recently, Nicholas Daly's *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (2008) expands upon the theme of intrusion to explore representations of impact between machine and human as symbolic of anxieties regarding the erasure of difference between human and machine. Such studies consider the impact of technology on society and on the psyche, both collectively and individually. Other approaches to technology and literature stress the role of mass culture on shaping society, others on the role of technology in conditioning our view of nature and the environment. All of these approaches are perfectly valid, of course, and deal with different aspects of the immense changes wrought by technological innovation. They are, however, only tangentially connected with my interests in this thesis.

Here, I am concerned rather with resistance to technology in literature as an arena for discussion and exploration of otherwise unacceptable anxieties. Therefore, I locate my argument with reference to works such as Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958), Patrick Brantlinger's *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (1983), and Zeev Sternhell's *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (2010). Following Williams and Brantlinger, I take a broadly historicist approach, seeking to place anti-technologism within a wider tradition, and emphasising the extent to which it was and is a continuation of a long-established discussion regarding mass society and concerns about decline and degeneration. I want to note very clearly at this early juncture that I do not see anti-technologism as fundamentally a response to post- World War Two concerns regarding nuclear war, environmental degradation, or the loss of

privacy and autonomy in technological society. Though the works I refer to in this thesis often make use of these themes, I believe that this is substantially a matter of narrative and context rather than content. Therefore, I try to contextualise the themes I discuss within an established literary and intellectual heritage, particularly in the introduction and conclusion to this thesis, in order to try and show the lineage of ideas that anti-technologism draws upon. In this way, I hope to make clearer the way in which I see anti-technologism as a sublimated or displaced discourse.

I hope that this approach will also help clarify why certain authors who have written about the dangers posed by technology are not dealt with in this thesis. Two names which might suggest themselves in this respect are those of Lewis Mumford and JG Ballard, both of whom have written extensively on the dangers of technology. Whilst I would argue that certain elements of their writing reflect certain themes which I identify with anti-technologism, I do not class either of these authors as anti-technologist in outlook as I believe both of them, despite their evident concerns regarding technology and society, are ultimately liberal rationalists in their outlook and as such do not fall prey to the misconceptions which I believe characterise anti-technologism.

Ballard, for example, is clearly deeply interested in exploring the role of technology in modern society and its effect not only on society as a whole, but on individual communities and even our individual psyches. Many of Ballard's novels, such as *High Rise* (1975) or *Hello America* (1983) deal with themes which superficially might seem to mirror anti-technological concerns: the decline of civilisation, the reversion to more traditional or primitive way of living, and even the idea of history moving in cycles of rise, decline, and fall. Yet it is noticeable that what is missing from these dystopian visions is a sense of satisfaction in the collapse of technological modernity. Ballard does not revel in the reversion to the primitive, he explores it. The atavistic behaviour of the inhabitants of the tower block in *High Rise* when communal living collapses is

not a joyful communion with a regained instinct long repressed by modern society, but rather a horrific breaking-out of instincts that had been held in check by modern society. Ballard, the concentration camp survivor, asks the question: what if technological society is only a thin veneer on dark, primal urges which might resurface if the complex machinery of modern society were to break down? Thus, though his concerns overlap with those explored in anti-technologist literature, his perspective and attitude is very different.

Mumford, as his biographer Donald L. Miller notes, was heavily influenced by Spengler and his perception of culture and history as organic and cyclic in *The Decline of the West*, choosing it in 1939 as his selection for Malcom Cowley and Bernard Smith's *Books That Changed Our Minds* (300). As Miller notes, though Mumford found Spengler's thesis persuasive he was too much of a rational optimist to subscribe entirely to the Spenglerian worldview of cyclic rise and collapse and instead "put forward a philosophy to harmonize democracy and planning, the machine and the human spirit, a conception of change encompassing personal as well as institutional regeneration" (302). Thus, whilst Mumford was not immune to one of the more seductive intellectual currents of his time he was able to synthesise it with a rationalistic outlook.

Writers like Ballard and Mumford demonstrate the truth of the assertion that it is perfectly possible to have a critique of technology and society that does not reference or legitimate the kind of dubious analogies and arguments which I examine in this this thesis. It is of course merely a truism to say that technology massively altered western society, especially in the twentieth century, and that a great deal of thought and literature will be rightly devoted to working out the causes, effects, and patterns of that change. The writers I am interested in in

this thesis, though, differ in that their concern about the societal changes wrought by society implicitly or explicitly perceive these changes as a deviation, a degeneration from a previous, better and more natural way of life. With this distinction being drawn, then, I would like to begin with Raymond Williams and *Culture and Society* (1958).

In *Culture and Society* Williams looks at the reaction to industrialisation in English literature and culture, and observes that it is a reaction "compounded of very different and at times even directly contradictory elements" (Williams 20). Williams perceives the reaction as a hybrid ideology that, in resisting the disruption of technology, takes elements of both conservative and liberal thought and combines them, often without acknowledgement or analysis of the fundamental precepts which underpin them. Williams cites the example of John Ruskin, one of the great socialist Victorian reformers, who inveighed against the depredations of the machine age and argued forcefully for a society not only closer to agrarian ideals, but based on the example nature provided. Though Ruskin was politically progressive, even radical, William argues that in applying the aesthetic ideal of "organic form" taken from nature to society, Ruskin was, consciously or not, echoing the arch-conservative thinker, Thomas Carlyle. Williams sees this as a fundamental flaw in Ruskin's philosophy that caused Ruskin to abandon the ideal of equality in favour of a pseudo-naturalistic vision of society ordered in a supposedly natural hierarchy:

The basic idea of 'organic form' produced, in Ruskin's thinking about an ideal society, the familiar notion of a paternal state. He wished to see a rigid class-structure corresponding to the idea of 'function' . . . [therefore] democracy must be rejected: for its conception of the equality of men was not only untrue; it was

also a disabling denial of order and 'function'. The ruling class must be the existing aristocracy, properly trained in its function. (146)

Williams' notion of the "organic form" as a result of the synthesis of paternalistic progressive impulses, agrarian idealism, and subsumed or unacknowledged conservative ideology is crucial to my argument in this thesis. The idea that nature provides a pattern, example, or ideal for society is one of the fundamental attributes of anti-technologism as I analyse it here. Therefore, before proceeding with the literature review part of this introduction, I would like to open out what is meant by the use of the organic form and some of the implications that follow on from it. As stated earlier, I draw my examples from the first half of the twentieth century here in order to demonstrate an established literary and intellectual heritage for the anti-technologism of the second half of the century.

The idea of organic form taken from nature and applied to human society and history is an attractive if invalid analogy common to many cultures and civilisations, not least because the appeal to "nature" very often turns out to be "merely a generic designation for the valid norm of human life" (Lovejoy & Boas 13). It gives the status quo (or the desired structure) a veneer not only of rationality but inevitability. If a certain way of life is natural, then by definition any deviation from it is artificial and unnatural, and must sooner or later come to grief. Of course, technology is the ultimate expression of this perceived artificiality, and its disruption of the natural order led some early writers to embrace fascism as a means of reconciling the world as they found it with their belief in the imperative of the organic form. Orwell, for example, very clearly identifies this mood in Yeats:

Translated into political terms, Yeats's tendency is Fascist. Throughout most of his life, and long before Fascism was ever heard of, he had had the outlook of those who reach Fascism by the aristocratic route. He is a great hater of democracy, of the modern world, science, machinery, the concept of progress — above all, of the idea of human equality. Much of the imagery of his work is feudal, and it is clear that he was not altogether free from ordinary snobbishness. (Orwell “W B Yeats” 176)

As Orwell observes, this tendency was often (in the early twentieth century) found paired with an interest in the occult and the cyclic theory of history, as "if it is true that 'all this', or something like it, 'has happened before', then science and the modern world are debunked at one stroke and progress becomes forever impossible" (Orwell “W B Yeats” 177). In the writing I examine from the second half of the twentieth century an interest in the occult is mostly exchanged for an insistence on the unsustainability of modern society by reference to the collapse of previous civilisations, though the impulse is the same.⁶ Belief in a cyclical version of history (instead of the traditional Western linear view) allows not only denunciations of bourgeois notions of “progress” in material terms of comfort and health, but also gives credence to the idea that the decline and degeneration writers like Yeats saw all around them were the paradoxical but inevitable result of such material progress, an idea Patrick Brantlinger (see below) has termed

⁶A distinction needs to be made here between legitimate criticisms of modern resource use and pollution and the employment of spurious arguments from analogy which use extrapolation to turn a relatively short-term trend into a civilization-ending phenomenon. The classic example of this latter tendency would be the panic over the demographic transition that accompanied the industrialisation of non-Western countries which I consider in the chapter on anti-technologism and overpopulation.

"negative classicism".⁷

Yeats was only one of the prominent writers of the first half of the twentieth century who misused the organic form fallacy and consequently came to defend or justify inequality and exclusion. TS Eliot was another. His Page-Barbour lectures to the University of Virginia in 1933 (published under the title *After Strange Gods*) are worth pausing over as they exemplify the way in which the belief that society should in some way be based on nature precipitates a further series of conflations and false analogies about what is natural and what is artificial and hence what should be proscribed and excluded, a discussion that occurs frequently in anti-technological texts. Furthermore, it provides an early and particularly clear demonstration of the way in which the organic metaphor, whilst anti-capitalist and ecological in tone, is concerned above all else with the idea of nature as both continuity and renewal, a counterbalance to the wrenching societal changes wrought by technology.

In his lectures, Eliot is concerned to lend his support to a group of writers from the old Confederate American states that came to be known as the New Agrarians for their rejection of industrialism and defence of tradition, as collected in 1930 in *I'll Take My Stand* (Twelve Southerners). Eliot chooses to make his case for tradition and agrarianism in Virginia not only for this literary reason but also because he sees Virginia as potentially more fertile ground for his argument because "you are farther away from New York; you have been less industrialised and less invaded by foreign races; and you have a more opulent soil" (16). Eliot argues that the "happiest" lands are those in which "the landscape has been molded by numerous generations

⁷ As John Carey notes, much of Yeats' fascistic tendencies sprang from his eugenicism and belief that improvements in science, technology, and medicine were allowing the survival and multiplication of the supposedly less fit. Thus, Carey paraphrases Yeats' conviction in his 1939 work, *On the Boiler*, that "the principal European nations are all degenerating in body and mind, though the evidence for this has been hushed up by the newspapers lest it harm circulation" (Carey 13,14).

of one race, and in which the landscape in turn has modified the race to its own character", a claim which shows Eliot's Spenglerian influences very clearly (17). Eliot's declared target here is "economic determinism" which he believes has led to both the decline of the family farm as a way of life and its associated traditions and culture (17). Rather than subsequently engaging in a materialist analysis based on class or economics though, Eliot locates the root of the problem in an intellectualism that fails to recognise and acknowledge the importance of the cultural traditions that he believes are the outwards representations that affirm "the blood kinship of 'the same people living in the same place'" (18). Employing the organic metaphor to bolster rhetorically the organicism of his beliefs here, Eliot claims that we become aware of the importance of these representations of tradition and culture "only after they have begun to fall into desuetude, as we are aware of the leaves of a tree when the Autumn winds begin to blow them off - when they have ceased to be vital" (18).

Having singled out disinterested intellectual enquiry, "economic determinism" and estrangement from the soil as causes of the decline in cultural vitality that he perceives, Eliot offers his prescription for a return to a society ordered along the organic lines championed by the New Agrarians. "Stability is obviously necessary" according to Eliot, because the movement or migration of people from place to place dissolves the connections between people and place, and therefore make the revitalisation of culture and tradition difficult:

The population should be homogenous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate. What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable. There must be a proper balance between urban and rural,

industrial and agricultural development. And a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated. (19, 20)

The interplay between the oppositions set up by Eliot here neatly exemplifies the way in which the organicist conception of society is fundamentally an irredentist one concerned with cultural purity and vitality (the two are intimately connected in anti-technologism).⁸ The emphasis on "stability" and "balance" are hallmarks of the organicist perception which encode an argument for the subordination of individualism and liberalism in the interests of the vitality and health of the social body as a homogenous whole.⁹ As such, they are an important and frequently recurring theme in anti-technologism.

The use of the organic form is also picked up on by Patrick Brantlinger in *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (1983). Brantlinger builds on Williams's analysis to develop a theory of negative classicism: the belief that the rise of the masses and mass culture portends the decline of culture and civilisation, that historical evidence for this can be found by reviewing the fate of previous civilisations such as ancient Rome, and that such decline and decadence arises when individual rights and freedom of expression take precedence over social cohesion and homogeneity. Like Williams, Brantlinger also sees negative classicism as a deeply contradictory impulse that arose out of the belief that the prosperity brought by technological progress was leading paradoxically to the breakdown of society. A corollary of this

⁸ I use the term "irredentist" to refer to ideologies that base claims to territory or land on ethnic and cultural grounds and that emphasise a close connection between a people and a territory. Irredentism is perhaps most succinctly described in the phrase "blood and soil".

⁹ Returning to my initial example of the crossover of reactionary and progressive ideologies in *Adbusters*, they reproduce Brett Steven's introduction to Linkola's work which cites Michel Houellebecq's novel *Atomised* (1998) in support of the idea that the root cause of environmental degradation is the Enlightenment ideal of individual autonomy: "Our civilization understands itself not as a product of history and maker of future history but as a facilitation - like a big shopping mall with a legal system" (96). The interests of the individual are set in spurious opposition to those of society.

belief, Brantlinger observes, is that it "substitutes a catastrophic or cyclic view of history for a progressive one" because it posits a form of social entropy in which increasing prosperity and egalitarianism lead to a diffusion of perceived societal goals, the dilution of social cohesion, and eventually to irrationality and the return of barbarism (51).

Noting the bipartisan appeal of this seductive mythology, Brantlinger traces the rise in influence of this idea to Oswald Spengler and his immensely influential work *The Decline of the West* (1918), though as he rightly points out, the idea has numerous antecedents. Spengler's thesis of an organic form or morphology of history, consisting of the rise of culture, its reification into the forms of civilisation, its expansion in its late imperial phase and eventual ossification, decline and dissolution influenced not only other historians such as Arnold Toynbee but also psychologists like Sigmund Freud, critical theorists of the Frankfurt School such as Adorno and Horkheimer, and writers such as DH Lawrence, James Joyce, and W B Yeats.¹⁰ I make extensive use of Brantlinger's theory of negative classicism in this thesis as it points to an important and often unacknowledged aspect of modernity, namely the extent to which catastrophism and the sense of apocalypse underpin not just the texts which I examine here, but much of modern culture itself. As the cultural critic Christopher Lasch put it in 1984, "the rhetoric of crisis now pervades discussion of race relations, prison reform, mass culture, fiscal management, and everyday personal 'survival'" (63).

Lasch, like many other critics, traces this sense of decline and crisis back to World War Two and its aftermath, to the atomic bomb, the horror of Nazi concentration camps, and the

¹⁰ As Peter Fjågesund points out in *The Apocalyptic World of DH Lawrence* (1998), the Spenglerian themes of civilisation in decline and decay pervade Lawrence's thought and writing, as the critic Henry Miller grasped: "Doom! Lawrence sees it written all over the universe. Even more forbidding, more devastating than Spengler sees it. Not just an Occidental culture, not just the Faustian man, the Gothic soul, but man everywhere . . . he returns to it eternally" (qtd in Fjågesund 45).

realisation of the damage being done to the environment and human health. Whilst it is a truism to state that World War Two and its aftermath as well as the threat of nuclear annihilation during the cold war caused a re-evaluation of modernity and the idea of progress, it is an important part of my argument that anti-technologism as I define it pre-dates this. Hence I make it an integral aspect of my thesis, and particularly the introduction and the first chapter, to show that anti-technologism has literary and intellectual roots from significantly before World War Two and the atomic bomb.

Meredith Veldman, whose work most closely anticipates my own, albeit from a slightly different perspective, considers this continuity in her work *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest 1945-1980* (1994). As the subtitle of her work suggests, she is concerned with what she terms "romantic protest", a term she admits is somewhat ambiguous but argues that it is useful as a descriptor for "certain common patterns and themes . . . a shared series of affirmations and denials" that she observes in the fantasies of conservative writers such as C S Lewis and JRR Tolkien, and the post-war protest movements such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the nascent Green movement, particularly in Britain (1). This common attribute, Veldman argues, was unease and even distrust of technological, technocratic modernity and a sense that society had lost its organic wholeness or unity. In this belief, she proposes, conservative writers like Tolkien and Lewis significantly influenced the new counter-cultural protest movement which,

affirmed and sought to strengthen the bonds between humanity and the natural world, endeavored to restore the ties between individual human beings and their histories, and struggled to rebuild community life and spirit in a society they believed to be increasingly atomized . . . Asserting that material, empirical reality

did not encompass the whole of truth, they [the participants in the progressive and alternative movements] looked for ways to acknowledge and expand intuitive, emotional, and spiritual assumptions of contemporary society, and sought, in very different ways, to save their worlds from decay and destruction.

(1,2)

Veldman's mention of a shared attempt between conservative writers such as Tolkien and Lewis and progressive movements to forestall perceived decay is acute, and it is a shame that she does not really engage with an analysis of this aspect in particular. This is an aspect which I shall return to later in my discussion of Paul Monaco's conception of "reactionary consciousness".

Essentially, Veldman appears to accept at face value the themes of cultural identity, community cohesion, and the forestalling of societal decay in the works of Lewis, Tolkien and others, as well as in the early counter-cultural movements and chooses not to enquire too deeply into the fundamental preconceptions which underlie them. She notes, for example, that the tradition she analyses adopts the "organic form" perception of society and even cites Williams in this context, but fails to note William's observation of the strong illiberal tendencies such a view licensed (11-14). In part such an emphasis stems from Veldman's evident sympathy with the idea of organic form, as with romantic protest as a whole, but it leads her to gloss over or omit important distinctions, particularly where issues of class inequality and racial exclusion are concerned. For example, in sketching out the historical roots of romantic protest Veldman briefly discusses the Romantic poets but begins individual case studies with Thomas Carlyle. She notes that a large part of Carlyle's influence lay in his approach to history not as a bald recitation of facts and events but "as a storehouse of moral and spiritual wisdom" that a properly poetic historian should interpret in ways which informed the conduct and ordering of contemporary

society. She observes that for Carlyle, faith in the idea of progress was not only "wrongheaded and dangerous" but "part of the intrusion of the Machine into all aspects of life" and closes her review of Carlyle's importance to the romantic protest tradition by commenting that his "social and cultural critique offered a vision of the preindustrial past as a repository of much needed wisdom and an example of authentic community" (16).

All of this is fine as far as it goes, but it omits entirely any discussion of Carlyle's counter-Enlightenment views and how this informed his dim view of democracy and his belief in inequality as an unalterable law of nature - a strange omission in a work which undertakes to look at an aspect of the history of protest and social criticism. Carlyle's "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" goes entirely unmentioned, even though it launches the most blatant and grotesque defence of slavery and inequality on the entirely spurious grounds of natural hierarchy. Such considerations are no mere curiosities, nor are they merely inevitable examples of a generalised racism and classism prevalent at the time, rather they are absolutely fundamental to Carlyle's attempt to "save his world from decay and destruction" (14). To say that Carlyle rebelled against the reform movement because it was an "intrusion of the Machine" - an attempt to reduce human affairs and happiness to equations of material prosperity - merely glides over the fundamental preconceptions which underpinned this antipathy. As Sternhell notes, Carlyle's animus against reformism, as against rationalism and the Enlightenment, lay precisely in the fact that he believed they upended the proper organic form of society:

Carlyle saw the universe as both a monarchy and a hierarchy, governed by the Almighty with an eternal justice; this was the model for all "Constitutions". The laws of nature, of which democracy is precisely the opposite, require superior people, nobles, to lead the less noble, and that is the reason why democracy is an

imposture . . . Thus [for Carlyle] inequality is natural and universal suffrage absurd. (219)

Hence, Veldman's analysis of the charges Carlyle leveled against the idea of progress is not necessarily incorrect, but it is certainly incomplete. Carlyle's rejection of "the intrusion of the Machine" is not a motivating cause of his rejection, as she seems to treat it, but a symptom of a far more fundamental organicist philosophy which saw in nature proof of the eternal inequality of human society, and thus the unsustainability of attempts to ameliorate that inequality.

Similarly, in discussing the role of early twentieth century Guild Socialism as a precursor to later anti-materialist progressive movements, Veldman omits discussion of its hierarchical and reactionary aspects in favour of a portrayal of a movement guided by a search for communal values not based on the cash nexus. She notes that the movement was founded by AJ Penty as an alternative to the more materialist concerns of Fabian Socialism, but after a brief mention of Penty's founding vision of a non-materialist socialism that tried to "recapture cohesion and vitality" she moves on immediately to claim GDH Cole as "Guild Socialism's foremost thinker and activist" before devoting the next three pages to Cole's vision of Guild Socialism and its influence on later romantic protest (24). However, in the same context Philip Conford's *History of the Organic Movement* (2001) gives Cole only a single passing mention as one of the members of the first executive of the National Guilds League and focuses instead on AJ Penty and AR Orage as the prime figures in the movement. So far as Penty as the founder of the Guild Socialist movement is concerned, Conford remarks that "Penty's career provides an excellent example of the stages by which a man of the radical Left might end up on the far Right" (154). Veldman does not consider Penty's path from disillusionment with the materialism of traditional Socialism to the neo-feudalism of Guild Socialism to his eager defence of Italian fascism as a regenerative

force. Yet this progression is once again no mere historical curiosity but an outcome of pre-existing fundamental preconceptions, not least Penty's hierarchical organicism, his belief that the most pressing matter facing society at the time was "not primarily a question of the redistribution of wealth, necessary as that may be, but of how to get the social pyramid to rest again foursquare upon its base instead of upon its apex as it currently does" (32). Like Ruskin, Eliot, Carlyle, and other organicist thinkers, Penty's primary concern was "stability" and "balance", the reversion to a traditional hierarchy based on land ownership and agricultural production. Similarly, Tom Gibbons (1974) notes of AR Orage, the other important figure in Guild Socialism and founder of the *New Age* and *New English Weekly* journals (of which Eliot was later the editor), "Orage's guild socialism, despite its evolutionist and Nietzschean trappings, is basically a program for neo-feudalism, with its roots in that pervasive Victorian nostalgia for an idealized medieval society" (1143-4).

Penty believed that the "pyramid" of society had been upended by the imposition of machinery and the search for efficiency in the name of profit and consumerism. This, he felt, was the cause of the malaise he detected all around him. "Society" he declared, "can only be in a stable and healthy condition when its manufactures [*sic*] rest on a foundation of agriculture and home-produced raw material and when its people share a common life in the family, the guild and locality" (33). Not only would international trade lead to economic instability, Penty argued, but also psychological instability as well because "insofar as the opposite ideal of cosmopolitanism comes to prevail, people become uprooted, and once they are uprooted they begin to find themselves at loose ends" (33). Like Eliot, he identified technology with speculative international finance, cosmopolitanism, arid intellectualism, and - most importantly - with the decay of shared cultural values.

In failing to acknowledge what we might think of as the darker side of romantic protest, Veldman weakens an otherwise perspicacious and highly original thesis. Whilst she draws many highly illuminating connections between pre-war movements, thinkers, and writers, and post-war progressive and counter-cultural movements, she makes only cursory nods towards the more problematic elements of these pre-war movements and writers and is perhaps a little too quick to accept the thought that romantic protest was purely a positive movement to revive community cohesion and a sense of shared identity. This is not to condemn what is an otherwise excellent work, but rather to point out that there is a need for an exploration of this darker side of romantic protest, the attraction of organic form and its attendant theme of anti-technologism.

In making the case for the need for a review of this darker side of romantic protest I will begin by arguing that romantic protest can be traced back to the counter-enlightenment attack on individualism and I will propose that the anti-technologism of the second half of the twentieth century was a manifestation of what I identify as the deeply contradictory nature of this movement which simultaneously sought to advance the sphere of human experience whilst also limiting it with reference to the bounds of nature, environment, ethnicity, and culture. I begin by adopting Paul Monaco's conception of the "reactionary consciousness" in *Modern European Culture and Consciousness 1870-1980* (1983).

In his thesis Monaco distinguishes between three essential ways of thinking in modern Europe, three consciousnesses: individualistic, revolutionary, and reactionary. The first two types can be identified to a substantial degree with the ideals of the Enlightenment, individual consciousness emerged via the ideal of the renaissance human, Diderot's encyclopedic human, Proust's fully realized individual and, later, existentialism; Revolutionary consciousness was the

embodiment of this idea of the fully realised self as achieved through collective action. Arising in the French revolution, revolutionary consciousness may be thought of as the idea that progress demanded not incremental reform but systematic change. Reactionary consciousness Monaco defines as

a state of awareness that is in rebellion against the loss of community, the loss of identity, and the loss of a sense of transcendence. Reactionary consciousness rebels against loneliness and anomie, against rationalism and materialism, and against the artifices of human progress and technology. In seeking to ameliorate the condition of spiritual and emotional impoverishment brought on by modern life in industrial societies, reactionary consciousness marks an atavistic flight from nearly any aspect of experience that may be called modern. In this flight, the pursuit of a return to nature, or the embrace of instinct over reason, or the quest to recognize links between people which are racial rather than historical, are common. (91)¹¹

If we compare this to Veldman's analysis of romantic protest cited earlier, we can see that the two are almost identical. The only real difference is Monaco's additional identification of the desire to find racial links between people as a common theme, and his labeling of this mindset as reactionary. This is highly significant because it points to a dichotomy: an important part of Veldman's argument is that the alternative movements in Post-war Britain such as the "New Left", the Green Party, and other protest movements should be placed within this tradition of

¹¹ I think it needs to be made clear here that Monaco's mention of historical rather than racial links between people refers purely to the existing facts of history, that is, to the events that resulted in nations and other forms of alliance. It is not, at least as I interpret it, a claim for the primacy or righteousness of determining links between people by reference to their historical antecedents. In other words, Monaco refers to actually existing links between people, and not to an ideal.

romantic protest, an argument which she makes a very convincing and well-documented case for. Yet Monaco identifies these same themes and concerns not with progressivism, but with the reactionary consciousness. How, then, can this circle be squared?

Providing a full answer to such a question would require a thesis in itself, and would certainly take me far beyond the restricted area of interest I have demarcated for this thesis. However, I believe some headway can be made here if we recognise two essential elements. First, that Veldman's romantic protest and Monaco's reactionary consciousness are two ways of looking at and thinking about permutations of the counter-enlightenment tradition. Second, that the counter-enlightenment tradition is best thought of not as "anti-modern" or an utter refusal or denial of modernity, but rather a product of modernity itself. That is to say, all counter-enlightenment movements, whether the Romantic poets, the Victorian medievalists, *fin de siècle* thinkers such as Croce, Taine, Spengler and Ortega, or the anti-technologism which I discuss in this thesis, are best conceived of as modernity struggling with its own contradictions. The problem with this, as Monaco points towards, and which I explore in this thesis, is that rebelling against the materialism and rationalism of the modern world, in the often honest attempt to ameliorate anomie and atomisation, frequently leads to xenophobia, racism, irrationality, and a distasteful and often disastrous quest for cultural purity. Most of the writers I examine in the chapters would normally be considered politically progressive, or at least are often associated with politically progressive causes, yet as I will show, their work often exhibits a paradox whereby the quest to affirm non-materialistic ties between people leads to sympathetic treatment and even recommendation of exclusionary and repressive policies.

Exploring the attributes of anti-technologism and how it enables this synthesis of progressive and reactionary attitudes will be the work of this thesis, but for now I want to begin opening out a consideration of how anti-technologism allows anxieties regarding mass society and liberal democracy to be discussed, making use of John Carey's work in *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (1992). Having done that, I will then sketch a brief alternative history of the romantic protest movement that complements Veldman's work by showing that there were significant reactionary elements at play in the early progressive movements. I show how these reactionary elements can be identified by their antipathy towards technology and their use of the organic form metaphor for society, and briefly discuss their influence both on the early progressive movements and more specifically on anti-technologism in literature.

Carey's work focuses on the rise of mass democracy and egalitarianism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and attempts by literary and artistic elites to draw superficially convincing distinctions between themselves and the public. Much of Carey's work focuses on the influence of Nietzsche and the cult of vitalism and "natural aristocracy" for artists, writers and intellectuals, together with a concomitant rewriting of the bulk of humanity in dehumanizing terms which emphasised its purported indistinguishability and "massness" (71).¹²

¹² Here we come up against one of the many contradictions of anti-technologism and the thinking behind it: as my reference to Eliot and his desire to exclude "free-thinking Jews" showed earlier, and as many of the examples in this thesis attest to, intellectuals and intellectualism are blamed as one of the root causes of degeneration because they question the cultural underpinnings and beliefs of society. Of course, Eliot was by any definition an intellectual, as was Nietzsche, Spengler, Ortega and many of the other writers and thinkers who criticised intellectuals and intellectualism. Once again, this seeming contradiction can, I believe be traced back to the tension between enlightenment and counter-enlightenment thought. Counter-enlightenment thinkers, stressing the importance of cultural, ethnic, and historical ties and contexts accused enlightenment thinkers and intellectuals of abstract and metaphysical thinking, divorced from specific realities. It is, then, not intellectualism as such that is

This rewriting, Carey remarks, used vitalistic and organicist metaphors to draw invidious but superficially convincing distinctions between the mobile and "artificial" inhabitants of industrial cities and the traditional and stable hierarchies of peasants, aristocrats, and intellectuals.

Parallel with this desire to reclaim individualism by drawing spurious distinctions between artists, intellectuals and aristocrats on one hand, and the great bulk of humanity on the other was a rising interest in eugenic theory, which gave the appearance of scientific validity, inevitability, and even a sort of philanthropic paternalism to fantasies of eliminating large swathes of the population (or at least, denying their essential humanity). Carey cites D H Lawrence's letter to Blanche Jennings of 1908 in which Lawrence fantasises about a solution to the problem of the poor, sick and crippled of London:

If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber, as big as the Crystal Palace, with a military band playing softly, and a Cinematograph working brightly; then I'd go out in the back streets and main streets and bring them all in, all the sick, the halt, and the maimed; I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks; and the band would softly bubble out the "Hallelujah Chorus". (qtd in Carey 12)

It is telling that an important element of Lawrence's fantasy here is the use of mass media and popular music, not only as a final concession to the masses, but also as a final identification of

being attacked, but rationalism. As Sternhell puts it, for counter-enlightenment thinkers, "rationalism was the source of the evil: it led to 'materialism', to utopias . . . it killed instinct and vital forces; it destroyed the almost carnal connection between the members of an ethnic community and made one live in an unreal world" (24).

their disposability as products of mass-production, the detritus of machine civilisation. Lawrence seems to feel that the existence of such people shows that technological society perverts nature's law of survival of the fittest and therefore institutes its own decline. Thus at the end of his 1923 semi-autobiographical novel *Kangaroo* (which, as Kermode notes, "offers a surprisingly naked self-portrait") the hero proclaims that "I'm the enemy of this machine-civilisation and this ideal civilisation. But I'm not the enemy of the deep, self-responsible consciousness in man, which is what I mean by civilisation" (Kermode 99 and Lawrence 383).¹³

Neither is the case of Lawrence a particularly egregious example, either then or now, as many of the examples in this thesis affirm. Indeed, as Carey observes, the horrors perpetrated by Hitler, whilst seen in retrospect as an unfathomable aberration were in many aspects the instantiation of contemporary fears and fantasies which many writers and intellectuals subscribed to and which set up pseudo-naturalistic oppositions between fit and unfit populations. The spurious division between "fit" and "unfit" populations using biological metaphors, for example, was not restricted to Nazi propaganda, but as Carey points out, was a common theme among many writers and intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century.

All these elements manifested in vitalistic labels and metaphors which either explicitly or implicitly declared some people to be more alive or more vital than others. Robert Proctor's research on metaphors of organicism and pollution in *The Nazi War on Cancer* (1999)

¹³ Lawrence manifests this diminution of people to disposable masses in *Kangaroo* when the hero, Richard Somers, reads of twenty young bullocks following each other into a mud pit and drowning. Lawrence, as Somers, presents this as a parable on mass civilisation and democracy: "That, thought Richard at the close of the day, is a sufficient comment on herd-unity, equality, domestication, and civilisation. He felt he would have liked to climb down into that hole in which the bullocks were drowning and beat them all hard before they expired, for being such mechanical logs of life" (307).

demonstrates that the counterpart to the dehumanisation and genocide of "unfit" or "unnatural" populations was an intense interest in natural foods and medicines for the "fit" populations. As he notes, whilst images of industrial-scale extermination, of bodies being bulldozed into open pits, are well-known, it is less well known that prisoners at Dachau cultivated herbs for use in alternative medicine and research and produced organic honey, or that bakeries in Germany were required by law to bake only wholegrain bread (4, 56). Here, in horrific fact, is the division between the "illegitimate" and "artificial" masses, identified with mass-production and systematically disposed of, and "legitimate" populations, the conception of whom is increasingly invested with a kind of vitalism which affirms their connections (and hence their claim) to the soil. Under such an ideology the concept of growth attains a bizarre duality, in which the fertility of legitimised populations is identified with nature and welcomed as natural, wholesome growth, whilst that of delegitimised and "artificial" populations is seen as parasitic and unsustainable.¹⁴

Robinson Jeffers' 1937 poem "Decaying Lambskins" exemplifies the literary representation of these elements as well as the transfiguration of the masses into mass-produced technological artifacts. As such, he represents a mid-point between the explicit stance of the likes of Yeats and Lawrence, and the more sublimated discourse of later anti-technologism. He reprises the same themes, but also begins to shift the discourse away from literalism and into metaphor and representation. Jeffers argues in the poem that even though our technology is much more advanced – "Our engineers have nothing to learn from Rome's" and our science "can hardly / Lean low enough, sun-blinded eagle, to laugh at the strange /

¹⁴ I analyse anti-technologism's treatment of this theme in my chapter on Tolkien and in my chapter on over-population.

astronomies of Babylon" – ours is in truth not an admirable but rather a sick and decaying civilisation (3, 5-7). We are not "boastful" but instead "wearily ashamed" he declares, because,

What is noble in us, to kindle

The imagination of a future age? We shall seem a race of cheap

Fausts, vulgar magicians.

What men have we to show them? but inventions and appliances.

Not men but populations, mass-men; not life

But amusements; not health but medicines . . . (12-19)

Jeffers wonders if the same technology that brought such debilitating ease might also be part of the solution through war, and therefore whether it might be "almost time to let our supreme inventions begin to work" and "the exact, intelligent guns" to "wheel themselves into action" - but unfortunately he finds no solace in the prospect of any imminent revitalising catastrophe there either: "Our civilization, the worst it can do, cannot yet destroy itself / But deep-wounded drag on for centuries" (24-26, 31-2). Like Lawrence, what seems to anger Jeffers particularly is the thought that technology is subverting nature's law of survival of the fittest, thereby allowing superfluous populations to not only survive but even impose a measure of control, thus preventing heroic men from assuming command.

The idea of organic form, that society should mirror the processes of nature, then, leads to an extended series of subsequent beliefs and ideals. A common factor, though, is the idea of degeneration and decline in technological society. On the one hand, intellectualism (more specifically, rationalism) and science are blamed for a moral and cultural decline as they loosen

the beliefs, shared cultural values, and respect for tradition and authority that bind traditional, hierarchical society together. On the other hand technology is condemned for a physical and mental decline in the overall health of a nation, as the checks and balances of nature on society are circumvented. Such anxieties became translated in the literature of the interwar years into metaphors that portray organic wholeness and purity being infiltrated by some foreign and sinister agent. Henry Williamson (author of *Tarka the Otter* and *Salar the Salmon*) in his autobiographical work, *The Story of a Norfolk Farm* (1941), blamed the new chemical pesticides for his mother's cancer, but makes the cancer representative of a more fundamental sickness in society: "I put my hand on her brow, thinking how small it was, and childlike, with the thin faded hairs, and the dark suffering eyes. Was this dread thing that was killing her due to white bread, to wrong values, to industrialism, to unnatural ideas which had come upon European man?" (48).

Though he cannot cure his mother's cancer and make her whole again, Williamson holds firm to the hope that the cancer he identifies in society might be removed once the unsustainable technological world collapses and society returns to its traditional homogenous organic structure:

I longed to say, Mother dear, do not be afraid, the children will be so happy and fearless, strong and confident to make the New World out of the wreckage of the Old, in which you, a tiny unit, are perishing; and I, too, perhaps, in my time. Mother, the salmon dies after spawning, and the floods of spring wash its dislusted body to the great sea again, to dissolution and return to the fount of life, even as the eggs are hatching in the pure gravel beds of its racial origin. And

so your children, through me your son, will live the happier because they are natural on their native land. (48)

Williamson differentiates between, and translates into metaphor, two different types of growth: the unnatural and exponential growth of cancer, identified with technology and urbanism, which expands relentlessly and unsustainably until it ultimately collapses, and the organic growth of nature and life lived in accordance with nature's laws, which is cyclical and draws sustenance from the death of the old life to sustain the new. Again, the idea of growth is given a bizarre duality, in which a dubious distinction is set up between natural and desirable growth and artificial and sinister growth which is identified with science and technology in the service of international capitalism.

Given that a return to the type of society Williamson and others believed was necessary would incur a wholesale return to the land and traditional relationships, it was highly unlikely that any democracy would institute the types of remedial policies that were supposedly needed. Therefore, Williamson and many writers and intellectuals sought solace in the theory that history, as well as society, had an organic form, that civilisations arose, grew, matured and then decayed and died. Anti-technologism embodies and instantiates this theory in two important respects. Firstly, it holds a contradictory attitude, bemoaning evidence of decline, and warning of catastrophe, yet at the very same time also desiring it on some level as the point at which the old civilisation is finally ended and the new culture and civilisation can begin again.¹⁵ Secondly, it

¹⁵ Ronald Wright's 1997 novel, *A Scientific Romance* (the title is a nod to the influence of HG Wells) exemplifies the continuation of this tendency into the last quarter of the twentieth century when the narrator of the novel declares that "civilizations, like individuals, are born, flourish, and die . . . the very qualities which bring them into being - their drive, their inventions, their beliefs, their ruthlessness - become indulgences that in the end will poison them" (82-3).

venerates "primitive" people, not for who they actually are in themselves, but for what they supposedly represent: perfect symbiosis with nature according to its laws, survival of the fittest, leadership of the best, and absolute cultural and ethnic homogeneity. The primitive in anti-technologism represents living proof of humanity's original state and the continuing possibility of organic society, of living according to the rules of nature rather than democracy.¹⁶

In this introduction so far I have used texts from the first half of the twentieth century to exemplify the themes of anti-technologism, because I am concerned to clearly establish a literary and intellectual precedent for anti-technologism that predates both the environmental and anti-war movements of the period following World War Two. As well as establishing anti-technologism within a tradition in Western literature I have also been concerned to demonstrate that anti-technologism explores the same themes and anxieties as these earlier works. In addition, while showing that the particular antipathy towards technology that I analyse here was not simply a reaction to the threat of nuclear war or environmental disaster I also want to lay the foundations for the argument that anti-technologism facilitates the cross-pollination and synthesis of progressive and reactionary attitudes because it speaks to some of modern society's current fears, such as environmental degradation, but does so within an entirely different and largely unspoken intellectual framework. What I would like to do now is to give a specific example of the reactionary themes I've discussed here being discussed in a putatively progressive milieu of the early environmental and Green movement in Britain in the 1970s. My

¹⁶ A curious consequence of this, as I show repeatedly in this thesis, is that very often xenophobia or even outright racism is combined with admiration for primitive tribes and societies. Their cultural and ethnic homogeneity is praised as an example of the desirability of cultural and ethnic homogeneity generally in each distinct population. The praise of diversity and the admiration of different cultures often found in anti-technological writers is perfectly sincere, and yet is predicated on the desire to maintain (or advance) cultural and ethnic homogeneity at home. The "diversity" praised by anti-technologism is, as I will show in this thesis, a diversity of separate entities, each strictly homogenous; not a commingled diversity but a plurality of purities.

example focuses on two men: Edward Goldsmith, founder and editor of *The Ecologist*, and his close friend, naturalist, zoo owner and casino owner, John Aspinall.

In her work on romantic protest, Veldman notes that *The Ecologist* was "the leading eco-activist journal in the early 1970s [and] was significant in the early Green movement for a number of reasons" (227). This assessment is supported by Bramwell (1989) who observes that "the intellectual core of the British ecological movement during the 1960s and 1970s was with *The Ecologist*, a journal edited and financed by the brother of Sir James Goldsmith, the multi-millionaire businessman" (218).¹⁷ Tom Burke, one of the directors of Friends of the Earth (UK) during the 1980s called *The Ecologist's* 1972 publication, *Blueprint for Survival*, "the seminal document for the birth of the modern environment movement. It created a framework of ideas for the first time" (qtd in Lamb (1996) 45).

The hugely successful *Blueprint for Survival*, which called for a new ecological sensibility and the imposition of austerity to conserve resources was launched at the Clermont Club and Casino, owned by Edward Goldsmith's close friend, John Aspinall (famous for his private zoo and his practice of "going in" to the animal enclosures). Together with his brother, James Goldsmith, and Aspinall, Edward Goldsmith had significant and substantial influence on the direction of the early Green movement.¹⁸

¹⁷ Bramwell seems to have made an error here, as *The Ecologist* was founded in 1970.

¹⁸ As Eric Krebbers of the Dutch anti-fascist organisation Der Faabel observes, apart from the use of *The Ecologist* as a forum for his ideas, this influence was exercised mainly through funding "actions against gene-technology, nuclear power and the supposed 'globalization'" (Krebbers, Westerink, and Schoenmaker 2003 97). Robert Lamb (1996) gives an example of this when he notes how Graham Searle, one of the founders of Friends of the Earth (UK) raised funds for the organisation by "dining with the devil" in the early 1970s: "At the playful invitation of society gambler and zoo owner John Aspinall, [Searle] attended a private dinner in Belgravia along with some of the wealthiest industrialists

The Ecologist, which billed itself as "The Journal of the Post-Industrial Age" (a phrase coined by Penty) was founded at a meeting of the Primitive People's Fund (later renamed Survival International) which campaigned for the rights of tribal people worldwide (Veldman 228).¹⁹ Thus, as Veldman observes, Goldsmith and other members of *The Ecologist* "came to an ecological awareness via anthropological concerns" and this "hunter-gatherer ideal shaped the main ideas of *A Blueprint for Survival*, one of the key texts of the early Green movement" (229, 230). In his introduction to *The Great U-Turn* (1988) Goldsmith summarises this approach and begins by arguing that "the development of science, technology, industry, the global market system and the modern state" are the cause of our problems and that these problems "can only be solved by reversing these developments" (Introduction n. pag.). In this he looks to traditional societies which he claims were and are free of such problems and provide the only proven blueprint for a sustainable and stable society: "for to postulate an ideal society for which there is no precedent within the human experience . . . is very much like postulating an alternative biology without reference to the sort of biological structures that have so far proved viable" (n. pag.). It is from his study of traditional societies that Goldsmith took his policy of "no growth" both industrially and in terms of population. Goldsmith saw both of these as examples of

in Britain, including Teddy Goldsmith's multi-millionaire brother, Sir James Goldsmith, and Lord Rothschild, owner of the banking group". Searle later described the dinner as a "'bear-baiting' session" at which he was questioned extensively on the aims of the new organisation. As Lamb notes, after questioning, cheques totalling £14,000 were donated, "more than the organisation's whole first year's expenditure" (91).

¹⁹ Wilson (2008) has Edward Goldsmith as a founding member of the Primitive Peoples Fund, whilst Veldman, Bramwell and others do not (3,4). Whether or not Goldsmith or Aspinall were founding members, what seems indisputable is that they were both intimately connected with the founding and early years of this organisation.

unnatural growth, and frequently compared their growth to the spread of cancer.²⁰ Only primitive societies, he believed, were stable societies, in balance with nature.

What comes though very clearly here is Goldsmith's organicism, his adherence to the idea of organic form, which he believes primitive societies exemplify. The conclusions he draws from this primary assumption demonstrate how this initial belief leads to extreme reactionary positions being adopted whilst pursuing the putatively progressive aims of environmental protection, respect for tribal cultural integrity, anti-imperialism, and ameliorating social alienation. *The Way* (1998), Goldsmith's final and most comprehensive exposition of his philosophy reveals a preoccupation with the idea of degeneration in modern society and the extent to which this preoccupation was based on readings of texts from the early twentieth century. For example, in chapter sixty-two (suffused with Lawrencian terminology about "increasing the stock of 'vital force'" in "vernacular man") Goldsmith argues that tribal societies have escaped degeneration and alienation by observing the rules of nature's hierarchical structure:

The relationship between things and beings at different echelons in the hierarchy of the cosmos is not symmetrical. Vital power flows downwards to vitalise and hence sanctify things and beings at the lower echelons, though it will only do so

²⁰ As I note in my chapter on overpopulation, the comparison of population growth to cancer continues to this day to be a much-used trope, implying as it does that the rise in population is somehow unnatural and a malady which is symptomatic of a systemic sickness. It conveys the unspoken assumption that Western technology and food production is somehow upsetting the "natural" balances of non-Western nations and causing artificial and therefore unhealthy and unsustainable growth. In doing so it once more resurrects the old division of natural and unnatural (population) growth.

if the latter fulfill their obligations towards the higher echelons and hence towards the cosmos as a whole.

It is thus understandable that so many of the rituals and ceremonies of a traditional people – and indeed, their whole way of life – should be designed to maintain the correct distribution of vital force at each level in the cosmic hierarchy. In this way they can maintain the critical order and stability of the cosmos, and thereby follow the Way. (*The Way* n. pag.)²¹

As well as their vitality and cosmically ordained subservience to the natural hierarchy, primitive people were also admired by Goldsmith and Aspinall for their cultural homogeneity and masculine sense of pride and willingness to defend this homogeneity. Thus both defended apartheid and ethnic cleansing as merely the resolution of a problem created by the artificial modern state which paid no attention to cultural or ethnic boundaries which Goldsmith and Aspinall argued were, in more primitive societies, aligned naturally along ecological, bioregional boundaries. In the tense and fractious period before the collapse of apartheid, for example, Aspinall spoke at an Inkatha Freedom Party rally at the invitation of his friend, Zulu chief Buthelezi. At this rally Aspinall urged the Zulu to defend their Bantustans rather than integrate, exhorting them to "sharpen your spears and fall on the Xhosas", the traditional ethnic rivals of

²¹ Goldsmith was by no means the only one propounding this type of hierarchically structured vitalism as an alternative to technological society. EF Schumacher, author of the classic low-technology (or appropriate technology) text *Small is Beautiful* (1974), also held similar views. In *A Guide for the Perplexed* (1977) he claims that whilst there are no set limits to what an individual could potentially comprehend of the cosmos, "what he will actually grasp depends on each person's own Level of Being [sic]. The 'higher' the person, the greater or richer is his or her own world". Unsurprisingly, Schumacher identifies people whose worldview is "materialistic scientism" as being lower types whose world is "a meaningless wasteland unfit for human habitation" (45). I owe the example here from *The Way* to Krebbers ("Goldsmith's Gaian Hierarchy").

the Zulu (Draper and Mare 555). Unperturbed by his failure to incite genocide, Aspinall then wrote to South Africa's president, FW De Klerk, urging him to abandon the planned transition to democracy and instead divide the country up along ethnic lines (that is, to split South Africa up into several smaller countries on the basis of ethnicity and tribe). Aspinall's reasoning here can be directly traced back to Goldsmith and Aspinall's organicism as Draper and Mare remark:

[Aspinall's] justification of unnatural eugenic selection was that it was better than no selection at all. His material support of a select group of animals, together with what he perceived as the elite warrior-caste of Zulus, has to be understood in this light. He must have believed that he was assisting those whom he thought were the fittest to gain the ascendancy in South Africa . . . Is it too fanciful to suggest that, in Aspinall's world, by feeding Zulu ethnic ambitions and stoking conflict in South Africa, he was helping nature to take its course? Perhaps not. He once, in a typically outrageous speech, celebrated the chimpanzee practice of dividing into rival armies and extracting large mutual mortalities as "beneficial genocide". (563)

Aspinall and Goldsmith sought rejuvenation of society, a rejuvenation which they believed could never occur as long as technology perverted the laws of nature, fostering an artificial and corrupt society. Though assessing their influence is fraught with difficulties, what is certain is that they substantially reinforced certain reactionary aspects and elements of "romantic protest" by employing the organic metaphor for society as explanation for the malaise and discord of the 1970s, and by continual use of the language of decline and crisis as justification for the more

heterodox claims.²² As the historian Martin Wiener (1981) commented, describing the rise of a new mood in the 1970s which fused these elements:

A new cultural phenomenon came of age in the 1970s: explicit and organized opposition to the results of technical and material advance. This was of course part of a development embracing the entire industrialized world, where antigrowth and antitechnology [*sic*] movements had taken root among left-wing university students and had become a force to be reckoned with in public life. The ranks of English critics of progress extended far beyond the universities or the Left; these critics tended to see their mission as inseparable from English patriotism - to save traditional English life from unwelcome change. (165)

Ironically, then, *The Ecologist*, the foremost journal advocating anti-technologism among left-wing university students and others, was a forum for propagating long established conservative and even far-right reactionary beliefs. Though it campaigned on environmental protection, overpopulation, alienation, and rights for indigenous communities, the philosophy which informed it was not the new, largely Left-wing environmental movement, but far older and longer established preconceptions of a hierarchical and stable society and world which had been

²² As Aspinall put it in a coda to his autobiography, "I believe that wilderness is Earth's greatest treasure" and that "there is an outside chance to save the earth" which "must grasped with gambler's hands". Therefore, Aspinall felt, given such existential stakes, inflaming tensions and heightening fears and passions to halt the modern world's destruction of life was not only justified but required: "I believe that terrible risks must be taken and terrible passions roused before these ends can hope to be accomplished. If a system is facing extreme pressures, then only extreme counter-pressures are relevant, let alone likely to be effective" (qtd in Masters 252). As Masters, Aspinall's biographer, notes, the publishers balked at printing this part of the coda and cut it by half, leaving it as merely a declaration of Aspinall's belief in the rights of animals and plants as well as humanity.

upended by technology and mass democracy which had turned it into an anarchy and the resources of the world into a free-for-all.

However, just as it would be a gross error to conflate these unsavoury beliefs with modern environmentalism I would argue, it would also be a mistake to imagine that the ecological sensibilities of Goldsmith, Aspinall, and of anti-technologism generally are merely a ruse, a guise with which to smuggle in justifications for some kind of reactionary utopia. Instead, what I try and show in this thesis is that when environmentalism, the New Left, the counter-culture and other elements of progressive politics came to prominence in the latter half of the twentieth century there was already a well-established philosophy, complete with numerous texts and persuasive and prominent writers and thinkers, which superficially at least appeared to share the views and values of the new progressive politics. Like the new progressive movements, this philosophy despised *laissez-faire* capitalism and was strongly anti-imperialist in feeling. Similarly, it decried the alienation and anomie of the cities and of modern, technological society and it stressed the value of the natural world. Less obviously, but perhaps even more significantly, it was also decentralist in tone, echoing the new themes of community and the rejection of the state being pioneered by New Left thinkers at the time. Where the counter-culture envisaged communes and self-organising communities, this philosophy saw a return to smaller, localised, hierarchical communities based on land ownership, but couched in terms of a nurturing relationship with the land that had broad appeal. Once again, in its broadest antecedents, this philosophy can be traced back to the counter-enlightenment tradition.

Thus, when (as Veldman notes) the New Left, the Greens, and other progressive movements after World War Two rejected the Enlightenment veneration of rationalism and

objectivism which they blamed for militarism and the destruction of nature, communities, and local cultures, they found numerous texts and numerous writers that seemed to coincide with and validate not only their primary beliefs but the foundational rejection of oppressive rationalism and the overly metaphysical and judicial conception of human society which they felt served the powerful. Is it any wonder, then, that references to natural selection or preventing cosmopolitanism and the decline of society were tolerated as eccentricities: curious but irrelevant personal vestiges from a less (so to speak) enlightened era? Many of the authors I identify with anti-technologism in this thesis seem to contain both of these tendencies, and their work manifests a resulting mixture of tendencies: technological society, mass culture, and even liberal democracy are still attacked, either as unsustainable or as a sham, a hollow carapace, but this condemnation draws upon themes of environmental degradation and the militarism of large governments and is clearly aimed at an audience sympathetic to such charges.

The counter-enlightenment assertions of natural hierarchy and inequality embodied in anti-technologism also, I believe, explain at least in part its ability to synthesise reactionary and progressive ideologies to make them superficially acceptable. Anti-technologism appeals to the belief that the reader is a reasonable and restrained individual, willing to do what is necessary for the common good, but that the vast bulk of humanity – the masses – are stupid, slovenly, and unreasonable, and would rather have a larger fridge than save society or even the planet.²³

²³ Ronald Wright's novel, *A Scientific Romance* (1997), the fictionalisation of themes he later explores in his essay *A Short History of Progress* (2004), exemplifies this tendency. The hero discovers a (literally) Wellsian time machine and travels a millennium into the future when Britain is deserted and semi-tropical, civilisation having collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions. The hero is somewhat dismayed to find no human inhabitants (for most of the book) and spends much of the time reminiscing elegiacally on his own past as an undergraduate at Cambridge, punting on the Cam and sipping port in rooms. Despite his loneliness though, there is still a very obvious sense of satisfaction at the wiping out of the greedy, bovine masses who thought that their own ease and luxury could continue forever, that medicine could solve every health problem when of course "six billion hundredweight of overcrowded ape meat was a free lunch waiting for the wily microbe - as you and I know only too well . . ." (105). As with many

This attitude is amplified to near rage in American anti-technological writers such as Edward Abbey and James Howard Kunstler, but is still very much evident in the works of English writers such as Edward Cooper and takes a particularly acerbic twist in the later writings of Aldous Huxley who at times seems positively pleased at the thought of the harsh lessons nature will mete out in regard to the organisation of society. The condemnation of the masses and the denial of their agency and ability to effect directed change is a constant theme in anti-technologist thought and writing, and one most frequently portrayed as being solved by nature in some way that indicates an unanswerable judgment on society's attempt to do away with observing the natural order and hierarchy. Thus, for those readers who believe themselves to be liberal, but are concerned and perhaps angered that most people just don't "get it", the reactionary themes of anti-technologism offer a powerfully seductive allegory and narrative.

In introducing the chapters of this thesis, then, I would like to re-emphasise the extent to which anti-technologism, for all its invocations against machine civilisation, is a phenomenon of modernity, and contains paradoxes and even contradictions as an integral part of its internal dynamic. As such, it draws upon the same anxieties and concerns about urbanism and ruralism, change and stasis that have been so ably analysed by Williams, Leo Marx, and many others. Its difference, I would argue, lies in its emphasis on nature as a guide for the organisation of society and its implicit belief in a natural order or hierarchy, deviation from which is portrayed as leading inevitably to degeneration, decline, and eventual collapse.

other anti-technological works, the influence of writers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is evident. The title of the story is an obvious nod to HG Wells, and High Tory naturalist and writer Richard Jeffries' is quoted, as is MP Shiels, an author who perhaps more directly than any other dealt with themes of degeneration and decline in machine civilisation. The entire mood of the novel could be condensed down into the thought that in the destruction of consumerism and crass individualist materialism the masses got exactly what they deserved.

I begin with a chapter that looks at attitudes towards technology and society in the years leading up to World War Two as a means of opening out and contextualising the heritage of some of the themes of anti-technologism as discussed in this introduction. I focus on two works by Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and the novel, *Coming up for Air* (1939). Whilst these works obviously pre-date the post-World War Two period on which I am focusing in this thesis, I believe that their inclusion is not only warranted but necessary given not only the immense influence of Orwell on twentieth century literature and culture, but also as a way of understanding the influence of eugenic theory and concerns about technological society's supposedly dysgenic effect and how deeply that understanding affected writers of this period. In particular, I look at the representation of food and how it represents concerns not just about the dysgenic effects of technology, but also about the masses themselves. An important element of my focus on this representation is the way that a division is made between natural and processed or "artificial" foods. I discuss how this division came to be identified with ideas of a people having "roots" in a particular region without which they somehow degenerated into something less than fully human and alive in a spiritual as well as physical sense. I show how tinned food came to be identified with mass production and mass society, with the implication that this was the wretched and worrying result of mass democracy.

In the second chapter, I focus entirely on JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which, I argue, more effectively than almost any other text romantacised and transmitted the idea of a natural order and the Spenglerian conception of organic form from pre-war to post-war culture and society. I analyse and discuss some anti-technological themes in the trilogy and then consider how they came to exert a powerful influence on the countercultural movement and alternative progressive politics, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. I show individuals involved

with progressive movements of the time came to model aspects of their life or personal philosophies on Tolkien's story and I argue that in so doing they imbibed many of the reactionary elements that the trilogy contained. In particular, I examine the idea of "false fertility", the idea that there are different types of growth: a natural, organic growth in accordance with nature, and an artificial and sinister, exponential expansion identified with technology and overpopulation which echoed earlier concerns about the rise of the masses. I relate Tolkien's influential division of growth here to Spengler's morphology of history, where he conceives of history (as the record of civilisations) having organic form, rising from cultures rooted in the soil, before eventually losing this vital connection and as a result becoming ossified, arid and entering a period of degeneration and decline. I also show how this conception of unnatural or artificial growth is rooted in right-wing ecological tropes of pollution as an insidious foreign agent infiltrating the holistic and organic whole of the nation or culture and I briefly discuss how this manifests in Tolkien's trilogy.

I continue this consideration of anti-technologism's two types of growth in the third chapter, on anti-technologism and overpopulation. As I show there, the theme of overpopulation is a popular one in anti-technologism and is linked in a fundamental sense to fears of degeneration and deracination in industrialised Western nations together with an artificially-fostered population boom in non-Western nations, raising fears of invasion and reverse colonisation whereby still virile non-Westerners overrun a West grown too weak (both physically and culturally) to repel them. This is one of the most important chapters in my thesis, as the theme of unnatural and unsustainable growth is central to anti-technologism, and I consider in some depth the heritage and nature of the preconceptions behind it, as well as considering how anti-technologism enables discussion of these reactionary fears of

degeneration and differential population growth between ethnicities in a superficially acceptable manner. I also develop my analysis of anti-technologism's Spenglerian view of civilisation and history, by discussing the way anti-technological treatments of overpopulation manifest Spengler's condemnation of imperialism not on ethical grounds, but as a symptom of the expansionary drive that dooms Western society. Just as Spengler argued that the expansion of imperialism would lead to what we would today refer to as reverse colonisation, that anti-technologism's treatment of overpopulation manifests this sense of reversal and directionality.

In the same chapter, I also look at how fears of technology's fostering of "unnatural" growth in population also gave rise to the co-option of the idea of limits on resource use in ways that justified cultural and ethnic separatism and exclusion. I examine the way that anti-technological literature, viewing the population boom as a result of society deviating from nature's immutable laws proposes a return to cultural purity and separation as a "natural" way to impose limits on growth. With reference to Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* (1992) I show how anti-technologism uses pseudo-naturalistic analogies to legitimise cultural exclusion on the grounds that it preserves "diversity" and limits population growth, thus preserving the stable society the desire for which lies at the root of anti-technologism.

My fourth chapter is on the use of catastrophe in anti-technological literature. As I note there, catastrophe in anti-technologism is ambiguous. Anti-technologism is concerned with detecting and forestalling decline and degeneracy, and so must logically work towards arresting the perceived slide towards the final undoing represented by catastrophe, yet at the same time catastrophe offers the final resolution of the problems of corrupted modern society and the

chance for a revived culture aligned once more with the natural hierarchy.²⁴ Though this chapter is less concerned with conceptual development than some of the others, some ideas important to my larger argument are still covered here, particularly in my consideration of how anti-technologism sees catastrophe as a result of societal degeneration and subsequently as a necessary natural purgative to cleanse a corrupted culture of its gross materialism and the part of the population identified as degenerate and artificial. Among other texts I review Edmund Cooper's *The Overman Culture* (1971) and James Howard Kunstler's *World Made by Hand* (2008). I also relate this latter fictional work to Kunstler's treatise on technology and society, *Too Much Magic* (2012) to show how anti-technologism's use of the catastrophe disguises a desire to return to a hierarchical society.²⁵

I then devote my fifth chapter to what I analyse as the anarcho-libertarian variant of anti-technologism. Whereas, in my thesis up to this point I have advanced a theory of anti-technologism concerned with managing the perceived dangers and instabilities of mass democracy and technological civilisation, anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism essentially

²⁴ Lasch points to this function of catastrophe adroitly when he observes that "the apocalyptic vision appears in its purest form not in the contention that the nuclear arms race or uninhibited technological development might lead to the end of the world but in the contention that a saving remnant will survive the end of the world and build a better one" (83). Catastrophism, in anti-technologism at least, functions as an extreme form of culling, allowing a new, purified culture to rise from the ashes of the old one.

²⁵ Kunstler's *Too Much Magic* exemplifies the translation or transfiguration of concerns over decline into quasi-ecological and putatively progressive treatments of social disintegration. Touring the deserted summer "camp" (actually a mansion) belonging to an ex-girlfriend, Kunstler admires the simplicity and self-contained nature of the house which took a substantial staff of servants to maintain. Mournfully noting the loss of such a home, Kunstler declares that "the sad gestalt of the situation put me in a mood to reflect on the current state of American society. The United States, like the house on Tongue Mountain, had become a kind of wreck. Nobody took care of anything. The whole nation was sliding into dereliction and ineptitude" (220). In particular, Kunstler bemoans the fact that "If you wanted household help you pretty much had to hire an illegal alien, and that didn't work so well since a certain quasi-familial allegiance is needed to cement mutual trust" (220). In this way, the myth of feudal obligations and care in a hierarchical society is resurrected and its loss is related to decline and degeneration.

advocates bypassing the administrative reproduction of nature's hierarchy onto society and instead abolishing all advanced technology so that nature itself imposes its own limits and structures. Thus, whilst anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism subscribes to the same fallacies about society that administrative anti-technologism does (the organic form and other pseudo-naturalistic analogies) it also calls for the direct and unintermediated imposition of such limitations and controls on society by reversion to a primitive state. As I show in this chapter, though, ideas about degeneration and culture are still never far from the surface, as is an irredentist conception of land rights and a celebration of cultural purity based on spurious ecological or "bioregional" grounds. I base my analysis in this chapter on the work of Edward Abbey, author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) and other novels and essays. I use my analysis of his works to try and draw out the way in which anti-technologism, and particularly anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism looks to nature to validate irredentist ideals of nativism as well as licensing a quasi-Nietzschean ideology of natural aristocracy achieved by an assertion of masculinity and physical fitness.

In the sixth and final chapter before the conclusion, I once again take a more conceptual look at anti-technologism and diagnose what I see as its use of the fascist aesthetic, with reference to Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club* (1996). In essence, what I hope to achieve with this chapter is a consideration of anti-technologism's roots in counter-enlightenment's anti-materialism, and to show how the novel (and anti-technologism in general) deals in fascistic themes of revitalisation through an irrationalist embrace of violence as a transcendent force and the rejection of stultifying materialism. I select *Fight Club* as a text here as I see it as an excellent example of how the sublimated themes of anti-technologism and its counter-enlightenment heritage are translated and represented. The rejection of technological society in the novel is

symbolic but also absolute: the narrator literally destroys all of his possessions in self-engineered explosion in order to free himself from the grip of materialism. Only once he has so utterly renounced the logic of technological society and its measurement of progress in material possessions can he begin the process of revitalisation and revivification, which he does through violent male on male contact (thus signaling his return to the observance of nature's hierarchical structure where the "fittest" survive and prosper).

In the work that follows, then, I hope to give a clear demonstration that the themes of degeneration and concerns over mass society and mass democracy did not die out in the first half of the twentieth century, but were continued in a transfigured form in which criticism of technology allowed discussion of these themes in a sublimated discourse which made them acceptable. Furthermore, I hope to show how such a discussion exerted a powerfully seductive appeal which masked its reactionary basis by appeal to progressive concerns over loss of community, ecological degradation, and social alienation.

Chapter One: Orwell's Troubling Syllogism.

As I noted in the introduction, the anti-technologism that, in Martin Weiner's phrase, "came of age" in the 1970s is not simply a response to contemporary fears over nuclear war, uninhibited technological development, overpopulation, or environmental degradation, but also drew substantially on long established themes present in literature and culture. In this chapter I want to start opening out some of these themes, in particular the way that anti-technologism facilitates a subtle but important shift in writing about and discussing the masses. I use the term "metaphorise" both here and elsewhere in this thesis to describe the transfiguration of the masses in literature from the people they are to the artefacts associated with them, but really that is too blunt a term for what is a much more subtle process whereby the negative qualities associated with mass production were projected on to the masses who both produced and consumed the manufactures of industrialism. What I want to show in this chapter is the way in which fears of degeneration in the population, identified with the shift from an agrarian to an almost entirely industrial and technological society, were projected onto technological artefacts such as tinned food, and I want to show that this was a complex form of metonymy in which technological artefacts came to stand for the attributes associated with technological society and the urban masses. I will argue that with George Orwell this transfiguration is used to discuss his anxiety that technological society's homogenising effects would create a devitalised and homogenous urban population. I suggest that Orwell's anxiety about this can be tied in with his pessimistic view of the possibility of real progress by either revolutionary or incremental means. I further argue that although Orwell's anti-technologism was tempered by his realisation that only increasing mechanisation offered any real chance of materially improving the common welfare, his deep-seated belief that the agrarian way of life was ultimately the natural way of life led him to be pessimistic about the possibility of real progress.

In this chapter I use two of Orwell's earlier works to show how this elision of the masses and mass-production functioned. I do this for a number of reasons. First, because I see Orwell as perhaps

the most representative writer of the twentieth century whose writing reflects the tensions and contradictions of that century (as Timothy Garton-Ash (1998) memorably put it, “anyone who wants to understand the twentieth century will still have to read Orwell” [14]). Second, because of Orwell’s status as a progressive writer whose dystopian vision of technology in *1984* has been highly influential, particularly on the anti-materialist outlook of the New Left. Though the New Left’s relationship with Orwell has often been a fractious one, there can be no doubt that he still exercised a powerful influence on the direction of progressive thinking in the 1950s and 60s particularly, an influence summed up in John Rodden’s comment that “the connection between Orwell and the emergence of the British New Left is tangled and indirect, yet vital” (191). As Rodden (1989) notes, New Left writers like Raymond Williams in his *Culture and Society* are engaged to a significant degree in an attempt to come to terms with Orwell and his influence. This consideration leads me to the final reason for beginning my thesis with Orwell, which is his complete absence from Meredith Veldman’s work. Surprisingly, Veldman simply does not mention Orwell or his ambivalence regarding socialism as a materialist philosophy, even in passing. Given his considerable influence not just on the New Left but on the protest movements of the 1960s and 70s, as well as his ambivalent attitude towards technology, this is a problematic omission which I hope to partially redress here.

I begin with a look at Orwell’s attack on technology in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) as an example of the way technology was seen by some of the most influential progressive writers and intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century as the root cause of many of the problems in society. As I will show, Orwell’s criticism of technology was predicated largely on fears of intellectual, moral, and physical degeneracy in the population, and was significantly concerned with reshaping socialism into a more ameliorative and pacificatory force, one that acknowledged middle-class concerns over the breaking down of class distinctions and hierarchies. From here, I move to a discussion of how eugenics and associated theories were substantially a reaction to perceived problems caused by technology and urbanisation and were not solely a reactionary, right-wing

response but also embodied a significant reformist element which sought to apply scientific solutions to problems supposedly caused by science. I look at Orwell's attack on processed food to try and show how some of the vitalistic ideas of rural rootedness and vitality versus urban degeneration and corruption manifested themselves in this avowedly progressive writer and I finish by discussing, with reference to Monac and his theory of reactionary consciousness, Orwell's organicism and how it may have influenced his jaundiced view of progress.

In 1935 Orwell's publishers approached him with a proposal to research and write a book about the conditions of the working classes in the industrial north of England. The result, published in 1937, was *The Road to Wigan Pier*.²⁶ Whilst the first half of the book was a compassionately written, if not ground-breaking reflection of the daily lives of the people who worked in the mines and mills of Lancashire, the second half was a much more personal and idiosyncratic look at socialism, the problems of what Orwell referred to as "machine civilization" and the prospects for the future. In many ways, it was something of an interior dialogue between two halves of the author's psyche: the middle-class Englishman who revered tradition, loyalty, and order, and the more rational, forward-thinking intellectual who believed that socialism offered the most reliable means of defeating the threat of fascism and advancing the cause of equality and fairness in society. In attempting to resolve the opposition between the two, Orwell seems at times to almost grind to a halt, and examining the nature of this disparity will be my avenue to an examination of the broader elite response to technology and society before the World War Two.

In *Road*, Orwell is wrestling with what might perhaps best be thought of as a troubling syllogism. He believed that socialism necessarily implied urbanisation and the extensive use of machinery in order to increase the availability of goods. "Any world in which Socialism actually existed," he declares, would be at least as mechanized as the USA and "probably much more so . . .

²⁶ Cited hereafter as *Road*.

no Socialist would think of denying this" (*Road* 165).²⁷ But whereas Marx believed that machinery had brought about the end of feudalism, and offered a way to relieve the hardships, dangers, and drudgery of the working classes, Orwell takes a remarkably contrary stance.²⁸ Rather than denying that technology could ameliorate physical labour and hardship, he worries that it would do precisely this, and that the result would be physical, intellectual, and cultural decline. He argued that "the truth is that many of the qualities we admire in human beings can only function in opposition to some kind of disaster, pain, or difficulty; but the tendency of mechanical progress is to eliminate disaster, pain, and difficulty" (*Road* 170). The transition from horses to cars, for instance, Orwell sees as encouraging "an increase in human softness," and the tendency of technology to become more fool-proof may well mean "a world inhabited by fools" (*Road* 171). Indeed, he questions whether "progress" is something to be sought after at all, as "softness is repulsive; and thus all progress is seen to be a frantic struggle towards an objective which you hope and pray will never be reached . . . what is usually called progress also entails what is usually called degeneracy" (*Road* 172). Thus, as socialism implied machine civilisation and progress (in material terms), but machine civilisation and progress led to softness and degeneracy, Orwell was faced with the troubling thought that in advocating socialism, he was also advocating a route that would lead to degeneracy.

Orwell attempts to resolve the problem by reference to the even greater threat of fascism, and by arguing that as machine civilisation and its attendant degeneracy were *already* a reality, the only possible option for any decent, educated person was to support socialism and machine civilisation for the time being, but to be ready to call for a reassessment of socialism as a political

²⁷ It is worth noting here that for Orwell socialism was "bound up, more or less inextricably, with the idea of machine-production" but that machine-production, whilst it implied collectivism, did not necessarily imply socialism, indeed it could conceivably lead to "the Slave-State of which Fascism is a kind of prophecy" (*Road* 164-5).

²⁸ See Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 which saw machinery and urbanisation as offering a route out of the "idiocy of rural life" for the proletariat. As Orwell himself (see note 2 above) acknowledges Socialism to be tied to urbanism and machine-production, I take this point to be unexceptionable.

ideology based on a materialist conception of progress when the danger had passed. “The beehive state *is here*” he argued:

The job of the thinking person, therefore, is not to reject Socialism but to make up his mind to humanize it. Once Socialism is in a way to being established, those who can see through the swindle of “progress” will probably find themselves resisting. In fact, it is their special function to do so. In the machine-world they have got to be a sort of permanent opposition, which is not the same thing as being an obstructionist or a traitor. But in this I am speaking of the future. For the moment the only possible course for any decent person, however much of a Tory or an anarchist by temperament is to work for the establishment of Socialism. Nothing else can save us from the misery of the present or the nightmare of the future. To oppose Socialism *now*, when twenty million Englishmen are underfed and Fascism has conquered half Europe, is suicidal. It is like starting a civil war when the Goths are crossing the frontier. (*Road* 193. Emphasis in original)

This is a particularly interesting passage, in view of Orwell’s previous self-deprecatory description of his early self as a “Tory anarchist” (Claeys 188). Orwell uses the imagery of negative classicism here, comparing modern Britain to ancient Rome beset by marauding hordes, in an appeal to the “thinking person” to support socialism “for the moment”. Once the immediate threat has receded, however, the task will become one of resistance to the “swindle” of progress and machine civilisation – a form of civilisation which Orwell believed was a prerequisite for a socialist state. This resistance, he sees as the “special function” of the educated, professional classes (for whom Orwell was writing here) who would resist the encroachment of machine civilisation and subsequent degeneracy, urging instead a return to a “simpler, harder, probably agricultural way of life” as soon as was possible (*Road* 184).

What we have, then, is a cascading series of threats, which are to be played off against each other. Fascism's ability to motivate, organise, and mobilise entire nations to new forms of total warfare meant that only a political system which could achieve the same levels of coordination and popular feeling (namely socialism, in Orwell's opinion) could possibly defeat it. But this form of government, with its attendant requirement for mass organisation, mechanisation, and subordination of the individual to the collective, would, Orwell worried, lead to degeneration and thus potentially to totalitarianism. The task of the educated elite, then, is to support socialism and the changes in society it requires for now, in view of the greater threat of fascism, but later to act as a sort of "permanent opposition" when it is safely established, in order to try to ameliorate the worst effects of machine civilisation. "The choice is not, as yet, between a human and an inhuman world" Orwell counsels the thinking person, "it is simply between Socialism and Fascism, which, at its very best is Socialism with the virtues left out" (*Road* 193). Effectively, then, technology is identified as the underlying ailment of society, enabling the rise of the collective state, but as technological knowledge cannot simply be wished away, the next best approach is for the class Orwell writes for to become "a sort of permanent opposition" to "the machine-world", continually emphasising the vitalistic virtues of the agrarian life in order to stave off national degeneration and the threat of totalitarianism.

Orwell's equivalence of socialism with "machine civilisation" and his ambivalence regarding the desirability of its achievement is palpably Wellsian in tone, hardly surprising since Wells was such an obvious influence on Orwell's early writing (Hunter).²⁹ Like Wells, Orwell seems to recognise that technology and mechanisation hold out the promise of improving the living and working standards of most people, and that this must be welcomed by anyone claiming to be democratic in their

²⁹ Like Orwell after him, Wells was doubtful about the notion of eugenic selection, arguing that it was an impossibility to select *individually* for complex traits such as intelligence on the same basis that pigs were bred for more meat or cows for more milk. However, Wells, like many other writers of the first half of the twentieth century, was concerned about dysgenics: the possibility that unnatural environmental influences were causing a steady degeneration in various characteristics *on the level of the population in general*.

sympathies. Yet at the same time, like Wells, he is intensely concerned about the implications for society of making life too easy and giving people too much leisure. Similar views were also expressed by other influential writers and intellectuals in the interwar years. Aldous Huxley had summed up the general mood of disillusionment with technology only the previous year (1936), claiming that “the disease from which our civilisation suffers may be described in a few words. Since the accession of Queen Victoria there has been enormous and accelerating technological progress. Machines and the arts of organisation have been developed out of all recognition” (“If We Survive” 215).³⁰

Likewise, in 1932 the influential architect, writer, and proponent of guild socialism, Arthur Penty, quoting Ruskin’s contention that merely material progress brought “illth” instead of wealth, launched an attack on the “Quantitative Standard of industrialism” on the grounds that mass production inevitably meant that “you must accept the taste and standards of the average man at any given moment as your standard” and to necessarily exclude “the best men and things” (47-8). Therefore, “in the long run” Penty warned, technological advancement and industrialisation, are “fatal to society, for unless average men are in contact with persons and things higher than themselves, they tend, progressively, to degenerate. Society loses its salt by being deprived of true leadership, and because of this the theory of averages in industry, as in politics, leads to an ever lower level” (48). Penty’s complaint here – about the degeneration of artistic taste – may seem to be categorically different from Orwell’s concerns about degeneration caused by loss of physical labour in the fields and the effects of eating processed food, but as I will show this is not the case. Whether the complaint was about physical, cultural, or artistic degeneration, the underlying concern was the issue of degeneracy and decline in technological society in a much broader sense, based on anxieties about the effects of deviating from a supposedly natural paradigm.

³⁰ Huxley’s immediate reference here is to World War Two which was looming on the horizon. However, he uses the threat of war as a starting point for a much broader discussion on the implications of technology. Questioning the use of medical advances, for example, he claims that “the market is flooded with new drugs” and wonders if “this is one of the reasons why the number of doctors has doubled since the beginning of the century, while the population has increased by only about a fifth?” (216).

Orwell's concerns over the threat of degeneration, and his appeal to the "thinking person" to push for a post-War return to "simpler, harder, probably agricultural way of life" must be assessed within the context of his time, which as the comments above show was characterised by the influence of eugenic ideas, combined with fears of degeneration reinforced by a literary heritage which dwelt on such fears without every explicitly confronting them. As RB Kershner (1986) remarks, "never given complete expression because of its very amorphousness – not to mention its irrationality – the fear of degeneration lurks behind fictions of Joyce, Wells, Kipling, Conrad, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Machen, and other, lesser writers of the period" (420). In part, this was due to copious mis-readings of Darwin and his theory of evolution, but also in large part to the influence of Nietzsche and similar mis-readings which attempted to synthesise Nietzschean ideals of the *ubermensch* with reformism. Before continuing with my analysis of Orwell and his concerns over degeneracy in machine civilisation, I want to briefly contextualise the issue by outlining some of the more salient elements that fed in to degeneracy fears of the time.³¹

In 1914, surveying the state of scientific and philosophical knowledge, Bertrand Russell commented on what he saw as the motivating spirit of the age:

Evolutionism, in one form or another, is the prevailing creed of our time. It dominates our politics, our literature, and not least our philosophy. Nietzsche, pragmatism, Bergson, are phases in its philosophic development, and their popularity far beyond the circles of professional philosophers shows it consonance with the spirit of the age. (qtd. by Gibbons 1141)

³¹ My aim here is to briefly delineate how, in a era of improving health and nutrition, even during the Depression years, it came to be widely accepted that physical and mental health were declining and that the discussion was not so much about the truth of this, but about the causes and how to deal with it. Though, as Charles Webster (1982) has documented, the official records showing steady improvement should not be taken at face value, nevertheless, it was undoubtedly the case that there was at least no decline in overall physical health in the population. Thus, the fears of degeneration must be symptomatic of broader concerns ("Healthy or Hungry Thirties?").

Russell's association of the influence of evolutionary theory with Nietzscheism points to the hierarchical manner in which evolutionary theory was then perceived, with survival of the fittest taken by many to be consonant with survival of the best. It was the combination of the Nietzschean Romantic ideal of the "superman" who rose above the common herd by his own virtues with the pseudo-scientific application of evolutionary theory to improving humanity and society by selective breeding that allowed the synthesis of reformism with elitism and belief in a natural hierarchy. Thus, even Havelock Ellis, one of the most progressive thinkers of the time, could argue that preventing the poor from breeding was actually a radically philanthropic position: "the superficially sympathetic man flings a coin to the beggar; the more deeply sympathetic man builds an almshouse for him so that he need no longer beg; but perhaps the most radically sympathetic of all is the man who arranges that the beggar shall not be born" (qtd in Bradshaw xv). As David Bradshaw notes, such a view, whilst repugnant to us today, was "typical of the progressives' point of view" in the 1930s. Though such an argument is seen as repugnant today, such was the widespread acceptance of quasi-Darwinian and Nietzschean notions of hierarchy and the inequality of nature, that preventing the propagation of the supposedly unfit was broadly accepted by both conservative and progressive thinkers – the argument was more about methodology than anything else.

Eugenics allowed the elite and the professional classes to rationalise asserting the need for an elite guiding and directing society on the grounds that modern civilisation was enabling the survival and growth of the unfit and undesirable. Indeed, Aldous Huxley's eugenicist views that the most important thing was to ensure that the top 0.5% of the population dominates the rest of society have been described by one critic as "typical of left-leaning British intellectuals in the inter-war period" (Woiak 106). George Bernard Shaw, another reformer, showing the links between eugenics, fears of degeneration, and negative classicism, argued that "there is now no reasonable excuse for refusing the face the fact that nothing but a eugenic religion can save our civilization from the fate that has overtaken all previous civilizations" (Galton 21).

Such chilling statements were made possible by the belief that they were necessary, that progress in the shape of science and technology was leading ineluctably to the degeneration of the population in advanced western society. Whilst it is often assumed today that the purpose of eugenics was to fashion a race of Nietzschean supermen, a significant camp in the debate was more concerned with *preventing* the dysgenic effects of modernity, rather than *selecting* for perfection, as H G Wells' perspective shows: "the way of nature has always been to slay the hindmost, and there is still no other way, unless we can prevent those who would become the hindmost being born. It is in the sterilization of failures, and not in the selection of successes for breeding, that the possibility of an improvement of the human stock lies" (qtd in Galton 11).³² Thus, eugenic theorising was not restricted to those who wanted to selectively breed a "higher" race of humans, but was also involved in fears about the perceived decline in physical and mental ability.

Whilst Orwell's complaint against technology was not quite as crass and simplistic as this, the influence of eugenic ideas regarding technology and science's pernicious effects on the "quality" of the population is just as evident. He bemoans the "physical degeneracy" of modern Britain and asks "where are the monstrous men with chests like barrels and moustaches like the wings of eagles that strode across my childhood's gaze twenty or thirty years ago?" (*Road* 87-8). The dysgenic influence of World War One is considered, but Orwell insists in tracing the beginning of the decline back much further than this, arguing, just as Henry Williamson would do, that the growing degeneracy "must be due ultimately to unhealthy ways of living, i.e. to industrialism". In particular Orwell singles out that metonym for the masses, tinned food, as the proximate cause of physical degeneracy in the working classes, concluding darkly that "we may find in the long run that tinned food is a deadlier weapon than the machine gun" (88).³³ The idea that deviation from an agrarian

³² Wells' speech was one of a number given at a presentation organised by Galton and recorded in a paper authored by Galton and submitted to the *American Journal of Sociology*.

³³ Such a charge was not uncommon at the time. Jenks (1950) cites a report of a group of doctors concerned that "probably half our work is wasted, since our patients are so fed from the cradle, indeed before the cradle,

lifestyle to an urban, technological lifestyle was responsible for degeneration was a widely disseminated idea that speaks to anxieties about the rise of mass society and the decline in standards and “taste” (in both senses of that term). The American author and advocate of organic farming, Weston A. Price, for instance, in the introduction to his *Nutrition and Physical Degeneracy* (1938) attempted to give a veneer of scientific validity to this dysgenic fear:

The origin of personality and character appear in the light of the newer data to be biologic products and to a much less degree than usually considered pure hereditary traits. Since these various factors are biologic, being directly related to both the nutrition of the parents and to the nutritional environment of the individuals in the formative and growth period any common contributing factor such as food deficiencies due to soil depletion will be seen to produce degeneration of the masses of people due to a common cause. Mass behavior therefore, in this new light becomes the result of natural forces, the expression of which may not be modified by propaganda but will require correction at the source. Nature has been at this process of building human cultures through many millenniums and our culture has not only its own experience to draw from but that of parallel races living today as well as those who lived in the past. This work, accordingly, includes data that have been obtained from several of Nature's other biologic experiments to throw light on the problems of our modern white civilization. (4)

What Price exemplifies is the connections being made at the time between physical degeneration, supposedly caused by tinned food and other evils of machine civilisation, and the idea of cultural decline and degeneration in modern society. A decline in “taste” caused by eating mass-produced food is linked to a decline in “taste” in sense of acceptance of and adherence to commonly held

that they are certain contributions to a C.3 nation[sic]. Even our country people share the white bread, tinned salmon, dried milk regime”(qtd in Jenks 129).

standards of behaviour. In this way, not only were technology and mass society blamed for the decline many saw all around them, but some form of a return to an agrarian society was seen as essential for restoring the natural vitality supposedly found there.

Whilst Orwell never advocated eugenics, and appears to pillory it as a tool of repression in *1984* (where reproduction is by artificial insemination) the influence of eugenic theory is unmistakable in his earlier works in the identification of processed food with physical degeneration and natural food with not just physical but cultural revitalisation. Though he rejects the selective breeding of positive eugenics he is clearly concerned about the supposedly dysgenic effects of modern technology as evidenced by his sombre allusion to tinned food being a greater danger than the machine gun to the health of the nation. Here again, in Orwell's allusion to tinned food we see evidence of his conflicting views of technology and its effects on the masses. In his attack on "tinned food" – on mass-production and mass-produced food – that, as I will now show, Orwell attacks the technological world which he sees as debasing the solid yeoman that had previously populated England into a superficial and corrupted facsimile of its former self.

As Carey has commented, tinned food and false teeth were commonly used and well recognised tropes signifying elite disdain for modern mechanised mass culture in the interwar years used by authors including EM Forster, TS Eliot, Graham Greene, Knut Hamsun, John Betjeman, and HG Wells. The symbolic identification became widely understood by the literary and artistic elite after the Second World War as well. So much so, that in 1962, when Warhol exhibited his famous paintings of Campbell soup cans, a painting of something which had sustained him daily as a struggling artist, more than one critic could see no other rationale behind it than an unequivocal condemnation of machine civilisation: "What appears to be a painting of an innocent everyday object is in reality a subtle but powerful criticism of the decay of modern civilization . . . it reflects

the low level to which our urbanized and mass-producing civilization with its bourgeois values has fallen” (Sontag “Warhol at Bennington” 238).

This interpretation exemplifies the extent to which tinned food, false teeth, and other accoutrements of modern life had come to be codified and understood within literary and artistic discourse. Orwell is open about the identification in his 1939 novel, *Coming Up For Air*, in which the everyman protagonist, George Bowling, goes to visit a faux-American diner. Biting into a hot dog (the epitome of Americanised, mass-produced food) gives a taste of “horrible soft stuff” that “gave me the feeling that I’d bitten into the modern world and discovered what it was really made of” (24). The ersatz food is the counterpart to the fat, flabby and degenerate figure of Bowling, who makes his living through the “swindle” of selling insurance and has exchanged pride and physical strength for the comforts of a car, and a home with inside bathroom (11). Mass-produced food and clerical instead of physical work have left Bowling with a pot belly, wasted muscles, and – most tellingly of all – false teeth with which to eat his false food³⁴. This is all contrasted with the slickness and shininess of the diner, a sort of “propaganda” for the modern world, which is all “slick and streamlined, everything made out of something else. Celluloid, rubber, chromium-steel everywhere” (22, 24). Machine civilisation is seen as leading to a culture of mass mediocrity, in which lack of physical toil and cheap, mass-produced food are tied to physical and cultural degeneracy. Everything is superficial, and based on mass appeal and a vaguely American, cosmopolitan aesthetic.

It is instructive, in this context, to compare Orwell’s characterisation of the modern world with that of Henry Williamson, best known for his nature books *Tarka the Otter* (1927) and *Salar the Salmon* (1935). Williamson, like Orwell, despised what he saw as the swindle of progress, which he ascribed to capitalism, but (except for a youthful flirtation with Leninist

³⁴ It is not for nothing that the novel, which deals with one man’s forlorn attempt to escape the modern world and go back to his childhood haunts, begins with “The idea really came to me the day I got my new false teeth” (3). It is the sight of his false teeth staring up at him whilst he looks at his pudgy reflection in the mirror that sets the protagonist of the novel to questioning where his life is going, and what it all means.

communism) was an ardent fascist, believing that socialism was the incarnation of modern machine civilisation, and that only strong leadership could prevent its triumph.³⁵ In his semi-autobiographical novel, *The Phoenix Generation* (1965), set in the years immediately prior to the Second World War, Williamson describes modern Western civilisation in very similar tones, but more explicitly, with degenerate modern machine civilisation identified with egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism:

They reached the area left ugly by the maulings of London: speculative hire-purchase housing “estates” – all trees cut down – tens of thousands of cubic yards of coke-breeze blocks and pink heaps of fletton bricks piled up. Life is big business, fornication, and death. Civilisation is chromium fittings, radio, love with pessary, rubber girdles, perms, B.B.C. gentility and the sterilising of truth, cubic international-type architecture. Civilisation is white sepulchral bread, gin, and homosexual jokes in the Shaftesbury Avenue theatres. Civilisation is world-citizenship and freedom from tradition, based on rootless, eternal wandering in the mind that had nothing to lose and everything to gain including the whole world. Hoardings, brittle houses, flashiness posing as beauty, mongrel living and cosmopolitan modernism. (373)

In Williamson’s characterisation of modern civilisation, as in Orwell’s, superficiality is blinding people to the decay all around them, moral, cultural, and physical. Mass-produced food (“white sepulchral bread”) is both cause and symptom of decay, of a world which had forsaken tradition and hierarchy for the superficial promise of ease, comfort, and excitement. Though at opposite ends of the political spectrum, there is a distinct similarity of complaint against modernity in both Orwell and Williamson, which stems from their shared belief that technology, driven by predatory capitalism, was corroding the traditional structure of society. Both accuse modern technological society for what they see as

³⁵ As I argue later on in this chapter, part of Orwell’s fear of fascism in England was that it understood the appeal, perhaps even (in Orwell’s eyes) the need for people to identify with tradition and country, rather than simply with class. Thus, though Orwell believed fascism was a return to the dark ages, he understood only too well its attraction.

pandering to the base wants and desires of the urban masses rather than providing them with what would actually be in their own best interests. Orwell and Williamson's attack on white bread is emblematic of this attitude, with the displacement of hand-produced wholegrain breads by factory-made white bread symbolising tacky and shoddy mass-production, falling standards, physical degeneracy, and above all a sense of superficiality, a feeling that modernity was superficial and lacked roots and authenticity.

Such beliefs clearly stem from the eugenic thinking of the time, as well as the more generalised fear of degeneration which I have already mentioned. Eugenic ideas about the effects of technology on the population were pervasive and were disseminated in literary as well as scientific circles. Alfred Orage, editor of the putatively socialist journal *The New Age*, and writer, psychologist, and social reformer, Havelock Ellis, both saw eugenics as an integral part of redressing the perceived deleterious effects of urbanism and machine civilisation on society. Orage and others put forward the idea of "guild socialism" on Morrisian lines that would reverse the trend towards mass production by machine and institute a society of small business and craftsmen guided by an elite who would ensure fairness and equality in distribution. As historians of the movement have noted, the guild socialism put forward in *The New Age* was essentially neo-feudalistic, an attempt to replace capitalism and modern society with the imagined mutuality and stability of the medieval guild system. Selective breeding would be used to ensure that there was never a surplus population of workers to become a new urban proletariat. Eugenics would therefore play a crucial role in ensuring social stability in a world where "quality" would take precedence over "quantity":

Elitist notions of the kind encouraged by the eugenicists are clearly reflected in the thought of Ellis, Wells, and Orage, all of whom looked forward to a socialistic corporate state led by a new and "highly gifted race of men". Orage's guild socialism was a program for a hierarchically structured society led by an evolutionary nobility, while for Ellis, writing in *The Task of Social Hygiene* in 1913, the breeding of a new

elite is synonymous with the creation of socialism: “The question of breed, the production of fine individuals, the elevation of the ideal of quality in human production over that of mere quantity, begins to be seen, not merely as a noble ideal in itself, but as the only method by which Socialism can be enabled to continue on its present path”. (Gibbons 1143)

Though he is little remembered today, Orage’s influence was remarkably deep and wide-ranging in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, together with George Bernard Shaw, Orage purchased a failing journal called the *New Age* which furthered his medievalist vision under the slogan “An Independent Socialist Review” and published and encouraged writers such as Katherine Mansfield, John Middleton Murry, Herbert Read, TE Hulme, Edwin Muir and others (Conford 172). Though it proclaimed itself as an alternative socialist review, the *New Age* combined both progressive and highly reactionary ideals in its columns, particularly in its disdain for what it saw as the false promise of industrialisation and mass democracy. Indeed, one historian describes it as providing perhaps the most important forum of the time for bringing together radical right and left wing opinion, observing that “nearly all” of its contributors “advocated the (sometimes violent) overthrow of liberal democracy while rejecting virtually every emancipatory aspect of modernity” (Ferrall 15). Later, in 1932, Orage founded the *New English Weekly* with TS Eliot on the editorial committee. Though boasting the slogan of being the “Monthly Forum for Socialist Discussion” the *New English Weekly* had a truly remarkable number of far-right and fascist writers on its staff, working alongside regular left-wing contributors such as George Orwell (Marks 277). These included Anthony Ludovici, its arts editor and author of *Jews and the Jews in England* (1938), promoter of eugenics, and the most important pre-World War Two translator of Nietzsche’s work into English, as well as other far-right figures such as the historian and Nazi apologist Arthur Bryant, and Jorian Jenks, Secretary of Agriculture for the British Union of Fascists (until his death in 1963 Jenks was also

editor of *Mother Earth*, the journal of the Soil Association, which promoted organic farming and a return to the soil).

Of course, most mainstream intellectuals who were concerned about the deleterious effects of modern machine civilisation did not go so far as to call for the overthrow of liberal democracy but took a more managerial and ameliorative approach, but one based nevertheless on a return to a more structured society where the old established order of settled workers overseen by a guiding elite was maintained. Bertrand Russell, for example, in a 1949 article tellingly entitled “Can a Scientific Society be Stable?” argued that unless world population was managed and enforced by a global authority made up of educated administrators, civilisation may well be threatened and that such a conclusion was “completely evident on Darwinian principles” (Russell 1309). Though Russell had by this time dropped any references to outright eugenic theory, there is the same anxiety over stability, the same mistaken application of evolutionary theory to human society, and the belief that the growth in urban populations was actually a problem that was amenable to resolution by controlling breeding. In his earlier engagement with guild socialism, Russell (showing the influence of Ruskin) had laid out his vision of a stable society where jobs would be matched to workers on the basis of their abilities, overseen by a ruling clerisy. Such a system, he felt, would be more equitable and fulfilling for the average worker than the modern, mechanised world, and would ensure that everyone would have the satisfaction of knowing their place. Russell realised that in every society there would be some work that no one relished, but he promised that “for entirely inferior work negroes will be employed wherever possible” (qtd. by Ironside 191).

The idea of the “stable society”, then, can be seen as resulting from the confluence of eugenic theory (whether positive eugenics or merely fears of modernity’s dysgenic effects) with the conception of society’s organic form: it saw people as born to fulfil a certain role or position, and sought to remove the vagaries and dangers of a mobile and individualistic technological society by administrating the allocation of worker to their task. Jorian Jenks’ argument in his treatise on organic

agriculture, *From the Ground Up* (1950), demonstrates the thinking behind the need to return to a putatively “natural” hierarchy. Attacking the trend towards liberalism and individualism in society, and claiming to detect a longing for a return to stability, Jenks argued that

This renewed emphasis on security and justice indicates a widespread, if largely unformulated, desire for a return to a social *order* in which every member has a recognized place, with appropriate duties and rewards. Effective socialism in fact, though this would probably be denied by so-called social democrats, postulates very much the hierarchic type of society and authoritarian type of government against which liberalism was so emphatic a protest. (135)

This argument, which Jenks had previously put forward in the pages of the *New English Weekly*, shows the fluidity of ideas and ideologies at the time, and the way that reactionary ideologies were already being propagated by analogy with nature and reference to dire social and ecological need. Conford observes that Orwell who “worked closely with [*NEW* editor Philip] Mairet in the late 1930s” declared “unequivocally that the *NEW* was not pro-fascist” but Conford remains unconvinced, arguing that structurally, “an outlook which attaches such importance to the earth and to the organic components of human life is likely to tend in religion to paganism and in politics to Fascism” (186).

Regardless of the fundamental ideologies of the *NEW* and other journals of the period, what is clear is that Orwell and other progressive writers were exposed to, and working within, a professional and intellectual environment in which the metaphor of organic form was prevalent. This conception permeates Orwell’s writing, as in *1984*, in which a rare moment of optimism overcomes Winston Smith when he watches one of the “proles” hanging out washing. As Carey notes,

Orwell surrounds her with images of countryside and farmyard. She is like a mare, with powerful buttocks, and like the rose hip that follows the rose, and like a turnip (linking her, perhaps, with the friendly turnip-sowing farm-hands little Orwell knew). She must, Winston thinks, have had many children – swelling like a fertilized fruit. She evokes a ‘mystical reverence’ in him. She has, he realizes, no mind, only strong arms, a warm heart and a fertile belly. But it is people like her who are “storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles’ the power that will one day overturn the world”.

(44)

Williams’ point about this passage, that it portrays the proletariat as not yet conscious but with the potential to one day awaken, is well made, but I would argue still mis-conceptualises this scene by locating it as a kind of Marxist parable about the masses waiting to be awoken one day to revolutionary fervour (*Culture and Society* 293). Orwell is quite clear in his use of imagery and metaphor here: this is not the hope of some spark of political ideology being passed on, but rather of endurance and return. Though Orwell was clearly contemptuous of the cyclic and occultist theories of history Yeats and others espoused, he still takes solace in the thought that eventually all empires and all civilisations fall, and that after their fall the people will return to the land and the way of life that had prevailed for generations before the rise of empires and civilisation. Thus Orwell portrays the possibility of hope represented by the prole woman in terms of natural fertility, the cycle of the seasons, and local food gathered from the fields and hedgerows. The description of the woman in terms of the foods not only of the field but also of the hedgerow is strongly reminiscent of Bowlings’ reverie about eating rose hips and other wild foods in *Coming Up for Air* when he says “I do remember different seasons, because all my memories are bound up with things to eat, which varied at different times of the year (38).

The identification of the prole women with such seasonal foods and the agrarian cycles of planting and harvesting (the plough horse, the turnips) is couched in a more vitalistic language than tends to be characteristic of Marxist intellectualism and identifies the cycle of the seasons with natural fertility. The potential to overturn the world embodied in the rose-hipped prole woman is surely not intellectual fervour or even physical power as such, but rather the belief in fertility and the peasant ability to simply endure the passing of another ruler, another empire or civilisation. By translating the prole woman out of the urban, industrial society she lives in back to an idealised rural past Orwell not only conveys his sense that machine civilisation is unnatural, but conversely that the fixed, agrarian way of life is the natural order of things and that one day people will return to it.

This ruralised vision of the eternal peasant in Orwell's *1984* stands in stark contrast to one of the few occasions where Orwell is unreservedly dismissive and contemptuous of the lower classes, his description, in *Road*, of the Brookers, landlord and lady at a boarding house in the north of England. The Brookers do not even have the sweat of honest toil to redeem them and live entirely on the proceeds of the new, travelling salesmen who represent increasing commercialism. As such, Orwell finds no redeeming qualities in their dirt, which is mere filth, representative of machine civilisation and its "massness":

It is no use saying that people like the Brookers are just disgusting and trying to put them out of mind. For they exist in tens and hundreds of thousands; they are one of the characteristic by-products of the modern world. You cannot disregard them if you accept the civilization that produced them. For this is part at least of what industrialism has done for us . . . this is where it has all led . . . to labyrinthine slums

and dark back kitchens with sickly, ageing people creeping round and round them like blackbeetles. (15-6)³⁶

Orwell's mention of "back kitchens" here in association with his uncharacteristically sweeping comparison of the "hundreds of thousands" of people in urban centres to "blackbeetles" is revealing, as is his depiction of them as "sickly" and "ageing". Whilst he is of course alert to poor housing, hard labour, and long hours, his anxiety over the degenerative effects of machine civilisation centres around the organicist linking of food with vitalism, and thus he makes processed food representative of mass society and mechanisation. Orwell's condemnation of the Brookers and their type focuses on the food they serve to an almost obsessive degree, discussing the tinned pies and the tasteless biscuits they served (14).

Along with Orwell's genuine dismay here at the effects of industrialism there is also a very vivid sense of the "Tory anarchist" side of his nature struggling with the contradictions he saw between improving the material standard of living for the masses and the degeneration he saw arising from that improvement. Orwell admits that the poor now have food to eat whereas in earlier times they may well have literally starved, but is disturbed by what he perceives to be its low nutritional and cultural value. At times, his concern regarding the diet of the working classes is so intense that (as I will shortly explore) it is difficult not to conclude that what is really being discussed is not simply the diet of the urban masses but their cultural values. It would seem that the issue of food, of nutrition, formed a kind of psychic release for Orwell, allowing him to resolve this tension by believing that if people could (and would) only eat natural food they might recover not only their

³⁶ Compare Orwell's description of the Brookers as the "by-products of the modern world" with Winston Smith's thought in *1984* that "The ideal set up by the Party was something huge, terrible and glittering – a world full of steel and concrete, of monstrous machines . . . The reality was decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes, in patched up nineteenth century houses that smelt always of cabbage and bad lavatories" (77).

natural health but also their natural culture. Thus, malnutrition and health become conflated in Orwell's thinking and writing with issues of cultural and national regeneration, as I will now consider.

A considerable proportion of *Road* is spent considering the "all-importance of food" which Orwell believes is more important than changes of dynasty or religion for the national psyche and constitution, and he bemoans the increasing consumption of mass-produced food which is cheap, relatively tasty, and (thanks to canning and preservatives) long lasting without refrigeration (82). Orwell, having taken the trouble to experience life from the perspective of the urban poor, is not insensitive to these reasons for the popularity of mass-produced food, and admits that when you're poor you want something quick and tasty not bland and nutritious. However, "the results of all this" Orwell claims, "are visible in a physical degeneracy which you can study directly, by using your eyes In Sheffield you have the feeling of walking among a population of troglodytes" (86). Orwell asserts that "the physical average has been declining all over England for a long time past, and not merely among the unemployed in the industrial areas". This cannot be proved statistically, Orwell admits, but it is a conclusion that is forced upon you if you use your eyes" even, he claims "in a prosperous town like London" (87).

Like Williamson, Eliot, and other writers of the time, Orwell believed that part of the problem was that machine civilisation was not only leading to a physical decline in the population through poor nutrition, but a mental and cultural decline as well. Examining this belief shows how influential the fallacy of organic form is in shaping perceptions about society and what is and is not "natural". Orwell declares in *Road* that part of the problem is that machine civilisation is altering people's tastes in unnatural ways. "The number of people who *prefer* tinned peas and tinned fish to real peas and real fish must be increasing every year" he asserts, though it's not clear what he bases this belief on, or his belief that the tinned version is of less nutritional worth than the fresh (and expensive) versions, merely remarking that it is a shame that "for lack of a proper tradition" people

choose the tinned food over the natural (89, 90). This observation being made, Orwell turns his attentions elsewhere, but it is not long before he is drawn back to discussing the tension between the desire for progress and the danger of degeneration such progress inevitably entails, and this discussion leads him back to the issue of a denatured populace. I would like to quote Orwell's argument here at length because it is here, towards the end of his text, that he finally and definitively makes the leap from arguing that mass-produced food causes physical degeneration to arguing that mass civilisation, machine civilisation, causes a similar decline in mental, spiritual and cultural terms which reinforces the physical decline in a downward spiral. It also shows, very clearly, how the fallacy of the organic form leads to irredentist assertions of national superiority, even in a progressive writer such as Orwell, ever alert to the dangers of xenophobia and jingoism.

Orwell begins this argument much as he began his plea for sensitive people to accept socialism and the mechanised state "for the moment", asserting that though we must use the machine for now, we should view it as a drug because "like a drug, the machine is useful, dangerous, and habit-forming" (176). He then warns of the results of allowing ourselves to succumb to machine civilisation, which he predicates, significantly, on grounds of taste, literal and figurative, thus giving the appearance of objective statement to subjective judgments:

You only have to look about you at this moment to realize with what sinister speed the machine is getting us into its power. To begin with, there is the frightening debauchery of taste that has already been effected by a century of mechanization In the highly mechanized countries, thanks to tinned food, cold storage, synthetic flavouring matters, etc., the palate is almost a dead organ. As you can see by looking at any greengrocer's shop, what the majority of English people mean by an apple is a lump of highly-coloured cotton wool from America or Australia It is the shiny,

standardized, machine-made look of the American apple that appeals to them; the superior taste of the English apple is something they simply do not notice. (178-9)

Of course, such assertions are purely subjective and have no basis in objective fact, but what is telling is that Orwell defends the English apple on grounds of “superior” intrinsic qualities (taste) and identifies the foreign products not only with technological society, but with debasement and a general decline in standards. As in the description of Bowling’s meal at the Americanised diner in *Coming Up for Air*, it is all surface appeal with no intrinsic quality.

From foods associated with mass-production Orwell then presses on with the analogy, arguing that “what applies to food applies also to furniture, houses, clothes, books, amusements, and everything else that makes up our environment” (179). In other words, from the basis of an attack on mass-produced food on the nutritional grounds of its supposedly leading to physical degeneracy, Orwell now advances the argument that this is only one aspect of a wider debasement that is leading to an unhealthy and distinctly un-English homogenisation of taste and culture. Here he reverses the direction of the argument, arguing that machine civilisation creates its own consumers, de-natured, de-vitalised, and dependent on technology:

The mechanization of the world could never proceed very far while taste, even the taste-buds of the tongue, remained uncorrupted, because in that case most of the products of the machine world would be simply unwanted. In a healthy world there would be no demand for tinned foods, aspirins, gramophones, gaspipe chairs, machine guns, daily newspaper, telephones, motor-cars, etc . . . Mechanization leads to the decay of taste, the decay of taste leads to the demand for machine-made articles and hence to more mechanization, and so a vicious circle is established. (179-80)

Orwell's organicism here leads him to conflate sensory taste with aesthetic taste, reinforced by the invocation of the idea that the pre-mechanised world was "a healthy world" and that it took mechanisation to create the demand for mechanised goods.

Orwell's attack on machine civilisation, then, is *not* simply based on disgust at the poor conditions of the working classes in cramped inner city housing, or the despoliation and pollution of the land. It is much more fundamental than that. Orwell conceives of technological society as a sick society and an agrarian, pre-mechanised society as "a healthy world", implying that there is a natural order to society that has been deviated from. Though mechanisation is the root of the problems, it is *not* the externalities of the mechanised world, the factories and urban housing, as the degeneration of taste and culture in a mechanised society. In Orwell's perception, the effects of machine civilisation are almost impossible to escape, because it changes culture as well as the human body and psyche.

Orwell's troubling syllogism regarding the relationship between socialism, machine civilisation and degeneracy, and his comments on the degeneration of taste in machine civilisation, lead ineluctably to the gloomy conclusion that there may very well be no turning back or away from the course set by machine civilisation towards mental, physical, and cultural degeneracy and the tyranny of the "beehive state" where the individual is crushed underfoot in the name of the collective good. Orwell's organicism leads him to emphasise the importance of attachment to place and "genuine" culture (for Orwell this means local, folk culture not high culture) – hence the extensive reminiscences on growing up in the South of England in *Coming up for Air* which serve as a paean to tradition and locale. For the urban masses, rootless and severed from a meaningful connection with a specific natural environment, their tastes and their psyche are, Orwell believes, formed by the artificial and degraded world of mechanisation and mass-production. Just as Spengler

argued that Western, Faustian culture, like all cultures, arose from the interaction of a particular population of people with a particular landscape, so Orwell seems to feel that authentic culture and taste are formed when people are born and bred in their own natural environment. The more we become an urban-dwelling people, reliant on technology, he fears, the more we will lose touch with our “true” nature. Therefore, the attempt by the born urbanite to move out to the country and reconnect with nature in the hope of reclaiming meaning and authenticity is doomed to end in a forlorn pastiche of genuine culture. Being raised in the artificial world of the city, their tastes and their psyche have been irreparably degraded.

Hence, in *Coming Up for Air*, when Bowling looks for his favourite childhood fishing spot, he finds it desecrated by a distinctly middle-class cluster of semi-rural homes for people consciously seeking a way of life more in tune with nature. But their idea of communing with nature, Bowling feels, is a sham, a mere lifestyle choice in place of anything real and authentic:

I knew the type. Vegetarianism, simple life, poetry, Nature-Worship, roll in the dew before breakfast . . . Do you know these faked-up Tudor houses with the curly roofs and the buttresses that don't buttress anything, and the rock-gardens with concrete bird-baths and those red plaster elves you buy at the florists'? You could see in your mind's eye the awful gang of food-cranks and spook-hunters and simple-lifers with £1,000 a year that lived there. (228)

In a final identification of these “simple-lifers” with the urbanism and machine civilisation they're fleeing, they stand condemned for filling Bowling's old fishing pool up with discarded tin cans. Though there is a sense of loss and even anger at the destruction of the pool and the woods, more than anything else, these newcomers are guilty of inauthenticity. Even their beliefs are presented as a pot-pourri of New Age eclecticism without any tradition or authenticity. They have no ties to the

land there, renaming the remaining local copse “the pixy glen” in a final act of indignity which infuriates Bowling:

The Pixy Glen. And they'd filled my pool up with tin cans. God rot them and bust them! Say what you like – call it silly, childish, anything – but doesn't it make you puke sometimes to see what they're doing to England, with their bird-baths and their plaster gnomes, and their pixies and tins cans where the woods used to be? Sentimental you say? Anti-social? Oughtn't to prefer trees to men? I say it depends what trees and what men. (229-30)

The imagery Orwell employs here and throughout the novel present machine civilisation and mass democracy as not only artificial and superficial, but crucially as lacking roots and therefore lacking authenticity. Hence, Bowling's retort, “I say it depends what trees and what men” draws a division between natural, rooted populations and inauthentic newcomers, identified with machine civilisation and lacking “real” culture and tradition. Orwell, of course, recognises the futility of trying to halt or reverse progress, and has Bowling realise with sadness but acceptance that he can't return to his boyhood. Similarly, Orwell's call for thinking people to lead a movement for a return to “simpler, harder, probably agricultural” way of life is clearly a forlorn hope and he more or less admits as much in *Road* more than once. What his agonising over the issue reveals, though, is how rooted his antipathy to technology was not just in anxieties of physical degeneration but also cultural degeneration and national decline, and, even for a writer as progressive as Orwell, a palpable anxiety over the rise of the masses and the direction of society.

Orwell's fear, then, can be conceived of as the fear that technological society would prove the undoing of humanity not only as a possible tool of surveillance and repression, as through a continual and relentless degeneration both physical and cultural (“taste”) so that the masses would

not even be aware of what they were being deprived off. As I remarked earlier, Orwell saw socialism as inextricably tied in with machine civilisation, and it is perhaps this more than anything else which influenced his decision to make the dystopia of *1984* a socialist dystopia, albeit one with clearly fascistic overtones.³⁷ As Paul Monaco points out in his discussion of the reactionary consciousness, *1984* can be read as a powerful debunking of the idea of the ability of liberal individualism and progress:

1984 is so effective because it ties the undermining of consciousness itself to the spread of technology. Its own consciousness in the novel is antiauthoritarian, and that with a vengeance. On the other hand, it provides an extraordinarily negative view of the masses. If democratization leads in the direction of mass society, then *1984* is antidemocratic . . . the myth of revolutionary change resulting in human liberation is debunked; so is the modest liberal or progressive faith in human reason, scientific advancement and technology. (113-4)³⁸

As Monaco observes here, Orwell's pessimism regarding technology leads him to take an extremely negative view of the possibility of mass democracy. In adhering on some level, emotional or otherwise, to the idea of organic form Orwell inevitably comes to the conclusion that there is a natural order and that deviation from it must ultimately be a mistake that can only be corrected by eventual return. As I noted earlier, citing Carey, one of the rare moments of optimism in *1984* occurs with Smith's contemplation of a female "prole", depicted as the eternal peasant, completely unintellectual, even mindless, yet retaining a sense of vitality and rootedness that will surely outlast

³⁷ It bears remarking that in *Road* Orwell warns that fascism poses a real danger in England because of what he sees as socialism's focus on progress in material terms without due consideration to tradition. "As a result" he cautions, "Fascism has been able to play upon every instinct that revolts against hedonism and a cheap conception of 'progress'" (188).

³⁸ Northrop Frye (1946) also hints at this perception of Orwell in his brief review of *Animal Farm* when he remarks "as far as he [Orwell] is concerned some old reactionary bromide like 'you can't change human nature' is as good a moral as any other for his fable" (49).

the repressive technocracy. Redemption in *1984* lies not in revolution, but in the possibility of eventual return; in the hope, however forlorn, of some kind of cultural regeneration rooted in agrarianism or at least the genetic memory of the countryside.

In Orwell we see an undoubtedly progressive writer and intellectual wrestling with contradictions inherent in modernity which his rational mind is simply unable to resolve. Williams memorably described the totality of Orwell's work as a paradox and traces this back to Orwell as exile, someone who had renounced empire, class privilege, and "the past" to throw in his lot with socialism and mass society, yet who could not help feeling the pull of his original home within him (*Culture and Society* 286-9). Intellectually, Orwell recognises that machine civilisation is a prerequisite for a socialist society. Yet on a deeper, emotional level, there is an anxiety that technology will prove not only physically but also culturally degenerative and this fear is tied in subtly but inextricably to anxieties over national decline. Orwell's anti-technologism causes him to question on a fundamental level the idea and possibility of progress, and though he was acute enough to realise that the idea of returning to some mythical rural idyll is merely a reactionary illusion, he still returns longingly to this theme.

Chapter Two: Blood and Soil: Cultural Identity and Locality in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien once remarked to me that the feeling about home must have been quite different in the days when a family had fed on the produce of the same few miles of country for six generations, and that perhaps this was why they saw nymphs in the fountains and dryads in the woods . . . We of course . . . are really artificial beings and have no connection (save in sentiment) with any place on earth. We are synthetic men, uprooted. The strength of the hills is not ours.

CS Lewis, qtd in Veldman 57

As once the microcosm Man against Nature, so now the microcosm Machine is revolting against Nordic Man. The lord of the World is becoming the slave of the Machine, which is forcing him – forcing us all, whether we are aware of it or not – to follow its course.

Spengler *Man and Technics* 90

In my consideration of George Orwell in the previous chapter I discussed the figurative role that food played in anti-technological literature, allowing representation and discussion of concerns over degeneracy and instability in an increasingly urban, technological world. As I demonstrated, tinned and mass-produced food became a kind of cultural marker for concerns over softness and degeneracy in the increasingly urbanised and technological societies of the West. An associated anxiety over the migration of the working classes from the countryside to the cities was also explored in relation to the same trope. With increasing industrialisation, including the mechanisation of agriculture, people were no longer tied to the land, and many migrated to the cities. The seemingly relentless growth in a mobile and often disaffected urban population gave rise to anxieties that modern society was inherently unstable and unsustainable. I briefly explored how

various remedies were proposed, at least in part, to resolve this perceived problem, such as Guild Socialism, which stressed the necessity of a holistic and hierarchical approach to society which recognised vitalistic links between people, the soil, and the food they ate. As I observed, “natural” foods such as locally grown and consumed vegetables served to represent contrary ideals of authenticity, identity, rootedness, and perhaps most importantly vitality and regeneration.

Implicit in this idealisation was a hostility to something that might be termed “false fertility”, a notion that the seeming abundance of technological society was a dangerous illusion that relied on an unsustainable, expansionary logic which was ultimately self-defeating. By defying the limits of nature and breaking the vital link between man, food, and soil, technological society’s prolific growth was not a sign of its success, but a kind of carcinoma, drawing sustenance from the countryside to fuel uncontrolled growth in population in the urban centres. The paradox was that in ignoring or forgetting the importance of spiritual and cultural links to native soil in pursuit of materialistic gratification, technological Western society was ensuring not only its decline, but also perhaps its own future sterility in the midst of seeming abundance. In this chapter I want to expand on this idea, and show how it relates to broader concerns over post-imperial decline and reverse colonisation and advances notions of cultural purity and identity. I will do so through an examination of JRR Tolkien’s epic fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954). I choose this work for two primary reasons: first because of the immense impact the novel had on the counter-culture of the 1960s and 70s of which anti-technologism was a part; second because I believe it offers an excellent opportunity to trace how a reactionary ideology is transmitted (and in that process transmuted) by literature in such a way that the basic direction of the ideology is maintained, whilst the antecedents and ultimate goal of that ideology is forgotten or ignored. Two caveats need to be made here in this regard, before I begin. I am not arguing or supposing that this transmission was intended – I am concerned here with how a particular world-view (to use that term for the moment) shapes an author’s conception, and in turn their work and subsequently how the world-view embodied in their

fiction conveys certain attitudes and beliefs. I also want to stress that the analysis I offer here of Tolkien's masterpiece makes no claims to exclusivity; that is to say, this chapter looks at one aspect of the novel from a particular analytical standpoint which does not claim to invalidate any other view.³⁹

I begin this chapter by looking at the influence of JRR Tolkien on progressive thought in the second half of the twentieth century, before briefly examining two opposing critical views of his epic fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings*, as they relate to my subsequent study: Michael Moorcock's condemnation of its reactionary agenda, and Patrick Curry's later defence of it as progressive and ecologically-minded. In contradistinction to these diametrically different views, I want to argue that it is both reactionary *and* progressive inasmuch as it displays a non-materialistic, holistic view of society which, in its rejection of materialism, necessarily grounds itself in irredentist and vitalistic notions of culture and society. This position, I will propose, is consonant both with modern ecological ideas of bioregionalism and with discredited notions of blood and soil. Structurally, my approach in this chapter will be to examine *The Lord of the Rings* in depth to analyse the relationship it constructs between culture, identity, and the soil, and how it presents technology as a disruptive and debasing force on this most fundamental connection.

The Lord of the Rings, after an initially lukewarm and sometimes bewildered response from critics, was enthusiastically received in Britain, taken up primarily by a middle-class audience, growing in popularity with the growth in university education in both Britain and America in the nineteen sixties.⁴⁰ In the mid nineteen-sixties, it was also proving extremely popular on campuses in American universities, spreading mainly by word of mouth. Curry observes that although exact figures are not easy to find *The Lord of the Rings* is "probably the biggest-selling work of fiction this

³⁹ I refer here to other critical readings of Tolkien, but also to his assertion that the primary aim of most authors in writing fiction is to tell a story in a way that will be enjoyed by the reader.

⁴⁰ See Meredith Veldman's chapter "Challenge and Response" for a well-documented review of the critical and popular reception of Tolkien's work (Veldman 91-111).

century” with sales as of 2004 standing at around fifty million copies, plus of course the numerous radio and film adaptations (Curry 2).⁴¹ What is particularly noteworthy for our purposes is the way in which this work by a staunchly conservative Roman Catholic was enthusiastically taken up by those involved with progressive politics and the burgeoning protest movement in the nineteen sixties and seventies.⁴² According to Veldman, this can be at least partially ascribed to the novel’s obvious championing of small-scale individualism over faceless and monolithic entities, though as Veldman observes the underlying ideal was very different:

Middle-earth, the philological wonderland of a politically disengaged right-wing Roman Catholic, coincided in its deepest structures with the vision of a participatory political life that shaped the New Left. Middle-earth is, of course, no democratic utopia; even the unpretentious Shire has a clear social hierarchy. In *The Lord of the Rings*, individuals act, but they act within the context of a clearly defined community and as part of an all-embracing supernatural plan. Neither Tolkien’s hierarchical vision nor his conservative religious commitment cohered with the New Left ideal. Nevertheless, the New Left, like Tolkien, protested against an increasingly bureaucratic, export-oriented, mass society. (109)

Certainly, the influence of Tolkien’s work as a kind of ideological or even mythological template of resistance against the impersonal technological state can be clearly seen in the accounts of many who were active in the protest movements of the nineteen sixties and seventies. The founders of Greenpeace, for example, used to refer to the area of British Columbia, Canada, where they lived as “The Shire” in affirmation of its unique culture and progressive ethic. Recalling the

⁴¹ Curry is referring to the twentieth century here, but seemingly extending it to 2004.

⁴² This is not to ignore the way in which many far-right ideologues also used the mythological apparatus in the novel. See Bramwell, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century* 130-32 and 232, for a brief but insightful discussion of the use and convergence over texts such as *Rings* by both the New Left and the neo-fascist *Nouvelle Droite* movement, see the entry for the European New Right in *World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopaedia: Vol. 1* ed. by Cyprian Blamires, s.v. “ENR”.

decision of the US Government to stop nuclear testing in the nearby Amchitka Islands, Rex Wyler, one of the co-founders of Greenpeace, characterised the triumph of the then nascent protest movement over the military-industrial complex in terms borrowed from Tolkien's novel, saying "The upstarts from the Shire had brought the Lord of Mordor to account for his treacheries" (Wyler 132). At a time when technology had become associated in the popular imagination with war, pollution, and ruthless corporate businesses exploiting natural resources, many drew parallels between the idea of evil in the novel, and technology itself. This was not unwarranted, either, for Tolkien clearly intended some equivalency between technology and the unwholesome and corrupting desire for power and instant gratification. "Both sides" in the novel, Tolkien wrote,

live mainly by 'ordinary' means. The Enemy, or those have become like him, go in for 'machinery' – with destructive and evil effects – because 'magicians', who have become chiefly concerned to use *magia* for their own power, would do so (do do so). The basic motive for *magia* – quite apart from any philosophic consideration of how it should work – is immediacy: speed, reduction of labour, and reduction also to a minimum (or vanishing point) of the gap between the idea or desire and the result or effect. (Tolkien *Letters* 200)

Machinery in *The Lord of the Rings* is the physical manifestation of the desire for power, for dominance, and for the immediate realisation of desire, without reflection. Saruman's fall into wickedness is characterised by Treebeard as stemming from his ". . . plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment" (Tolkien *Rings* 494). In its depiction of the possibility that a willing renunciation of power could defeat even great power the novel offered inspiration to a new generation who felt that humanity was unleashing forces that threatened to destroy the world, or at the least to homogenise and impoverish society and culture.

Some sense of the range of critical responses to *Lord of the Rings* can be gained by looking on the one hand at Moorcock's acerbic denunciation in his 1987 essay, "Epic Pooh", and on the other at Curry's *Defending Middle Earth. Tolkien: Myth and Modernity* (2004). Whilst there are other criticisms and apologies of Tolkien's epic fantasy these two amply represent a distillation of the opposing views of Tolkien as a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary and, contrarily, an ecologically-minded progressive writer who was ahead of his time in warning of the destruction wrought by the modern world. My aim is to examine the elements in the novel which these two critics see as either reactionary or progressive, and then ask if the disparity between the two contrary views might be resolved by taking a fresh look.

Moorcock's objection to *The Lord of the Rings* is primarily to what he identifies as the mood of the writing. This is characterised as one of "stuffy self-satisfaction, typical of the second-rate schoolmaster" carrying a "hidden aggression" and a "deep-rooted hypocrisy" (184). The novel, Moorcock complains, is "a pernicious confirmation of the values of a morally bankrupt middle class" with Sauron and his minions representing the "worst aspects of modern urban society represented as the whole [*sic*] by a fearful, backward-yearning class" (185-6). In this analysis, the novel is fantasy not just as escapism, but as a flat rejection of modernity and egalitarianism. It is flight from the realities and complexities of the modern world, with all their attendant compromises and imperfections, moral grey areas and venalities, to an imagined pseudo-history where the distinctions between right and wrong, the virtuous and the evil, are clearly delineated. *The Lord of the Rings*, as Moorcock sees it, is literally reactionary. The whole mood and ethos of the novel is a twilight nostalgia for the sunlit glory of Empire and the verities that came with it:

I sometimes think that as Britain declines, dreaming of a sweeter past, entertaining few hopes for a finer future, her middle classes turn increasingly to the fantasy of

rural life and talking animals, the safety of the woods that are the pattern of the paper on the nursery-room wall. Hippies, housewives, civil servants share in this wistful trance; eating nothing as dangerous or exotic as the lotus, but chewing instead on a form of mildly anaesthetic British cabbage. (203)

For Moorcock, then, there is nothing progressive about the novel, as it denies the idea of progress, turning instead to fantasies of power and glory, the inherent virtue of nobility, and the unquestionable good of social stability rooted in attachment to the land. The historian and critic Martin Weiner has noted that rural fantasies stress “stability and tranquillity” and provide a “psychic balance and refuge” from change (51). It is this desire for stability and loathing of change that Moorcock clearly despises most of all in the novel, as a small-minded and reactionary attitude that is at least partially responsible for instilling a belief in the possibility of denial, rather than dealing with the world as it actually is.

It would barely be an oversimplification to say that Curry’s view of *Lord of the Rings* is diametrically different; ironically Curry sees the novel as progressive for broadly the same reasons Moorcock sees it as reactionary. Indeed, Curry’s defence of *Lord of the Rings* emphasises the same elements, but offers a very different interpretation of what they signify. Moorcock attacks what he perceives as Tolkien’s rejection of modernity as reactionary nostalgia; Curry defends it as a form of “radical nostalgia” that anticipates the ideals of deep ecology and bioregionalism. He praises it for situating people “inextricably in and of their natural and geographical locales” and offering an alternative to the “impersonal forces of runaway modernity” (18-19). Claiming that “the only place in Middle-Earth which is industrialised, imperialistic, and possessed of an all-powerful state is Mordor” Curry notes that this model of society is presented as an “alien invader” which is not

properly “native” to the imagined world Tolkien created (22).⁴³ In this analysis, the novel may be read as a story of cultural diversity pitted against the forces of homogenising industrialism and imperialism. “The whole implicit project” of *The Lord of the Rings*, Curry proposes, is “*the resacralization (or re-enchantment) of experienced and living nature, including human nature, in the local cultural idiom*” (19. Emphasis in original). To perceive it as racist and reactionary longing for the glories of imperialism is, for Curry, not only a misapprehension of Tolkien’s intentions, but a failure to comprehend the message the work has for us today, that we must somehow find a way to reinvest our immediate environment with genuine meaning to avoid environmental catastrophe and increasing disillusionment and ennui.

Is the novel, then, a paean for the days of imperial splendour and a glorification of established hierarchy? Or is it a prescient call to reassert local colour and cultural identity as a way of averting ecological disaster and resisting the homogenising effects of technology and the urban way of life? Does it deserve its place as a touchstone for many in the protest movement for its message of determination against might and ecological awareness, or should it be condemned for advancing a racist or xenophobic attitude that characterises foreigners as a threat, and preaches social immobility? What part does technology really play in the novel and what might this tell us about perceptions of technology, both in Tolkien’s day, and subsequently following the widespread recognition and influence of his work? In answering this, I want to begin by locating *Lord of the Rings* within the context of a strain of anti-imperialism which referred not to ideals of international brotherhood, but to nationalism and a rejection of the cosmopolitanism which followed imperialist adventuring.

Discussing the rise of the literature of rural fantasy in the early years of the twentieth century Martin Weiner notes the arguments made by some that the Boer War was in many ways a

⁴³ Curry’s claim here is inaccurate, as Saruman turns Isengard into a hellish model of industrialism and imperialism in pursuit of his own desire for power. Presumably Curry means up to the point at which Saruman, by communicating with Sauron via the *palantir* seeing-ball, falls prey to his own baser desires and embarks on a process of rapid industrialisation and imperialism for his own ends.

clash between “a cosmopolitan industrial society versus a traditional, rural ‘folk’ society” that forced questions of which side better encapsulated the character and objectives of “real” Englishness (59). The war had served to intensify existing anxieties about degeneracy, raising fears that the English, thanks to the effects of urbanism and technology, were now too physically degenerate to wage the kind of campaigns which the maintenance of empire required (Greenslade). Indeed, it is to the soldiers of the Boer War that Orwell (in 1937) referred in his lamentation for the disappearance of “the monstrous men with chests like barrels and moustaches like the wings of eagles that strode across my childhood’s gaze twenty or thirty years ago” who had vanished thanks to the evils of industrialism and its avatar, tinned food (*Road* 87-8). The degeneracy crisis caused a wider reassessment of whether Britain was on the right path, intensifying already extant anxieties over the increasing urbanisation of the population and the effects on health and social stability. As William Greenslade (1994) observes, there was no single degeneracy crisis in the years between the Boer War and World War Two, but rather a series of intensifying crises that contrasted increasingly industrialised warfare with an agrarian idealism which stressed the harmony, hierarchy, and above all the natural health, of the rural way of life:

In a collection of essays, *After-War Problems* (1917), compiled by W. H. Dawson while the long battles of the war were still being fought, a hankering for a “natural” way of life based on a rural economy was unmistakable “We have realized how important the countryman is as a soldier, a better soldier than his town brother”. This leitmotif of urban degenerationism [*sic*], which had reached a crescendo at the time of the Boer War is sounded once again. A back to the land policy is put forward, enshrining a vision in which “England will be provided with a virile and happy rural population, able to enjoy its happiness in peacetime and defend it in the terrible hour of war” [The countryman’s] healthy virility is effortlessly translated, in instrumental terms, into a eugenically desirable quality of racial worth: “Help the

countryman to raise a large and healthy family and England will be safe". And the familiar, dysgenic racial consequences of urbanism are now counterpoised with the health-giving properties of rural life: "Why should you concentrate such masses in towns, with the evils of factory life impairing the health of the future of the race? . . . Attach the people to the country, breed a stronger race. The soil is more patriotic than the street". (241)

As this extract shows, agrarian romanticism stressed the ideals of identification with the local soil and national health and virility and opposed them to the industrialism of wars fought abroad, arguing that if Britain returned to a rural economy, such foreign adventuring would not be needed. Thus, in reaction to the myth of industrial and imperial supremacy, there were many writers and critics who forecast the rise of a literature of anti-imperialism that would stress national pride rather than international power and replace what they saw as the false (and largely foreign) materialist values with truer English values of tradition and contentment:

Soon after the Boer War, a young literary and social critic, CFG Masterman . . . complained that the literature of Imperialism had "neglected and despised the ancient pieties of an older England, the little isle set in a silver sea". Greatness had become equated with bigness. In contrast, Masterman discerned the rise of a new literature that was anti-Imperial yet not cosmopolitan – a literature of "nationalism". . . . Masterman anticipated the character of the coming *zeitgeist*: "It will proclaim always a particular concern in the well-being of England and the English people; a pride in its ancient history, its ancient traditions, the very language of its grey skies and rocky shore"; it would be democratic; and it would be concerned with restoring the moral and material health of English society, which had been undermined by the

new dissolvents of the nineteenth century: urbanism, industrialism, and cosmopolitanism. (Weiner 59-60)

It is not difficult to see how this might apply to the mood of *The Lord of the Rings* and how understanding this mood offers a means to reconcile those who see it as irremediably reactionary with those who see it as a key progressive tract. Tolkien wanted to create a literary world “redolent of our ‘air’ . . . the clime and soil of the North West” and “purged of the gross” which would echo Arthurian legends, but also speak of the people of Britain as well as its “soil” (Tolkien *Letters* 144). Confronted with the rise of political demagoguery and propaganda he harked back to what he saw as the relative stability of nations ruled by distant and inefficient monarchs, whilst recognising that in the modern world there was “nowhere to fly to” as in the modern world even the remote Siberian tribesman probably had “tinned food and the village loudspeaker telling Stalin’s bed-time stories about democracy and the wicked Fascists” (Tolkien *Letters* 64). The triumph of “Americo-cosmopolitanism” that would follow an Allied victory in World War Two was a prospect Tolkien found “very terrifying” and scarcely a worse outcome than an Axis victory (Tolkien *Letters* 64). In their use of machinery, mass-production, and propaganda, the Allies were in severe danger of becoming evil themselves, entranced by power for its own sake, and so even in victory would fail in defence of true freedom. “We are attempting to conquer Sauron with the Ring,” Tolkien wrote in an airgraph to his son serving in South Africa with the RAF, “And we shall (it seems) succeed. But the penalty is, as you will know, to breed new Saurons, and slowly turn Men and Elves into Orcs” (Tolkien *Letters* 78).

Rings is a fantasy that equates true greatness not with “bigness” but with renunciation, where the logic of imperialist conquest is rejected at the same time that nationalistic cultural purity and pride based on the mythology of the virtues of a stable rural hierarchy is asserted. EM Forster had warned in *Howard’s End* (1910) that although the imperialist may seem to be an admirable and

sturdy type like the countryman, in reality he was a “destroyer” as empire “paved the way for cosmopolitanism” and therefore cultural decay (Qtd in Bradshaw 161).⁴⁴ In *Rings*, imperial expansion paves the way for subsequent cosmopolitanism, depopulation, and eventual collapse. The imperial projects of Gondor’s past are now, in its decline, turned against it as the “cursed Southrons” come marching to attack “up the very roads that craft of Gondor made” (686). This invasion is recounted as the result of imperial conquest and trade. Ever susceptible to evil, the Southrons now come to plunder the riches of the former imperial power, now reduced to little more than a hollow shell of its former self. The template here is that of negative classicism again. It would be perhaps overly simplistic to make too direct a comparison of Gondor with Rome, but certainly Tolkien had some degree of identification in mind, remarking in a letter that the resolution of the novel results in something akin to “the re-establishment of an effective Holy Roman Empire with its seat in Rome” (376). Significantly, it is a “Holy Roman Empire” that is achieved at the end of *Rings* rather than renewed Roman Empire, because it is grounded in notions of culture and identity, rather than materialist expansion.

I have already noted, in the introduction, the immense influence of Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* and its permeation of Western thought. I will now argue that understanding Tolkien’s anti-imperialism as a longing for the sort of return to rural hierarchy discussed above requires an understanding of the scale and pervasiveness of Spengler’s influence on Western thinking in the twentieth century, and more specifically, on Tolkien’s conception of history in *Rings*. Spengler placed the blame for the West’s decline on technology and its impetus towards urbanism which led to the growth of what he termed “the world-city” and its inevitable outcome, imperialism. In the world city, instead of the “type-true people, born of and grown on the soil” there existed a

⁴⁴ *Howard’s End*, as Bradshaw’s essay explores, is another novel of the first half of the twentieth century which deals with themes of urban degeneration juxtaposed with images of rural virility and eugenic fitness. Thus, Forster’s anti-imperialism is based on the same isolationist longing for a return to a self-contained rural economy as that noted by Greenslade, Weiner, and others and broadly the same as the mood I detect in Tolkien’s *Rings*.

cosmopolitan “mob” without real culture or roots. (Spengler *Decline* 25). As cultures grew, they gave rise to civilisation – the city – but the city itself gave rise to the expansionary necessity of empire at the expense of culture. Imperialism was thus the final stage of a civilisation which would soon fall victim to cosmopolitanism by neglecting its own internal culture in external pursuit of imperial gain. The outward trappings of success only masking the increasing hollowness and petrification at the heart of empire:

Here, then, I lay it down that *Imperialism* . . . is to be taken as the typical symbol of the end. Imperialism is civilisation unadulterated. In this phenomenal form the destiny of the West is now irrevocably set. The energy of culture-man is directed inwards, that of civilization-man outwards . . . The expansive tendency is a doom, something daemonic and immense, which grips, forces into service, and uses up the late mankind of the world-city stage . . . (Spengler *Decline* 28. Emphasis in original)

In this late stage of civilisation, Spengler remarks, materialism and the desire for amusement and luxury (bread and circuses) replace the virtues of culture, probity, and the production of the next generation. This is especially pronounced in Western civilisation, according to Spengler, who characterises it as “Faustian” – relentlessly expansionary, seeking to bring closer that which is far. The telescope, for instance, is described as “a truly Faustian discovery” as it “penetrates into space which is hidden from the naked eye, and thereby increases the universe that we ‘possess’” (174).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Though Spengler condemns imperialism and materialist expansion, he also seems enamoured of the idea of a Holy Roman Empire claiming that “The type of the very priesthood is Faustian; think of those magnificent bishops of the old German Empire who on horseback led their flocks into battle” (180). As Sternhell (2010) notes in his chapter on “The Intellectual Foundations of Nationalism” this contradiction is a hallmark of counter-enlightenment thinking, exemplified by Johann Herder in *Another Philosophy of History* (1774) which Spengler, as Sternhell notes, follows “almost to the letter” in distinguishing between imperialism and nationalism. In essence, in counter-enlightenment thought admiration for the Holy Roman Empire is admiration for unifying cultural force purged of imperialism’s expansionary materialism and intellectualism. Thus Herder, for example, praises the Gothic tribes that took over Rome as they despised the Roman’s “luxury and refinement which had wrought havoc on mankind” and replaced them with “nature [and] a healthy northern intelligence” and in place of the centrality of Rome as central megalopolis had “built up the land” to ensure a “healthy and therefore happy people” (qtd in Sternhell 288).

In arguing that Tolkien's conception of history is Spenglerian, I want to show that *Rings* is saturated with Spenglerian ideology, thematics and symbolism, regardless of whether or not Tolkien consciously intended it. In making this argument, I want to begin with Frye's use of analogy to show how pervasive Spengler's influence was, using Frye's example of one of the twentieth century's most seminal poems, TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922).

In his 1974 essay on Spengler, Frye is interested in showing that in a very real sense "we are all Spenglerians" as Spengler's thesis of history and culture had so deeply influenced Western thought in the first half of the twentieth century that all Western thought was affected by it whether consciously or not (7). In pursuing this argument, Frye gives the example of *The Waste Land*. Though the work was written "without reference to Spengler," Frye points to the imagery of the poem to show its fidelity to Spengler's conception of history, civilisation, and culture - spring/summer/autumn/winter; morning/noon/evening/night; youth/maturity/age/death (7). His point is that Eliot's use of Spenglerian symbolism is less remarkable than his avoidance of it would have been, such was the extent to which it had come to pervade Western intellectual and literary discourse. "If we do not acquire our knowledge of Spengler's vision from Spengler," Frye observed in 1974, "we have to get it out of the air, *but get it we will; we have no choice in the matter*" (7. My emphasis). People, whether they had even heard of *The Decline of the West* or not, thought in organicist, geo-political terms of "Western Culture" and of that culture being "old, not young" (6). Indeed, to an important extent such thinking remains with us to this day, disseminated through our literature.

If we look at *Rings*, we can see how these ideas permeate the novel. It is the desire for knowledge that leads Saruman into error and evil, brooding on the roof of his tower where he was "accustomed to watch the stars" (278). Saruman embodies the Faustian spirit which seeks to penetrate and apprehend, to negate distance by seeing further through inventions such as the

telescope than is possible with the naked eye. Indeed, Saruman's "downfall" is precisely this Faustian desire to exceed natural limits causing him to gaze into the palantir ("The name meant *that which looks far away*" as Gandalf informs Pippin) and so becoming entranced by his desire to see further and further (621). The prime symbol of evil in *Rings* is of course the lidless eye, the image of Sauron which gazes ever outward seeking to capture by surveillance, to see everything, and by seeing everything, dominate everything.⁴⁶ Sauron embodies the essence of this Faustian lust for dominance by apprehension, his tower of Barad-dur topped with the unsleeping eye recalling Spengler's symbolic conceptualisation of Faustian Western culture as "a center [sic] with radiating points" (Frye 1974 4). Sauron's "expansive tendency" is indeed something "daemonic and immense" and directed ever outwards. We are given no real motivation for Sauron's imperialism because, like the pursuit of power in Orwell's nightmare technocracy of *1984* there *is* no motivation beyond the desire for power, it is the working out of a deep, primal motivation and needs no further rationale. The "primary symbolism" of the novel, as Tolkien wrote in a letter to a prospective publisher, lies in the ring "as the will to mere power, seeking to make itself objective by physical force and mechanism" (Tolkien *Letters* 160). The symbolism of the ring provides the dynamic underlying the myth of Middle-earth and the novel is therefore necessarily "mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine" (Tolkien *Letters* 145).⁴⁷

Throughout the novel, this desire to see more than the naked eye can take in is perilous. Though the wise in *Rings* also make use of the ability to see far away, they use this ability sparingly, aware that "seeing is both good and perilous" because of the temptation to try and apprehend or

⁴⁶ The eye of Sauron is described as though its sight has a quasi-physical ability to fix and capture by perceiving. In the chapter "The Breaking of the Fellowship" Frodo, having put the ring on, feels the eye "almost like a finger" searching for him: "Very soon it would nail him down, know just exactly where he was" (421).

⁴⁷ The relation of this to the Spenglerian idea of the desire to capture by apprehension is even more apparent in Tolkien's definition of the desire for power as the desire "for making the will more quickly effective, - and so to the machine (or magic)" (*Letters* 145).

alter that which they see (382).⁴⁸ This theme is returned to again in Faramir's recounting of Gondor's decline, where "in secret chambers withered men . . . in high cold towers asked questions of the stars".⁴⁹ In seeking external knowledge beyond their place, Gondor "brought about its own decay" and thus, as Faramir complains in distinctly Spenglerian terms, "we are a failing people, a springless autumn" (704). The quest for external knowledge and power in *Rings* leads eventually to internal petrification, sclerosis and decay. Civilisation engenders a change in the race from feeling with their heart ("blood") to thinking in abstract terms ("intellect"); the inhabitants become the "final men," more concerned with intellectual wanderings than raising a family (Spengler 250). At this stage, Spengler warns, an era begins of "appalling depopulation" begins as the inhabitants of the city fail to reproduce and the "best blood" of the countryside is sucked in to replenish the city, eventually draining the nation (251).

Again, we can see this theme made explicit in *Rings*, where it is linked to barely concealed symbols of fertility, race, and soil. When Pippin is first brought to Gondor by Gandalf he notices that the fields surrounding the venerable city are depopulated as by now most of the "people of Gondor lived in the seven circles of the City" (780). On reaching the city of Minas Tirith itself, he notices that despite its greatness it is "falling year by year into decay" and already "lacked half the men who could have dwelt at ease there" (*Rings* 782). Clearly, it is a city and civilisation in its autumn or twilight years. In Spenglerian terms, the great cities of late civilisation falter because they forget the "soul-root" of the race, its vital and vitalistic ties to the native soil (Spengler 245). In *Rings*, this "soul-root" is reaffirmed with the return of the King of "the race of the West unmingled" who plants the

⁴⁸ Compare with page 622. Also Denethor's (the steward of Gondor) doom, driven mad by staring into the palantir (890). When Galadriel offers Sam and Frodo the opportunity to look far away (in both space and time) she does so by using a reflective pool, "the Mirror of Galadriel," thus symbolically differentiated from Faustian apprehension and identified with internal reflection as well as feminine qualities of fertility and renewal (381).

⁴⁹ It is worth remarking here that Saruman's tower, Orthanc, is said to have been built long ago by the Numenoreans (277). Thus Saruman is not the first to use the tall tower to gaze at the stars and to try and see further.

white tree once more in his ancestral soil (1007).⁵⁰ On the King's return, he refuses the "white rod" of office, thus symbolically renouncing a materialist conception of power and attends instead to the health of the nation and the race (1003). The city is reconciled with the countryside, and thus the cycle of civilisation is begun anew and fertility restored:

In his [Aragorn's] time the City was made more fair than it had ever been, even in its days of first glory; and it was filled with trees and with fountains . . . and all was healed and made good, and the houses were filled with men and women and the laughter of children, and no window was blind nor any courtyard empty; and after the Third Age of the world into the new age it preserved the memory and the glory of the years that were gone. (1004)

If my analysis of *Rings* as a work influenced (directly or indirectly) by Spengler is valid, then it offers a possible reconciliation between those who see the work as irremediably racist and those who see it as a forerunner of modern environmentalist thought and reject charges of racist intent in the novel (as indeed Tolkien did in his lifetime). This reconciliation lies in grasping Spengler's conception of racial characteristics being largely determined by the soil rather than genetic inheritance. In his words, "A race has roots. Race and landscape belong together" and hence, "a race does not migrate. Men migrate, and their successive generations are born in ever-changing landscapes; but the landscape exercises a secret force upon the plant-nature in them, and eventually the race-expression is completely transformed by the extinction of the old and the appearance of a new one" (254). Though there are, of course, inherited racial characteristics, Spengler argued that environment was a far more powerful and immediate influence than was realised. The territory which a people inhabited shaped them, just as they shaped the territory. As I will now argue, this conception of race permeates the mythology of Middle-earth, and understanding it helps us to

⁵⁰ The strong implication of race fertility here is underscored by Gandalf's admonition to Aragorn over this tree: "Remember this. For if ever a fruit ripens, it should be planted, lest the line die out of the world" (1008).

understand both Tolkien's antipathy towards technology, and variant readings of *Rings* as embodying either reactionary or progressive ideals. It also helps explicate some of the inherent tensions and contradictions which I believe lie at the heart of anti-technologism.

As Niels Werber (2005) has noted, examining what he defines as the geo- and bio-politics of Tolkien's Middle-earth: "in a purely geopolitical context [in *Rings*], one is taught that the differences between the territories of these races should be considered results [*sic*] of intense interactions between the cultivating nations and their soil" (228). In light of my argument that Tolkien was influenced by Spenglerian ideals, I will go further here, and propose the inverse as well: that the races should also be considered the results of the territories they inhabit. Thus, racial and cultural identity and supremacy is asserted primarily as a result of occupation of territory and not vice versa. This relationship, and the irredentist ideology underpinning it, forms a powerful theme repeated throughout the novel. There is a palpable identification of territory with the races that inhabit it in *Rings*. Not only in terms of the characteristics (the quiet, unassuming hobbits and the gently rolling hills of the shire, the wild, hard men of the mountains, the stony dwarves and the willowy elves), but at a deeper, mystical level. In the elder races, such as the elves, this identification is so strong that, as Sam wonders in Lothlorien, it is hard to say "whether they've made the land, or the land's made them" (Tolkien *Rings* 380). Even speech seems to be formed by relationship to the land, so that the language of the Rohirrim, the horsemen, is said to be "like to this land itself; rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains" (530).

If we analyse the idea of race and land in Middle-earth in these terms, it resituates the debate away from connotations of skin colour and its simplistic representation in *Rings* (as in the black Riders for example) and towards notions of native and foreign which have far greater salience and valence in the novel. Curry's defence of Tolkien against charges of reactionary racism, and his counter-claim that the novel upholds ecological ideals is indeed apposite here, although not perhaps

in the way he intended, as the races of Middle-earth are portrayed as “inextricably in and of their natural and geographical locales” (18). To adopt modern ecological terminology for the moment, each race is a product of a distinct bio-region, just as a sub-species of animal is the result of adaptation to its surrounding environment.⁵¹ It is not, then, a question of skin colour and genetics, but more a claim to land by virtue of symbiotic evolution. The land shapes the people, and the people shape the land.

However, though this anticipates modern ideals of bioregionalism, and helps in the defence of Tolkien against simplistic charges of racism based on skin colour, it remains problematic inasmuch as it is structurally nativist. As peoples or races are products of the land they inhabit, those who do not belong are necessarily irremediably foreign and quite literally out of place; they are a violation. It is here that, in failing to recognise and address this problem, Curry’s defence of Tolkien fails. For example, Curry claims that *Rings* has an inclusionary ethos where one stands “in a village pub in multiracial company”, a clear reference to the Hobbit’s stop at the inn at Bree (8). *Pace* Curry, this is tantamount to misrepresentation: there are indeed a mixture of races present at the inn when the Hobbits visit, but this is clearly depicted as a sign of trouble, not of a happy multicultural existence. The patrons are described as “plainly not very ready to take a large number of strangers into their little land” and are distinctly displeased at the presence of so many foreigners in their local inn (Tolkien *Rings* 172). Thus, though Curry is correct in stating that the novel has what we would recognise today as an ecological or bioregional viewpoint, it is a distinctly right-wing one that conflates the foreign with pollution, as something which should not naturally be there. I would now like to explore this as it relates to my current topic, beginning with Jonathon Olsen’s analysis of

⁵¹ For example, Tolkien describes in the prologue to *Rings* how hobbits became “divided into three somewhat different breeds” with the small, “neat and nimble” Harfoots adapting to the highlands, the Stoors “broader and heavier” with large, flat feet preferring “flat lands and riverlands” and the Fallohides, taller and slimmer, “lovers of trees and of woodlands” (15). The influence works both ways (land to people, and people to land), but the ideology is one of natural adaptation to environment and thus an identity rooted in deep connection to the soil rather than manufactured culture or politics.

twentieth century right-wing ecology and its influence on our conception of pollution in *Nature and Nationalism* (1999).

Olsen argues that the very conception of pollution as we employ that term today is grounded in earlier twentieth century ideas about what is natural and native versus what is foreign and hence unnatural:

On closer examination it becomes clear that, in the West, our limiting of pollution to the natural world has merely concealed, but certainly not erased, the older understanding of this term. For in the modern and physical as well as the traditional and social understanding of pollution, pollution signifies something that does not belong, is foreign, strange, or out of place – be it dirt or matter or be it another human group and its practices. (35)

Native and foreign in this view are perceived as deriving from bio-geographical and ecological imperatives, and therefore the Enlightenment ideal of universalism which sees territories as purely human and political constructs is to be rejected as contradictory to the natural order:

Within a right-wing ecological framework, therefore, the key to solving ecological problems lies in a rejection of Enlightenment universalism and the recovery of the natural and the rooted – that is to say the ethnic and/or culturally pure nation. In short, within right-wing ecology our feeling of belonging to a certain place is *naturalized*, made into an ecological determinant. (35. Emphasis in original)⁵²

⁵² The enlightenment definition of nationhood was an individualist and above all legal definition, as seen in Diderot and Alembert's formulation: "a considerable number of people who live in a certain stretch of territory enclosed within certain limits and obeying the same government" (qtd in Sternhell 277). In contrast, according to Sternhell, the counter-enlightenment definition of a nation was much more organicist, emphasising historical, ethnic, and cultural connections between people and between people and land.

In *Rings* this naturalisation of race and land, and the concomitant idea of the foreign as pollution is a frequent motif. It is, as Elana Gomel puts it, part of a “grammar of bodily (im)perfection where evil is tied to physical ugliness and goodness to health and beauty” (140). Lothlorien, “the heart of Elvendom on earth,” is pure and clean by virtue of its long occupation by the elves, and disease or degeneracy is hence unknown: “No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lorien there was no stain” (371 & 369). The presence of Orcs in the healing waters of the river that flows through the land is seen literally as pollution (“curse their foul feet in its clean water!” 364). Purity ensures the prevention of degeneracy, and this symbolism is perhaps stronger here in the land of “the Tree-People” than anywhere else in the novel because the “Tree-People” are more closely identified with the land than any other, more rooted in the soil (359). Like the tall, slim, fair-haired elves, the white trees of Lothlorien are “beautiful in their shapely nakedness . . . arrayed in pale gold” (369). This is contrasted with their former home of Mirkwood, now part of Sauron’s industrial empire. There, in the “dark fir,” we are told that now “the trees strive one against another and their branches rot and wither” (370).⁵³ The foreign pollution is – more or less – equivalent to degeneracy, and as such a threat to fertility as well as purity. It represents a deviation from the natural order of things, and must be utterly scoured and cleansed before order and fertility can be restored.

Similarly, the “scouring of the shire” at the end of the novel requires the removal of the “squint-eyed and sallow-faced” foreigners with their “ugly new houses” and factories full of “outlandish contraptions” that “pour out filth” threatening to turn the Shire into “a desert” (1041 and 1051).⁵⁴ The message is clear and unequivocal: industrialism and urbanism are foreign and

⁵³ Once again, the symbolism of trees for the ideal of ethnic and cultural rootedness is apparent here. Compare the idea of purity and degeneracy here with the tale of the white tree of Numenor which is described as having “withered” as “the blood of the Numenoreans became mingled with that of lesser men” (*Rings* 262).

⁵⁴ The trope of desertification, whilst there is not space to explore it here, is an important one, current at the time Tolkien began writing the novel (around 1937) and tied in with metaphors of sterility and the need for

unnatural concepts and constitute pollution which must be scoured from the land for fertility to be restored. “This isn’t your country and you’re not wanted” as the representative Shire figure of Farmer Cotton tells the foreigners. After the homeland has been cleansed, fertility returns in a suitably organic fashion, with Sam planting his seed given to him by the elves in the soil at the centre of the Shire, and by so doing restoring purity and health to the race: “all the children born or begotten in that year, and there were many, were fair to see and strong, and most of them had a rich golden hair . . . and no one was ill . . .” (1061). Thus, just as Winston Smith in *1984* hoped that the prole woman might represent the promise of eventual return to agrarian simplicity, so in *Rings* the Spenglerian ideal of the “eternal peasant” who endures by virtue of his connection with his own soil is upheld: “The timeless village and the ‘eternal’ peasant reappear, begetting children and burying seed in Mother Earth – a busy, easily contented swarm, over which the tempest of soldier-emperors passingly blows” (Spengler 381).

What I hope has been noticeable in the preceding analysis of *Rings* is the extent to which it shares many of the features, themes, and concerns of the anti-technological works referred to in the first chapter. There is the immense importance placed on the idea of rootedness: where Orwell and others used the metaphors of locally grown vegetables and “real” food versus mass-produced tinned food, Tolkien has the even more powerful and direct metaphor of trees to represent the importance of rootedness and connection to the soil. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the ideal of rootedness in anti-technological texts carries with it the idea of false fertility, the criticism that the abundance of technology and the modern, urban lifestyle is something of a pyramid scheme, reliant on ever greater expropriation of resources to survive, and doomed eventually to catastrophic failure. If we compare the themes examined so far in *Rings* with a comment made by the influential Tory writer on rural affairs, HJ Massingham, we can see that this nationalistic anti-imperialism, anti-

cultural regeneration. See, for example, the overtly phallic imagery Steinbeck uses to describe the rape of the land by mechanised implements in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and the way it is very clearly portrayed as symbolic of a wider cultural malaise.

technologism and anti-cosmopolitanism were different aspects of the same ideology for many in the first half of the twentieth century.

In his autobiography, Massingham reflected on how he came to believe in the necessity of turning away from mechanisation back towards a more localised, agricultural way of life:

I perceived that agriculture lies at the heart of civilization, and that a civilization that neglects it is foredoomed to extinction. To acquire this view I needed no arguments. I had but to read what had happened to the Roman Empire through and from that neglect. The ascendancy of urban capitalism exhausted the soil and degraded the peasantry, while the exploitation of virgin lands overseas was the means of feeding a Roman proletariat subsisting on slave-labour in place of our machines. That Roman story is frightening (Massingham 1942, qtd. by BD Knowles)

The influence of the organicism and negative classicism of writers like Spengler and José Ortega Y Gasset is apparent here, as it is in *Rings* itself. As in the anti-technological works examined in the first chapter, the degeneration of an urban population due to machinery is a concern. This is analogised with the imperialism of ancient Rome, and the unsustainability of expropriating resources from other lands to feed an unproductive and degenerate population at home. In opposition to the expansionary, outward-looking imperialist mind-set, Massingham stresses the importance of looking inwards and regenerating culture based on a close relationship to native soil.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Arch-Conservative writers such as Massingham and their use of the organic form continue to be influential in anti-technological works that combine progressive and reactionary ideals to this day. For example, Paul Kingsnorth, a former staff member at *The Ecologist*, as well as a writer for progressive publications *The New Statesman* and *The Guardian*, is also the author of the *Uncivilisation* document that forms the manifesto of the “Dark Mountain” group of anti-technological writers and artists. His book, *Real England* (2008), whilst emphasising Green ideals of local food production and anti-globalisation, also declares that it is “about the sort of country I live in and the sort of people who inhabit it. It is about the wiping out of its culture and character . . . it is . . . a call to arms” (10). In this context, Kingsnorth approvingly quotes Massingham’s claim that the inhabitants of industrial cities like Manchester are “populations rather than persons. They do what their

In *Rings*, this ideology is appropriately mythologised and the unsustainability of expansion is seen in the effects of the centralising industrialism of Sauron's empire. When Frodo and Sam make it into Mordor they find a land "ruinous and dead, a desert burned and choked" and wonder "how the Lord of this realm maintained and fed his slaves and armies" (*Rings* 958). The answer, of course, is by ever greater exploitation and expropriation of other lands – it is Tolkien's representation of the expansionary logic of machine civilisation and imperialism in action. The centralising force of technological imperialism is sucking the life out of an ever-widening swathe of land to sustain its growth:

Neither he [Sam] nor Frodo knew anything of the great slave-worked fields away south in this wide realm, beyond the fumes of the mountain by the dark sad waters of Lake Nurnen; nor of the great roads that ran away east and south to tributary lands, from which the soldiers of the Tower brought long waggon-trains of goods and booty and fresh slaves. Here in the northward regions were the mines and the forges, and the musterings of long-planned war (*Rings* 959)

Though Mordor is a wasteland, pockmarked with the ejecta and effluvia of industrialism, its inhabitants are dangerously fecund. At the start of the novel, we are told that they are "multiplying" and by the time we get to Helm's Deep, the first major battle of the story, they are like "swarming flies", a "dark tide" that makes the valley seem to be "boiling and crawling with black shapes" (57, 565 and 556). Such imagery, as Connelly notes, comes from a long-established European fear of the Asiatic masses who were depicted in literature "as a nameless, faceless force of nature through such images as a flood, tidal wave or, alternatively, as ants, bees, etc." (Connelly 2006 302).⁵⁶ The long

industrial economy tells them to do" (11). Even in the twenty-first century, organicism leads to the conflation of environment with culture and the division of legitimate and artificial populations.

⁵⁶ The enduring effect of such imagery is still apparent today in the way migrants or refugees are frequently and unashamedly referred to in such dehumanising terms. So common is the trope, that it has become almost a dead metaphor, and no longer raises any comment at all.

held fear was that the Asian masses would inevitably someday industrialise and negate the technological and military advantage of the West.⁵⁷

However, though Tolkien may have used the language of Western anxiety over the Asiatic masses, I do not believe his intention was consciously or deliberately racist or based on any simple identification of class. Rather, I believe that insofar as it is legitimate to assign symbolism to the Orcs, they represent simply a race of people deracinated, debased and degenerated by industrialism and the “slaves” of the “technological and instrumental power embodied in Sauron” (Curry 14).⁵⁸ The “industrial, imperialistic” empire of Mordor is presented as the only country or realm in Middle-earth which is not properly native, but instead “essentially an alien invader” (Curry 22). By contrast, as Curry observes, ‘the various races of people in Middle-earth are rooted to and unimaginable . . . without their natural contexts’ (51). As per Olsen’s analysis of right-wing ecology, the sense of belonging to a place is naturalised and made an ecological determinant.

This has disturbing implications, which we can see actuated in the narrative. After battles, those races which have a homeland are explicitly pardoned and released on the understanding that they return there and do not become involved with imperialist adventuring again (*Rings* 568 and 1005). The Orcs, on the other hand, as the alien invaders, have no homeland to go to. They are, to use CS Lewis’s expression “artificial beings” – something which becomes quite literally true with the breeding of the gruesome Uruk-Hai, created by Saruman crossbreeding humans and Orcs. They are not “a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil” but instead a formless and indistinguishable mob “cohering unstably in fluid masses” (Spengler 25). Having no culture, they have no authentic identity and deserve to be wiped out: “as when death smites the swollen brooding thing that

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China* (1904).

⁵⁸ The fact that Tolkien thought of the elves in a similar way (as representing “Men with greatly enhanced aesthetic and creative faculties”), suggests that this reading is more likely than a straightforward racial or class-based reading (*Letters* 176).

inhabits their crawling hill and holds them all in sway, ants will wander witless and purposeless and then feebly die, so the creatures of Sauron, Orc or troll or beast spell-enslaved, ran hither and thither mindless" (985).

After the battle at Helm's Deep, we are told that "no Orcs remained alive" (in contrast to the hill men who fought alongside them and are released). Instead their bodies are "piled in great heaps" and left to rot. Cultural identity is seen as coming from connection to the soil, and thus industrialism and those identified with it are unnatural, synthetic, and a violation of the natural order – they are pollution. Eternal vigilance is required against any such contamination and this is explicitly couched in organicist metaphors relating agriculture to culture – as Gandalf informs the Lords of the West, it is necessary that they continue "uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till" (913).

The blood and soil relationship is thus the marker and of authenticity and guardian of purity and vibrancy of culture, keeping all life – spiritual, political, and even individual – in check. The desire to transgress and exceed these bounds, the refusal to recognise inherent limits, is the root of all evil in Tolkien's world. Technology, of course, does just that. Technology by definition is disruptive, it changes individual behaviours, social relationships, even the face of the land people live on. In Western Europe, undoubtedly the biggest change it wrought for most people in the twentieth century was the move from the country to the city, a huge centralising force, drawing people in. Tolkien loathed this tendency, and worried that "the bigger things get the smaller and flatter the globe gets" (Tolkien *Letters* 65). In opposition to technology's materialism and centralising tendency, Tolkien invented a world which we would now see describe as decentralised. The victory of the West, in *Rings*, is therefore ultimately couched as a cleansing that will lead to a revived and purified culture, rather than a victory that will lead to power and dominance over other lands.

Such a world encapsulates and offers both progressive and reactionary ideals, as I have shown in this chapter. Though it speaks to modern ideas regarding bioregionalism and the importance of safeguarding cultural identities against the homogenising tendencies of technology and capitalism, it does so by grounding culture in ties to the soil and places them within an organicist conception of civilisation and history which can serve opposite and contradictory ends. As such, it shows that Tolkien's influence on romantic protest, as considered by Veldman, must be recognised as introducing, or certainly reinforcing, tendencies which accentuate the paradox of "reactionary consciousness" at the heart of progressive ideology. Tolkien's *Rings* embodies Monaco's description of "an atavistic flight from nearly any aspect of experience that may be called modern" and exemplifies "the pursuit of a return to nature [and] the embrace of instinct over reason" (91). The extent to which it licenced a similar view of people as products of the landscape they were born in is obviously much more debatable, but certainly it romanticised and re-popularised the idea of mystical connection between people and place that had become unacceptable in post-World War Two Western society.

As it rejects the mass culture of modern society, then, the reactionary consciousness has to ground cultural identity in ideals of stability and order (hierarchy) based on analogy to the natural world. As Massingham put it in the introduction to a collection of essays published in 1945 entitled *The Natural Order* such an order was truly "ecological" because "The pattern of life worked out by pre-industrial rural society was an unconscious obedience to ecological laws because the independent nuclei of the pattern as a whole were localized" (7-8). When such "natural order" prevailed, Massingham claimed, "the country speech, the songs and rituals, the objects made, and the buildings all obeyed another law, the law of beauty" (10). As worked out in *Rings*, obedience to natural laws brings stability, purity, and beauty; defying them, whilst successful in the short-term soon leads to degeneration, blemish, and collapse. It is noticeable, for example, that in retrospect the first deviation from the natural order in the Shire is made not by outsiders but by native

inhabitants, and is linked to industrialism, the exporting of agricultural produce for profit, and speculative finance from unspecified foreign investors: “It all began with Pimple, as we call him” Farmer Cotton tells Frodo, “He’d funny ideas, had Pimple . . . he was always grabbing more, though where he got the money from was a mystery” (1049). The trouble really starts in the Shire when “Pimple” seeks to employ technological means towards greater efficiency and so knocks down the old mill: “then he brought in a lot o’ dirty-looking Men to build a bigger one and fill it full o’ wheels and outlandish contraptions Pimple’s idea was to grind more and faster . . .” (1050). Thus, in the blatantly physically degenerate character of “Pimple” deviation from the natural order is explicitly identified with commercialism, machine civilisation, and pollution of the native soil.

Rings romanticised and reinforced the feeling for a post-World War Two generation that there was such a thing as a natural order which applied to human society and culture, and which we ignored at our peril. It conveyed in mythological form the belief that the expansionary nature of technology violated inherent limits to growth and this was not only destructive to the natural world, but injurious to society and individual well-being. In the natural order, as exemplified in the novel, the different pure races fulfil a role that is harmonious, or – to put it another way, rightful – in respect to their immediate environment and thus bring their culture and society into line with nature and its inviolable laws. It is only the impure, debased, and cross-bred Orcs of Sauron’s technological imperialism that sought to range across the earth, ignoring or ignorant of such natural laws of place. Technology in *Rings*, then, is conflated with pollution and impurity. It is identified with expansionism, and enables and encourages violations of the natural order which, unless resisted, will “slowly turn Men and Elves into Orcs” (Tolkien *Letters* 78).

The symbolism and worldview that such a conception offered to the counter-cultural movements of the 1960 and 70s is obvious. The *New Scientist* magazine in 1979 remarked that “Middle Earth first appeared on the campuses of the west sloganizing against technopia” (Robinson

610). As disillusionment with the possibilities of revolutionary change set in, many in the counter-culture took the ideal of rural simplicity and regionalism in *Rings* to heart and moved away from the cities to pursue a self-sufficient, low-tech life as “hobbits” in the countryside.⁵⁹ Veldman makes the particularly acute observation that in rejecting overtly economic and political solutions in favour of personal inner awakening it accorded perfectly with the feeling that the personal was political. Yet it was not simply an escapist text, but an inspirational one. Greenpeace activists imagined themselves as “Hobbits” facing the might of Mordor, Friends of the Earth (London) met in the “Middle Earth” café opposite their headquarters to discuss strategy (Lamb 59). The original “angry young man,” the writer Colin Wilson, declared that *Rings* “is at once an attack on the modern world and a credo, and a manifesto. It stands for a system of values; that is why teenagers write ‘Gandalf lives’ on the walls of London tubes” (1974, qtd. by Veldman 110). In an era of rebellion against centralising governments, multi-national corporations, materialism, and homogenising mass culture, the novel offered an anti-materialist vision of redemption through harmony with nature, and – perhaps counter-intuitively for a fantasy novel – an ideal of authenticity, of rootedness.

These then, were the oppositions that *Rings* set up in the affluent, post-war West: regionalism versus globalism, cultural purity versus the homogenisation of mass culture, the desirability of a simple, fundamentally rural lifestyle versus urban living, and – perhaps most of all – a sustainable “natural order” versus an unsustainable and rapacious technological expansionism. It is of course extremely difficult, if not impossible, to clearly delineate the scope and extent of influence that any one work of fiction has on the culture and thought of its time, but I think the examples given in this chapter show that in writing a work that championed the ideals of nationalism over imperialism, influenced by negative classicists like Spengler who saw such imperialism as a symptom

⁵⁹ See, for example, Glenn Loney, “Hippy Home in Walden Pond West” LIFE magazine, 24th Nov. 1967, pp. R2-4. Loney reports a visit to a “hippy commune” modelled explicitly on the Shire, with homes called “The Hobbit House” and cats named “Frodo” and so on. In place of agitation and campaigning, *Rings* provided a mythology and romantic rationale for withdrawal and self-containment, an attempt to create an alternative community rather than trying to alter the world as it was.

of an “expansive tendency” that would be the “doom” of the Western World, *Rings* communicated certain fundamental reactionary counter-enlightenment ideas and ideals current in the early twentieth century into the progressive culture of the late twentieth century.

Chapter Three: Anti-Technology and Over-Population.

. . . Whether or not the Green Revolution can increase food production as much as its champions claim is a debatable but possibly irrelevant point. Those who support this well-intended humanitarian effort should first consider some of the fundamentals of human ecology. Ironically, one man who did was the late Alan Gregg, a vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation. Two decades ago he expressed strong doubts about the wisdom of such attempts to increase food production. He likened the growth and spread of humanity over the surface of the earth to the spread of cancer in the human body, remarking that "cancerous growths demand food; but, as far as I know, they have never been cured by getting it".

- Garret Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor" (n. pag.).

"'Mother Culture' tells us to increase food production to feed the hungry. But this will mean more people. Will we extract a promise not to breed? No".

"So what will happen if you feed the starving millions?"

"They'll reproduce and our population will increase".

- Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael* (136).

In the previous chapter I looked at the way Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* identified technology as an aspect of the expansionary mood of imperialism, and noted some parallels between the novel and Oswald Spengler's thesis in his seminal work, *The Decline of the West*. I noted the way in which

technology was seen to have a debasing and deracinating effect at the same time as it enabled an artificial and false fecundity which threatened to overwhelm the stable and rooted life exemplified in the novel by The Shire. I also discussed the role of the right-wing ecological trope of pollution as the intrusion of the foreign, and the role technology was seen as performing in engendering this pollution. In this chapter I want to extend and elaborate on these themes in examining the relationship between anti-technologism and Post-World War Two fears of over-population which reached an apogee in the 1960s and '70s. Though my focus on literature will be on these two decades, a crucial part of my argument in this chapter will be that the relationship between anti-technology and neo-Malthusianism is systemic; hence the relationship both pre-dates this period and remains very much alive to this date. I will therefore be referring to publications from before World War Two to the present day in making my case.

This chapter will be of a more conceptual nature than the previous one, concerned as much with discerning and delineating the ideological links between anti-technologism and Neo-Malthusianism as with explication of particular texts. This is necessary, I believe, as I see anti-technologism as being substantially interested at a deep, structural level with over-population, stemming in large part from earlier fears regarding urban degeneration and the proliferation of “unfit” populations. This chapter will be largely concerned with opening out certain systemic or structural facets of anti-technologism and its division of “false” and “natural” fertility, in order to facilitate better understanding and analysis of anti-technological texts in later chapters. A key concern here will be to argue that anti-technologism served to express and explore sublimated Western fears over the loss of hegemony, the numerical supremacy of the other, and reverse colonisation. In order to foreground these fears and explore how anti-technologism conceptualised them, I will be referring throughout to Jean Raspail’s infamous racist dystopic novel, *The Camp of the Saints* (1975).⁶⁰ I propose that the atavistic fears and ideology made explicit in Raspail’s novel are

⁶⁰ Cited hereafter as *Saints*.

very much implicit in anti-technologism's concern with over-population and distrust of "growth" generally. After laying out the terms of reference for this chapter I begin with a brief synopsis of *Saints* and consider the reception this overtly racist and xenophobic work has received. I then use this as an avenue to examine some aspects of the increasing concern over over-population in the West, the way in which it arose from eugenic concerns over differential breeding, and the way in which fears of non-Western industrialisation and competition were largely sublimated from open discussion into literary representation.

The tremendous growth in population during the twentieth century was undoubtedly one of the defining trends of the era. The world population at the start of the twentieth century was less than two billion, but approaching seven billion by the end of the century. This massive increase was the result not of increased birth rates but of a decrease in mortality brought about by advances in science, knowledge, technology, and the industrialisation of agriculture (Connelly *Fatal Misconception*). As I observed in the first chapter, such advances gave rise to eugenic fears of degeneration and of the proliferation of the less fit in the absence of "natural" checks on their survival. These trends will form an important strand of my argument in this chapter that the anti-technological obsession (I use the term advisedly) with Malthusianism can and should be seen as the extension and evolution of this eugenic concern. There is not space here to discuss the history of concerns regarding over-population and its links to eugenicism, but a good critical summary of Malthusianism and its modern variants can be found in John Bellamy Foster's "Malthus' Essay on Population at Age 200: A Marxian View".⁶¹ In this chapter I also rely on the left-libertarian perspective to be found in Frank Furedi's *Population and Development: A Critical Introduction*

⁶¹ I cite this analysis not least because I believe that Marx and Engel's criticisms of Malthus are directly relevant to my discussion here. Marx's analysis of Malthus recognised that fear of a flourishing underclass was a prime motivating factor and that the real object of Malthusians was to justify the withholding of efforts to materially improve the living standards of the poor, just as modern day Malthusians such as David Attenborough condemn food shipments to the starving in places like Ethiopia as "barmy" on the grounds that any such attempted circumvention of nature is foredoomed to fail (Furness "Sir David Attenborough: If We Do Not Control Population, the Natural World Will". n. pag.).

(1997), as well as the comprehensive history of the subject to be found in William Connelly's *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (2008). What follows is an extremely truncated overview of the discussion since the time of World War Two, foregrounding those aspects of it which are salient to this chapter.

As Furedi observes, modern Malthusianism (after World War Two) has its roots in Pre-War eugenic concerns over differential rates of procreation between the rich and the poor. Whereas previously this concern had tended to focus on differential population growth within Western nations, as non-Western countries began to follow the path of industrialisation similar anxieties began to emerge over differential rates of population growth between countries. As Frank Notestein one of the leading demographers of the twentieth century later recalled "we did not know whether to be worried about overriding population growth or incipient population decline in the Western world. But we were quite sure that we should be worried and that, whatever the trends, changes in the biological and social heritage might well threaten the quality of the population" (qtd in Connelly 305). Aldous Huxley was one of the first to raise such concerns over differential growth between nations and the threat to Western hegemony. In a letter to the writer Norman Douglas in 1925 Aldous Huxley confided his worries regarding a future in which the West would have neither numerical nor technological supremacy:

One winter, I shall certainly go and spend some months there [in Tunisia], about the time of the date harvest—tho' I have no doubt that the sight of the Arabs picking and packing the dates w[oul]d be enough to make one's gorge turn every time one set eyes on that fruit for the rest of one's life. How tremendously European one feels when one has seen these devils in their native muck! And to think that we are busily teaching them all the mechanical arts of peace and war which gave us, in the past,

our superiority over their numbers! In fifty years' time, it seems to me, Europe can't fail to be wiped out by these monsters. (*Letters of Aldous Huxley* 250-1)

Allied to the fear of non-Western nations gaining technological equality was the argument that it was the use of Western technology and scientific knowledge abroad that was fostering the growth in population which posed a threat to the West. As per the previous chapter's examination of *Rings*, this fear was often expressed in terms of an artificial and foreign technology upsetting a somehow "natural" balance. William Vogt's highly influential *Road to Survival* (1949) gives a good example of this mind-set.⁶² Vogt (an American) castigates the British imperialists in India not for their subjugation of the population, but for their importation of Western technology, medicine, and sanitation. "While economic and sanitary conditions were being 'improved'" Vogt complains, "the Indians went their accustomed way, breeding with the irresponsibility of Codfish" (226-7). Once more the imperialist is seen to be a "destroyer" and Vogt grimly warns of the potentially catastrophic implications for the West of upsetting the natural balance:

A heavily industrialized India, backed up by such population pressure, would be a danger to the entire world. Disorders following the British withdrawal seem to be imposing once more the Malthusian checks that held the pre-British population within reasonable bounds. It appears probable that the turmoil will also stultify any considerable industrial development. This is a result piously to be desired . . . (228)

The development of industry in countries such as India and China, according to Vogt, citing unnamed authorities, posed the greatest danger to world peace, and therefore extensive famines in such countries "from the world point of view" might be "not only desirable but indispensable" (238).

⁶² Cited hereafter as *Survival*. The work was translated into eleven languages and had an estimated audience of between twenty and thirty million people in book form, as well as reaching a still larger audience after publication in condensed form in *Readers' Digest* (Desrochers and Hoffbauer 2009 39).

Showing the influence and confluence of earlier eugenic fears of differential population growth, he also recommended that in developed nations “sterilization bonuses” be paid to marginal members of society, arguing that it was better to pay them to be sterilized rather than “support their hordes of offspring that, by both genetic and social inheritance, would tend to perpetuate their fecklessness” (282-3).⁶³

Publications such as Vogt’s and *Our Plundered Planet* by Fairfield Osborn were remarkably successful in shaping the debate over demographics and introducing a distinctly nativist element to the nascent environmental movement⁶⁴. Indeed, as Allen Chase notes in *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism*, both books became mandatory reading for many college courses and influenced a whole generation (381). Moreover, it was not by coincidence that Paul Ehrlich’s chose to open his massively popular book *The Population Bomb* with the author really feeling the population explosion for the first time “one stinking hot night in New Delhi” which inspired him to write of the need to address the “cancer of population growth” (15 and prologue).⁶⁵ Faced with the seemingly inevitable industrialisation of non-Western nations and their overwhelming numbers, the spectre of the foreign hordes invading and contaminating the West was once more resurrected. In 1963 Julian Huxley (then Director of UNESCO) warned that overpopulation in poor nations was leading to the “invasion” of Western nations, a process he claimed was,

⁶³ Such fears were surprisingly enduring and pervasive, affecting many disparate aspects of life in the Twentieth century. Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader, for instance, recently remarked that at the time of the momentous *Roe V. Wade* decision on abortion rights in America she naturally assumed the background to the case being brought before the Supreme Court was substantially about differential population growth: “Frankly I had thought that at the time Roe was decided, there was concern about population growth and particularly growth in populations that we don’t want to have too many of” (Emily Bazelon “The Place of Women On The Court”).

⁶⁴ For further discussion and contextualisation of the history of nativist attempts to influence and co-opt the environmental movement see Betsy Hartmann “The Greening of Hate: An Environmentalist’s Essay” available on the website of the Southern Poverty Law Center at <http://www.splcenter.org/greenwash-nativists-environmentalism-and-the-hypocrisy-of-hate/the-greening-of-hate-an-essay>. Also Levison et al. “Apply The Brakes: Anti-Immigrant Co-optation of the Environmental Movement” available on the website of the Center for New Community at <http://www.newcomm.org/content/view/2138/120/>.

⁶⁵ Like Vogt before him, Ehrlich also saw industrialisation of poorer countries as an existential threat, and urged his readers to write to their Senators and Representatives to argue (amongst other things) that “Not all countries can be industrialized” and “[developed] C[ountries] cannot feed U[n]developed C[ountries]” (178).

comparable to what happens in human cancers, where unlimited multiplication produces what are called metastases – groups of cells that migrate to another part of the body and start trouble there. I would say it is perfectly legitimate to compare the invasions of Puerto Ricans in New York and of Jamaicans in London and other parts of Britain to metastases in cancer. (Julian Huxley 71)⁶⁶

Like Vogt and others, Julian Huxley was at pains to stress the inadvisability of non-Western nations seeking to follow Western nations in industrialising their economies, a process he argued was futile anyway until they curtailed their population growth. This argument was echoed in the same year by his brother, Aldous Huxley, who also warned that population growth in underdeveloped nations would lead to the invasion of the West and “may bring irretrievable ruin to the one-third of the human race now living prosperously in highly industrialized societies” (“The World Population Problem” 329). The danger, he cautioned, was that “the science and technology which have given the industrial West its cars, refrigerators, and contraceptives have given the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America only movies and radio broadcasts, which they are too simpleminded to be able to criticize, together with a population explosion . . .” (325). Similarly, Ehrlich in *The Population Bomb* reminded his readers that in poorer countries “people have gotten the word about the better life. They have seen colored pictures in magazines of the miracles of Western technology . . . they are not going to be happy” (23). “Will they starve gracefully, without rocking the boat?” Ehrlich asked, adopting Hardin’s “lifeboat” metaphor for the position of the rich countries, “Or will they attempt to overwhelm us in order to get what they consider to be their fair share?” (133).

⁶⁶ Likewise in Australia in 1947 the Nobel prize-winning microbiologist Sir Macfarlane Burnet wrote to the government urging the development of “infectious diseases” and other biological weapons as “the most effective counter-offensive to threatened invasion by overpopulated Asiatic countries”. The government responded positively to such a suggestion, but nothing concrete seems to have come of it for technical reasons. See Brendan Nicholson, “Burnet’s Solution: The Plan to Poison S-E Asia” in *The Age* 10th March 2002.

By the 1960s and 70s, then, such perspectives and ideologies had permeated to mainstream thinking and led to largely unquestioning acceptance of the underlying nativist Neo-Malthusian themes as more or less axiomatic truths. Robert L. Heilbroner's work, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (1974) gives a good example of this, as well as demonstrating the extent to which the widespread diffusion of technology across the globe was blamed for instigating the crisis. Heilbroner proposes a "unifying proposition" which could explain the major threats of war, overpopulation, resource depletion, and environmental degradation: "The population explosion that looms with such horrifying possibilities is directly traceable to the consequences of new techniques of science and technology in the area of medicine and public health" (56). Illustrating the way in which (as Furedi and others have pointed out) such fears arose out of the perception of differential population growth rather than overall growth per se, Heilbroner later goes on to argue that of course "the problem of population growth must be discussed in terms of the differential rates of growth of the developed and the underdeveloped lands" (79). Such a differential, it was widely understood, was leading to resentments and pressures that were escalating into numerous wars, and may well end in all-out nuclear war. It is crucial to note that an essential part of this eschatological thinking was that as technology caused the problem, it could not possibly solve the problem (by increased crop yields for example). Indeed, such attempts were viewed with dismay and even anger by many. Heilbroner, for example, warns that an additional problem looming was "the danger that the Malthusian check [in developing countries] will be offset by a large increase in food production, which will enable additional hundreds of millions to reach childbearing age" (35).

As I will show throughout this chapter, the ideological thread running through these and similar publications in Post-World War Two Western society was that science, technology and modern medicine had upset the natural equilibrium that had previously prevailed and led to a population explosion whilst at the same time corrupting impressionable natives with aspirational ideas of a Western lifestyle. In short, it was a reprisal of earlier fears regarding degeneracy, of

anxieties about burgeoning, rootless and unstable urban masses being created by technology, urbanism and materialism. As I argued in my analysis of *Rings*, technology was perceived to be fostering artificial and unnatural growth of degenerate foreign populations which would inevitably overflow the boundaries of their own lands and seek to expropriate new territories. As I have previously noted, technology in such a worldview is perceived as fostering not a real, rooted growth, but an unnatural and cancerous multiplication that presents a danger to “civilisation” (which frequently, as I will show, seems to stand as a euphemism for the western world). As the diplomat and environmentalist, Sir Crispin Tickell, put it in his 2001 Linacre lecture at Oxford University warning of the dangers of overpopulation and the “prime threat” of refugees: “It can be seen as a case of malignant maladaptation in which a species, like infected tissue in the organism of life, multiplies out of control, affecting everything else” (n. pag.). Tickell’s crass analogy shows that even in the twenty-first century the old trope of unfit and somehow artificial populations continues to exert a depressingly tenacious influence. Such a conception of populations in these countries as “artificial” has the corollary effect of licencing the view of them as either a contagion or an invasive threat to Western society.

Thus, in Malthusian and anti-technological literature, overpopulation and contagion/invasion are seen as the logical and inevitable consequence of technology which weakens and degenerates the developed nations by decadence, whilst at the same time it allows the unsustainable growth of more primitive nations who might eventually overspill their boundaries and invade in a process of reverse colonialism. In the next section of this chapter I will explore some examples of this tendency with reference to Raspail’s *Saints*. I start with a brief synopsis and discussion of the novel. I go on to demonstrate how the metaphors, tropes, and schemata of the

novel can be seen in anti-technological works generally, especially the perennial Western fear of reverse colonisation and the need for strict separation of different cultures and peoples.⁶⁷

The one thing your struggle for their souls has left them is the knowledge that the West – your West – is rich. To them, you’re the symbols of abundance . . . After all your help – all the seeds, and drugs, and technology – they found it so much simpler just to say, ‘Here’s my son, here’s my daughter. Take them. Take me. Take us all to your country’. And the idea caught on. You thought it was fine. You encouraged it, organized it. But now it’s too big, it’s out of your hands. It’s a flood, a deluge. And it’s out of control. (*Saints* 27)

Saints is a novel about invasion. Specifically, it is a novel about the invasion of France by poor slum-dwelling Indians who over-spill their tenements and commandeer ships to find the promised land of the West, but more generally and symbolically the invasion of the West by “a third world burgeoned into multitudes” (introduction xiii). It recounts the events leading up to the landing of the flotilla on the beaches of southern France, the erosion of culture and loss of will that fatally undermines the Western world and leads to its colonisation by the innumerable poor of the third world. Monsieur Calgues, representing the old, reactionary and discredited Westerner, is a retired professor living in a beachfront house who records these events. Paralysed by decades of “propaganda” about the equality of all human life, “a limitless script in that ongoing cinema of the masses,” the decadent inhabitants of France and other wealthy nations equivocate and gnash their teeth, but are unable to take the decisive steps needed to repel the invasion (83). Meanwhile, thanks to Western aid and technology, the population of the poorer countries has swelled to overflowing and eventually the

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the perennial Western concern of invasion from the East in literature, and its links to Malthusianism, see Mathew Connelly, “To Inherit the Earth: Imagining World Population, from the Yellow Peril to the Population Bomb” in *Journal of Global History* (2006) 1, pp. 299–319. Connelly’s discussion is particularly relevant to this chapter as he observes the way in which such concerns fed into broader societal anxieties such as the need to prevent degeneration and preserve Western civilisation in a pure form, something I discuss on my own terms later in this chapter.

inhabitants decide to seek the Western paradise they have heard of: “the Third World had started to overflow its banks, and the West was its sewer” (260). They commandeer a fleet of aging Western ships and vessels and set sail for the West. Originally written in French, the novel was published in English by white supremacist, John Tanton, a long-standing colleague of *Population Bomb* author, Paul Ehrlich.⁶⁸ The reverse colonisation of the West is inexorable and total, but a symbolic last stand is made at the end of the novel by Calgues and a few remnants of the old Western world, such as Monsieur Machefer, the irascible editor of a newspaper condemned for its racist, reactionary opinions; Colonel Dragases, the last officer in the French army willing to try to resist the invasion; the Duc d’Uras, the local noble and landowner; and a handful of others. Faced with the fall of Western civilisation, they decide to make a symbolic last stand in a remote hamlet, the simple rural existence representing all that they lost long ago (“My heart is in The Village” Calgues records [285]). Temporarily secure in the isolation of the village, life once again makes sense, with a clear hierarchy and sense of purpose established. The two loyal man-servants of the Duc d’Uras form the peasantry of this fragile arcadia. Though this feudal scene is only a brief respite from the chaos now rampant outside, all enjoy a last few days of camaraderie and humour, united against the common enemy of the invader:

The colonel drove the truck back, all flags flying. They sang out their chorus of ‘No, no regrets,’ and Machefer dredged up a little ditty from his past. A tune about a duke that met with great success. Especially when the Duc d’Uras took one of the Springfields and, aiming it out the window while the truck rolled on full tilt, mowed down a trio of Ganges bastards, scampering off by the side of the road. Shot dead, through the heart. Great rifle to take on an African safari . . . (300)

⁶⁸ From 1975 to 1977 Tanton had been President of Paul Ehrlich’s Zero Population Growth movement, before leaving to form FAIR, the Federation for American Immigration Reform, an anti-immigrant population group which Ehrlich and his wife were senior advisors to for a number of years before it was revealed that FAIR received funding from the Pioneer Fund, a eugenicist foundation dedicated to proving IQ differentials between races (Southern Poverty Law Center, “Federation for American Immigration Reform”).

Underlying *Saints* is an atavistic loathing and horror of the “the other”, the utterly alien and seemingly limitless population of the Third World. They are described in terms of an inexorable cancer spreading across the globe and also as loathsome human sewage. Significantly for my analysis, they are also seen paradoxically as both vastly inferior and sub-human, and yet at the same time at least potentially superior. This seems to be a deep-seated and enduring facet of the Western apprehension of the unknowable Eastern “other” which concerns itself with the fear that out of the ferment of such perceived over-breeding an evolutionary superior being may emerge to challenge Western Supremacy. In *Saints*, this is depicted in simplistic terms as a misshapen monster on the shoulders of a giant:

Way back, behind the backmost women in the crowd, a giant of a man stood stripped to the waist, holding something over his head and waving it like a flag. Untouchable pariah, this dealer in droppings, dung-roller by trade, molder of manure briquettes, turd eater in times of famine, and holding high in his stinking hands a mass of human flesh. At the bottom two stumps; then an enormous trunk, all hunched and twisted, and bent out of shape; no neck, but a kind of extra stump, a third one in place of a head, and a bald little skull (23-4)

But this is merely a crudely reductive reworking of similar anxieties already extant in Western literature, and appears to have been taken at least in part from EM Forster’s depiction of a native in his 1924 novel, *A Passage to India*:

Almost naked and splendidly formed, he sat on a raised platform near the back, in the middle of the central gangway . . . He had the strength and beauty that sometimes comes to flower in Indians of low birth. When that strange race nears the dust and is condemned as untouchable, then nature remembers the physical

perfection that she accomplished elsewhere . . . This man would have been notable anywhere; among the thin-hammed, flat-chested mediocrities of Chandrapore he stood out as divine, yet he was of the city, its garbage had nourished him, he would end on its rubbish-heaps. (193)

As this similarity suggests, the real anxiety such works express is the fear that although the burgeoning population which technology “artificially” creates might be mostly inferior and degraded, there is always the possibility that by sheer weight of numbers some serious threat might emerge from such a seething cauldron to upset the established order. In his description of the giant holding aloft the deformed dwarf “like a flag”, Raspail merely instantiates this theme.

The paradoxical figure of the evolutionarily superior human arising from what was perceived to be a more primitive genetic base is, of course, a common theme: it pervades Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, for example.⁶⁹ As with *Dracula* and other earlier fictional treatments of this type, the threat posed by this figure lies partially in his (it is almost always a male figure) aggressive, primitive nature, but in anti-technological fiction it is technology which is fostering the mutation in the lower, excluded people at the same time that it is leading to degeneration in the technologically advanced society⁷⁰. I looked at the themes of technology leading to degeneration in an earlier chapter, where I noted that part of the anti-technological narrative of degeneration was a eugenicist one of technology allowing the survival of the less fit, thereby acting (in the narrative) as a counter-evolutionary force. What I am pointing to here is in many ways the obverse of that: it is the belief that as technology (including medical knowledge and agricultural technology) removes the purportedly “natural” checks on population in more “primitive” nations, the seething cauldrons of humanity there will throw up a creature with an intelligence and physique equal or superior to any

⁶⁹ See John Glendening, *The Evolutionary Imagination in Victorian Novels: An Entangled Bank* (2007).

⁷⁰ Svitavsky’s study of the *fin de siècle* writer, MP Shiel, analyses many of these aspects and provides interesting parallels to my analysis of anti-technologism here. See William L. Svitavsky “From Decadence to Racial Antagonism: M.P. Shiel at the Turn of the Century” in *Science Fiction Studies* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Mar. 2004). 1-24.

Western one, yet still possessing primitive and atavistic traits. It embodies a contradictory and dualistic role as both an avatar of primitive nature and a consequence of technology's disruption of nature.⁷¹ A further feature of this figure in anti-technological literature is that this threat comes from those populations, classes, or ethnic groups which present the most immediate threat to the stable, white, Western hegemony. In lurid contrast to the suppressed sexuality and restrained demeanour of polite, advanced society, this figure represents the primitive and rampantly fertile nature of the population from which it comes. Thus, for example, John Brunner's novel about an overpopulated world, *Stand On Zanzibar* (1968), has the figure of "the mucker," a product of the teeming developing world's adoption of Western technologies and way of life. Visiting a university in a developing nation, Donald Hogan, a Western visitor is confronted with such an assailant:

This is a classic portrait of the mucker phenomenon. The victim is a thin youth a little above average height for his ethnic group, sallow, black-haired and dressed in conventional garb spotted with fresh blood . . . His breathing is violent and exhalation is accompanied by a grunt – haarrgh ow haarrgh ow! His muscular tensions are maximised; his right sleeve has split from the pressure of his biceps. He has a convulsive grip on his phang [scimitar] and all his knuckles are brightly pale against his otherwise sallow skin . . . He has a conspicuous erection (445. Italics in original).

The "mucker" here is a product of the rapidly industrialising Asian country of Yakatang (a thinly disguised fictionalisation of Indonesia) which is "one of the most crowded areas on the face of the globe" (436-7). The introduction and adoption of Western science and technology have enabled an exponential increase in the population of non-Western societies, and vastly augmented their power, but this raises new fears: such populations are only a couple of generations away from a "natural"

⁷¹ Compare with *Saints* where "We are told that that the hardiest races are the ones pruned down by natural selection . . . very shortly . . . there will pour out over the soil of France a flood of hungry, scrawny creatures, but solid and healthy no less, and ready to pounce with all their might" (166).

state and so are seen as still retaining some essence of primitive vitality and aggression that may rise to the surface at any time and, on a global level, pose a threat to stability.

Of course, this anxiety can be seen as the obverse of fears of degeneracy and decline in Western society caused by technology as I discussed in previous chapters (and will be discussing with reference to Neo-Malthusianism later in this chapter). This is at first glance paradoxical, because technology stands accused of leading to both degeneracy *and* advancement. In analysing and resolving this paradox, it is useful to refer once again to negative classicism and the idea of the rise and fall of civilisations as laid out by Spengler, Ortega, and others. To generalise for a moment here: this view perceives technology as both cause and effect of the imperialist motive, birthing an expansionary drive and is thus – crucially – unsustainable in the long run, successful as it may well be in the short to medium term. As my previous chapter on Tolkien’s *Rings* argued, the twin forces of imperialism and technology are seen as initially overpowering, but if they can just be endured and resisted they will ultimately collapse under the weight of their own entropy; the pattern of technological advancement is therefore conceptualised as rapid expansion followed after an interval by equally rapid internal decay and collapse. As Arthur C. Clarke put it, “. . . Empires – like atomic bombs – are self-liquidating assets” (qtd. by Kilgore 118). Overpopulation is thus the numerical human aspect of this unsustainable technological and imperialist drive, the “population bomb” is the inflationary aspect of technology’s expansionist drive made manifest. The crucial thing to take from this conceptual view for my purposes here is the idea of *directionality* and *reversal* implicit in such a structural view of history. The expansionary momentum of technology combined with imperialism is inevitably followed by an equal and opposite momentum. Expansion leads to collapse; advancement to decline. Thus the motif of the West as a land ripe for exploration and exploitation by others is a recurring theme in anti-technological literature because it speaks to this directionality and reversal.

We can see this clearly expressed, I believe, in Brian Aldiss' *Earthworks* (1965) which tells the story of Knowle Noland, an escaped English convict in a degraded and overpopulated world. Noland finds himself caught up in a scheme to bring about the "re-birth" of culture and civilisation by instigating a global war. In *Earthworks* the consequence of Western technologism is an overpopulated world where the West is exhausted both culturally and agriculturally, and Africa is now the land of "virile young peoples whose technologies often surpassed those of Europe and America" (22). The trope of blood and soil is here reprised on a global scale and related to neo-Malthusian imperatives of food production versus human reproduction. Noland finds employment as the captain of a freighter taking sand from Africa to replenish the exhausted soils of the West as "only in Africa is the soil still fertile and the people still relatively vital" (inside jacket). The schemata of technological overreach and collapse here is predicated on humanitarian grounds, but is no less catastrophic for that: the export of Western technology to non-Western nations has led to global overpopulation, and the West's attempt to feed the starving nations leads only to the exhaustion of its soils, whilst its inhabitants, significantly, become emasculated (literally as well as figuratively) by their own technology:

Countries like America and Australia-Zealand overproduced to feed the other parts of the world, but they only got their own lands into a mess by so doing. Once land gets in a state, once it begins to deteriorate, it is hard to reverse the process. Land falls sick just like people – that's the whole tragedy of our time. Then came the big birth pill crisis, when the long-term effects of progestagen [*sic*] made themselves felt, and then the land wars that left the nations of Africa politically in the lead. (28)

The technology which once served the West so well has now led to its downfall. Its citizens have deviated from the natural order and so inevitably become degenerate and effete; the West, we are told, has become "spiritually and agriculturally bankrupt – perhaps the two must always go

together” (124).⁷² Conditions in Western nations have now deteriorated to a third world level of subsistence (in a reversal of the historic order, what were the third world nations are in the ascendant). The novel ends with Noland being persuaded that the only answer to this madness is to join an elite group called the “abstainers” dedicated to radically reducing the global population and help them instigate a World War by (in a rather convoluted and bizarre plot twist) assassinating the putative President of the African nations. Noland initially recoils at this – he knows the future president to be a peacemaker, a just and good man who has done much for his people – but ends up being convinced by the argument and assassinating the man anyway; the horror of the West’s current predicament, he recognises, is just too grotesque to be allowed to continue. As Justine, one of the leaders of the group tells him:

“Think of the cities, Knowle – you lived in them most of your life, think of the degraded rabble that inhabits them, divorced from the earth and from any natural and lovely thing Shouldn’t a system that has brought such things about go toppling into the dust?”.

“We’re not really assassins . . . We’re midwives. A new way of life has got to come, and the sooner the old one goes, the better”. (154-5)

The expressed hope is that the world war will be an Armageddon, a war so finally cataclysmic that not only will the global population be massively reduced, but all civilizational and technological structures will collapse, leaving the world to the “travellers” (as the novel calls them) who have adopted an hierarchical, quasi-medieval existence of living off the land. The “natural order” is restored by an act of war that will end technological civilisation (which has caused the West to

⁷² Even the name of the protagonist seems to be a less than subtle indication of the lack of patriotic pride Westerners take in their native soil and their subsequent disconnection from it: Knowle Noland – Know No Land.

degenerate to the point where Africa, with its fertile soil and people, is ascendant) and restore the links between people and the land, culture and agriculture, blood and soil.

What I would like to do now is look briefly at the schematic directionality and symbolism of the anti-technologism in Aldiss' story and how it is mirrored in Raspail's novel. In *Saints* the armada that sets sail from the third world to the first symbolises the old fear of reverse colonisation. The West has grown soft and complacent on the expropriated wealth of the third world, but the inevitable corollary to this is the export of its knowledge and technology to the third world – at least, enough to upset the balance between births and deaths. Hearing of the abundance of the first world and the failing of its resolve, the unhappy inhabitants of the under-developed nations eventually seize control of its ships – symbols of Western technology and expansionism – and commandeer them to seize and expropriate, in an almost perfectly symmetrical inversion of colonialism.

In *Earthworks*, this symbolism of reversal is achieved by the ships carrying the fertile sand of Africa back to the spent soils of the West. Whilst superficially this may seem to be a continuation of imperialist expropriation, it is made quite clear that the tables have now turned and it is the West which is being exploited by Africa, forced to beg for every boatload of sand it buys. The horror of *Earthworks*, as with *Saints*, lies ultimately in the thought of *reversal*, of the West being reduced to the status of third world dependent. This is made utterly explicit when Noland returns to England and is horrified at the sight of "tiny withered things tending rows and rows of withered plants" like backwards peasants in a poor nation (134). The idea of reversal is then thrust upon the reader and made unavoidable:

But the people, the people from whom I had sprung! Eagerly I turned to them, to realise for the first time how brutalized they had become . . . more and more the

people were looking like machines. A starved body shows its joints and tendons and stanchions in a manner hardly distinguishable from an ordinary robot.

But robots do not break out with those awful skin diseases. Robots do not develop stomachs and legs distended by beri beri. They never have running sores or scurvy. Their spines do not curve, nor their knees buckle with rickets. (135)

In a final identification of the West reduced to a grotesque likeness of its darkest apprehensions of the third world, even the act of reproduction is reduced to an inhuman animal urge that only deepens their immiseration: “. . . as if that anxious jerking of the loins by which they begot duplicates of themselves was a part of a universal death agony” (136). Horror at the degraded state of humanity is combined with disgust for their inability to control the urges which led to such overpopulation and degeneracy. This same fear and loathing can be seen in *Saints*, the difference lying in the overtly racist tone where, for example, the President of France confides his revulsion at the lack of control of third world nations: “They rant and rave at the UN, they treat themselves to jets, and coups d'état, and even wars, and epidemics. And still they reproduce like ants. Not even their deadly famines can seem to keep them down. It's frightening! (150-1). In both novels, of course, “these people” have effectively conquered the West, and completed the reversal of fortune, reducing Westerners to starving chattels and peasants. The only difference being that in *Earthworks* the murder of the putative leader of a unified African Union is a last desperate act that gives some hope for an end to the inversion, and a restoration of normality.

The real fear, then, underlying the combination of Neo-Malthusianism and anti-technologism in literature seems to be this idea of reversal, of the living standards, diet, and densely crowded nature of the non-Western world being visited on the Western world that had battered on it for so long it had grown fat and soft. I have chosen a few texts that most clearly illustrate this, but

the anxiety can, I believe, be clearly seen in many others. Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966), for example, is set in the overpopulated world of 1999 (a world imagined as having seven billion inhabitants, approximately the same as we have today in 2014), in which the citizens of New York are reduced to living almost entirely on rice and vegetables, suffer from third world diseases such as kwashiorkor and beri beri, and peddle rickshaws around the city just to earn enough to avoid outright starvation. The symbolism is again quite blatant and unmistakable – the inhabitants of the greatest city in the West are reduced to living like Indian slum dwellers. Certainly, as Harrison revealed in a recent article in 2006 the genesis of the book came from the widespread concern at the time over the population in India and other developing nations:

The idea [for the book] came from an Indian I met after the war, in 1946. He told me, 'Overpopulation is the big problem coming up in the world' (nobody had ever heard of it in those days) and he said 'Want to make a lot of money, Harry? You have to import rubber contraceptives to India'. I didn't mind making money, but I didn't want to be the rubber king of India! But I started reading a bit about overpopulation, and got the idea for the book. It stayed in my head as I watched the population trend going the wrong way. The thing took about eight years to write because I had to do a lot of research which was worth it. (Harrison 78)

Harrison's comments about the genesis of his book reveal once again the way in which the post-World War Two concern over the growth in population in less developed countries influenced literature. Many writers of fiction negotiated the widespread fears of overpopulation, and wittingly or unwittingly identified the fear of reversal as the deep-seated anxiety that gave impetus to the discussion. Just as Huxley worried about the Arabs and other "monsters" acquiring knowledge of Western technology to add to their numerical superiority, Harrison, Aldiss, and others express the same fear (albeit in less vehement terms) of a surging and newly powerful non-Western world

claiming their fair share and forcing a dramatic decline in Western living standards if the twin threats of promiscuous technology and “overpopulation” were not managed carefully.

I hope that what is becoming clearer in the course of this chapter is the structural importance of directionality and reversal in anti-technologism and the relationship this has with Neo-Malthusianism and fears of differential population growth. At this point, I would like to foreground this key aspect of the current chapter by examining Aldous Huxley’s last novel, *Island*. I locate *Island* (1962) as a utopian work in the sub-genre of the “lost world” fantasy, using the analysis developed by John Rieder in *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008). As Rieder observes, the Lost Race sub-genre blends fantasies of colonial expropriation with a satirical inversion of contemporary society. It explores fears of decay and contamination at home, whilst indulging in fantasies of easy abundance abroad. Rieder observes that although the integration of foreign people and lands into the global economy promises to bring abundance, “the assimilation of those territories, products, and people into modernity can also be decried as contagion [thus] the colonial narrative of progress always threatens to reverse itself into the threats of racial miscegenation and cultural degeneration” (52). My immediate goal here is to argue that *Island* is a modern day Lost World fantasy that negotiates fears over the decline of Western dominance by postulating a utopian alternative to the Western technological way of life for developing nations. Reprising established fantasies of a return to the organic form, this alternative envisages “development” in non-material terms, and stresses quality not quantity, in an attempt to limit growth in both population and power. Thus, *Island*, as with the other Neo-Malthusian, anti-technological works I have looked at in this chapter, deals with anxieties of reverse colonisation, though it does so negatively; that is to say, it negotiates such concerns by imagining a way of forestalling the rising differential in power between a declining West and a rising East.

In 1958, four years before Rachel Carson brought the dangers of indiscriminate pesticide use to wider public awareness, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World Revisited* used DDT as an example of how he saw technology leading to situations where good intentions have unintended consequences. As I remarked in the introduction, the anxiety over degeneration of the population, and the rise of the masses, supposedly inferior genetically but vastly superior in numbers, was projected from the urban centres of Britain and America in the 1920s and 30s to the industrialising non-Western nations in the Post-World War Two decades. Hence, Huxley in 1958 situates his concerns about overpopulation in the developing world by beginning with a quick summary of the situation in the Western world:

And now let us consider the case of the rich, industrialized and democratic society, in which, owing to the random but effective practice of dysgenics, IQ's and physical vigour are on the decline. For how long can such a society maintain its traditions of individual liberty and democratic government? Fifty or a hundred years from now our children will learn the answer to this question. (29)

Having warned of the continuing degenerative threat technology posed to Western society, Huxley then turned his attentions immediately to the problem of the developing nations, where insecticides, medicines, and other scientific advances were reducing deaths from disease and illness and allowing a vastly increased, but purportedly genetically inferior population to spring up:

For example, we go to a tropical island and with the aid of DDT we stamp out malaria and, in two or three years, save hundreds of thousands of lives. This is obviously good. But the hundreds of thousands of human beings thus saved, and the millions whom they beget and bring to birth, cannot be adequately clothed, housed, educated or even fed out of the island's available resources. Quick death by malaria

has been abolished; but life made miserable by undernourishment and overcrowding is now the rule, and slow death by outright starvation threatens ever greater numbers.

And what about the congenitally insufficient organisms, whom our medicine and our social services now preserve so that they may propagate their kind? To help the unfortunate is obviously good. But the wholesale transmission to our descendants of the results of unfavourable mutations, and the progressive contamination of the genetic pool from which the members of our species will have to draw, are no less obviously bad. We are on the horns of an ethical dilemma, and to find the middle way will require all our intelligence and all our good will. (29)

This dilemma, Huxley claimed, was “the price that Western man has had to pay and will go on paying for technological progress” (30). The example he gives here of technology’s self-defeating nature was expanded upon a few years later in his final novel, *Island*. The work explored in fiction many of the concerns Huxley had raised previously regarding the “dilemma” of technology’s dysgenic and Malthusian effects.

Set on the fictional island kingdom of Pala, the novel outlines some of Huxley’s ideals for the less developed nations. Pala is seen through the eyes of Will Farnaby, a disillusioned British journalist who finds respite from the “millions of maggots” he has to rub shoulders with in London only by taking day trips out to the country to wander in the woods and look at the wildflowers; only there, surrounded by nature, can he feel clean and whole again (101). Arriving on the island, Farnaby finds a small nation that has rejected both capitalism and communism and the “wholesale industrialization” that they bring (109). As one of the school teachers on the island explains to Farnaby, the West is committed to its technological lifestyle and can’t be expected to change that now, but Pala has decided to choose a different path of controlling fertility, eugenics, and taking a

more spiritual approach to development. “If the politicians in the newly independent countries had any sense” he tells his Western visitor, “they’d do the same”:

You people [in the West] have no choice . . . you’re irretrievably committed to applied physics and chemistry, with all their dismal consequences, military, political and social. But the underdeveloped countries aren’t committed. They don’t *have* to follow your example. They’re still free to take the road *we’ve* taken – the road of applied biology, the road of fertility control and the limited production and selective industrialization which fertility control makes possible, the road that leads to happiness from the inside out . . . (210-11. Emphasis in original)

This anti-materialist form of progress starts in Pala with education, with ecology being central to children’s education from a young age, by playing games such as “Evolutionary Snakes and Ladders” and “Mendelian Happy Families” which will teach them about the need for population control, selective breeding and respect for nature (210). Instead of industrialization and the uncontrolled and artificial growth in population and consumption it brings, the Palanese are interested in “improving the race” by artificial insemination with “the germ plasm of a better stock” (188). At the start of his stay on the island, Farnaby recalls the “terrifying” population growth in countries like India and China and bitterly reflects that “one starts with doing things that are obviously and intrinsically good [such as] keeping babies alive . . . healing the sick, preventing the sewage from getting into the water supply” but sadly such misguided efforts only lead ultimately to “increasing the sum of human misery and jeopardizing civilization” (80-1). He praises the Palanese decision to choose eugenics (“applied biology”) which will lead to a more fulfilled and intelligent population. By contrast, the indiscriminate use of technology in the West will undoubtedly lead to it becoming (literally) a world of morons with an average IQ around 85 points within a century: “Better medicine – more congenital deficiencies preserved and passed on” (188).

Intrinsic to the dynamics of Huxley's novel is his concern which I alluded to earlier in this chapter that the technology which had given the West its standard of living had given the rest of the world only TVs and radios that showed glimpses of this cornucopia "which they are too simpleminded to be able to criticize" (Huxley "The World Population Problem" 325). In *Island*, this fear is voiced by the Palanese Ambassador, who comments that "So long as it remains out of touch with the rest of the world, an ideal society can be a viable society. Pala was completely viable, I'd say, until about 1905" (58). At that point, he observes, it wasn't that Pala changed, but that the rest of the world changed: "Movies, cars, aeroplanes, radio" made the evidently desirable cultural isolation of nations from each other impossible. The spread of mass communication and travel means that everyone in the world was able to see how the West lives, and to succumb to the temptation to pursue the Western lifestyle. We are back to the ideal of the noble savage, uncorrupted by knowledge and hence shame at their primitive state. Ignorance, particularly ignorance of Western technology and lifestyle, is hence portrayed in terms of a paradisiacal innocence which somehow guarantees a bountiful, prelapsarian utopia. This theme forms the narrative spine of the novel: early on Huxley foreshadows the inevitable fall of Pala that closes the work, by introducing a Western shopping catalogue given to Murugan, the effeminate son of the ruling monarch, by Colonel Dipa, the assertive military ruler of neighbouring Rendang:

What an odd kind of present from Hadrian to Antinous! He looked again at the picture of the motor bike, then back at Murugan's glowing face. Light dawned; the Colonel's purpose revealed itself. *The serpent tempted me and I did eat*. The tree in the midst of the garden was called the Tree of Consumer Goods, and to the inhabitants of every underdeveloped Eden, the tiniest taste of its fruit, and even the sight of its thirteen hundred and fifty-eight leaves, had power to bring the shameful knowledge that, industrially speaking, they were stark naked. (134. Emphasis in original)

The implication is obvious: the island Eden of Pala can enjoy the fruits of tending to the tree of life (improving the race and so forth) as long as it can resist the temptation to eat the fatal fruit of the tree of knowledge and the loss of innocence that comes with it. Western technology works by seducing people who are “too simpleminded” to be able to criticize it intellectually with images of a life of relative ease and prosperity, in contrast to their life of honest toil in the fields. Huxley’s ideal in *Island* is that the less developed nations might be persuaded to choose not to industrialise, not to pursue the Western way of life, but to remain essentially agrarian. In so doing, their population will be kept “naturally” in check, and not pose a threat to their neighbours (and, of course, to the West). His fear is that technology’s insidious influence is for all practical purposes unstoppable, and when the rest of the world sees how the West lives they will be unable to resist the seductive ease and comfort of such a way of life and will, as Ehrlich put it “rock the boat” and threaten global stability.

Pala is effectively a lost world. As per Rieder’s analysis, it is extremely isolated geographically and hence culturally and also has one of the key defining features of the sub-genre, in the scientist-narrator, played by Farnaby, who interprets the lost world in terms of its colonial past. Though Farnaby is a journalist not a scientist, he still fulfils a quasi-scientific role by observing, questioning and noting the practices and rituals of the natives. He also situates the country by reference to its philosopher-king, Dr Robert McPhail, a Western doctor who, in conjunction with the monarch, gave laws to the new country. Farnaby’s references make clear the pivotal role of this benevolent Westerner in not only setting laws, but steering science and education in the right direction; that is to say, away from large-scale infrastructure and development and towards small scale mixed agriculture, ecology (with strong moral overtones), and eugenic breeding. To relate this directly to my ongoing discussion in this thesis of anti-technologism’s tendency towards the organic form, Huxley wants to draw lessons regarding human societal organization and ethics (a “natural order”) from nature. Palanese children are taught “true ecological fables with built-in, cosmic morals” and shown pictures of environmentally degraded landscapes to show them what happens to those who

try to go against the natural order of things. Confronted with such images, the hope is that “. . . it’s easy for the child to see the need for conservation *and then go on from conservation to morality*” [my emphasis]. The underlying lesson is clear in terms of the order of things: “Treat Nature well, and Nature will treat you well. Hurt or destroy Nature, and Nature will soon destroy you” (212). Certainly, *Island* has an environmental moral to the story, but it is one that is harnessed to the idea of organic form under the leadership of a benign (though not, it should be noted, democratically elected) leadership. Thus, though *Island* is progressive in its ecological awareness and its emphasis on the development of consciousness, it is decidedly colonialist and reactionary in implicitly advocating an administrative regime that denies agency to the inhabitants of the island, supposedly for their own good.

As David Bradshaw has noted in his essay “Huxley’s Slump: Planning, Eugenics, and the ‘Ultimate Need’ of Stability” (1995) the belief in the need for putatively benign administration of the masses by the elite was a hallmark of the work of many British writers and intellectuals of Huxley’s era.⁷³ Certainly, Huxley’s *Island* follows in the “lost world” fantasies of earlier British writers such as HG Wells who in his *A Modern Utopia* (1905) argued that “the resources of the world and the energy of mankind, were they organised sanely, are amply sufficient to supply every material need of every living human being” if only things were rationally ordered by those who knew best (117). As I have argued previously, it is important to note the significance of this administrative element in anti-technologism, as in my analysis anti-technologism is not necessarily against technology per se but is concerned with the democratic availability of technology and the potentially negative repercussions.⁷⁴

⁷³ See also Joanne Woiak for an analysis of Huxley’s *Brave New World* which situates it not as a satire *against* eugenics but rather *against* the dysgenic effect of modern living and the triumph of mass culture. Joanne Woiak “Designing a Brave New World: Eugenics, Politics, and Fiction”. *The Public Historian*. Vol. 29. No. 3 (Summer 2007). 105-129.

⁷⁴ John Carey’s work *The Intellectuals and the Masses* contains two chapters on Wells – “H.G. Wells: Getting Rid of People” and “H.G. Wells Against H.G. Wells” – which explore both Wells’ Neo-Malthusianism and his ambivalence regarding technological progress. I have drawn on Carey’s analysis here in this part of this chapter.

The role of scientist-narrator, then, combined with the figure of the Western philosopher-king, is crucial here in staking a claim for the need of enlightened Western guidance in the development of the under-developed nations. It must be noted that Huxley's island is not to be preserved intact in pristine condition – the extraction and export of natural resources such as gold are still envisaged – but this extraction of natural resources is not accompanied by large-scale industrial development that might give the nation military or economic power of any kind. For example, the odious (and notably effeminate) Murugan has hopes that industrialisation will mean the building of factories to manufacture insecticides because “if you can make insecticide . . . you can make nerve gas” and wants industrialization to make the nation powerful so that it is respected (46). This “bad-blooded little demi-god” represents the threat of a client state that has aspirations to independent power, and thus is presented as being outside of the natural order of the island; because of his Western education and experience of its way of life, he is both contaminated and contaminate, and in a significant sense now artificial and foreign to his own land (41). Whereas everyone else on the island is culturally insular and Buddhist with the pleasingly peaceful and non-threatening attributes that implies Murugan is cosmopolitan, having been educated in Europe and is keen on Western entertainment. Tellingly, he is also Muslim and proud, rather than Buddhist and humble: “If one knows one is doing the will of Allah – and I *do* know it Mr Farnaby – there is no excuse for nervousness” (23). Perhaps it might be stretching the point too far to suggest that Murugan's militant Islamism is a vestigial remainder of Huxley's antipathy and fear toward the Arabs which he expressed in his letter of June 1925. Nevertheless, it is clear that Murugan is the personification of the threat of contamination and reverse colonialism that discovery and subsequent integration of the lost world implies.

There is a duality in direction here, of course. In penetrating the lost world of Pala, Farnaby has gained the opportunity to draw from a well-spring of primitive purity and shake off the “maggot-world” of degenerate Western life. However, the ability to cross the boundaries between these two

worlds implies that it is also possible for the inhabitants of Pala to travel to the Western world – and bring knowledge of it back with them . This may have unforeseen consequences, as indeed it does in the novel: experiencing the technologically advanced Western way of life has utterly corrupted Murugan and will contaminate and eventually (at the very end of the novel) lead to the downfall of this island Eden. Thus the chance to shape this developing nation into a suitably non-threatening polity has been lost forever, reinforcing the trope of the lost world as a parable of the need for benign Western hegemony in the ordering and development of the non-Western world for its own good. From Farnaby's traumatic and perilous entry to Pala by climbing up the cliff face, to the denouement of Colonel Dipa's installation of Murugan as a puppet ruler, the Edenic motif serves to underline the desirability and urgency of maintaining the lost world in isolation to prevent such contamination. In this *Island* shows its debt to the trope of the lost world and the neo-colonial fantasy of expropriation. As Rieder observes of such fantasies:

The ordeal of entry registers the discontinuity between the adventurer's world system and the isolated territory they have penetrated. Thus the ordeal of entry is often matched by a cataclysmic departure that seals the place off from return, emphasizing that the singularity of the opportunity that presents itself to those who can cross the boundary between the two realms depends on maintaining their separation. (52)

Such strict separation and administration is necessary in order to prevent contamination, and the paradisiacal theme of a prelapsarian balance of nature is often invoked in anti-technologism to justify this, particularly with reference to the threat of overpopulation caused by the introduction of modern medicines and facilities. This reinforces the ideological link between anti-technologism and Neo-Malthusianism, the fear of the loss of hegemony, reverse colonisation and invasion, and the reversal of living standards where the West becomes as the countries it formerly exploited. Because

anti-technological Neo-Malthusianism deals with such anxieties, it is my contention that it is always concerned with questions of cultural purity, immigration, and race. In the last section of this chapter before the conclusion, I want to sketch out some of these connections using Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* as an example.

Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* (1992) is a novel concerned with arguing one essential point: that there are natural limits and laws that govern the world, and that humanity's attempt to circumvent these with technology is fatally misguided. For example, the most important law or limit the novel is concerned with is the limit on human population. The story takes the format of a Socratic dialogue between a majestic mountain gorilla and an inquisitive young man, who discovers that he is able to communicate telepathically with the gorilla. By leading and gently prodding the young man the gorilla hopes to instigate a fundamental change in how the young man perceives the world and its priorities. One such priority is the idea that increasing the availability of food to forestall starvation in the world's poor is desirable and morally required. Thus, just as Vogt, Ehrlich, Hardin, and others had argued that sending food shipments to starving countries was self-defeating, so the eponymous interlocutor and teacher of *Ishmael* lectures his student that exporting technology or the fruits of technology to other regions is a defiance of natural laws that will have devastating repercussions:

"Every increase in food production is answered by an increase in population *somewhere*. In other words, *someone* is consuming Nebraska's surpluses – and if they weren't, Nebraska's farmers would stop producing those surpluses pronto".

"True", I said, and spent a few moments in thought. "Are you suggesting that First World farmers are fuelling the Third World population explosion?"

"Ultimately", he said, "who else is there to fuel it?" (139)

The problem identified here can be seen as a failure of separation. The technology of the advanced world is being used in a way which is upsetting the balance of nature in another, less advanced part of the world. The underlying fear is essentially the same as that seen in Raspail's *Saints* and in Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1949) as well as Aldiss' *Earthworks*: by shipping food and technology to foreign lands, we in the West are allowing the population to become artificially inflated to devastating proportions and sooner or later the burgeoning population will burst its banks and flood the West. Because technology offers to subvert (for a time, anyway) the natural limitations on population growth, not only must the export of technology or its fruits to less advanced countries be prohibited, but conversely, the immigration of people from less advanced lands to the West must also be prohibited. Only in this way can population be controlled and cultural integrity preserved.

Of course, such an argument explicitly stated would not be acceptable in modern literature and would be rightly reviled. Instead, *Ishmael* justifies the exclusion of other cultures, races, and peoples, on the more acceptable grounds of maintaining cultural diversity, for which population control is purportedly a necessity. Controlling population and maintaining the crucial separation between cultures is thus portrayed not as a Western administrative project for the less developed nations, but an already extant ideal which less technologically advanced people instinctively knew and followed but which we have fallen away from. It is, in other words, presented as a reversion to the natural order, and as such implicitly propounds the idea of organic form as discussed in the introduction. Analysing this argument for cultural separation helps to explicate the way in which the balance of nature link between anti-technologism and Neo-Malthusianism is always nativist in conception, it is worth looking at this justification in a little detail and extrapolating from it to draw out some of the underlying assumptions.

In the novel, Ishmael hands his student a copy of a work entitled *The American Heritage Book of Indians* and draws his pupil's attention to the existence of all the different tribes of Native Americans before the arrival of European settlers. He asks his pupil to think about how the existence of so many different tribes "served to limit their growth" (140). Ishmael then draws an analogy with modern America asking what happens when people in the more densely populated Northeast of America get tired of living there, to which his pupil replies that they simply move to less crowded regions of the country. Ishmael's point is therefore made: the "gushing wellspring of growth" in one region is allowed to flood into other regions rather than the natives of that region having to limit their own population. They can do this, because the boundaries between regions are easily crossable both territorially and culturally thanks to technological advancements such as the automobile and the aeroplane as well as television and the internet (141). By contrast, the Native American tribes had to limit their population because each tribe had its own culture which it jealously guarded and therefore "those cultural boundaries were boundaries that no one crossed by choice" (141). The dialectic which follows this claim bears quoting at some length, because it so neatly illustrates the way in which anti-technological Neo-Malthusianism relies on nativism and the idea of the separation of cultures in order to maintain a 'balance of nature' that preserves the world as it is:

"True. On the other hand, the Navajo could cross the Hopi's *territorial* boundary without crossing their cultural boundary".

"You mean they could invade Hopi territory. Yes, absolutely. But the point I'm making still stands. If you ever crossed over into Hopi territory, they didn't give you a form to fill out, they killed you. That worked very well. That gave people a powerful incentive to limit their growth" (141-2)

Ishmael stresses that of course this was no utopian system, and that ferocious wars sometimes broke out in defence of boundaries; he argues that this actually meant the system worked properly, because in a non-technological world without surveillance and border controls “you want them [that is, outsiders] to know exactly what they’ll be in for if they don’t limit their growth and stay in their own territory” (142). But as Ishmael explains to his pupil, limiting population requires not just that territorial boundaries be inviolate, but that cultural boundaries are also preserved:

“Yes, I see. They limited each other”.

“But not just by erecting uncrossable territorial boundaries. Their cultural boundaries had to be uncrossable too. The excess population of the Narranganset couldn’t just pack up and move out west to be Cheyenne. The Narranganset had to stay where they were and limit their population”.

“Yes. It’s another case where diversity seems to work better than homogeneity”. (142)

As Ishmael warns his pupil, those who refused to accept that this separation was necessary were defying nature and deserved what they got. After all, he warns rather ominously, such separation is a law of nature and therefore “Those who threaten the stability of the community by defying the law automatically eliminate themselves” (144).⁷⁵ Thus, executing immigrants from other cultures and races who attempt to migrate into your territory is defended as a natural act that preserves diversity in contrast to a technological, homogenised and cosmopolitan culture.

⁷⁵ The context of this quote allows for some ambiguity of reference here: it can feasibly be read as suggesting that ecological disaster will overtake civilisation as a whole if it doesn’t alter its ways. However, the broader context of “diversity” (interpreted as cultural purity) implies at least a correlation of this issue with the question of civilizational collapse.

This perverse definition of diversity being equivalent to cultural purity is a recurrent feature of anti-technological literature. In Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, for example, an African character in the novel expresses a desire to return to her native country because she is "sick of France and the French who aren't French any longer, but some sort of horrible averaged-out Common European mongrels" (308). The dual applicability of such sentiments is obvious: they can be used to justify protection of vulnerable cultures, or to justify the exclusion of others from a society. In *Ishmael*, Quinn employs this argument by using the supposedly pre-technological Native Americans as an example which shows how such cultural exclusion is, in his view, the "natural" way societies would be organised before technology.

It's obvious that Quinn's device of the Native American example is just that: a device to make the idea of ending immigration and enforcing cultural purity seem more natural and therefore palatable. There is of course no "gushing wellspring of growth" in the United States, the reference would seem to be a transparent reference to Mexico and Mexican cultural influence in America. I want to refer here to my previous chapter and the right-wing "ecological" idea of the foreign as pollution. In Quinn's identification of American Indian tribes and culture with specific locales we have a biogeography similar in some important respects to Tolkien's in *The Lord of the Rings*. The irredentist trope licences exclusion and even persecution on the grounds of what is supposedly natural, conflating biology and geography with politics and culture. As the foreign is not native, it is unnatural, artificial, and is effectively pollution that must be kept out; if need be, it must be expunged. This thought is necessarily sublimated in Post-World War Two anti-technological discourse and literature, but the frequent reference to growth (especially population growth) as a "cancer" belies this sublimation. As Edward Goldsmith, editor of the staunchly anti-technological journal *The Ecologist* argued in 1971, "the ever-growing chaos associated with the uncontrolled proliferation of culturally undifferentiated people must set a further limit to economic growth" ("Limits of Growth in Natural Systems" 56-7). Under the subheading "Multi-Ethnic Societies"

Goldsmith went on to prosecute the case for cultural and ethnic purity in what he claimed was accordance with nature, proposing that “what is today regarded as prejudice against people of different ethnic groups is a normal and necessary feature of human cultural behaviour, and is absent only among members of a cultural system already far along the road to disintegration” (61). The seemingly indefensible is made defensible by appeal to supposedly immutable natural laws, defiance of which will only lead to greater tragedy. The eugenicist Garret Hardin’s now famous formulation of “the tragedy of the commons” in his essay “Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor” is perhaps the best known example of this argument. But Raspail makes the same argument from a more visceral position of fear and loathing; Brunner, Aldiss and others from a more apprehensive and bleak perspective. However it is framed, the diffusion of technology as the catalyst for disaster, and the eventual reversal of fortunes is a recurring schemata in such fears which, I believe, shows the underlying anxiety motivating such anti-technological Neo-Malthusian literature.

In *The Environmental Revolution: A Guide for the New Masters of the World* (1970) Max Nicholson, co-founder with Julian Huxley of the World Wildlife Fund and Director-General of the Nature Conservancy until 1966, explicitly linked technology with the so-called population “explosion”, declaring that: “To live during the technological revolution and the population explosion is to be a conscript, forced to sweep the streets of a slum civilisation” (38).⁷⁶ Nicholson’s bitter condemnation of technology and population growth anticipates the quote from Petti Linkola which opened this thesis as it accuses technology not only of fuelling rampant over-population but also of cultural dilution and degradation, turning Western society into a “slum civilisation”. In this chapter, I have argued that this connection stemmed ultimately from fears of relative Western decline and degeneracy as the rest of the world caught up technologically and numerically. As the diffusion of

⁷⁶ I say “so-called” because, as Connelly (2008) points out, it was well known among demographers that following industrialisation and the introduction of modern science and medicine, populations boomed, but then evened out and started a long decline. This phenomenon, known as the demographic transition, was a demonstrated fact, yet an atmosphere close at times to hysteria still attended the rise in population of non-Western nations.

technology and technological knowledge to less developed nations was deemed responsible for this anti-technological literature warns of the consequences of such diffusion. Simultaneously it also calls for a return to a more 'natural' way of life in the advanced nations to ward off the threat of degeneracy. Such concerns are displayed quite clearly in Nicholson's introduction to what is ostensibly an environmental text:

As nature is man's ancestral home and nurse, and as landscape is his modern mirror, the achievement of a fresh recognition by mankind of the potential for the renewal and for the healing of a sick society through creative intimacy with the natural environment could bring a transformation of the kind and scale which our degenerate and self-disgusted, materialist, power-drunk and sex-crazed civilisation needs. The lesson is plain that without some immensely greater and more enduring inspiration and support than everyday affluence and hollow success any human civilisation must totter. A civilisation which through its own intellectual advances has gone far to cripple supernatural religion as a living force has probably no option but to return in some form to the wilderness from which religion itself sprang. (*The Environmental Revolution* 17)

Like Linkola, Nicholson's theme is ostensibly environmental, yet in actuality is at least as much about restoring "proper" morals to society as it is to the protection of the environment. Technology and urbanism are seen as enabling individualistic materialism which has led to degeneracy and a decline in morals and cultural values. The environment in such texts is in reality a mirror for the author to hold to society, a way of arguing for the organic form, for the need to prevent the repugnant softness Orwell feared would result from a technological society.

In his complaint, Nicholson is clearly echoing a longstanding argument which Thoreau had already famously encapsulated in his essay "Walking" (1849): that civilised man requires some degree of contact with the wild to prevent enervation, effeminacy, and decay:

The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the world. Every tree sends its fibres forth in search of the Wild. The cities import it at any price. Men plow and sail for it. From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind. Our ancestors were savages. The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf is not a meaningless fable. The founders of every state which has risen to eminence, have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar wild source. It is because the children of the empire were not suckled by the wolf that they were conquered and displaced by the children of the northern forests who were. ("Walking" 71)

The concern over the diffusion of technology and the growth of the world's population, then, can be seen as the necessary corollary to this fear. As I showed earlier in this chapter, anti-technological literature very often deals with contradictory themes of the other as both inferior and at least potentially superior, encompassing the evolutionary threat of the lesser races overtaking the West. As I argued, because it negotiates such fears of reversal there is often a clearly directional motif in anti-technological literature. I used Raspail's *Saints* in this chapter, as I wanted to demonstrate how the themes of technology, over-population, cultural decline and invasion, or reverse colonisation were all related in anti-technological literature. *Saints* offers a very obvious example from which to draw these distinctions out and it also shows how such fears set up a necessarily competitive and antagonistic worldview which very frequently relies implicitly or explicitly on racial notions of supremacy and inferiority. In this schema, the diffusion of technology to less developed peoples

perverts the natural (and therefore “right”) state of affairs, the “balance of nature” and therefore leads ultimately to inversion – in other words, reverse colonisation.

Thus the invasion of the West that is the end result of Western shipments of food aid to starving Africans and Asians in Huxley’s *Ape and Essence* (1948) is seen as not only a logical outcome, but predestined from the very first shipment:

And meanwhile, on the other side of the world, the black men have been working their way down the Nile and across the Mediterranean. What splendid tribal dances in the bat-infested halls of the Mother of Parliaments! And the Labyrinth of the Vatican – what a capital place in which to celebrate the lingering and complex rites of female circumcision! *We all get precisely what we ask for.* (28. My emphasis)

Though the fruits of technology may be shared with other countries with the best possible intentions, the results of such failure of separation are ultimately the same here as Forster, Spengler and others saw for imperialism: expansion and growth followed inevitably by contraction, decline, and finally collapse.

Such a belief, of course, raised extremely disquieting and unsettling ethical questions for many. The use and adoption of technology in less developed nations offered the possibility of easing pain, lowering infant mortality, feeding the hungry and improving everyday life for many hundreds of millions. But if the end result of such efforts was simply to enable the population of less developed nations to grow to “unsustainable” proportions and subsequently to threaten (Western) civilization, were such attempts fatally misguided? As I have shown in this chapter, such concerns regarding differential population growth in less developed nations almost invariably tied in with themes of cultural separation and stability. To many people concerned with such questions, it must

have seemed a terrible moral dilemma. If only there was some way to simply press a reset button which would resolve these complex issues without guilt or reproach. In the next chapter I look at anti-technological fantasies of catastrophe as resolution and rebirth, as a guilt-free way of exploring in fiction the erasure of such troubling people and problems.

Chapter four. Purification and Rebirth: Anti-technologism and catastrophe.

We're Greek now boy, it's as hard for us as it was for them, and if we can make something beautiful out of it it'll be like what they made, that fine carved line pure and simple.

Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Wild Shore* (297).

In the previous chapter, I looked at how the fear of overpopulation in anti-technological literature was closely related to anxieties of reverse colonisation and the subsequent desire for cultural and even ethnic isolation. In a world in which technology was making the exchange of ideas and cultures and the movement of people ever more fluid and frequent, this desire must have seemed to some both more urgent and ever more unachievable. Whilst people around the world enjoyed the benefits of Western technology and proliferated, it seemed to some that at home people had become decadent and effete, dissipating themselves in the hollow amusements that cosmopolitanism and technology brought in a manner that recalled the fall of ancient civilisations due to luxury and degeneracy.⁷⁷ Just as the spoils of empire in ancient Rome had brought first plenty, then luxury, then inevitable degeneracy and decline, so technology and Western imperialism – the Spenglerian drive – had undone Western civilisation, rotting it from within. All that now awaited, it seemed, was the inevitable slow decline of Western civilisation. For who could reasonably expect that people act against their own interests in their lifetime, to ensure the continuation of Western hegemony into the seemingly distant future? The inexorable logic of the Spenglerian organicist view of history invited despondency: if it was the nature of civilisations to

⁷⁷ One does not have to look very far for examples of contemporary reworkings of negative classicism. Ronald Wright's *A Short History of Progress* (2004) functions as both an attack on the liberal ideal of scientific progress, and as a defence of negative classicism. Wright mentions HG Wells and William Morris as two writers who asked the question "What if the degradation of the slums caused degradation of the human race? What, exactly, was the *point* of all this economic output if, for so many people, it meant deracination, misery, and filth?". "No doubt many will say that we stand here to prove those gloomy Victorians wrong", Wright declares, "But do we?" (121). For Wright and others, progress seems to always imply degeneration of some kind.

grow, to expand, and then to decline – to fall into senescence and eventually disappear – what could be done to alter this?

In this chapter, I look at a significant response in anti-technological literature to this sense of Western decline. I look at how anti-technologism takes one of the oldest ideas – that of catastrophe as purging and rebirth – and seeks to reapply it to modern times, sweeping away the abstract complexities and uncomfortable issues of the modern world and replacing them with new certainties licenced by the need for simple survival. I want to develop on the idea that anti-technologism relies on the Spenglerian organicist conception of history, and argue that in anti-technological literature catastrophe serves a necessary role of purgative, expelling the gross luxuries and foreign influences that decay and dilute society, and allowing a purer, more cohesive society and culture – a revived culture – to go forward once more. In other words, as I see it catastrophe in anti-technological literature is a wiping clean of the historical palimpsest; or as the reset button being pressed on a culture that is perceived to have lost its vitality. Hence, as I will be exploring in this chapter, there are two important aspects or facets of catastrophe in anti-technological literature: sacrifice and purification, leading to revivification of the culture and the subsequent renewal of fertility. Sacrifice provides recognition of, and atonement for the greed and folly of past imperialist ventures, and purification sloughs off of the foreign luxuries and refinements that originally cast their spell on the people and led to imperial adventuring and the quest for technological advancement. Once these corrosive influences have been burnt away in the fires of catastrophe, and proper atonement made, the next stage of the cycle is a revivification of culture as an affirmation of the rightful inhabitants' proper relationship with the land they live on. This being done, the final stage in the anti-technological catastrophe cycle is the return of fertility which is the final signifier that the culture, the people, and the land are once again in a healthy equilibrium.

I start by looking at what is now very much a forgotten play: JB Priestley's *A Summer's Day Dream* (1949) as I believe it offers a nearly perfect example of these desires in a relatively short text that allows for clear and unequivocal exposition of some key issues mentioned above. I identify the themes of catastrophe as cleansing, and show how the idea of sacrifice and atonement is tied in with the idea of purification and the revivification of culture and society as part of a necessary completion of a cycle that acknowledges the organic nature of civilisations, whilst at the same time seeking to deny this same thing by the *deus ex machina* of the catastrophe as rebirth. These themes identified and explicated, I go on to show how they recur again and again in anti-technological literature, using another fictional exploration of a possible post-nuclear holocaust world, Pat Franks' 1959 novel *Alas, Babylon*. I also look at the example from the 1970s of Edmund Cooper's fantasy of catastrophe and the subsequent rebirth of upper-middle class British culture into an entirely depopulated world, *The Overman Culture* (1970).⁷⁸ I then choose to look at a much more recent example of catastrophe in anti-technological literature, James Howard Kunstler's *World Made by Hand* (2008). This will give a broadly representative look at the anxieties I want to discuss here, showing an essential continuity from 1949 to 2008. Kunstler is particularly useful and salient to my thesis here, because he has written non-fictional works propounding his theory of civilisation and collapse which offer interesting insights into the motivations and beliefs underlying his fiction. Most saliently for the purposes of this chapter's analysis, I believe his non-fiction work demonstrates explicitly the influence and evolution of the Spenglerian conception of history and civilisation and how this has been resurrected in recent years by reference to imperatives that reference ecology, but which are ultimately concerned more with cultural degeneration than ecological degradation.

JB Priestley's short play *A Summer's Day Dream*, first performed in 1949, is an early look at a post-atomic war scenario. Set in the south of England in the summer of 1975, it looks at how life in England might be a mere fifteen years or so after a nuclear war brings conventional life there to an

⁷⁸ Cooper's nod to HG Wells' creation of the Overman in the title of his work shows not just the continuing influence of Wells and other writers who explored anxieties about technology and degeneration, but the continuation, in sublimated form, of such worries well into the second half of the twentieth century and, I would argue, into the twenty first.

end.⁷⁹ Unlike later treatments, however, Priestley's post-nuclear holocaust England is a merry place where the ephemera of the modern world have been done away with and the (vastly-reduced) population has "plenty to eat, plenty to drink and live like kings" (120). In this post-atomic scenario, life has more or less returned to a feudal, agrarian system, and everyone seems much happier for it. Priestley's play further testifies to my contention that anti-technologism is not a reaction to either the threat of nuclear war or environmental disaster, but merely makes narrative use of them. In this early scenario, technological society has destroyed itself, showing that unnatural forms of society that deviate from the organic form are ultimately unsustainable. England has returned to a feudal, hierarchic society, and the inhabitants, in Priestley's play, do not want their new-found stability threatened. The play is set in what was the mansion of a noted industrialist, now a pleasingly weathered and dilapidated farmhouse; the industrialist is now a convert to the joys of the simple life. Forced to live without the material comforts of technological society and to return instead to a rural, hierarchical and patriarchal society, the inhabitants of Priestley's post-holocaust England awaken as if from a dream to discover a meaningfulness and sense of contentment that was previously lacking.

It is genuinely difficult for the modern reader not to read the play as a parody of the cosy catastrophe style of writing that Brian Aldiss identified in post-war British writing (*Billion Year Spree*). Everything is as it should be, and everyone is blissfully, amiably content in their newly imposed isolation. As the play opens, for example, the patriarch, Stephen Dawlish, and his loyal servant, Fred, are enjoying a pipe and a pint of beer when Dawlish's wife bustles in to inform them that "I'm baking that lovely piece of ham – and a big rabbit pie – and then there's plenty of . . ." (106). Everyone is thrilled to be working in the fields, or cleaning the house, and there are always lashings of beer and cake after tea. This is no post-Hiroshima horror of radiation sickness and distraught

⁷⁹ As the play is a short one, published without line numbers I refer to page numbers in the edition indicated.

survivors struggling through the aftermath, but instead a release from a sick and artificial world and a return to the traditional, hierarchical world.

This bucolic bliss is threatened, though, by the arrival of three foreigners, representatives of industrial corporations intending to mine the white chalk of the rolling English hills to make synthetic substances for industrial use (an obvious and clumsy piece of symbolism, even for Priestley). These three foreigners, an American, a Russian, and an Indian (“a mighty nice, clever young fellow, though Asiatic of course”) are clearly types – caricatures of their respective cultures – and represent not only the still industrialised world, but at a deeper level the problem of colonial guilt and the threat of reverse colonisation (112). When the American outlines his plans to “dump five to ten thousand Chinese on these hills” to mine the chalk, and build “bungalows . . . cafes, dance halls, T-V-Palaces” he is quite obviously proposing the colonisation and exploitation of what is now a simple, agrarian society (129). The problem (and Priestley is quite open in his delineation of it) is how can the inhabitants of a post-colonial power reasonably complain about being colonised? As Heimer, the American, remarks, as the debate gets ever more heated: “You’ve got something here the whole world needs, so we’re going to make use of it. Nothing new about that. You British used to do it all over the world”. Chris Dawlish, the grandson of the patriarch, launches an impassioned response to this accusation:

“I’m not old, Mr. Heimer. But I know what my grandfather means, and I feel as he does. You don’t understand. This isn’t just a piece of land, just something to pull a living out of. It’s our home. It’s part of us. We love it. To us, it’s just as if you proposed to excavate our bones and nerves and tap our lifeblood, and then mash them all up with chemicals to make your synthetic muck”. (150)

This speech not only shows the survival of the old tropes of blood and soil in the immediate post-war years, but also the rejection of the imperialist as a destroyer who threatens stability with cosmopolitanism in the name of progress. Priestley returns to this theme throughout the play in a forthright and unapologetic manner. The ancestral connection to the soil is the tether that binds the people to the land, and the land to the people. Modern technology alienated the inhabitants to the primacy of the relationship between culture and agriculture for a time, but they have atoned for that in the most suitable way – with blood - and now the mystical relationship is reaffirmed, deeper than ever.

Ultimately it is this connection to the soil and to the ancient culture of the land that saves them from the threatened re-industrialisation and the reverse colonisation that would accompany it. In what is, it has to be said, a rather jejune denouement to the play, the foreigners decide that the cultural and ancestral connection the inhabitants have to the soil is too sacred to be exploited for mere profit and they depart, leaving the natives to their rural idyll. The conclusion the audience is invited to draw from the play as a whole is that it is the enforced return to the land that has redeemed Dawlish the industrialist and by extension all the other inhabitants. Conversely, it is their subsequent care and the (re)connection they forge with the land that saves it from exploitation. This theme speaks to the organicist conception of civilisation which underpins the ideas the play explores. There is continual reference to an ancient, semi-mythic racial past that underpins the sense of rejuvenation that is the dominant tone of the play. There is a palpable sense throughout that the apocalypse was a blessing in disguise, purging and burning away the gross and synthetic materialist elements of society and culture, and clearing the ground for the green shoots of an ancient culture to once more bud and grow again. The previously materialistic, alienated and sick inhabitants of England discover, following the enforced reconnection to the land brought by nuclear war, discover an innate sense of Englishness that is rekindled by reconnection with the soil and local culture, one that affirms ancient racial ties to the land that reach back to the Celts. There is an eerie

and quite ostentatious sense of a recently invoked and reawakened *genius locus* here, an animating spirit that makes those who dwell there feel as though “we men and women are part of a great procession of beings, many of them infinitely stronger and wiser and more beautiful than we are” (185). Indeed, it would be hard to find a clearer example of Monaco’s definition of the reactionary consciousness in literature.

All of this affirms a nativist ideal of the validity and essentiality of the ties between people, food, and land. In the course of an argument over whether materialist science is a boon for mankind or a pernicious threat, the Indian scientist, Dr Bahru, is forced to admit that he too feels this strange animating spirit here, though he does not feel the same thing back in the East. Margaret’s response stakes out a racial and spiritual claim to the land, affirming a connection with far distant ancestors whose presence was suppressed by the babble of voices and influences when science, technology and industry ruled the land, but who have now returned: “The Celts have never died. They were only silent for a little time while the smoke was thick over the cities. And now it has cleared again” (166).

Catastrophe, then, brings not the ruin and anarchy it might rationally be expected to bring, but rather a rightful return to a previous way of life that was simpler, more self-contained, and – crucially – deeply rooted. Perhaps it would be more precise and more useful to say that it brings a revivification of the native society and its culture. Frequent mention is made in the play of the inhabitants devising and enjoying their own entertainment, all of which is, of course, pleasingly traditional and local. Following a day’s satisfying and rewarding labour in the fields, the inhabitants enjoy nothing more than folk dancing, playing the fiddle, performing plays, and reciting poetry. These recreations are very much part of their relationship with the land and provide profound meaning for the inhabitants, a meaning which the siren cacophony of modern life had alienated them from. The exchange between Dawlish and his granddaughter gives a flavour of the way in which this return to tradition regenerates the culture and infuses it with meaning: Rosalie, the

granddaughter, tells Dawlish that she was going to give a poetry recital later that evening, but now that the foreigners will be arriving, she might not:

ROSALIE: "Perhaps they don't like poetry. They're not English"

STEPHEN: "Well, we can see my dear. There was a time when I didn't care for it".

ROSALIE: (*Smiling.*) "What was wrong with you?"

STEPHEN: "I think I was ill. Most of us were. But I didn't know it". (110)

The enjoyment of poetry is seen as characteristically English, and a sign of a healthy, right-thinking society. Modern entertainments such as TV are seen as foreign and enslaving, stultifying and confusing the people, making them sick and alienating them from their own culture and land. As Dawlish observes a little later on, life before global nuclear war was hectic, unfulfilling, and left little time for reflection or contemplation. "Then came – catastrophe and ruin – and since then," he amiably remarks, "I've been able to stay here all the time – and eat well, sleep well, enjoy my surroundings and have plenty of time to think" (117). The prospect of redevelopment and reindustrialisation, complete with all the bungalows, cafes, TVs, and newspapers fills them with horror. Of course, as Dawlish admits, industrialisation starts with the desire to make life easier and more pleasant for most people, but "it all ends . . . in a hopeless muddle of values" (145).

To be fair to Priestley, it would not be reasonable to read the play entirely as though it were some kind of simplistic propaganda for traditional English values written without any understanding of recent history. As noted, Priestley seems almost anxious to identify some of the ethical dilemmas raised by the reversal the play explores. In the foreword to the published text of the play he records that he took "a great deal of time and trouble" over this short play "which was re-written several times". It is, Priestley comments, a type of "fantastic comedy, in which, however, certain values come up for discussion . . . [and] is not, as some reviewers appeared to think, a political-economic

manifesto" (99). The foreigners, as I commented on earlier, are types, but still not entirely without nuance, and are not unsympathetically portrayed. It is rather the "muddle of values" that science and technology had brought about to which Priestley seems to be pointing. Significantly, as is often the case with anti-technologism, technology is not repudiated entirely, but all technologies which might lead to the dissemination of external ideas, cultures, or ideologies are repudiated. Thus, there is electricity for light which is generated by a wind turbine, but no newspapers beyond a hand-printed local village circular, and no TV, radio, or cinema. Such things, it is understood, were diluting the cultural and native spirit of the country, and Priestley invites his audience to consider whether a return to what they might see as a primitive society, or at least, the adopting of certain of their values, might not in fact revitalise their own society:

STEPHEN: "We don't look after machines all day to pay for other machines to entertain us half the night. We find we can do without a lot of things that were beginning to make slaves of us".

HEIMER: "It sounds *okay*, but they could talk like that on the Congo".

STEPHEN: "I've never been on the Congo, but probably they had some good sensible ideas about life there".

HEIMER: "Maybe, but however you look at it – it's a narrow life".

STEPHEN: "Perhaps life is best when it's narrow – but deep and high. The spirit expands upwards, not sideways". (142. Emphasis in original)

The motif of direction, of expansion, here is significant because it conceptualises the technological, industrial way of life in Spenglerian terms in which culture is conceptualised as the expression of the collective soul of a people, and therefore narrow and deep. Civilization – the outwards expression of culture – expands across the face of the earth, and is therefore conceptualised as wide and shallow. As Spengler puts it “the energy of culture-man is directed inwards, that of civilization-man outwards” (28)⁸⁰. The agrarian life, then, is identified with genuine culture, that is to say native culture which is organic. It comes from within the local community and is shaped by, and related to the local environment (compare with Spengler’s conceptualisation of environment shaping race, as noted in the chapter on Tolkien). In this conception, technological culture does not come from within, but emanates, in imperialist fashion, radially from a centre. When Irina, the scientist from the communist Soviet Union asks Fred, the faithful bailiff of Dawlish’s estate, “is cultural life organized from a centre?” he replies “No. We don’t have anything organized from centres” (137). The permeation of Spenglerian tropes is further demonstrated in the connections made between technology and imperialism, again in a similar way to that which I explored in my chapter on Tolkien: “just as the armies of mad conquerors blindly marched, so, blindly and with furious mad energy, you tear down, lay waste, build, set machines in motion” (145). The outward, externalising drive of imperialistic ‘civilisation man’ is repudiated and refuge is sought in isolation and a desire for self-containment.

Typically in anti-technological literature, following this sweeping away and purging of what had become a dissipated and degenerate civilization, there is a period of atonement, where the land is tended with the blood and sweat of the rightful inhabitants, before finally fertility returns. Margaret Dawlish, matriarch of the family, informs the foreigners more than once that “You left us

⁸⁰ This is a conception which permeates the work, but see in particular the section on “Cultures as Organisms” in *The Decline of the West* where Spengler talks of culture standing in an almost “mythical relation to the Extended, the space in which and through which it strives to actualize itself” (74). Culture, as soul, is perceived as having depth, civilization as extension. It is worth noting here that under Spengler’s conception, only culture can “grow” in a real, organic sense. Civilizations do not grow, but expand. This ties in here, and in other chapters, with the idea of real, organic growth versus artificial, synthetic growth – or to put it in Spenglerian terminology, expansion.

nothing but the bare thorn and our bleeding hands; but now our hands are healed and the thorn is beginning to flower” (126). At the end of the play, with the threat of foreign colonisation and development seen off, the “local news” is once again as it should be: “hay looking good – corn harvest promising – one or two nice girls getting married – nobody down with ulcers or delirium tremens” (188). Just as Tolkien ended *Rings* with the restoration of fertility following the removal of technology from the Shire, so, towards the end of *A Summer’s Day Dream* there is the restoration of fertility now that technology has wrought its own destruction and the people have returned to a proper, hierarchical and rural way of life. In both texts, as in other anti-technological works, the reappearance of fertility marks the restoration of the natural order, the return to a putatively proper way of life.

The play closes with a mystical, but unequivocal, reaffirmation of a vitalistic culture based on connection to the soil:

MARGARET: “We are nourished by this planet’s clay and the flame that comes from beyond the stars”.

STEPHEN: “And I have lived long enough to understand at last that what is neither clay nor flame, neither Earth nor Spirit, can only leave us famished and frustrated. (*He pauses.*) Send down your roots and lift your faces to the sun and stars”. (191)

The themes of the play – a tired and degenerate cosmopolitan culture being purged by catastrophe; atonement and a renewed claim to the land; and finally the return of fertility – are common tropes in anti-technological treatments of catastrophe. However, whilst the overall themes are frequently held in common, the representation of them varies and is sometimes sublimated. Though the contours of these ideas can often be discerned, there are often (as I will discuss in the

course of this chapter) other overlaying concerns and themes that obscure them. Pat Frank's 1959 post-nuclear holocaust classic, *Alas Babylon*, is a good example of this. Frank's primary concern in the novel is to alert people to how easily a catastrophic nuclear war could erupt, and the totality of the consequential aftermath at time when jingoistic triumphalism was still prevalent. But underlying the novel's depiction of the travails and triumphs of post-atomic life in the small town of Fort Repose, the same themes can be detected. Retired Navy Admiral Sam Hazard provides a fairly transparent outlet for the authorial voice in the novel with his scholar's detachment and expansive view of history and current affairs. The ultimate cause for the enforced return to the Neolithic age can be found, he explains, not in Pentagon records or the White House, but in Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

There are odd similarities between the end of the Pax Romana and the end of the Pax Americana which inherited Pax Britannica. For instance, the prices paid for high office. When it became common to spend a million dollars to elect senators from moderately populous states, I think that should have been a warning to us. For instance, free pap for the masses. Bread and circuses. Roman spectacles and our spectacles. Largesse from the conquering proconsuls and television giveaways from the successful lipstick king. To understand the present you must know the past. (236)

Once again, the decadence and degeneration of empire are burned away by catastrophe and, following suitable (if involuntary) sacrifice, a revival of local cultural life occurs, signalling the beginning of the new cycle. Before the destruction of the cities people had sat there "painlessly absorbing visual pabulum on television" and mindlessly imbibed other mass distractions. But now "all this was ended. All entertainment, all amusements, all escape, all information again centered in the library" (189). It is the library that provides the local knowledge that enables life to resume, knowledge of the land, such as where salt could be found, that reintroduces the necessary

relationships and period of atonement that must come. The directionality is altered, and instead of looking outwards, beyond the local community, people once more look inwards and affirm local ties. The anomie of modern materialism is swept away, and with re-emergence of authority, of hierarchy, comes stability and meaning.

Similarly in Edward Cooper's cult classic *The Overman Culture*, concerns over the renewal and revivification of culture are explored. Cooper's novel is set ten thousand years into the future after a series of global wars have wiped out the human race. The only survivors are a small group of children, unaware of the past, and artificially reared and brought up by androids in a make-believe world. Surrounded by robots that almost perfectly resemble humans, and inhabiting a recreation of London during the blitz, the children grow up amidst a strange pastiche of British culture: Winston Churchill and Queen Victoria stroll through the park arm in arm, whilst jet fighters and laser beams battle Zeppelins overhead. The great and the good of a thousand years of British history walk among the children; they are their teachers, classmates, and friends; they converse with them whilst out walking or cycling around the famous landmarks and monuments of London. The hero of the story, Michael Faraday, begins to suspect that all is not as it appears in this world, and sets out to uncover the truth. Eventually he and his friends discover the artificial nature of their world and rebel against it, horrified to discover that the adults they had thought of as parents, relatives and teachers were in fact mere automata, not people.

This act of rebellion, the smashing of the machines that guarded them and kept them safe triggers a pre-programmed response. Having reached a level of maturity sufficient to indicate that they are capable of their own decisions, they are taken to the central control room where they are told, by a recreation of William Shakespeare, that the world they inhabit is a synthesis of a culture long since vanished, a recreation designed to capture and transmit the concentrated high points of their culture from the morass of relativism and degeneracy from which it had sunk to a distant

future where it would be the sole surviving culture in an uninhabited world. The central irony of *The Overman Culture*, then, is that the technology which had led to the destruction of a degenerate society is utilised one last time in order to ensure that white, Anglo-Saxon culture survives Armageddon and that only when the children reject the technology that supposedly keeps them safe and comfortable will they be truly free and ready to begin "the overman culture".

In a chamber designed to recreate exactly the great reading room of the British Library, the figure of William Shakespeare admits that the children do not, in fact, inhabit the real London, but rather a recreation of it on an island ". . . that was once called Tasmania. You are the only human beings on the entire planet, and you were especially developed for this project. You are the Overman culture" (173). The entire vision, the children are informed, was the project of Dr Julius Overman, who foresaw the wars and catastrophes that would inevitably follow from the breakdown in order and morality in the modern, technological world, and wanted to seed a "second human race" with what he believed was the right genetic and cultural heritage (166). A plaque records Overman's vision which demonstrates again how themes of destruction and hoped-for revival link not to scientifically determinable causes (such as pollution or species extinction) but rather are tied to a moral and cultural collapse:

I was born in the year 1977 in London, England, to which corrupt and decadent country I shall not return until time and the Will of God have wrought great and cleansing changes. The world is evil and is bent upon a course of great destruction . . . But shall mankind be utterly destroyed because of the evil that exists today? . . . I have caused this chamber to be built in a small and yet unspoiled land far from my natural home. I have gathered genetic material on the advice of scientific men of good will, and I have caused it to be preserved here. (173-4)

In keeping with the anti-technologist desire for cultural and even ethnic purity, the robot informs the children that "the sperm and ova he [Julius Overman] had preserved were from British donors of Caucasian stock" (185). The second human race will thus be one whose genetic make-up and cultural heritage is absolutely uniform, solving at a stroke all the tiresome problems of ethnic and cultural diversity, interchange, and multiculturalism which plagued the machine age. "Cleansing changes" have indeed been wrought not just on England, but on the whole world. There are no other oppressed races, chafing at the yoke, no insidious foreign cultures permeating and corrupting Western society and no native inhabitants of Tasmania or elsewhere to upset the smooth institution of the revived culture.

In this version of the Spenglerian organic cycle, the stages are writ large, and the return of fertility that follows the end of the old cycle and the beginning of the new is absolutely all-encompassing in scope. This time, there will be no threat extant to the integrity of the new race and culture for a very, very long time. The machines have obligingly spent the last ten thousand years helping to restore and preserve "the ecological balance of the planet" as well as "as much as possible of the literature, achievements and history of man" so that the world they re-inhabit will be as near perfect as possible; the balance will be completely restored so that fertility may return (184). Fittingly, the namesakes of the British scientist and British author, Michael Faraday, and his partner, Emily Bronte, enact the final stage of this cycle - the revivification of culture and the return of fertility – in a speech located (with heavy symbolism) on top of a hill overlooking a vista of virgin land and sea, the artificial city in which they were raised behind them. As the patriarch of the new human race, Michael lays out his vision of a unified world at peace with itself:

Mankind has a second chance. We are the waymakers, the advance guard of a new humanity. The way we live, the actions we take, will decide whether intercontinental

ballistic missiles or space ships lift off Earth a thousand years from now. We have to create a world in which there are no nations but only one people. (189)

Emily answers his speech with appropriate ingenuousness, confirming her role as mother of the race: "‘I want to have your children.’ said Emily, hardly understanding what she meant. ‘I want to have many of your children’" (189). This rousing speech about creating a world in which there are no nations and only one people conveniently overlooks the fact that this is already de facto the case – there are now no nations, no different cultures or races, but "only one people". In Cooper's apocalypse, catastrophe brings the ultimate realisation of the Spenglerian cycle. There is now, through no fault of the survivors, no degenerate culture, no dangerous influences, no other threatening races competing for resources, but one culture, and one people now free to repopulate the planet. As with Priestley's play, catastrophe – though superficially portrayed as being viewed with regret - is surreptitiously viewed as a golden opportunity to resolve many of the besetting complications of the technological age. Importantly, the realisation of this re-setting *through* catastrophe absolves the survivors of any guilt or complicity regarding the wiping out of foreign cultures and races. There are no troubling images of emaciated figures scratching at the window of Western society, no upsetting stories on the evening news. The survivors are presented with a world in which such unpleasant realities have been almost magically erased, with the added bonus that their experience of catastrophe has atoned for any lingering sins of their ancestors.

Cooper's novel illustrates once again the essential distinction at the heart of anti-technologism: technology is not necessarily rejected in its entirety, but the more problematic outcomes that stem from it have to be worked out and resolved first.⁸¹ The perceived corrosive

⁸¹ A theme Cooper explores in more detail in his novel, *The Cloud Walker* (1973) in which a future England has rejected technology entirely and returned to a medieval, feudal existence. The hero of the novel is fascinated by legends that humanity once flew through the air, a fascination which almost results in him being burnt as a witch. It is only the threatened invasion of England by ruthless foreigners that saves him, demonstrating at the same time that some level of technology is necessary to safeguard national sovereignty.

effect of technology on social conformity and moral fibre that technology has to be decisively resolved. There is a clear separation between on the one hand technology as a tool, carefully administered and controlled by responsible people, removed from everyday life, and on the other hand technology that saturates society and is open to all, which leads to cheap diversions and ease, sloth, and dissipation. In anti-technologism this distinction is presented as a choice between technology as a servant and technology as a master. In *The Overman Culture*, for example, it takes the format of a perennial riddle, the "Overman legend", for the children to solve: "The problem is this. Shall men control machines or shall machines control men?" (150). However, a strong case could be made that the real distinction being argued for in anti-technological literature is not between technology as a servant or master, but rather between technology that is exclusive and the preserve of a sober and responsible few, and technology that is accessible and open to all, radically democratic and employable by anyone, an aspect of technology and reaction against it noted by Moorcock (1988). Thus, anti-technological literature seems to propound a vision of technology that is hermetic, with very clear divisions between technology and society, and especially technology and culture. Faraday solves this problem in the novel by rejecting the machine's offer to help artificially inseminate and raise a second generation of children, declaring that "it can help us to build farms, houses, laboratories. But it must not create another culture - another generation" (189-90). This time, not only must there be absolute, total unity and purity of culture, but the distinction between a saturating technology and a carefully managed technology must be made from the very beginning. Technology, in its place, has an important role to play in this "Overman Culture" but the demotic and democratic aspects of it must be controlled or curtailed.

Cooper's fantasy of catastrophe as cleansing, washing away utterly a corrupt and decadent culture is an extreme example that serves as a useful case study that highlights key aspects which I am interested in exploring in this chapter, as well as more generally in this thesis. *The Overman Culture* presents a version of the anti-technological narrative that is simplistic and one that is

extrapolated to its furthest limits, but in doing so it throws into relief certain aspects of anti-technologism's sublimated yearning, not necessarily for catastrophe itself, but for a decisive event or break that would allow resetting and purifying the culture without guilt. The novel achieves this level of decisiveness, this totality of separation, by virtue of the sheer passage of time between the catastrophe that brings about the end of the effete culture and the rebirth of the new. It allows for the previous culture to serve solely as a backdrop, more or a less a caricature of itself, something winked at in Cooper's novel, which has Queen Victoria driving her hover car around the grounds of Buckingham Palace, or strolling arm in arm with Winston Churchill through Hyde Park. The cultural high points, the great men and women, and great achievements are backlit to throw fantastic shadows on this distant future, their purpose to inculcate a sense not just of a great and proud heritage, but also of great expectation for the new and utterly unified human race and culture. Faraday's launching speech, situated with Nietzschean symbolism on the highest hill in the vicinity, acknowledges this expectation, laying out a thousand-year vision for the new race which has all the room and resources it could wish for. With no competing cultures or races to threaten it, the ultra-British, ultra-white culture that is propagated in the unspoilt environs of Tasmania is expected to flourish and progress without deviation towards a glorious future.

The same yearning for simplicity, and isolation from alien cultures and influences can be seen in James Howard Kunstler's *World Made by Hand* (2008), a story of America "sometime in the not-distant future" after the crystallisation of what Kunstler refers to as the long emergency: declining levels of oil and other sources of energy that will have seismic effects on the modern world, effectively forcing a return to a simpler, more regional way of life (inside jacket). From the perspective of Robert Earle, a former software executive turned carpenter, the novel explores many of the ideas Kunstler has about a reborn America following the collapse of a modern world that has

become over-reliant on complex technology.⁸² Described on the inside fly-leaf as depicting “a surprisingly lyrical, tender, and hopeful new America struggling to be born” and showing that the future “is not necessarily something to fear”, the novel presents a picture of a community emerging from the collapse of the modern world, returning to its roots, and finding a new sense of identity and purpose by returning a way of living that is consonant with the natural order.

As I’ve spent significant time so far in this chapter explicating and exploring the structural elements of catastrophe in the anti-technological novel, I want to use my discussion of Kunstler’s novel to look at how the anti-technological use of catastrophe as a “reset button” for civilization expresses an intensely conservative mood that yearns for simplification in the face of what is perceived to be a dangerously over-complex modern world, and does so whilst professing what is ostensibly a progressive, ecologically aware agenda (this crossover, or confusion, between ostensible progressivism and underlying reactionary politics is, as I observed in the introduction to this thesis, a notable aspect of anti-technologism). My intention in this section is to show how Kunstler’s novel puts forward a vision of a new world which is essentially a return to a much older one as way of illustrating how anti-technological literature uses catastrophe as a means of avoiding uncomfortable or unpleasant issues that arise from its desire for a return to a society based on what it sees as the natural order. This return to the natural order is portrayed as both necessary and proper once the expansive force of technology has been seen to have failed. To resume and expand on a metaphor from previous chapters, in this vision, catastrophe is the bursting of the inflationary bubble of technology and the “unnatural” ways of life it sustained, and the reassertion of eternal and undeniable societal norms. It is therefore always viewed in anti-technological literature as a

⁸² Kunstler’s basic premise, both in this work of fiction and in his non-fictional work, is that modern technology and modern civilization require vast amounts of energy which in turn depend on the infinite supply of a finite and steadily declining fuel source (oil, gas, coal, and so on). It is his contention that renewable energy cannot hope to supply anything like the amount of energy required to keep modern civilization running in anything resembling its current state. The long emergency he speaks of is not so much one thing as a convergence of problems with the technological world and its unsustainability which coalesce to cause it to collapse from within. Once again, though, as my analysis here shows, though the immediate references are environmental, Kunstler’s real animus seems to be against materialism and cultural decline.

vindication, the point of the Spenglerian cycle at which “the whole pyramid of cultural man vanishes” (Spengler 251).

In *World Made by Hand*, then, we see that old patterns are resumed as though they are the only correct and authentic way of life. This return proves the eternal verity of organic form, only briefly masked by the glossy chaos of the technological world. For example, a town hall meeting is described:

All the trustees were men, no women and no plain laborers. As the world changed, we reverted to social distinctions we'd thought were obsolete. The egalitarian pretenses of the high-octane decades had dissolved and nobody even debated it anymore, including the women of our town. A plain majority of the townspeople were laborers now, whatever in life they had been before. Nobody called them peasants, but in effect that's what they'd become. That's just the way things were.

(101)

As this extract shows, the return to conservatism and a clearly delineated hierarchy is depicted as both necessary and more or less right or proper. The idea of equality promulgated in the technological era was a “pretence”. Women have returned to their previous purely domestic role and are no longer treated as equals in the workplace. The “peasants” are apparently not unhappy with their lot – indeed, the happiest and best fed of all are those who live in the demesne of a powerful landowner who runs his estate on overtly feudal lines. The loss of technology means a return to manual labour, and a division of labour between peasants and administrators, men and women. Once again, the professed ideal of an anti-capitalist guild socialism apparently necessitates a reversion to feudality and patriarchy.

Just as the loss of technology means a return to distinctions of class and gender in Kunstler's world, so it also means the recognition of the need for separation of race and culture. For reasons not fully explained, the decline in availability of the means to power a technological society leads to a breakdown in harmony between the different races and cultures, both on a regional and global level. The act that "tank[s] the whole U.S. economy" and precipitates a return to regionalism effectively ending the technological way of life is a bomb going off in Los Angeles, an "act of jihad [that] was extraordinarily successful" in ending the globalisation that was an integral aspect of the technological lifestyle (23). An "especially vicious" strain of "Mexican flu" which wipes out a large proportion of the population also leads to people withdrawing from trade with others outside their own communities (7). On a national and regional level there are also repeated pointed references to "trouble between the races", something which preoccupies Kunstler in his non-fiction work as well (8). As society returns to a more localised, agrarian economy, it is understood that the "pretenses" of the technological world, such as a successful multicultural society are unravelled. Because of their racial and cultural homogeneity (being almost entirely white, Anglo-Saxon) Union Grove and Washington County have been spared such inter-ethnic violence. When Earle meets a member of a quasi-Amish Christian sect who tells him they are fleeing "race trouble" in the more populous areas, the brother notes approvingly that "I haven't seen any black folks or Spanish in Union Grove" and tentatively asks him: "You got any sir?" (148-9). Earle reassures him that they had very few non-white families before the catastrophe and those few have already left, though it is left unclear whether this is voluntarily or they have been driven out: "There was a fellow named Archie Basiltree who worked in the Aubuchon hardware store when we first came. The store is gone and so is Archie" (149). In Kunstler's vision of an America reborn along its previous colonialist, agrarian lines there will apparently be a clear division between the races and cultures just as there will be a clear division – again, supposedly of necessity – between the roles of men and women, and labourers and landowners. The egalitarianism of modern civilization will be shown to have been a brief chimera.

In a recent interview promoting his latest book on the problems of the technological age, *Too Much Magic: Wishful Thinking, Technology, and the Fate of the Nation* (2012), Kunstler discusses what he sees as the unavoidable truth that the different races just can't get along, a truth briefly escaped because of the relative ease and abundance of modern society. Pressed by the interviewer on why he thinks that people will default to racial or cultural divisions in the event of the modern technological world collapsing, Kunstler doesn't explain why he thinks society will divide along these lines, instead choosing to launch an attack on what he sees as the delusion that multiculturalism in America has been a success:

I think we *should* be concerned about the ethnic situation in the USA. My own, um, "group of people" shall we say, you know, progressive centrists and the so-called liberals and democrats, have been deluding ourselves for years that we're living in a successfully multi-cultural society. And there are elements of it that I think have been successful, but it's hardly nirvana and there are huge populations of aggrieved people in this country. They just haven't acted out. Much. At least, for the last twenty years.
(Staggs)

Kunstler's rejection of multiculturalism seems to be based on a belief that people's natural instinct is to identify along racial and cultural lines, and that sustainable, successful societies require homogeneity, as TS Eliot argued in *After Strange Gods*, as I noted in my introduction. This ideal has become so accepted and pervasive that it is noticeable how even the more nuanced anti-technological treatments of catastrophe such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984) deal in essentially the same ideas. In Robinson's story, the idealisation of homogeneity and simplicity is not foregrounded to anything like the same extent as Kunstler's, but the separation along cultural and racial lines, and the sense of the catastrophe as being the result of being "so far from the earth that we couldn't figure out how to live off it" are undeniable (295).

The example of *The Wild Shore* shows, I believe, how the tropes of anti-technologism diffuse into the wider literary and intellectual world. I see Robinson's questioning of technology as arising from a concern over the ecological and psychological impacts of technology, rather than from a reaction against change. Even so, there are still some aspects of anti-technologist ideology in his writing, such as the way in which the simpler life portrayed in *The Wild Shore* is viewed as being a resetting or return to a way of life that is somehow more authentic and natural than modern society. There is still a sense in the novel that humanity in the modern world was degenerating, and lacked meaning and direction. In his endnotes to a collection of anti-technological short stories which he edited, *Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias* (1994), Robinson comments that "I think the stories reveal everywhere their writers' belief that the societies they depict are preferable to the boxed existences of modern urban life – preferable because of their engagement with the world, and because of the tremendous infusion of meaning back into the lives of their characters – in part because of the return of the hardship and danger which seems so un-utopian to us," a stance to which he is clearly sympathetic (346).⁸³ The short stories selected for the volume all depict "future primitive" worlds that explore a return to a more primitive lifestyle following the collapse of the technological world. Whilst I want to remain focussed on Kunstler's novel here, and not diverge into a discussion of Robinson's work, I think it illustrates again how collapse and catastrophe are perceived as offering a return to simplicity and self-sufficiency which implies cultural isolation whether prescribed or de facto. Not all treatments of the theme are as forthright as Kunstler's, but there is a broad theme of revitalisation through simplification in them that is striking. I believe that this demonstrates the sublimated worries about degeneration (cultural, moral, and physical) which underlie anti-technologism and show that the ideals and themes it propounds have diffused into more general literature and popular culture.

⁸³ Note how such a view ties "meaning" to a rejection of progress and a rather Nietzschean view that meaning involves a rejection of materialism and an acceptance – even an embracing – of hardship and danger.

The concern over degeneration in anti-technological treatments of catastrophe is very clear in Kunstler's non-fictional works such as *Home from Nowhere* (1998) where he rails against the commercial "trashiness" of modern America, which he argues is leading to a downwards spiral of degeneracy. The pursuit of such dissipations such as watching television, shopping, microwaved snack foods, and kinky sex are, he claims, leading to the population degenerating physically, mentally, and culturally into a nation of "overfed clowns, crybabies, slackers, deadbeats, sadists, cads, whores, and crooks" to such a degree that it "call[s] into question the value of technological progress itself" (82). The technological world, Kunstler charges, has led to a debased culture of instant gratification that is reflected in the ugliness of our physical surroundings which "seem designed to enable us to dwell in a condition of ever-diminished humanity". Such sloth, indulgence, and degeneracy, he warns, invite catastrophe because they are contrary to the natural order:

Why this should be so has something to do, I suppose, with the self-correcting mechanisms of the teleologic [*sic*] process that we call nature, or the *ever-unfolding universe*, which seeks at many levels to maintain a course towards evermore self-aware intelligence, or grace, and in so doing tends to punish craven stupidity of the kind evinced by American culture in the late twentieth century. In other words, we're getting what we deserve. (81-2. Emphasis in original)

Once again at the bottom of anti-technologism, beneath all the narratives about declining energy supplies or environmental degradation, there lies an argument (if we can call it that) over the preservation of culture that collapses into moralism and charges of degeneracy and depravity. It is notable that the anti-technologist works dealing with catastrophe all depict life in modern civilization as confused and confusing, a welter of different voices and influences, with the implicit suggestion that these are foreign influences drowning out the native "voice". Thus in *Summer's Day Dream* Margaret speaks of the babble of modern life drowning out the sound of the ancient Celts

who are the true ancestors and inhabitants of the land. In *Alas, Babylon* it is the TV corroding the identity of the people who are unified after catastrophe in and by the town library, repository of local knowledge. In *World Made by Hand* the silencing of the TV and radio enable people to hear the sounds of their land once more and “follow the natural cycles” (37). Thematic polarities are set up between simplicity and righteousness at one end of the spectrum, and complexity and decay at the other. Running parallel with this, and integral to it, is a polarisation between bewildering complexity and foreign influences, and simplicity and homespun values. Such thematic polarisations mirror a conception of catastrophe as a chain of events that can be directly traced back to the decadence of the modern world. The proximate causes of collapse in *World Made by Hand* all speak to a weakened and diluted culture in its final days, under siege from within and without: jihad-inspired bomb attacks in the cities, “Mexican flu” and “race trouble”. These proximate causes are themselves the effects of declining oil production (leading to tensions between America and the oil-producing countries of the Middle East) and climate change (warming leads to the spread of virulent new diseases from warmer, poorer countries such as Mexico). However, declining oil production and climate change are themselves the result of a civilisation addicted to the ease and abundance of technology. Hence the ultimate cause of catastrophe, when the chain is followed all the way back, is seen to be the decadence of Western society. Technology and imperialism are thus revealed to be two symptoms of the same disease, and therefore the “crumbling of society’s touchstones” is ultimately of one piece with “the wrath of the earth’s weather” caused by “our gleeful avarice” (64).

Catastrophe, then, becomes a nodal point between the decayed and degenerate culture and the reborn and revitalised one. As the root of decay was the ease brought by technological imperialism, with its concomitant reflux of foreign influences, the re-born culture must necessarily reject all external influences along with all useless luxuries and diversions. Catastrophe is both an undeniable indictment on the degeneracy of the previous society and the birth point of the new, purified society. Thus it holds a particular fascination for anti-technologism because it marks both an

end point and new beginning in the Spenglerian cycle of decay and rebirth. It is therefore regarded ambiguously in anti-technological literature as it is feared in the immediate sense but longed for as well for what it promises; its approach is prophesied and decried as a judgement from nature on a degenerate society and falling standards, but longed for as it heralds the death of a decayed civilisation and the rebirth of culture.

Without wishing to cast aspersions on the authors themselves, or to presume any connection with their personal political beliefs, it must be noted that this holds many similarities, thematically, with the fascist conception of decadence and renaissance in society, what Cyprian Blamires terms “the paradoxical mood of ‘palingenetic’ cultural pessimism” (168). This form of cultural pessimism, according to Blamires, came out of widespread concern amongst intellectuals at the close of the nineteenth century that the enormous gains in science, technology, and medicine came at the cost of morals, spiritual values and a sense of direction that ultimately undermined society to the point of collapse. One response to this was absolute pessimism – the belief that Western society would continue to weaken internally until finally conquered by more primitive (and therefore more vital) outsiders. The second response, which he identifies as palingenetic cultural pessimism, held out some hope in the form of a cleansing catastrophe which enabled Western society to return to its roots and reaffirm its vitality. In this view,

The current crisis presaged a new phase of civilisation based on a revitalizing vision of reality that would enable morality and the social order to be regenerated, a presentiment that induced the paradoxical mood of ‘palingenetic’ cultural pessimism - that is, pessimism about the viability of the present combined with an unshakeable belief in an immanent transformation and rebirth. This second response to decadence has an affinity with the many pre-modern cosmological myths that conceive historical time to be not linear but cyclic, passing from a golden age to an

age of depravity and back to a new creation, often after a major cataclysm has wiped out a world become dissolute. (168)

As Blamares goes on to observe, before World War Two decadence was normally signified by materialism, cosmopolitanism and aesthetic modernism. Since then, however, the indicators of decadence for the fascist or proto-fascist palingenetic outlook have changed and “since 1945 further signs for fascists of the encroaching decadence are the rise of multiculturalism, globalization, consumerism, the Americanization of society, and the looming ecological crisis” (168). All these features, as I have sought to make clear in the course of this chapter, are recurrent motifs in the anti-technological imagining of catastrophe. Anti-technologist authors, such as Kunstler, seem to return to these themes and link them in with a general sense of confusion and decline, one which catastrophe mercifully wipes away. The worlds depicted in the novels I have examined in this chapter are above all worlds in which one common culture is unquestionably prevalent and there are no tiresome arguments about right and wrong. It is also, quite clearly, a world which is both new and at the same time a return. It resembles Victorian agrarianism far more than any modern day world, both in substance and politics, and in doing so recaptures the sense of spiritual purpose and clarity of societal vision.

The anti-technological view of catastrophe, then, can be seen as concurrent with Blamare’s theory of the fascist palingenetic view of history, in that it utilises catastrophe as a nodal point which performs the twin roles of drawing the curtain on a decayed culture whilst raising the curtain on a simplified and revived culture. I want to explore the thematic similarities between anti-technologism and fascism, particularly with regards to the idea of “creative destruction”. Just as fascism glorified the violence and sacrifice of war as a cleansing prelude to a purified culture and society, so I believe anti-technologism draws on the same themes. I believe this is an aspect of anti-technologism’s view of materialism’s degenerative effect on society, as I alluded to in my

introduction. Thus, anti-technologist literature often deals in fantasies of personal and cultural renewal through the violent destruction of materialism, whether the impersonal destruction of catastrophe or the personal renunciation of material goods and the embracing of hardship and danger as a kind of spiritual redemption.

In the chapter that follows on anti-technologism and the fascist aesthetic I explore these connections in greater depth, but first I want to examine a variant strand of anti-technologism that also explores fantasies of renewal through the rejection of materialism, the embrace of danger and hardship, and the idea of cleaning violence or “creative destruction”. I define this strand as anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism and I see its fundamental difference to administrative anti-technologism lying in its rejection of any form of administrative or ameliorative approach to the perceived degenerative or homogenising effects of technology. Anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism, as I analyse it, looks to nature to perform the supposedly necessary tasks of weeding out the weak and unfit in society, maintaining a vital and cohesive culture and society, and preventing degeneration. For this reason it tends to be more hard-line and fundamentalist than administrative anti-technologism and more openly advocates and celebrates an ethos of destruction of materialist civilisation in the hope of bringing about a revived culture that obeys the strictures of organic form. The analysis of these trends will, in turn, create groundwork for the final chapter’s discussion of anti-technologism and the fascist aesthetic.

Chapter Five: Wildness and Wilderness: Edward Abbey and Anarcho-Libertarian Anti-Technologism.

What I am writing about, what I have always written about, is the idea of human freedom, human community, and the real world that makes them both possible and the new technocratic industrial state which threatens the existence of all three.

Edward Abbey, letter to Karen Evans, 18th June 1984 (*Postcards* 156).

All things organic are dying in the grip of organization.

An artificial world is permeating and poisoning the natural.

Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life* (47).

So far in this thesis I have advanced a theory of anti-technologism that locates it as an administrative impulse formed in reaction to the societal changes wrought by increasing use of and access to technology: rising living standards and decreased mortality, mass travel, communication, and entertainment. I have situated it as the survival, in sublimated form, of an established anxiety over degeneration, cosmopolitanism, and loss of cultural cohesion in increasingly urban and mechanised Western societies. Such a reaction was typically formed and articulated by literary and intellectual elites. Their concern was primarily with stability, with an implicit but still very substantial stress on the need for hierarchy, and the restoration or instillation of what was seen as a natural balance. Immanent in this reactionary mood was the belief (whether voiced or implicit) that technology had upset or removed natural limits and balances on society, allowing the survival of the unfit and the growth of a restive urban population. Whether it was expressed by the eugenic movement prior to the Second World War, or the “Limits to Growth” Neo-Malthusian concern about resources

afterwards, the unnatural growth that technology enabled was a common factor and was perceived as dangerously disruptive to this balance or order. Restoration of this natural balance, and the reassertion of proper controls by responsible members of the administrative class, was seen as imperative if society was to be prevented from spiralling downwards into degeneracy and chaos.

In this chapter I look at a variant stand of anti-technologism, one that identifies and concerns itself with many of the same problems that administrative anti-technologism does, but which differs in that it rejects an administrative or technocratic solution to the technological problem. I shall refer to this strand of anti-technologism as anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism and, as I mentioned at the end of the last chapter, its main distinguishing characteristic is that it looks to nature to maintain a putative natural balance or harmony both between people within society and (more importantly) between people and nature itself. To put it another way, it seeks to “read off” truths about the nature and organization of human society and culture from observations and idealisations of the natural world. As I have noted before in this thesis, the idea that there is a necessary balance or harmony to be maintained and which technology had sundered is a central aspect of anti-technologism in general. But whereas administrative anti-technologism, in recognising what it sees as a disharmony, seeks a reformist solution, a re-structuring of society, anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism sees administrative and reformist solutions as simply more of the same kind of thinking which led to the problem in the first place. Some anarcho-libertarian anti-technologists advocate extreme anarcho-primitivism (a literal return to the Neolithic age) others place the emphasis instead on reducing the need for institutional, geographically widespread governance by looking to a return to society based (supposedly) more closely on nature and the organic form to render obsolete the functions of a centralised government.

The essential difference between administrative and anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism which I will be exploring in this chapter can be summarised like this: though both strands of anti-

technologism reject what they see as the artificiality and unsustainability of a highly technological society, as well as its degenerative attributes, and seek to pattern human society along putatively more natural and organic lines, administrative anti-technologism seeks to do this by *fiat* and administration – a managerial solution to the ills of modern society – whereas anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism believes that such attempts are themselves technocratic and that the only realistic way forward is to return to a much simpler state of society where government above a very basic, local level will be unnecessary. To take the example of perceived overpopulation in the modern world, which both strands of anti-technologism are concerned with: whereas administrative anti-technologism tends to propose a bureaucratic and ameliorative response (usually greater birth control, especially in “undesirable” sections of the population), anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism tends to the belief that such managerialism would be unnecessary in a more “natural”, less technological society because the ratio of births to deaths would return to sustainable levels by natural processes of attrition.⁸⁴

Perhaps it is for this reason that anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism is often quite fundamentalist and nihilistic, especially in response to reformism which it tends to view with suspicion as a perpetuation of modern civilisation. Anti-technologist author Derrick Jensen, for instance, when asked by *The Ecologist* in 2004 what book he would give to politicians and industry leaders replied “one that explodes” – his point being that bureaucratic and intellectual attempts to reform society were structurally invalid and merely served to perpetuate modern civilisation (Jensen n. pag.). On reading the manifesto and other writings of Ted Kaczynski (better known as the “Unabomber” for his practice of placing bombs at universities and airports) writer and essayist Paul Kingsnorth comments that despite the deaths, maiming, and injuries caused by Kaczynski’s bombing campaign, he identifies with the latter’s desire for “revenge” against the technological world to such

⁸⁴ Anarcho-primitivist John Zerzan, for example, argues that “expanding population was not a cause of agriculture but its result; this suggests a basic dynamic of the population problem . . . [therefore] it may be that we can only solve the planet’s overpopulation problem by removing the root cause of basic estrangement from each other” (Zerzan, “No Way Out” 199).

an extent that he worries that Kaczynski's manifesto "might change my life" (Kingsnorth "Dark Ecology" n. pag.). He notes as particularly compelling Kaczynski's argument that a revolutionary movement "dedicated to the elimination of technological society" is needed and that in its reformism "the political left is technological society's first line of defense against revolution" (Kingsnorth "Dark Ecology" n. pag.). Indeed, as the thrust of Kaczynski's argument in the manifesto is that reformist movements only serve to perpetuate a civilisation that has become too advanced for its own good, it provides an excellent reference for understanding the anarcho-libertarian anti-technologist philosophy. Similarly, John Zerzan's reply when asked if he was really "against civilisation" (the title of an anthology of writing critiquing modernity which he edited) also illustrates the revolutionary and nihilistic nature of anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism very clearly. The interviewer asks Zerzan "you mean you're being literal when you say we have to go back to the Stone Age?" Zerzan replies:

Absolutely, otherwise it's just talk. We have to dismantle this whole mess, and start thinking practically, start regaining the skills we once had as people on this planet. We're just becoming more and more dependent on technology, which drains everything away – it drains community away, it really drains experience away, it drains meaning away. (Sampath n. pag.)

Whilst Zerzan often attacks technology on the grounds of ecological damage, it is notable that often, as in this example for instance, he bases his argument for the dismantling of technological society on ground of cultural vitality, social cohesion and personal fulfilment. The return to the state of nature, then, is at least as much about the type of culture and society Zerzan and others think desirable as it is about environmental concerns.

Of course, anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism, as I analyse it in this chapter, encompasses a spectrum of opinions on modern society that ranges from Zerzan's preference for a return to the Stone Age to Kirkpatrick Sale's bioregionalism and calls for the revivification of local culture. Some of its proponents also seem to be rather vague on the level of "dismantling" that would be required. Edward Abbey, whose work I focus on in this chapter, sometimes recommends merely outlawing certain artefacts of technology, whilst at many other times he seems to be calling for a near-Neolithic level of existence. Nevertheless, the common factor in anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism is the belief that nature (or at least their reading of nature) provides the perfect model for society and that all attempts to ameliorate or improve it are misguided and – as Zerzan's response above argues - serve only to separate human society and culture from the source of its vitality. As I observed previously, where administrative anti-technologism seeks societal remedies to technology's perceived perversion of Darwinian selection, anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism looks *directly* to natural selection to perform this function and therefore places the stress on a society where such natural selection can still operate. Given this proclivity, it will be part of the argument of this chapter that anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism may be further characterised by its preoccupation with strength over weakness as morally "right" and with action over intellect.

I will begin this chapter by elaborating on this analysis of anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism and argue that once again we can see the long shadows of Spengler's influence being cast over aspects of late twentieth century thought. I then turn my focus on to the writings of iconoclastic American writer Edward Abbey to consider how some of these aspects of anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism are translated into literature. As part of this analysis I argue that Abbey's writing provides an excellent example of how anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism's reliance on nature as both ideal state and analogue for human behaviour tends to collapse into a kind of quasi-Nietzschean cult of action, where instinct, action, and animalistic passion are morally superior by virtue of their perceived naturalness and lack of artifice. I then link this back to the

Spenglerian idea of the vital and healthy culture being one that is based on a close relationship to the local soil and environment and in light of this I close with a consideration of anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism's use of the "bioregional" ideal.⁸⁵ I attempt to draw out some of the implications of the bioregional vision within the context of my analysis here because I think it will serve to clarify the role of some crucial underlying themes of anti-technologism, such as the stress it places on authenticity and meaning. As these are broad themes, I will only have space in this current chapter to offer a sketch or outline of some of the characteristics of anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism as I see it, but I hope that much of the work done here will prove useful as background to my next chapter which focuses on anti-technology and the fascist aesthetic.

Finally, before beginning my analysis, I would like to offer a very brief defence of the term "anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism". It must be said that this definition is not one used (as far as I know) by those whom I see as writing from this viewpoint. Typically, writers and thinkers such as Edward Abbey, John Zerzan, Derrick Jensen, Kirkpatrick Sale, Chellis Glendenning, Stephanie Mills and others would be more likely to describe themselves as anarcho-primitivists, some of them as Deep Ecologists, and a few of them – such as Kirkpatrick Sale and Chellis Glendenning – simply as neo-luddites. I include under this rubric those writers and essayists whose anti-technologism is characterised by deep scepticism towards administrative or reformist critiques of society and the belief that, as Stephanie Mills puts it, that any valid critique "would be more concerned with the Whole [sic] than the parts and has to proceed from the premise that death and pain, short life spans, and no bread without sweat must be accepted" (Glendenning, Mills and Sale n. pag.). Not all anarcho-libertarian anti-technologists critiques see the ideal society as a necessarily brutal one –

⁸⁵ By way of defining the bioregional ideal, Andrew Dobson's *Green Political Thought* (2007) comments that "the guiding principle of bioregionalism . . . is that the 'natural' world should determine the political, economic, and social life of communities" (92). Just as the different climates and topographies of the natural world determine the biota there, so bioregionalism proposes that it should similarly determine the characteristics of the particular human societies and cultures that inhabit them. Sale, who more than anyone else has popularised and advanced the ideal, writes that "It is in the diligent study of those laws [of nature] that we can best guide ourselves in reconstructing human societies for a bioregional world" (Sale *Dwellers in the Land* 49).

indeed, many see it as far less brutal than modern society – but I think that Mills’ argument (that attempts to alter nature to ameliorate the human condition are misguided) is characteristic of the philosophy.

I want to begin, then, by referring to an argument made by Martin Lewis in his book *Green Delusions* (1994) in which he explores some of the foundational concepts and assumptions that underlie a belief in the superiority of the natural state. Lewis notes that such a belief in the superiority or desirability of humanity existing in a primal or natural state almost invariably tends to run contrary to modern scientific and ecological understanding, in that it perceives the natural state to be one of near perfect equilibrium. He comments that, in this view, “the natural world encompassed primal humanity as just another species, thus maintaining balance. But when human beings discovered technology, unity was rent. A single species now separated itself from, and in the process began to destroy, the rest of nature” (45).⁸⁶ Therefore, in this rather simplistic and prelapsarian view, a dichotomy is created: the natural world is seen as near perfect stasis and balance, and technology represents change and hence deviation from the original state. As technology became more complex and more pervasive, and in so doing increasingly altered the environment, so the technological “world” and the people within it drifted further and further away from the putatively natural state even as they appropriated the resources of the natural world to sustain themselves. Hence it will be clear why, so far as Deep Ecology and also anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism is concerned, there can be no reformist answer to modern civilisation because any such attempt would be by definition administrative and technocratic, and would therefore be merely another form of technological thinking.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The science of ecology has long eschewed the idea of nature as essentially stable and harmonious, and instead has adopted a view of nature that emphasises dynamic disequilibrium and continual change. See Daniel Botkin *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (1990).

⁸⁷ Bramwell, in *The Fading of the Greens* (1994), defines Deep Ecology as “an approach to environmental issues first formulated by Arne Naess in 1972, but implicit in ecologism from its inception. It is apocalyptic, anti-political and anti-reform. It has adopted principles of biological equality, and emphasises the role of humanity

In this conception, then, modern urban life is seen as an unnatural technological “bubble” that progressively degrades humanity whilst at the same time it ensures an increasingly artificial and unsustainable life within the synthetic cocoon of modern civilisation, one predicated on the ruthless exploitation and destruction of the natural world outside its borders. Because anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism prefers the laws of nature to society’s laws as a solution to the perceived ills of the technological world (see above), and wants to reject modern civilisation more or less in its entirety, it has a marked tendency towards a geographical imagination. That is, in perceiving the city and its environs (not just suburbia but also any areas farmed on an industrial scale to supply the cities) as being within the technological bubble, and the wilderness – pristine nature – as lying outside, it sets up a directional tension between them, with the technological city and its attendant pollution at one end, and wilderness and purity at the other. This schema enacts the desire to leave the city as technosphere behind and re-enter the wilderness as inhabitant, rather than visitor or invader. Thus Theodore Roszak in *Where the Wasteland Ends* (1972) compares the unnatural growth of technological society to a bloodsucking octopus, declaring that “the artificial environment taken as a whole . . . stretches out tentacles of influence that reach thousands of miles beyond its already sprawling perimeters. It sucks every hinterland and wilderness into its technological metabolism” (167). John Landau’s attack on civilisation in his 2005 essay “Civilisation and the Primitive” similarly demonstrates this tendency when he characterizes civilisation as “the machine, fragmentation, the violation of integrity into coordinated parts. It is homelessness, exiled everywhere, therefore colonizing all it sees (“Civilisation and the Primitive” 111).

In fiction, this tension described or imagined in directional, geographical terms can be seen in Abbey’s describing technology’s alien presence in the wilderness as though it were sentient and monstrous, a pernicious urban presence invading the wilderness. For example in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* he describes the power-line pylons “marching league on league in lockstep like 120-

as a participant in nature rather than as nature’s steward. Hence its anti-humanism. The deep ecology vision of humanity is as a natural disaster, something like an exterminatory virus” (161).

foot outer-space monsters across the desert plains” as the “blazing cities feed on the defenseless interior” (26). Modern civilisation is the “global kraken, pantentacled, wall-eyed and parrot-beaked, its brain a bank of computer data centers, its blood the flow of money, its heart a radioactive dynamo, its language the technetronic [*sic*] monologue of number imprinted on magnetic tape” (172). Abbey and Roszak’s use of a blood-sucking octopus as metaphor for the modern city is disturbing given the history of such an image in far-right anti-Semitic propaganda. As I noted in my introduction, the Nazi demonization of the Jews relied substantially on the use of biological metaphors that identified them with the unnatural growth and cosmopolitanism of urbanism and machine civilisation, and thus portrayed them as a parasitical growth on “natural” German society, purportedly rooted in the soil. Whilst I do not think either Abbey or Roszak deliberately intended any straightforwardly anti-Semitic slur in the use of such imagery, I think it speaks to the appeal and persistence of the tropes of natural and unnatural growth, and consequently of natural populations identified with the soil and unnatural and degenerate populations identified with urbanism and deracinated cosmopolitanism.

That the vast majority of people seem happy enough to remain within the artificial environment of the city is seen as evidence for the degenerative and corrupting influence of the modern technological world. A Manichean duality is set up between the supposedly corrupt and artificial modern world and its uniform mass of inhabitants, and the wilderness outside with a few hardy adventurers who willingly embrace the ennobling hardships of a life outside the technological bubble. Those who have embraced nature and have chosen to live close to the wild are therefore seen as somehow more vital and fully realised because they held to be existing on their own terms, and because of their own intrinsic quality, rather than being reliant on the artificial world of technology for survival. Such a belief stems from a clearly detectable bias towards biological determinism and Social Darwinism in Abbey’s thought. In *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (1989) for example, he offers the apothegmatic thought that perhaps homosexuality and androgyny (in other

words, a lack of red-blooded masculinity of the kind Abbey saw in himself) were the result of overpopulation and urbanism fostered by the imperialism of modern machine civilisation, suggesting that “homosexuality, like androgyny, might be an instinctive racial response to overpopulation, crowding, and stress. Both flourish when empire reaches its apogee” (81).⁸⁸ Therefore, for Abbey, the wilder, more challenging, and more sparsely populated the terrain, the nobler, more vital and more heterosexual its inhabitants. For example, in *Desert Solitaire* (1968) Abbey debates the virtues of people inhabiting different topographies and contends that there is “a superior breed in the deserts”, pointing to the Bedouin, Mongols, and Apaches as proof of this superiority. “As for those others,” he asks, “the wretched inhabitants of city and plain, can we even think of them, to be perfectly candid, as members of the same race?” (243-4).

Of course, such representations, and the tendency to base ideas of vitality and legitimacy based on a relationship with the wild earth, bear obvious debts not only to generalised Nietzschean elitism but also to the influence of Spengler and his view of “type-true people, born of and grown on the soil”. It is not altogether surprising, therefore, to see anarcho-libertarian anti-technologist writers and thinkers such as Derrick Jensen and John Zerzan acknowledging a debt to such a deeply conservative thinker as Spengler. In his essay, “Why Primitivism?” (2002) Zerzan, though admitting that Spengler was “nationalist and reactionary”, calls *The Decline of the West* “the great masterwork of world history” and argues that we need to revisit his theory of an “artificial world [that] is permeating and poisoning the natural” to understand why modern civilisation is, in Zerzan’s view, unsustainable:

⁸⁸ Obviously there is an element of intentional shock value in this statement, as in much of Abbey’s writing. Yet it would be a grave mistake to simply write off such statements as *pour epater les bourgeoisie*. In *Epitaph for a Desert Anarchist* (1994) James Bishop argues that the whole point of the comic element in Abbey’s writing was to allow him to say the inexcusable, the outrageous. Bishop cites as evidence Abbey’s admittance in one of his last interviews before his death that he wrote the way he did and said what he said simply because “I like provoking people. I’ve been willing to be dismissed as a crank and a crackpot simply for the pleasure of saying exactly what I really do believe” (qtd in Bishop 12).

Especially relevant here are Spengler's judgments, so many decades ago, concerning technological development and its social, cultural, and environmental impacts. He saw that the dynamic, promethean ("Faustian") nature of global civilisation becomes fully realized as self-destructive mass society and equally calamitous modern technology. The subjugation of nature leads ineluctably to its destruction, and to the destruction of civilisation. "An artificial world is permeating and poisoning the natural. The Civilisation itself has become a machine that does, or tries to do everything in mechanical terms." Civilized man is a "petty creator against Nature." "...This revolutionary in the world of life...has become the slave of his creature. The Culture, the aggregate of artificial, personal, self-made life-forms, develops into a close-barred cage". (n. pag.)

Similarly, Jensen exemplifies the attractiveness for anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism of this organicist view of civilisation when he presents his case that technological civilisation has reached the end of its cycle:

Years ago I read Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. It's a long book from which I really only remember one image. I think Spengler would be pleased at which one. Culture is like a plant growing in a particular soil. When a soil is exhausted . . . the plant dies. Cultures . . . are the same. The Roman Empire exhausted its possibilities (both physical, in terms of resources, and psychic or spiritual), then hung on decadent – I mean this in its deeper sense of decaying, although the meaning having to do with debauchery works, too – for a thousand years. Other empires are the same. The British Empire. The American Empire. Civilisation itself has continued to grow by expanding the zone from which it takes its resources. The plant has gotten pretty big, but at the cost of a lot of dead soil. (*Endgame* Vol. 1 89)

Jensen and Zerzan's tribute to Spengler in forming their own theories on civilisation demonstrates the way in which the theory and associated lexicon of the organic theory of history became embedded in anarcho-libertarian anti-technologist thought. It provided a theoretical basis and a language for dividing the world – and to a greater or lesser extent the people within it – into natural or artificial. The depiction of technological civilisation as a relentlessly expansionary force invading and feeding on the putatively “natural” world in anarcho-libertarian anti-technologist thought owes much to the continuing influence of Spengler's cyclic, organicist theory of history.

I would like to turn now to an examination of how some of these themes are translated and represented in the works of Edward Abbey. Like Zerzan, Sale, Glendenning and other anarcho-libertarian anti-technologists Abbey believed that, in its origin at least, the primitive human society based on a primal unity with nature was the ideal. Deviation from this ideal, he believed, had led to deviation in human behaviour and morality. “Primitive or traditional societies”, he wrote to a correspondent in 1984, “have been organized . . . on natural and therefore decent principles [and] it is only in modern times, as I see it, that is, in the last five thousand years, that the drive to dominate nature and human nature has perverted and now threatens to destroy the sound, conservative, sustaining relationships of men and women”, about as clear an endorsement of the organic form as it is possible to imagine (*Postcards* 158). Abbey wrote largely to advance this view of society – one based of putatively “natural” principles of “decency” – as an alternative to what he saw as the corrupt, degenerate, and stifling technological society. In so doing he used the geographical metaphor of the natural and artificial worlds of wilderness and the city to illustrate these themes. I think this led to a great deal of confusion amongst readers and critics who failed to read a deeper meaning beneath his representations of wilderness, a confusion that exasperated Abbey as an irate letter to his publisher regarding a proposed introduction to one of his novels demonstrates:

It is quite false to say that I am a writer whose primary and exclusive concern is “wilderness preservation”. I cannot for the life of me understand where he got that

idea. If my books have a common theme, it would be something like human freedom in an industrial society; wilderness is merely one among (many) means towards that end. (*Postcards* 81)

Abbey's protestation here that wilderness was only one possible route to personal liberty in industrial society is sparked largely by his eagerness to shake off the much-resented tag of "nature writer". But even so, his point is well made: Abbey was deeply invested in defending the wilderness of the American South-West in his writings, but that was part of a much deeper defence of what he saw as the human need for wildness as a source of vitality and wilderness as a place of freedom and cultural and psychic regeneration.

Abbey saw a necessarily close relationship between personal liberty and a healthy culture, and believed that human spontaneity and creativity sprang from an intimate knowledge and relationship with their local soil, their local environment. In his essay "Science with a Human Face" (1979) he advances a critique of technological society which draws on the organic metaphor in criticising the alienating nature of modern society:

The denunciation of science-technology that I have outlined here, simple-minded and oversimplified though it may undoubtedly be, should be taken seriously at least as an expression of the fear and detestation millions now feel for the plastic-aluminium-electronic-computerized technocracy rapidly forming around us, constricting our lives to the dimensions of the machine, divorcing our bodies and souls from the earth, harassing us constantly with its petty and haywire demands. What most humans really desire is something quite different: liberty, spontaneity, nakedness, mystery, wildness, and wilderness. (126-7)

Modern technological civilisation is seen here as arid and inorganic, and at the same time relentlessly expansionary, "rapidly forming around us" and "divorcing our bodies and souls from the

earth". The directional tension anarcho-libertarianism anti-technologism tends towards is evident here in the Spenglerian polarities set up between inorganic city and organic nature, between "beat and tension, blood and intellect . . . the countryside in bloom [and] the city of stone" (Spengler 250). Abbey rails at what he sees as the oppressive and expansionary nature of technology, crushing organic life and exiling us from the earth.

However, the Spenglerian organicist conception of history provided more than just a lexicon for Abbey and other anarcho-libertarian anti-technologists, it also provided hope because all civilisations went through the organic cycle of growth, maturity, senescence and finally death. The faster a civilisation expanded, the sooner it must use up its energy (both material and psychic) and become brittle, fall into decay, and finally collapse. This seems to have been the basis for Abbey's "optimism" that technological civilisation must crumble relatively soon and give way to revived human societies and cultures, as I think is evident from the following passage in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*:

When the cities are gone, he thought, and all the ruckus has died away, when sunflowers push up through the concrete and asphalt of the forgotten interstate freeways, when the Kremlin and the Pentagon are turned into nursing homes for the generals, presidents and other such shitheads, when the glass-aluminum skyscraper tombs of Phoenix Arizona barely show above the sand dunes, why then, why then, why then by God maybe free men and wild women on horses, free women and wild men, can roam the sagebrush canyonlands in freedom – goddammit! – herding the feral cattle into box canyons, and gorge on bloody meat and bleeding fucking internal organs, and dance all night to the music of fiddles! banjos! steel guitars! by the light of a reborn moon! – by God yes! Until, he reflected soberly, and bitterly, and sadly, until the next age of ice and iron comes down, and the engineers and the farmers and the general motherfuckers come back again.

Thus George Hayduke's fantasy. Did he believe in the cyclical theory of history? Or the linear theory? You'd find it hard to pin him down in these matters.

(107)

Whilst the novel is something of a comic romp, and therefore the rhetoric is deliberately exuberant and overblown, what comes through very clearly is the idea of wilderness as vitality, of the renewed contact with nature bringing about a revivification of the human spirit that is suppressed and stunted in the grey canyons of the cities. Hayduke is depicted as a larger-than-life Don Quixote type of character, but this augments rather than detracts from Abbey's message here: Hayduke's boisterousness and his refusal to engage with the compromises and complexities of reformist ideals are of a piece with his irrational, intuitive and exuberant nature which seeks a direct connection with wildness and nature unmediated by reason and ideology. Like Abbey, Hayduke's philosophy is one of action not contemplation.

There is a clear contrast being made in Hayduke's fantasy between the technological world, which is seen as arid and desiccated, qualities Spengler attributed to the intellect in the world-city of late civilisations – "intelligence is the replacement of unconscious living by the exercise of thought, masterly, but bloodless and jejune" – and the natural, non-technological world (250). It is also expansionary and imperialistic, prone to the reflux that was the fate of all such inflationary adventures, the skyscrapers of Phoenix recalling the fate of Shelley's Ozymandias of course, but also referencing Spengler's declaration in *Man and Technics* that "This machine-technics will end with the Faustian civilisation and one day will lie in fragments, *forgotten* -- our railways and steamships as dead as the Roman roads and the Chinese wall, our giant cities and skyscrapers in ruins like old Memphis and Babylon" (67). The technological world of concrete, asphalt, glass and aluminium spreads outwards, covering the land, but eventually the natural world breaks through and sunflowers push up through the concrete, reaching towards the sun, as the people dance "by the light of a reborn moon". In Hayduke's fantasy, the death of civilisation marks the rebirth of culture,

which is envisaged as instinctual, vitalistic, and Dionysian, at least until civilisation rises again and the Spenglerian cycle repeats itself.

So, just as the return of poetry in Priestley's *A Summer's Day Dream* marked the return of health and vitality to the people and culture after television and radio had been silenced, so the absence of techné, and the return of putatively "native" music through an essentialist connection with the wilderness signifies the rebirth of culture in Hayduke's fantasy. Instead of the "heavy rock electric jungle sound [and] the industrial beat of hard-core imitation-Negro music" of "the rootless ones" of degenerate modern culture, there are the supposedly traditional instruments of Anglo-Saxon American culture, -- the fiddle, the banjo, and the steel guitar -- which signify reconnection with the land and the subsequent rebirth of what is held to be a genuine culture (Abbey, "Telluride Blues" 123). Tellingly, Abbey employs the same phrase in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, when the character of Doc berates his girlfriend for playing "that god-damned imitation-Negro music again . . . that slave music" (49). Abbey's intention here seems not to be so much denigrating indigenous African American music (though he clearly despises it) but rather its influence on white, Anglo-Saxon American culture. The repetition between his essay and his later novel demonstrate the extent to which Abbey uses the comic elements in his fictions as a foil with which to express his own beliefs and opinions.

The sense of musical vitality in Hayduke's fantasy contrasts with Abbey's criticism of jazz, which he saw as a bastard musical genre from the city slums which had been taken up by the dissipated and rootless urban aesthete. This, he felt, was not true American music, grounded in a culture shaped by its landscapes, but a rootless music that reflected the characteristics of its originators in the slums of the artificial world:

The music of boredom, bored people. The urban ennui. Big-city music. American? The American Negro loose in the slums. Crafty, cunning, subtle, arid music. Cool and dry. No emotion, no passion. No blood and guts. The mechanical meter. (Shuffle-dance.) The industrial rhythm. Classicism, factory-style. (*Confessions* 168)

The technological world, then, is identified with a soulless rationality which manifests itself in a predilection for degenerate art and culture which is ultimately “arid” and sterile because it is divorced from any meaningful connection with a particular landscape or environment. It is, to use Spengler’s terminology, the music and culture of the weary world-city at the end of its cycle, frozen and spent. In our unhealthy fascination with the scientific and the technological, Abbey felt, we had forgotten our animalistic, instinctive side which was necessarily rooted in and shaped by the natural world around us. “Be true to the earth, said Nietzsche” Abbey reminded his readers at the end of “Science with a Human Face” and not to some intellectual or philosophical abstraction (128). And for Abbey this truth meant embracing a natural world that was one of “blood and guts” where instinct and emotion, not cold rationality, were the means to forging a meaningful connection to our own wild nature.

We get a clear sense of this ideal in *Desert Solitaire* (1968) where Abbey recounts seeing a rabbit on one of his hikes and how he was seized with an irrational urge to pick up a stone to see if he could kill it as a test of his ability to survive unaided in the wild. The stone hits the rabbit and after a brief spasm, and some blood loss, the rabbit dies. Abbey is at first surprised, but then pleased by the feeling that he has in some mystical way asserted his place in the wilderness by this act:

For a moment I am shocked by my deed; I stare at the quiet rabbit, his glazed eyes, his blood drying in the dust. Something vital is lacking. But shock is replaced by a mild elation . . . I continue my walk with a new, augmented cheerfulness which is hard to

understand but unmistakable. What the rabbit has lost in energy and spirit seems added, by processes too subtle to fathom, to my own soul. I try but I cannot feel any sense of guilt. I examine my soul: white as snow. Check my hands: not a trace of blood. No longer do I feel isolated from the sparse and furtive life around me, a stranger from another world. I have entered into this one. We are kindred all of us, killer and victim, predator and prey. (34)

This passage provides an excellent example of anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism's geographical imagination in literature. In demonstrating his essential wildness through the act of killing Abbey asserts his right to step out of the modern, technological world and into the natural one. It transforms him from being "a stranger from another world", allowing him to "enter this one". Instinct is preferred over rationality, and action over intellect. Questions of the ethics of killing animals, or of ecological stewardship fall away here, suddenly redundant. Instead, a type of Lawrencian vitalism obviates concerns over stewardship and justifies the act of killing when performed in a state of nature, and this is implicitly contrasted with the artificiality of life in a state of techné. Abbey's claimed contentment in this passage stems from what he believes is the alignment of human wildness with natural wilderness, and it is important to observe that the most significant impression we get from Abbey's description of the killing is one of harmony between human and nature. Just as the act of herding feral cattle into box canyons for slaughtering in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is seen as a fulfilment of humankind's wild nature, the killing of a rabbit is a claim to be part of the natural world on its own terms. It is not the protection or stewardship of nature that is being celebrated here, but the assertion of survival of the fittest, of the laws of nature as a revitalising force.

This ideal of harmony not through peaceful co-existence, but through assertion and enactment of supposedly natural roles seems to be fundamental to anarcho-libertarian anti-

technologism. The anarcho-primitivist poet and writer Gary Snyder, for example, in *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), argues that although we should try to not cause needless harm, “Coyote and Ground Squirrel do not break the compact they have with each other that one must play predator and the other play game”. In fulfilling their natural roles as predator and prey they merely remain true to their own nature and “such are the lessons of the wild” for humanity that the technological world has forgotten (4). Indeed, his biographer James Callaghan suggests it is entirely possible that Abbey invented the encounter with the rabbit in order to illustrate what he believed was a deeper, more important truth (Cahalan 105).

In describing this act of killing as a kind of communion with nature, Abbey shows that as well as Spengler’s organicist vision of history, he was also influenced by supposedly Nietzschean ideals of natural elitism and the virtues of action over intellect⁸⁹. In discussing the qualities of the *Übermensch* Nietzsche argued that the superiority of the truly noble man lay in his ability, his willingness, to accept and embrace the animal side of his nature:

[I]n the wilderness they make up for the tension which is caused by being closed in and fenced in by the peace of the community for so long, they *return* to the innocent consciousness of a wild beast, as exultant monsters, who perhaps go away having committed a hideous succession of murder, arson, rape, and torture in a mood of bravado and spiritual equilibrium, as if they had simply played a student’s prank, convinced that poets will now have something to sing about and praise for quite some time. At the centre of all these noble races we cannot fail to see the beast of prey, the *blond beast* avidly prowling around for spoil and victory. This hidden centre needs release from time to time, the beast must out again, must return to the wild (23).

⁸⁹ Abbey mentions Nietzsche approvingly a few times in his writings, and seems to have some familiarity with his texts, but he would also have picked up many of the Nietzschean tropes from Robinson Jeffers, a poet Abbey greatly admired, and whose “inhumanist” poetry was saturated in both Spenglerian and Nietzschean motifs and imagery. See Arthur Coffin *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of Inhumanism* (1971).

It would be going entirely too far to claim that Abbey similarly condoned violence against others on the same grounds. Indeed, given his anti-imperialist convictions, a quite convincing case could be made that the opposite was the case. But what is apparent in his writings is the way in which he seems to feel those who can break out of what he sees as the prison of modern scientific rationality and embrace the wildness within human nature are somehow superior to those who remain within the accepted parameters of modern technological society because they are more true to themselves and the earth they stand on. Therefore, Abbey's wild man has licence, by virtue of his embrace of internal wildness, to disregard all intellectual contradictions, a recurrent and perhaps essential motif in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Such licence is essential, because in their efforts to rescue the wilderness from techné, the gang must utilise the instruments of technology: the phone, the car, and the chainsaw for example, which of course is something of a paradox. Thus, when Bonnie questions the environmental impact of using a chainsaw, Doc Sarvis is quick to curtail any debate: "Forget all that. Our duty is to destroy billboards" (MWG 44). Similarly, when Hayduke curses the traffic in his way, then reflects that he too is in a car as thus is adding to the traffic he reviles, he dismisses such niceties by asserting ". . . I'm here on important business. Besides, I'm an elitist" (MWG 27). As with much of Abbey's writing, the comic element should not be forgotten in analysis, but that being said, it is necessary to once again remark how the larger than life comic element in his fiction also serves as cover for what would otherwise be simply unacceptable. Thus, in this conception, though the members of the monkey wrench gang are indeed children of a technological society they also perceive themselves to be more fully realized individuals who scorn the boundaries and rules of modern civilisation as being only for the weak, and therefore they take it upon themselves to scorn complexity, compromise and reflection and pursue a program of action.

Following this ideal, in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* the gang is formed beside a blazing camp fire underneath a towering mountain plateau where "the men swore to one another the pledge of eternal comradeship, sealing the oath with bourbon, and blood drawn from the nick of Hayduke's

buck knife" (224). Against this suitably wild backdrop, the men of the gang each assert their essential wildness by connection with what is fierce and wild and natural and therefore "real" as opposed to the artificial and technological. They pursue resistance to the incursions of the artificial world not by the intellectual routes of debate or raising popular opposition but by action in the form of destruction. Indeed, the sole woman in the gang, Bonnie Abzug an intellectual from New York City, seems to have the role in the novel of pointing out contradictions in the gang's approach to sabotaging technological society, and proposing alternative, reformist solutions to technological and environmental problems, interjections which are invariably cut short by her male companions who have no patience for intellectual contemplation. She is notably absent from the blood-brother ceremony, though, we are told, she is "tacitly included" (224). By contrast, Hayduke imagines the purely sensory aspects of bringing about the end of technological civilisation through sabotage: "masochistic machinery, steel in pain, iron under unnatural duress, the multiple images of what he called 'creative destruction'" (225). Only that which is primal and natural is "real" and the rest is simply a mass of intellectual wanderings which may be disregarded. "River, rock, sun, blood, hunger, wings, joy – this is the real" as one of the characters in the novel reflects, punning rather obviously on the homonym of week and weak: "all the rest is transcendental transvestite transactional scientology or whatever the fad of the day, the vogue of the week . . . Ask the hawk. Ask the hungry lion lunging at the starving doe. They know" (61). And once again, the speech of the character here is made to frame the opinion of his author. "What do I believe in?" Abbey asked rhetorically elsewhere, responding in his own voice: "I believe in sun. In rock . . . I believe in blood, fire, woman, rivers, eagles, storms, drums, flutes, banjos and broom-tailed horses" (*A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* 7).

The rejection of intellectualism and reformism here, and the rejoicing in intuition, emotion and above all action highlights the way anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism grounds cultural vitality and meaning in people and society fulfilling putatively "natural" roles which require no

reflection or interpretation but which are direct, visceral responses to life lived in direct contact with the wilderness. This was a scenario Abbey depicted at some length in his novel, *Good News* (1991), about a post-apocalyptic America where “whites and Indians” band together to make a new way of life “with skills and savvy resurrected from the pre-industrial past” (back cover). Thus though the title of the novel is intentionally ironic – the *Good News* is the arrival of apocalypse and the end of technological civilisation – it is also, for Abbey, an optimistic one, as it signals the death of the old, calcified technological culture and the possible birth (though unrealised at the end of the novel) of a new, vibrant one based on a close identification with the local environment. In his essay, “Theory of Anarchy” (1988) he predicts that such a scenario will happen within a century and that this was “the basis of my inherent optimism”. Abbey’s hope was that following the collapse of modern civilisation the cycle could begin again and people would revert to “scattered human populations modest in number that live by fishing, hunting, food gathering, small-scale farming and ranching, that gather once a year in the ruins of abandoned cities for great festivals of moral, spiritual, artistic, and intellectual renewal, a people for whom the wilderness is not a playground but their natural native home” (“Theory of Anarchy” 28)

Again, as with Hayduke’s flight of fantasy, the return to a markedly more primitive lifestyle is heralded not as regression, but instead as a renewal, reflecting the influence of the organicist metaphor. The absence, and rejection, of techné (the cities are not just “ruined” but “abandoned”) allows for a far closer alignment of humanity with the natural local environment (wildness and wilderness) and this connection gives their habitation of an area legitimacy, it will be their “natural native home”.

Here we come back to the idea of “natural” and “synthetic” populations and cultures which I first mentioned in my introduction before exploring the idea further in my chapter on Tolkien, and which I have also alluded to earlier in this chapter. “Natural” populations and cultures are those

legitimised by a nativist connection to their local environment. Indeed, one only has to think of the character of John Vogelin, the hero of Abbey's early novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1962), to see this realised. Vogelin steadfastly rejects all modern technology, owning a dusty ranch without electricity or piped water and is distinctly territorial in nature, mounting armed guard against government incursions on to his land, whether accidental or deliberate. He ends up in an armed stand-off with the authorities after refusing to cooperate in the compulsory purchase of his land by the government. As the pressure mounts on him to sell an old family friend attempts to reason with him, asking who can really be said to truly own the land: is it him, the government, the Native Americans, or "the man who stole it last"? Vogelin's reply spells out his claim and stakes out his legitimacy according to proximity to the earth, and more than that, according to identification with this particular soil: "I am the land . . . I've been eating this dust for seventy years" (40).

Abbey's grounding of cultural identity and vitality in close identification with the local environment mirrors the more general tendency of anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism towards bioregionalism, as well as pointing to the dangers of such a way of thinking. Bioregionalism can be seen as the survival of the Spenglerian idea that "a race has roots" and that "race and landscape belong together" and as such is fraught with potentialities that require, at the very least, careful thinking through (254). For example, in his presentation on the bioregional ideal to the Schumacher Society in 1983 Kirkpatrick Sale welcomed what he saw as an increasing urge to separatism in Europe, citing "the Croatians, Serbs, Macedonians, and the Montenegrins in Yugoslavia" among other examples such as the Catalans and Basque people in Spain. Sale saw the "retribalization" of European society as not only a hopeful sign but also as representing a return to organic form. For Sale, the growing unrest in the Balkans and elsewhere was "an organic, I would argue an inevitable, response to the disintegration of the contemporary order" which proved the practicability and desirability of the bioregional ideal:

What is so interesting in this amazing process is the clear expression of the bioregional idea. For though it has long been acknowledged that the cultural aspects of these separatist movements are grounded in their special regional histories, from which they take their obvious and cherished differences of language and dress and music, the fact is that their political and social characters are every bit as rooted in the long, intimate, and knowledgeable association with their particular bioregion and its history. And the truths these movements embody, the apparently unquenchable truths, are in every case the product of the land they hold sacred. ("Mother of All: an Introduction to Bioregionalism" n. pag.)

Sale's celebration of such separatism as a "clear expression of the bioregional idea" only a few years before horrific fighting and ethnic cleansing broke out in the Balkans starkly demonstrates at least some potential dangers of tying cultural validity and authenticity too closely to a particular land.

Furthermore, because bioregionalism carries with it the assumption that each culture and society should be shaped by its particular local environment, it implies that questions of global laws, human rights, and other similar standards which spring from the enlightenment concept of universalism are invalid. Thus, each bioregion would have its own customs, laws, rules and – to the extent that they would need them at all – government. As Sale explains to his audience, this is an integral aspect of the bioregional theory:

I feel I must add here a note that may be painful for those whose allegiance to the precepts of fragmentation and diversification tends to crumble halfway through. Bioregional diversity means exactly that. It does not mean that every region of the Northeast or of North America or of the globe will build upon the values of democracy, equality, liberty, freedom, justice, and other suchlike "desiderata." It

means rather that truly autonomous bioregions will likely go their own separate ways and end up with quite disparate political systems—some democracies, no doubt, some direct, some representative, some federative, but undoubtedly all kinds of aristocracies, oligarchies, theocracies, principalities, margravates, duchies, and palatinates as well. And some with values, beliefs, standards, and customs quite antithetical to those that the people in this room, for example, hold dearest. (“Mother of All: an Introduction to Bioregionalism” n. pag.)

Thus, though anarcho-libertarian anti-technologists like Sale are, on the face of it at least, against centralised, technocratic government, the bioregional vision recognizes that some limited forms of government may arise as a societal response to environmental conditions in a particular bioregion.⁹⁰

Problematically, though, because of the way it wants the shape of human societies to be largely an outcome of their local environment, the bioregional vision’s only substantive response to disagreements within communities is further separation and isolationism. Without the allegiance to the universalist enlightenment ideals of such “desiderata” as equality and justice, bioregionalism seems trapped in a reductive loop of fragmentation, as the following passage from Abbey’s “Theory of Anarchy” suggests:

If Lebanon was not so badly overpopulated, the best solution there – as in South Africa – would be a partition of territory, a devolution into self-governing, independent regions and societies. This is the natural tendency of any population divided by religion, race, or deep cultural differences, and it should not be restrained.

⁹⁰ In bioregional theory such determining environmental conditions would include factors such as climate, precipitation and terrain. A bioregion suited to small scale farming might give rise to one form of governance; a bioregion suited to pastoralism, another; and a bioregion suited to hunting, still another.

The tendency runs counter, however, to the love of power, which is why centralized governments always attempt to crush separatist movements (27).

Abbey's suggested remedy to the problems of apartheid echoes Aspinall's putatively naturalistic solution to cultural and ethnic differences which I discussed in my introduction. It also demonstrates that because anarcho-libertarian anti-technology looks to nature to render obsolete the function of centralised government it lacks any clear and coherent response to societal tensions beyond fragmentation, migration, or war. Furthermore, because of this theoretical lacuna, there is always the risk that the bioregional vision can be read backwards. That is to say that value judgements about different cultures, societies, and even populations, may be made on the basis of the area they inhabit. By extension, then, there is also the danger that in relating a culture's and a population's identity to a close affinity with the territory it inhabits it can also imply that that culture or population's worth is based on its affinity to its local soil, and that without this affinity it loses both worth and authenticity. Considering the works of Edward Abbey we can see this perception recurring frequently in his treatment of ethnic minorities. In the last part of this chapter I want to focus on this problematic relationship between bioregional identities, worth, and authenticity in Abbey's thought and writing.

I noted at the beginning of this chapter Abbey's argument that there was "a superior breed in the deserts", and his pointing to the Mongols, Apaches, Bedouin, and others as evidence to substantiate his assertion. Of course, Abbey's claim is completely fallacious, but it demonstrates how the Spenglerian idea of landscape acting on race survives in the bioregional idea. Consider his treatment and representation of Native Americans in his essays and in his fiction: in "The BLOB Comes to Arizona" (1977) Abbey notes that the Navajo have been there for thousands of years but that despite owning large chunks of property they are still amongst the poorest sections of the community there. Though he admits that there are various factors to blame for their poverty, he

asserts that “basically it comes down to the fact, observed all over the world, that the descendants of hunters and warriors do not make good clerk-typists or computer tapers” (149). Having been shaped to be hunters and warriors, by their close relationship with their environment since their arrival, they do not possess the analytical skills needed for Western civilisation. Previous to this essay, in *Desert Solitaire*, he had gone into a little more detail in attempting to explain the predicament of the primitive hunter in the modern world: “the average Navajo suffers from a handicap more severe than skin color, the language barrier or insufficient education: his acquisitive instinct is poorly developed. He lacks the drive to get ahead of his fellows or to figure out ways and means to profit from other people’s labor” (106).

As Native Americans according to Abbey, are genetically and culturally unsuited for life in modern civilisation it follows that their traditional lifestyle of hunting and gathering is the best one for them as it was the one for which they are adapted. Left to the traditional life, they are perfectly happy and healthy, because their lifestyle and numbers perfectly complemented the bioregion they lived in. Abbey seems to subscribe to the notion that the primary consideration for culture and society is the community’s relationship with the soil rather than the development of the individual.

As Martin Lewis notes, bioregionalism is suffused with the belief that people who have lived in continuous and primal contact with a particular environment for many generations have not just different ways of thinking but even a different consciousness to modern people (46). He quotes Carolyn Merchant’s claim (1989) that for the Native American hunter “the primal gaze of locking eyes between the hunter and the hunted initiated the moment of ordained killing when the animal gave itself up so that the Indian could survive . . . for Indians engaged in an intimate survival relationship with nature, sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch were of equal importance, integrated into a total participatory consciousness” (*Green Delusions* 20). This tendency to believe that different people have a qualitatively different form of consciousness is, Lewis observes, a troubling one as it

has long been a staple of racist propaganda that the European mind is uniquely analytical and therefore more advanced and better suited to civilisation. As Lewis remarks, though Merchant and others would “reverse the moral signs and hold the mimetic consciousness of native Americans superior, the very distinction remains invidious” (56). Non-civilized peoples are seen as enjoying a close and satisfyingly authentic relationship to the territory they inhabit, and venerated for this, but only so far as they remain within their context. Outside of their assigned parameters of “dwellers on the land” their supposedly innate authenticity and superiority in this respect may be swiftly discounted.⁹¹

In Abbey’s bioregionalism in particular this authenticity is indeed swiftly discounted and the primitive who leaves the natural world for the artificial one of the city can become seen by implication almost as a non-person in that he or she lacks even the identity of the person born to technological civilisation; the displaced primitive is seen as especially rootless as he or she belongs neither to the natural world of the wilderness, nor to the artificial world of the technosphere. The deracinated primitive is an object of pity and contempt in Abbey’s essays and novels in a similar manner to the way that complements the veneration accorded to the “genuine” primitive is accorded veneration. A passage in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* provides an excellent example of this perception. A group of Native Americans observe Seldom-Seen-Smith and the rest of the gang sabotaging equipment but decline to help. Removed from their “proper” environment and acculturated to the civilised world these Native Americans no longer have any interest in protecting their ancestral lands from despoliation. They have become thoroughly artificial and superficial figures, identified only by the things they consume just as I noted, in a previous chapter, that rural

⁹¹ In this we can see quite clearly that bioregionalism, like anti-technologism, lies squarely within the counter-enlightenment tradition. It sees the individual as both a product and an integral part of their culture and geographic environment. Thus, the individual who moves outside of their original geography, or who casts off the traditions and customs of their culture loses part of their personality, their human “soul” so to speak, and in consequence they lose something of themselves. See Sternhell (2010), especially his chapter on “The Intellectual Foundations of Nationalism” 274-314 where he discusses the counter-enlightenment perception of the nation in historical and ethnic terms rather than political and judicial or legalistic (274-314).

workers who fled the countryside for the city became contemptuously associated with tinned food and white bread, symbols of their artificiality: “the Indians giggled. To hell with *them* – Stone Age Savages riding around in pickup trucks, eating Rainbo bread and Hostess Twinkies, wearing bolo ties, their TVs tuned to *Mister Rogers’ Neighbourhood* every fucking afternoon” (217). Smith, on the other hand, as someone whose love of the wilderness around him has given him a deep sense of identification with it, seems to have absorbed the genius of the place and even walks “like an old-time prewar pre-pickup truck Indian with a steady loping stride” (347). Thus the place of “dwellers in the land” has, by identification with the land, been transferred.

It can be seen, then, that the ideas of authenticity and identification with the land play an important role in Abbey’s bioregionalism. As I commented on earlier in this chapter, embracing the wild, fierce side of human nature is seen by Abbey as more real and authentic because more natural as opposed to the abstraction of the artificial technological world. The characters of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* are therefore true dwellers in the land because of their embrace of wildness and wilderness and their ardour in defending it from the incursions of the artificial world. The novel enacts the geographical tension between natural and artificial worlds in a literal sense. It was a working out for Abbey of an image he had long held since his days as a postgraduate student writing his thesis, “Anarchism and the Morality of Violence” (1959). “My favorite melodramatic theme:” he wrote in his journal of 1951, “the harried anarchist, a wounded wolf, struggling towards the green hills, or the black-white alpine mountains, or the purple-golden desert range and liberty” (8). In the defence of the real, the natural, against the artificial, authenticity is granted by identification with the territory. But this identification with wilderness must be more than intellectual to satisfy Abbey, it must be mediated through action. Thus it is the anarchist as Miltonic Satan, who defies the supposed heaven of the city and is cast out to the wilderness “a wounded wolf”, there to find liberty. An entry from Abbey’s journal of 1973, whilst he was writing *The Monkey Wrench Gang*,

demonstrates the relationship in his thinking between action, authenticity, and identification with territory:

I'm tired of 'hippies,' 'freaks,' that whole sick crew. I find, more than ever, that I respect only *men* – and *women* – who can *act*, who can do good things well, who are responsible to others, who are honest in all ways, who *really care* about this earth we live on. Letting your hair grow is not good enough; nor does wearing a headband make an Indian. I'm tired of soft weak passive people who can't *make anything* – except babies (*Confessions* 249).

In the novel, Abbey has the character of Doc Sarvis frame this thought for him. Sarvis criticises the theorising of the “hippy degenerates” that befriend Bonnie Abzug, his lover. Defending the place of discussion and debate Abzug protests that at least “they don’t do any harm”. Sarvis cuts her short by remarking that “I’m tired of people who don’t do any harm. I’m tired of soft weak passive people who can’t *do* anything, or *make* anything. Except babies” (144). Once again New Yorker Abzug is made to be the mouthpiece of East Coast intellectualism, and once again Sarvis is made to frame Abbey’s response forestalling debate and mandating action. Though there is indeed an element of Dionysian comedy running throughout *The Monkey Wrench Gang* this in no way detracts from the seriousness of the ideas and ideals conveyed in the novel, which are very clearly and identifiably the ideas and thoughts of the author.

In summary, then, I have used Abbey’s writing as a detailed exemplification of the way anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism identifies many of the same problems as administrative anti-technologism, but it rejects the administrative or reformist approach to resolving them. Instead it wants society to be regulated by nature, and so seeks to read off ideas about the formation of societies and cultures from nature. In a sense it can be seen as a form of abdication, a refusal to

recognize the legitimacy of any technocratic approach, and it is this refusal which I think accounts for the sense of nihilism, both in anarcho-libertarian anti-technologist philosophy and in literature, as my analysis of Abbey's writing has tried to illuminate. Anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism, as I analyse it, is a fundamentalist creed and as such scorns reformism. Since its project is the elimination of modern civilisation as we know it, this means that the only philosophically coherent response it can offer is destruction. In his essay, "We Have to Dismantle All This" (2002), Zerzan offers the following formulation of this nihilistic vision: "our answer must be qualitative, not the quantitative, more-of-the-same palliatives that actually reinforce what we must end" (160).

It is for this reason, I believe, that many of Abbey's works, though often a celebration of independence and free will, are ultimately nihilistic with the only triumphs being – rather ironically perhaps – purely symbolic. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is a novel about the destruction of the symbols of technology's incursion into the wilderness that ends with the gang once more fleeing the forces of techné, deeper into the wilderness. His earlier work, *The Brave Cowboy* (1956) is a work about a ranch hand who refuses to engage with techné in any form (whether as artefact or as governmental organisation) and cuts down fences as part of a one-man crusade against the modern world. Though he successfully eludes the police after getting arrested, and escapes on horseback, he cannot escape the modern world and in a rather simplistic metaphor is killed mere metres from the wilderness that promises freedom by a collision with a tractor-trailer carrying toilets. *Good News* ends with the victory of "the Chief" (symbolising the forces of technology, progress, and oppression) and the heroic death of Jack Burns, killed trying to assassinate the man who is slowly but surely bringing order (techné) to the post-apocalyptic chaos. *Fire on the Mountain*, as I observed earlier, ends with the death of the protagonist, though he triumphs after death by his ashes being returned to his own soil, completing the cycle of "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust". Even his thinly-veiled autobiographical novel, *The Fool's Progress* (1988), is a work where progress and technology have triumphed and the only victory over them, such as it is, lies in acts of destruction (such as

Henry Lightcap, Abbey's alter-ego shooting the refrigerator before abandoning his home). All these novels enact elements both of the geographical imagination of anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism in their plots, the incursion of the artificial world on the natural world, and all of these novels, in their scorn for reformist accommodation and compromise, are left with flight, and action, in the form of destruction, as the only possible responses.

Chapter Six: Meaning and Modernity: Anti-technologism and the Fascist Aesthetic.

We were eating breakfast in the house on Paper Street, and Tyler said, picture yourself planting radishes and seed potatoes on the fifteenth green of a forgotten golf course.

You'll hunt elk through the damp canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center, and dig clams next to the skeleton of the Space Needle leaning at a forty-five-degree angle. We'll paint the skyscrapers with huge totem faces and goblin tikis . . .

Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (124).

In the previous chapter I used the works of Edward Abbey as a means to explore what I saw as the anarchist-libertarian strain of anti-technologism. Among other aspects, I discussed the importance of the bioregional ideal – the view that a population derived its culture and society from a close relationship with its local soil and that this was the basis of a just claim to that soil – and I noted how this tended to lead to factionalism and to a belief in the virtues of destruction as a necessary prelude to creation. I concluded that the primary difference between administrative and anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism was that the latter took a much more radical view of technology that saw it as inherently corrupting and corrosive to society, no matter who controlled it, whereas the focus of administrative anti-technologism's anxieties was the particular effect of technology upon the urban masses.⁹² I observed how, in taking this absolutist approach to technology, anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism pursued fantasies of a return to primal nature. The world thereby envisaged, as I noted, set up a much more extreme opposition between the world of nature (including human nature) and the purportedly unnatural, artificial and stultifying world of technology and civilisation. Of course, all anti-technologism relies on this false dichotomy of natural and artificial ways of living

⁹² Of course, such distinctions should be seen as positions along a spectrum rather than absolute categories.

to some extent, but as I observed, anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism maps this distinction onto the landscape and opposes primal wilderness with a few quasi-Nietzschean inhabitants to a degraded and cosmopolitan urban culture and city which has lost all vitality. I cited as an example of this perception a scene in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* in which Hayduke indulges in a Spenglerian fantasy about a post-technological world in which once mighty skyscrapers stand empty and abandoned, their desiccation symbolic of the bleeding away of meaning and vitality that accompanied the demise of the civilisation that had erected them.

In this chapter, I want to look at some of the thematic similarities between anti-technologism and fascism. Whilst I don't believe there is any simple equivalence between the two, I believe that they are both responses to anxieties regarding the stability and sustainability of mass society and mass democracy. In particular, as I locate anti-technologism firmly within the counter-enlightenment tradition of irrationalism and the reactionary consciousness, I am interested in the similarities between fascism's rejection of materialist philosophies (such as *laissez-faire* capitalism and communism) and anti-technologism's rejection of materialism in the search for societal and cultural meaning beyond the cash nexus. I focus on one text only in this chapter – Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) – because of the way in which its rejection of technology and technological society is so intimately and symbolically bound up with the rejection of materialism. I am further interested in exploring how this rejection of materialism in both fascism and anti-technologism licences violence and destruction as the means to a supposed realignment of society with "true" nature. I will return to these themes and an account of how I intend to explore and analyse these parallels and themes in this chapter shortly, but first I think it is necessary to provide some background to the analysis of this chapter in order to link the work that will be undertaken here to some broader themes of anti-technologism. I will begin by returning briefly to a discussion of the symbolism of Hayduke's decayed skyscrapers in order to show how this vitalistic aspect of anti-technologism ties in with what I see as the similarities between anti-technology's rejection of materialism and

embrace of irrationalism and fascism's intellectual and ideological roots in a similar rejection of materialism and embrace of irrationalism.

The symbolism of Hayduke's Spenglerian fantasy of the decayed skyscrapers is picked up briefly by David Edward Tabachnick in "Heidegger's Essentialist Responses to the Challenge of Technology" (2007). Tabachnick, responding to Andrew Feenberg (1999), explores Heidegger's ideology of technological essentialism in order to draw out and analyse their implicit themes.⁹³ Tabachnick notes that Hayduke's fantasy of a "post-technological world [is] similar to Spengler's", and compares it to both Theodore Kaczynski's anti-technological manifesto, *Industrial Society and its Future* (1995) and to the image of a post-technological world in Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club*. Tabachnick characterises these three anti-technological images as representative of what he calls "aggressive essentialism" and defines this in much the same way as I define anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism: the belief that technology itself (as differentiated from the availability of technology) is so corrupting that it must be destroyed before any meaningful reconstruction of society can begin (494). He notes that these fantasies reject reformism – there are no attempts to ameliorate the impact of technology, no sense that it might be managed so as to minimise its negative consequences. In that respect, he argues, these responses to technology move from anarchist to totalitarian ideologies:

In these depictions, there is no effort to humanize technology. They are post-apocalyptic, post-holocaust scenarios unlike anything described by eighteenth and nineteenth-century critics of science. While certainly more anarchist than fascist,

⁹³ Feenberg defined technological "essentialism" as a theory that "attributes an autonomous cultural force to technology that overrides all traditional or competing values" and identified Heidegger as an extreme essentialist (qtd in Tabachnick 487). Tabachnick's response was to argue that "the very fact that Heidegger saw a possibility of transforming our relationship with technology through Nazism highlights the fact that his essentialism is not determinism" (492). In essence, his argument is that Heidegger's admiration for fascism's vitalistic politics proves that his philosophy of technology was not entirely deterministic.

they share in the same vicious defiance of the Nazis⁹⁴ and the violent atavism of the twenty-first century Taliban and Jihadist movements. Heidegger's "Russia and America" is Hayduke's "the Kremlin and the Pentagon." Durden's "Project Mayhem" is Osama Bin Laden's September 11th. (494)

Whilst Tabachnick is incorrect in asserting that such images are qualitatively different from earlier depictions (Richard Jeffries' 1885 novel *After London* would certainly sit alongside these comfortably), his observation that they rather counter-intuitively employ a totalitarian ethos to ostensibly promote what they claim would be a fairer, less oppressive society is astute. Indeed, given that Abbey was heavily influenced by Heidegger, whom he saw as "the most important philosopher of the twentieth century", it is hardly surprising that Abbey's anarchism often seems to appropriate such essentialist themes of destruction and regeneration in his response to technology (214).⁹⁵ Although numerous objections could be made to the equivalences Tabachnick suggests here, his insight that the anti-technological dystopias portrayed in these works merge anarchism with fascism in an effort to reinvest the world with meaning through destruction is, I think, an important one. Anarchic figures in anti-technological literature such as Abbey's Hayduke and Palahniuk's Tyler Durden often seem to encompass the apparent polar opposites of anarchism and fascism within one literary character. That is, they somehow manage to represent the extremes of both free-wheeling rebellion and adherence to precepts of extreme discipline and self-sacrifice for the greater good as

⁹⁴ Of course, as well as vilifying technology in a generalised sense, the Nazis also fetishized it in specific manifestations for its brute power. Tabachnick's reference here is a little crude perhaps. As I mentioned in the introduction, Nazism, like fascism generally was capable of maintaining an almost schizophrenic attitude towards nature and technology that allowed it to label certain things and certain people "natural" or native, and others unnatural and artificial. Thus Walter Benjamin in "Theories of German Fascism" (1930) complains, with regard to this specific topic, that "It must be said as bitterly as possible: in the face of this 'landscape of total mobilization' the German feeling for nature has had an undreamed of upsurge" (126). The fascist attitude towards technology and nature was utterly contradictory, but no less sincere for that. As Staudenmaier (1995) observes, "it would be a grave mistake . . . to see these [ecological] themes as mere propaganda, cleverly deployed to mask Nazism's true character as a technocratic-industrialist juggernaut" (17).

⁹⁵ This quote is taken from Abbey's 1987 letter to Rowohlt Verlag, the German publishers of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, in which he asked them to restore the twenty-first chapter that had been inadvertently left out and which Abbey considered "thematically central" to the novel, as it juxtaposed "the domination of Nature, the natural world" with "the domination of human nature by our excessive, uncontrolled and inhuman technology" (*Postcards* 213-4).

they see it. As I will show in this chapter with reference to *Fight Club*, they also exemplify anti-technologism's violent rejection of materialism, its preoccupation with destroying the symbols of desiccated civilisation in the hope of cultural rebirth.

Like Tabachnick, Suzanne Clark (2001), a critic interested in representations of male violence in American film and literature, has also pointed to the symbolic continuities between the characters of Hayduke from *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and Tyler Durden from *Fight Club*. She situates these characters within a context of male rebellion against a consensual, feminised culture beginning with Ken Kesey's RP McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), with his rebellion "through fighting, sex, fishing, and gambling" against the oppressively maternal figure of Nurse Ratched (Kasey 417). Clark claims that "the sociopathic, anarchic McMurphy prefigures later heroes of green politics and anarchism who put their bodies on the line for masculine freedoms . . . after McMurphy and Hayduke, *Fight Club's* Tyler Durden is a recognizable type" (417). Though she does not pursue it, I find her linking of "green politics" and anarchism in this context intriguing. *Pace* Clark, I would suggest that rather than Green politics as it is normally understood (a broadly New Left affiliation which views contemporary politics and society through the lens of ecological and environmental issues) the characters in these novels actually reference a much older strain of conservationism (and conservatism) which speaks to notions of vitalism through unmediated experience of, and contest with, the forces of nature.

In a literary context, then, I would situate the characters by reference to Ernest Hemmingway, Robert Bly, Robinson Jeffers, and Edward Abbey with their emphasis on a view of nature that emphasises masculine stoicism and the legitimacy of violence as consonant with the supposed laws of nature and the so-called survival of the fittest. In a political sense, I would argue that, *contra* Clark, the ideology these characters reference is not Green politics – which emphasises the need for consensus and expends huge intellectual energy in argument and rhetoric to ensure

that consensus – but rather older notions from the interwar years of vitality, and the struggle against degeneration in a decadent and cosmopolitan age. As I argued in my introduction, these much longer established notions regarding technology, nature, vitality, and degeneration continue to this day to have an influence on progressive politics and “romantic protest” but they should not be seen as consonant with it.

I see figures such as George Hayduke and Tyler Durden as not just survivals from the ideologies of a previous era, but their reinvention within a modern idiom.⁹⁶ As Johann Hari perceptively pointed out regarding Palahniuk, “there is a longing throughout his novels, reminiscent (disturbingly) of Martin Heidegger, for the authenticity of nature, of the pre-human, of the animal.”⁹⁷ Of course, this speaks to the tensions between civilisation as ascendancy from the savage, and anxieties over whether such an ascendancy might entail degeneracy and effeminacy – the Spenglerian organic cycle of culture and civilisation writ large once again. Thus, as Philip Armstrong (2008) has pointed out, continued (mis)readings of Darwin led, in the first half of the twentieth century, to what Armstrong terms therio-primitivism, attempts by modernists such as Wyndham Lewis to “cut through the corrupt impedimenta of civilization” and reconnect with the animal and the savage (143).⁹⁸ In his interview with Palahniuk, Hari suggests that the goals of Fight Club’s Project Mayhem to bring about “a prematurely induced dark age” and thereby “force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the Earth to recover” might be goals that resonate with

⁹⁶ I should perhaps note here for the avoidance of any confusion that it is not my argument that this was the intention of the authors in drawing up these characters, but that the qualities and ideas that these characters represent draw on a broad spectrum of ideals which have been carried over from an earlier era.

⁹⁷ Certainly, like Abbey, Palahniuk is conversant with Heidegger’s philosophy of technology. He draws on it in his essay “You Are Here” in a way that shows he is quite familiar with Heidegger’s philosophy of technological essentialism.

⁹⁸ John Carey points out that Modernists like Lewis adopted such primitivist affectations in large part because they saw the technological modern world as effeminate, lacking the ruthless vigour and cruelty of nature (as they saw it). For Lewis, as Carey summarises it, the twentieth century was “undergoing a new kind of cultural decay, attributable to the erosion of traditional male values by the female”. Such a process, he felt, had always been incipient, but “had not become troublesome or assertive until the modern period, when the advent of mass democracy had inaugurated a wholesale feminization of Western cultural values” (Carey 186). As Carey observes, Lewis’s disgust at the softness and degeneracy of modern mass democracy led him to enthusiastic support of fascism in general and Hitler in particular, dismissing the Nazi’s anti-Semitism as “a mere bagatelle” (qtd in Carey 196).

the author and many others in contemporary American society. Though Palahniuk denies too close an identification with the violent achievement of this desire envisioned in the book, he does admit that he sympathises with the ideal:

Palahniuk does not endorse this view himself. "It's a real natural thing to blame everybody else. It's very [Jean-Paul] Sartre – hell is other people. That's one reaction. You conclude that the solution is to get rid of human beings. I am worried about over-population, but I don't think that killing everyone is the solution." We talk about the Society for the Voluntary Extinction of Man – a group that argues that human beings should all voluntarily sterilise themselves in order to allow the planet to recover from our thrashing of it. "They have a huge internet presence," he explains. "I love those guys". (Hari)

Like Abbey, Palahniuk seems to use the dark humour of his work as a way of putting authorial distance between himself and the controversial ideas he explores, both in his fiction and in his essays and interviews. *Fight Club* explores one possible project of "get[ting] rid of human beings" to enable a regeneration of the world in its depiction of "Project Mayhem" and its mission to destroy modern civilisation, but it does so at a certain ironic distance. Like Abbey, Palahniuk uses such distance to explore issues of cultural decadence and regeneration that might otherwise be unacceptable in a post-holocaust world that is painfully aware of the vast impulsive power behind such ideals. The schizophrenic imagining of Tyler Durden as alter ego, can therefore be seen as a further placing of distance between the writer and the ideas which the novel explores.

Though this discourse in *Fight Club* and anti-technologism more generally is viewed through the prism of ironic distance, it still clearly displays the same anxieties and preoccupations with the degenerative materialism of technological society, anaesthetising and emasculating the "true"

savage (male) spirit by removing physical danger and hardship. The deracinated metrosexual IKEA modernity of *Fight Club* with its packaged, processed food stands in as a marker for the loss of cultural vitality and superficiality of technological modernity: “a house full of condiments and no food” the narrator reflects, gazing on the ruins of his yuppie apartment. The “hoardings, brittle houses” and “cosmopolitan modernism” that Williamson, in his semi-autobiographical recounting of the years preceding World War Two, railed against as the markers of a culture being drained of meaning by commodification are echoed in Palahniuk’s narrator’s apartment with its pseudo-indigenous furnishings: “my clever Njurunda coffee tables . . . my Haparanda sofa group with the orange slip covers designed by Erika Pekkari, it was trash now” (43). The symbolic denunciation in earlier works (such as Orwell’s or Williamson’s) of modernity’s superficiality as false and rotten is reproduced in *Fight Club*. The affectless insomniac existence of the narrator, where everything is “a copy of a copy of a copy” is only broken by the willing destruction of his apartment (21). Fittingly, after the narrator has destroyed the trappings of modernity he moves to a rambling Victorian villa which is falling apart; the superficiality of modern life is stripped away to reveal the decay underneath. The reader is unsure as to which is more real: the narrator’s life before his breakdown and move to the old Victorian villa, or his life afterwards. If his experiences after the breakdown are illusory, the schizophrenic fantasies of someone cut off from reality, they certainly seem no less real than the alienated and pointless existence of office work and consumerism beforehand.

Therefore, just as characters such as George Hayduke and Tyler Durden manage to encompass seemingly dichotomous politics, they also manage to encompass and transfuse ideologies from previous eras into more recent times. It is, I will argue, an integral part of the fascist aesthetic in anti-technologism that it has this Janus-faced quality, this ability to contain seemingly contradictory ideas and put them to use. In the course of this chapter, I will discuss how the fascist aesthetic relies on syncretism and paradox for its appeal, and will consider how this is reflected in anti-technological literature in general. In particular, I want to draw attention to the way in which

the fascist aesthetic in anti-technological literature is used to pursue ideas about authenticity and rootedness that are based on drawing non-material (or, more accurately, anti-materialist) distinctions between cultures and societies. By use of the fascist aesthetic, I will argue, anti-technologism inveighs against what it sees as the atomisation inherent in modern, liberal democracies with their materialism which disconnects people from nature and community, giving them a false sense of individual identity, outside of ethnic and cultural contexts. As the cadets of Project Mayhem are lectured: “our culture has made us all the same. No one is truly white or black or rich, anymore. We all want the same. Individually we are nothing” (134). The novel depicts the inhabitants of twenty-first century metropolises as so thoroughly deracinated and homogenised by their consumerist existence, which allows them to “choose” a lifestyle and sub-culture to identify with, that they have no sense of racial or historical past to draw on. *Fight Club* embodies the fascist aesthetic of violence as a force that transcends divisive materialist distinctions of class and status and binds people together tightly in shared identity and purpose:

“You have a class of young strong men and women, and they want to give their lives to something. Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don’t need . . .”.

“We have to show these men and women freedom by enslaving them, and show them courage by frightening them”. (149)

In this chapter I want to look at this very specific aspect of anti-technologism, its use of what I shall refer to as the fascist aesthetic. I use this term to clearly differentiate it from fascist politics as, although there are obviously important links between the two, it is the use of the fascist aesthetic in anti-technological literature that I am interested in here rather. By “fascist aesthetic” I mean the use of fascistic themes, images, and ideologies in literature or film regardless of the ideology of the work. Central to this aspect of my analysis here is an explication of the way in which pursuit of the

irrational, as a response to the perceived hyper-rationality of modernity, has a dangerous internal logic of its own which unchecked can (and often does) lead to the countenancing of the previously unacceptable. The fascist admiration of violence as a cutting through the “corrupt impedimenta of civilization” is the same primitivism, the same rejection of rationality and materialism that animated the violence of *Fight Club*.

In arguing this particular point I am following Zeev Sternhell, who argues that the fascist admiration for violence and brute force arose from its rejection of enlightenment rationalism and Marxist materialism in favour of vitalism and an emphasis on instinct as a response to the decadent materialism of modernity:

Marxism was a system of ideas still deeply rooted in the philosophy of the eighteenth century. Sorelian revisionism replaced the rationalist, Hegelian foundations of Marxism with Le Bon’s new vision of human nature, with the anti-Cartesianism of [Henri] Bergson, with the Nietzschean cult of revolt, and with Pareto’s most recent discoveries in political sociology. The Sorelian, voluntarist, vitalist, and antimaterialist form of socialism used Bergsonism as an instrument against scientism and did not hesitate to attack reason. It was a philosophy of action based on intuition, the cult of energy and *élan vital*. (24)

As Sternhell’s analysis indicates, although fascism began as an attempt to infuse the anti-capitalist popular appeal of socialism with the integrative force of nationalism, its jettisoning of materialism and rationalism led to fascism becoming a psychological approach to politics rather than an economic and rationalistic one. Hence it became concerned with vitalistic themes of cultural regeneration reached through rejection of materialism and the embrace of irrationalism and violence, “the cult of energy”. In terms of Monaco’s definition of the reactionary consciousness,

therefore, fascism “rebels against loneliness and anomie, against rationalism and materialism, and against the artifices of human progress and technology” (Monaco 91).

What Sternhell’s analysis makes clear is that fascism arose as a response to fears of modernity’s disintegrative force. His definition of it as an attempt “to rectify the most disastrous consequences of the modernization of the European continent and to provide a solution to the atomization of society, its fragmentation into antagonistic groups, and the alienation of the individual in a free market economy” closely echoes Monaco’s definition of the reactionary consciousness, as noted above (6). Hence, as Mosse summarises in the introduction to *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (1980) nationalism and fascism should be understood not as simplistic rejections of modernity and technology, but rather as attempts to contain their contradictions by reference to non-materialistic factors such as a mythologised past. Just as Sternhell points out that fascism and nationalism did not reject technology and industrialism as such but rather were concerned with redressing their supposedly corruptive and degenerative influence on the masses and society, Mosse argues that

[i]ndustrialization was kept subordinate to an anti-industrial ideology, treated as technological advance rather than as leading to a new perception of the world The frightening process of scientific and industrial change was embedded in pastoral, historical, or sacred traditions, perceived as a means to an end that would transcend industrial society; indeed, ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century there have been those who sustained both the industrial ideal and its moral rejection. (3)

The similarity between this analysis of fascism, William’s discussion of organic form in *Culture and Society* and later in *The City and the Countryside*, and my analysis of anti-technologism are, I hope, obvious. Just as anti-technologism is not equivalent in any simplistic way to the rejection of

technology, but is instead a sublimation of fears and anxieties regarding its potentially degenerative effects on society, so fascism's apparent anti-modernism, its appeal to a mythologised past, to nature, to history and to race are not a flat rejection of technology or science but rather an attempt to divorce them from their tendency towards egalitarianism, social and geographical mobility, and emancipation.

In this struggle to contain the perceived contradictions of modernity, fascism, like anti-technologism, employed the mythology of civilizational decline and resurgence. As Roger Griffiths (2002), one of the most respected researchers of fascism, has noted, whilst there is still disagreement amongst scholars on many aspects of fascism, there is a broad consensus regarding its core dynamic as an ideology which relies on and manifests the idea that "a perceived period of decadence or degeneracy is imminently or eventually about to give way to one of rebirth and rejuvenation in a post-liberal new order" (23, 15). Fascism thus relies on a cyclic view of history, which (as Orwell noted of Yeats's fascism in the example I cited in the introduction) has the dual benefit of both denying the liberal ideology of progress and of licencing a sense of elitism among the inner circle who can divine and thus claim to lead the nation out of decline and through destruction to rebirth. All of this, of course, speaks to the Spenglerian sense of a culture that, in becoming a civilisation, has lost touch with its roots and so is in decline. Thus, along with the theme of decline and regeneration an aesthetic of destruction and creation is often pursued in the hope that in destroying the old civilisation a new one will rise up phoenix-like out of the ashes (the idea of the *Nachkrieg* or runic, anti-rationalist, regenerative war Benjamin analyses in "Theories of German Fascism"). Hence fascism requires a leader who is utterly transcendent, who can claim to contain this ideal of purging, of going through a personal cycle of struggle and dissolution so as to be reborn in a purified and strengthened form to lead the people. The gross and the materialistic must be purged and cast aside, because in fascist ideology the leader is essentially a spiritual figure identified with the nation's rebirth.

Turning now to Palahniuck's *Fight Club* (1996). I want to make a threefold argument that the novel employs the fascist aesthetic of spiritual regeneration through violence and the violent renunciation of materialism, that it does so as an exploration of a possible response to the perceived alienation and anomie of modern technological society which rejects liberal reformism, and that in so doing *Fight Club* embodies the deep motivational drives that underlie both fascism and anti-technologism. That is to say, I will contend that *Fight Club* is a very sophisticated attack not on technology in terms of artefact, but rather on technological society and the assumptions which underpin it: the ideology of progress, of material comfort, of individualism as freedom. Certainly, there are symbolic destructions of technology throughout the novel – the blowing up of computers and skyscrapers for example – but these destructions of artefacts are clearly secondary. *Fight Club* is an anti-technological novel *because it rejects technological society*, because it explores the utter rejection of liberal modernity and embraces anti-materialism, irrationalism and the cult of violence, energy, and *élan vital* as a means to catastrophe (the unmaking of civilisation) and so to a spiritual and ultimately a cultural rebirth. Anti-technologism's use of the fascist aesthetic, I will argue, is unusually clear in this novel. Though there is no sense of nationalism and no appeal to a mythologised past in *Fight Club*, the novel's extreme rejection of technological society and the liberal, democratic beliefs that underpin it, and its embrace of irrationalism and violence as a transcendent force through which a sense of group identity can be found, brilliantly employ the fascist aesthetic in attacking the perceived alienation of modern technological society.⁹⁹

In analysing *Fight Club* I take it as self-evident that the novel has obvious and undeniable fascistic overtones: how could it not when the members of the revolutionary army that is Project

⁹⁹ The *Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (2002), citing Sternhell, notes that Social Darwinism was one of the most influential ideologies influencing the formation of both fascism and the rise of racist ideology in general in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though there is no detectable nationalism or appeal to a mythical past in *Fight Club*, the idea of a natural elite self-identified by membership in a group dedicated to violence as a transcendent force united beneath a spiritual leader prefigures the themes of group identity and superiority that gave rise to nationalism and racism (120-1).

Mayhem are instructed to shave their heads and provide “Two black shirts. Two black pair trousers. One pair of heavy black shoes” and “one heavy black coat” for their clothing? (127-8). Given this, the task is therefore to analyse these overtones and ask what role they play in the work. Why does the novel make use of the fascist aesthetic? What does it provide, and what does it imply? The proposal I put forward below can be summarised quite simply. I argue that fundamentally *Fight Club* is a denunciation of safe modernity and its hyper-rationalism where risk and danger have been reduced to vanishing point – the consequence of which is that for many people there *are* no meaningful consequences in their lives. *Fight Club* answers the logic of technological society – liberalism, capitalism, democracy, and individualism – not with a rational response, but with an irrational one. It rebuts the materialism of modern technological society not with an alternate form of materialism (socialism instead of capitalism, for example) but with anti-materialism, undercutting the entire project of modernity as material progress. As the symbolic figure of the mechanic puts it in the novel: “we don’t have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression” (149).

The diagnosis of modernity the mechanic makes here is decidedly *not* a materialist one: Tyler Durden is no progressive reformist seeking fairer pay and conditions. Rather, the diagnosis is explicitly a spiritual one: society has become safe, stale, and sterile and no materialist, rationalist approach will rectify that and bring meaning back to modernity. No reformist agenda that accepts the materialist basis of modern society can succeed in reinvesting meaning into society. Before genuine change can come, the narrator’s rationalistic, materialistic world of capitalist modernity must be utterly destroyed before anything meaningful can be created. It is in these two concepts – in the power of irrational spiritualism versus rational materialism, and in creation through destruction – that the dynamic of the fascist aesthetic operates in *Fight Club*.

In offering this reading of *Fight Club*, I should make it clear that though I argue strongly that it can and should be viewed as employing the aesthetics and thematics of fascism this does not imply a reading of authorial sympathy or proselytization for fascist ideals in any simplistic, straightforward way. I am concerned to argue, though, that in attacking the perceived atomisation and alienation of technological modernity the novel clearly demonstrates that the anxieties that anti-technologism explores in sublimated form are identifiable with the anxieties that gave rise to fascism and that both can be seen as modernity struggling to contain its own contradictions. Following my analysis of the aesthetics of the novel, I propose a reading of the novel that locates it as a work of inversion in which rationality is revealed to be irrational, much like the utopian dystopia Aldous Huxley portrayed in *Brave New World*. If the end result of the enlightenment project of rationalism as the guiding force for humanity is a sterile, safe existence that is little different to that of a lab rat, is further “progress” really rational? “Perhaps self-improvement isn’t the answer” Palahniuk’s narrator ponders, “maybe self-destruction is the answer” and in this we have a set of contradictions which is actually an antinomy, within the confines of the novel at least (49). It forms a hermeneutic circle in which the completely irrational is the only rational response and which therefore requires the reader to accept the basic premise of the novel in order to make sense of it. As such, it works as a commentary on the irrationality of modernity even whilst admitting its own artificiality as a work of fiction. Just as Abbey’s presentation of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* as a comic romp allowed him to use it as a vehicle to explore and indeed express unacceptable opinions, so Palahniuk’s use of irony and contradiction in *Fight Club* create space for the exploration of unacceptable ideas. Thus, whilst Palahniuk is (presumably) not advocating a fascistic agenda in the novel, he is certainly using the fascist aesthetic in the novel to attack the foundational premises of modern technological society. In short, then, I offer an analysis of the novel that sees it as an attack on the materialistic enlightenment conception of modernity that explores a response so extreme that it is framed within the context of a psychotic break from normality, just as the twentieth

century's experiment violent and bloody experiment with fascism can be viewed as a psychotic break from the continuing rationale of modernity's progress.

One final note before beginning my analysis of the text: because of the extraordinary success and influence of the filmed version of *Fight Club* I feel it may be necessary to remark on the differences between the novel and the film. With the exception of the film's alternate, Hollywood ending (which I come to later in this chapter) the difference is mainly one of mood and the portrayal of the narrator and his complicity in the events described. In the film, there is a sense that the narrator is a passenger on a journey that increasingly repulses and horrifies him until the point at which it forces the realisation of his identity as "Tyler Durden". The novel differs significantly from the film as there is little or no sense of revulsion or disapproval on the narrator's part over the actions of his alter ego, Tyler Durden. The importance of this is that it is fundamental to the much darker, more vicious and visceral mood of the novel, in which the narrator is complicit in the machinations of Durden. In the novel, Durden is more the fantasy of the narrator than his nightmare, a way for the narrator to allow himself to transcend his own limitations. There is not the sense of shock or disapproval in the novel which there is in the film version but rather a sense of satisfaction in cutting through the "corrupt impedimenta of civilization" and finding an inner, primal, and "true" self through violence.

To cite just one example for now. In the scene where the narrator and Marla, his girlfriend, walk around the garden where the herbs and flowers for Durden's soap making are grown, the novel hints at a far more macabre form of recycling than simply stealing liposuctioned fat from the dumpsters behind medical facilities:

Tufts of hair surface beside the dirt clods. Hair and shit. Bone meal and blood meal. The plants are growing faster than the space monkeys can cut them back . . .

In the dirt is a shining spot of gold, and I kneel down to see. What's going to happen next, I don't know, I tell Marla.

It looks like we've both been dumped.

In the corner of my eye, the space monkeys pace around in black, each one hunched over his candle. The little spot of gold in the dirt is a molar with a gold filling. Next to it surface two more molars with silver amalgam fillings. It's a jawbone.

I say, no, I can't say what's going to happen. And I push the one, two, three molars into the dirt and hair and shit and bone and blood where Marla won't see.

(135-6)

As this scene shows, not only is the figure of the narrator complicit in the novel in a way in which he isn't in the filmed version, there is a much deeper current of menace running beneath the surface of the novel which is largely elided by the film which focuses on the fist fights of the initial "fight club" but plays down the seriousness and intensity of "Project Mayhem". Though the mission of Project Mayhem is nodded to in the film, the violence is purely directed against property, whereas in the novel there is no real distinction drawn (as I will show) between violence towards property, and violence towards people. Both are utilised as "the motive force of history".

In "Fascinating Fascism" Sontag reviews *The Last of the Nuba* (1973), Leni Riefenstahl's then recently published collection of photographs and commentary on a primitive Sudanese tribe. Riefenstahl was famous as the director whose masterpiece *Triumph of the Will* (1935) had been an extraordinarily powerful piece of propaganda for the Nazi regime. In publishing the collection of photos of the Nuba, Riefenstahl had perhaps hoped to re-establish herself as an auteur whose work for the Nazis had been an unfortunate accident of history. Sontag, however, detected a strong sense of the fascist philosophy, what she famously identified as the fascist aesthetic, in Riefenstahl's

photographic collection, and set out to explicate how this work was in its own way as fascistic as any of her films from the Nazi era.

One aspect of the representation of the Nuba which Sontag singles out for attention is the focus on virility and health via struggle. This can be seen as an ideal which stems from the Rousseauian notion of the noble savage, but as Sontag observes, “what is distinctive about the fascist version of the old idea of the Noble Savage is its contempt for all that is reflective, critical, and pluralistic”. Riefenstahl eulogised the wrestling matches that were central to Nubian society, and commended the way the men fought not for material gain but “for the renewal of the sacred vitality of the tribe” (qtd in Sontag). Riefenstahl’s photographs of the Nuba are, even today, striking in their depiction of tall, physically perfect Nubian men, muscles gleaming under a sheen of sweat. This celebration of the culture of physical combat, Sontag argues, fulfils two criteria of the fascist aesthetic inasmuch as it glorifies physical aggression as a unifying and revitalising force for a society whilst at the same time relegating women to their ideal role in fascist society as “merely breeders and helpers, excluded from all ceremonial functions”. The corollary to this is a culture which is seemingly indifferent to the loss of life of any individual (because the possibility of death is something they live with every day) but where paradoxically “[the] most enthusiastic and lavish ceremonial is the funeral. Viva la muerte” (Sontag). The fascist society, then, in its exultation of physical combat, must be seemingly indifferent to the life of any individual (because they struggle and die for the greater good) whilst at the same time indulging in the exultation of the dead warrior as a means to further unify and inspire.

Seen in this light, the cult of physical combat in *Fight Club* clearly tallies with Sontag’s analysis of the fascist aesthetic. Of course the novel glorifies physical combat and the sense of virility and health that comes with it. But in its exultation of the dead warrior as exemplar it goes beyond a sense of masculine camaraderie and exhibits the cult of death that Sontag sees as characteristic of

fascism. For example, after one fight club member is shot and killed by police whilst on an assignment for Project Mayhem, he ceases to be merely another black-shirted “space monkey” and, in death, assumes an identity and stature guaranteed by his falling in battle, an identity proudly affirmed by the other men gathered to fight in each “chapter” of fight club:

In every fight club, tonight, the chapter leader walks around in the darkness outside the crowd of men who stare at each other across the empty center of every fight club basement, and this voice yells:

“His name is Robert Paulson.”

And the crowd yells, “His name is Robert Paulson.”

The leaders yell, “He is forty-eight years old.”

And the crowd yells, “He is forty-eight years old.”

He is forty-eight years old, and he was part of fight club.

He is forty-eight years old, and he was part of Project Mayhem.

Only in death will we have names since only in death are we no longer part of the effort. In death, we become heroes. (178)

This is the celebration of death as the ultimate achievement because the ultimate heroic individual sacrifice for the common good. In a similar vein to Sontag, Umberto Eco identifies in fascism’s idealisation of death what he calls “a cult of heroism” which is “strictly linked with the cult of death. It is not by chance that a motto of the Falangists was *Viva la Muerte* . . . the ur-fascist hero craves heroic death, advertised as the best reward for a heroic life. The ur-fascist hero is impatient to die” (7).

It is this death that *Fight Club's* narrator craves without knowing why prior to the formation of fight club. Every time he flies across country on business, the narrator fantasises about a spectacular death. "I prayed for wind shear effect" he tells us, "I prayed for pelicans sucked into the turbines and loose bolts and ice on the wings . . . I prayed for a crash" (26). He fantasises about transcending the anomie of modernity through images of violence and death. Forced to enact the ruthless calculus of late capitalism ("A times B times C equals X. This is what it will cost if we don't initiate a recall") the narrator invents a hero who answers such cold hyper-rationalism instinctively, with violence (30). In a revealing scene that takes place *before* the narrator recognises that he and Tyler Durden are one and the same, he is confronted at work by his boss after using the office photocopier for personal use. He fantasises about a shooting rampage, whilst his boss berates him: "with thirty shots, our totally fucked hero could go the length of mahogany row and take out every vice-president with a cartridge left over for each director" (98). The narrator's fantasy here exemplifies the fascist aesthetic of "heroic" death as final proof of innate superiority over the paradoxically weaker but temporarily more powerful oppressor type. It revels in the fascist dualism of a victimised elite, kept from their rightful positions of power by the underhanded machinations of those weaker than them. As Eco notes, this dualism is a staple of the fascist aesthetic and its focus on heroic redress against claimed historic victimisation where, "by a continuous shifting of rhetorical focus, the enemies are at the same time too strong and too weak" (7). Because of this, fascist campaigns against the "other" are always total, as the enemy have shown themselves to be underhanded and crafty, and cannot be allowed to remain a threat. In the novel (though not in the film) the narrator kills his boss in a suitably anti-technological act by booby-trapping his computer with home-made napalm, exterminating all trace of him.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Again, this is just another example of how the novel differs from the film. In the film, the physical violence is limited to the fist fights and any violence outside of the clubs is purely against property, not people. The novel does not make this distinction and the violence in pursuit of a spiritual rebirth is utterly ruthless.

As a mere cog in the corporate machine, then, Palahniuk's narrator feels his existence to be pointless, and longs for a heroic – or at least dramatic – death to give some meaning, some kind of distinction to his life. There is a feeling throughout the novel that the hyper-rational world of modern capitalism has made the world safe, clean and comfortable, but in doing this it has drained it of meaning, because there is nothing left to struggle for that has any real consequence. Between bouts at fight club, the narrator changes slides during a presentation whilst his boss tells Microsoft how he came to decide on a particular shade of cornflower blue for the icons he designed, a scene heavy with the sense of utter pointlessness. During the presentation, the narrator notices Walter, one of the young Microsoft executives present who has “perfect teeth and clear skin” but whom he recognises as a recent member of fight club and he realises that Walter is looking at the bruise on his face and the blood on his lips, “and maybe Walter’s thinking about a meatless, pain-free potluck he went to last weekend or the ozone or the Earth’s desperate need to stop cruel product testing on animals, but probably he’s not” (55).¹⁰¹ Like the narrator, Walter from Microsoft has abandoned abstract ideals for the visceral, shared experience. The immediacy and instinctiveness of fight club is contrasted with the bloodless rationality required in solving the complex problems of modern technological society. Though modern life is not without consequence in a broad sense, the consequences are beyond the horizon of immediate personal experience. The human figure is dwarfed by the scale of modern society.

With this loss of consequence and meaning comes anhedonia, and the deadening of all visceral feelings. Society becomes atomised, people become alienated, unity and cohesion are lost, and underneath the smooth technological façade of perfection finally reached, decay has set in because “nothing is static. Even the *Mona Lisa* is falling apart” (49). The novel re-enacts the fascist

¹⁰¹ The sense of animus against environmentalism is a recurrent theme in the novel which I see as a conscious effort on Palahniuk's part to differentiate his attack on modernity and materialism from the environmentalist critique. Like Abbey's writings, Palahniuk's attack on modernity is popular with many environmentalists, as shown by Johann Hari's admiring interview with him (Hari mainly writes on environmental and Green issues), but like Abbey his rejection of materialist, technological modernity is grounded in an older, more vitalist ideals, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter.

aesthetic of creation from destruction, the belief that “only after disaster can we be resurrected” to rise like a phoenix from the wreckage (70). Fascism sought to counter what it saw as the crushing rationalism of modern materialism with irrationality in the form of violence, of destruction, just as the narrator’s alter ego wants to reverse the enlightenment privileging of materialism over will. The point which must be recognised here is that it is that much of fascism’s and anti-technologism’s contradictory nature stems from their attempts to somehow re-infuse modern society with the supposed meaning of pre-industrial society. As I argued earlier, it is not the technological artefact that fascism denied, but the centrifugal tendencies of technological society. Thus, just as Mosse argued that fascism subordinated industrialism to an anti-industrial ideology in order to re-forge a sense of national unity and organic identity so Umberto Eco in “Ur-Fascism” (1995) comments that:

even though Nazism was proud of its industrial achievements its praise of modernism was only the surface of an ideology based upon Blood and Earth . . . the rejection of the modern world was disguised as a rebuttal of the capitalistic way of life, but it mainly concerned the rejection of the [Enlightenment] spirit of 1789 . . . in this sense Ur-Fascism can be defined as *irrationalism*. (n. pag.)

The use of violence and irrationalism as a unifying and transcendent force in literature, then, is the employment of the fascist aesthetic, and one which anti-technologism makes full use of, particularly anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism.

We see this trope of violence as a transcendent, anti-materialist force exemplified in the novel when the narrator’s alter-ego, the expression of his subconscious, urges him to tell the detective on the phone the truth about the destruction of his apartment: “‘I’m breaking my attachment to physical power and possessions,’ Tyler whispered, ‘because only through destroying myself can I discover the greater power of my spirit’” (110). This “spirit” is the will-to-power, the

fascist rejection of materialist individualism as a means of accessing the higher, spiritual life of the hero. The first act of this personal regeneration, then, is the rejection of materialism, the trappings of rational modernity in an overly theatrical act of pure destruction that symbolises the triumph of the will over reason: the utter annihilation of the narrator's apartment by home-made explosives. The renunciation of the modern, materialistic way of life must be total, and it must be an act of symbolic destruction to show the supremacy of will over rationalism and materialism.

This symbolic act of material destruction prepares the way for the second act of personal regeneration. This regeneration involves the endurance of pain, signifying the cleansing of the leader as well as the acceptance that it is only through such acts of violence that anything worthwhile can be achieved. The purification comes from realising that to achieve anything truly great the narrator must be willing to accept that he will have to cause pain, to sacrifice the lives of others in order to make something truly meaningful. As Durden explains, soap was discovered as a result of human sacrifice; after the bodies of the victims were burnt, their fat ran into the water: "Without their death, their pain, without their sacrifice . . . we would have nothing" and therefore "*It was right to kill those people*" (77-8. My emphasis). In its rationality, in its desire to avoid pain and injury to others, to pursue safety and comfort, modernity denies the validity of sacrificing the lives of others for the greater good, it cleaves to the enlightenment ideal of the sovereign individual whose rights cannot be overridden in the name of society or the greater good. But to remake society the narrator must first disabuse himself of this pretension and accept that violence and the sacrifice of others is sometimes necessary.

Following these acts of personal destruction and re-creation, and of pain and purification, the next stage is the remaking of society. The Sorelian ideal of violence as the motive force of history and the aesthetic of creation from destruction are clearly evident in the sexual imagery of power and

death as vitalistic forces of creation. After Project Mayhem is formed, Tyler tells the black-shirted recruits to go out and purchase guns. He then instructs them:

“The explosion blasts a metal slug off the open end of the shell, and the barrel of the gun focuses the exploding powder and the rocketing slug,” Tyler said, “like a man out of a cannon, like a missile out of a silo, like your jism, in one direction.”

When Tyler invented Project Mayhem, Tyler said the goal of Project Mayhem had nothing to do with other people. *Tyler didn't care if other people got hurt or not.* The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world. (122. My emphasis)

Tyler Durden is here revealed to be the perfect type of fascist dictator, someone for whom the pursuit of regeneration and revitalisation licences any extreme of violence and destruction. His insistence on the supremacy of the will to power over materialism is encapsulated in his phallic references to a gun as something that focuses energy in one direction. The material power within each person is nothing, he implies, without direction and focus, thus the will to power *must* precede materialism just as intention must precede action. The discipline and uniformity of Project Mayhem are a means of focusing that energy for political ends, a point which belies readings of *Fight Club* as anarchist or straightforwardly anti-capitalist. This is made perfectly clear by the apostolic figure of the mechanic, when he tells the narrator that focussing the will to power is all that is really needed to gain actual power:

The mechanic starts talking and it's pure Tyler Durden.

“I see the strongest and smartest men who have ever lived,” he says, his face outlined against the stars in the driver’s window, “and I see these men are pumping gas and waiting tables. . .”.

“If we could put these men in training camps and finish raising them”.

“All a gun does is focus an explosion in one direction”. (149)

What else is this if not a statement summarising the most basic definition of fascism, the binding together of the people under a single will, as signified by fascism’s symbol, the *fasces*, or bundle of rods tied tightly together to represent strength through unity under one leader? Through pain, sacrifice, and discipline, the atomised individuals of modern materialist society will be bound together into a weapon that can be used to end the old, sick civilisation and usher in a new age under the laws of nature and survival of the fittest.

The sequence of indoctrination towards this binding together is perfectly clear in the novel. First, the connection with others on a visceral, emotional level through fight club, implying membership and belonging in a spiritual brotherhood, albeit one that merges elements of eastern spiritualism to violence (though of course this itself was a popular theme of fascist syncretism). Through this brotherhood, the members are broken down and remade, destroyed and recreated, just as the narrator has been, and just as society will be. They are taught to despise material possessions, and to value only the triumphs that come through pain and suffering. Again, the symbolism of Durden’s soap made from human fat (the same fat which is also turned into high explosive) is important here, signifying the cleansing and purifying of society’s gross materialism. Finally, through discipline, identification with the corps, and regimentation (the shaving of hair, wearing black shirts and heavy black boots) they are bound into a *fasci di combattimento* – a league

of combat or “Fight Club” - that has one single purpose: to bring an end to the decadent materialist civilisation that has exhausted its possibilities and must be ended before a new culture can begin.¹⁰²

Fight Club, then, as I analyse it here, is a transgressive novel that broaches the late twentieth century taboo against fascism in order to reveal the underlying tensions and contradictions it sees as inherent in modern technological society. Materially, the narrator of *Fight Club* has everything a person could reasonably expect: a warm, comfortable home, a well-paid job, and plenty of material possessions. Spiritually though, he is empty, a vacuum, alienated from those around him, so that all the comforts, all the material wealth have come to mean nothing. Indeed, they further distance him from others as he retires every night after to work to clean his apartment and browse the IKEA catalogue alone. Not only is this seen as emasculating (the “IKEA nesting instinct”) but as I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, it functions as a marker of the inauthenticity of cosmopolitan modernity. In a paradox of materialist individualism, the purchase of material comforts serves only to bleed identity from the nameless narrator still further. Already nameless and faceless, a drone, he is stripped even of the characteristics of ethnicity, culture, and even gender, the very type of the utterly atomised individual. Analysed by reference to modernity’s own precepts, this existence is perfectly sane, perfectly rational. To voluntarily reject this safe, materially comfortable life for uncertainty and possible destruction would, apparently, be the act of a madman, thus the narrator, in rejecting materialism, is by definition “mad”. Yet, the novel asks, for all his transgressions and violence, how can we condemn the narrator as insane when modern technological society relies on the implicit acceptance of the violence caused by technology? Not only violence against the soul, in terms of anomie and alienation, but the real, physical tally of violence and injury embodied in the production of technological artefacts based on the profit principle?

¹⁰² “Fasci di Combattimento” was Mussolini’s first fascistic party or group. *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (282).

Palahniuk draws our attention to this supposed equivalence when his narrator, at his workplace in the corporate headquarters of some unspecified automobile manufacturer, is approached by his boss who demands to know why he has been using the office photocopier to print copies of the rules for fight club. Instead of justifying or apologising for his unauthorised use of office equipment, Palahniuk's narrator ironically cautions his boss that whoever wrote those rules "sounds like a dangerous psychotic killer" who "could probably go over the edge at any moment in the working day and stalk from office to office with an Armalite AR-180 carbine gas-operated semiautomatic" (97). The narrator's threatened use of technology in this unacceptable form is compared to technological society's implicit acceptance of the violence embodied in a system where artefacts are manufactured primarily for profit:

What I don't have to say is I know about the leather interiors that gets so hot it sets fire to the maps in your glove compartment. I know how many people burn alive because of fuel-injector flashback. I've seen people's legs cut off at the knee when turbochargers start exploding and send their vanes out through the firewall and into the passenger compartment. I've been out in the field and seen the reports where CAUSE OF FAILURE is recorded as "unknown". (99)

The equivalence drawn here between unacceptable personal violence and the supposedly tacitly accepted violence inherent in modern, capitalistic technological society forces the reader to reflect on whether the narrator is truly insane or is merely responding to an insane system and way of life that, in seeking to escape from the hardships of life in the pre-technological natural world, merely replaces personal violence with institutionalised violence.

In drawing such equivalences, *Fight Club*, like anti-technologism in general, seeks to uncover and reveal what it sees as the artifices and contradictions of technological society by contrasting

them with life before technologically advanced societies emerged. For all its cleverness and adroit use of irony, at its most basic level the novel recapitulates the concern that in attempting to escape the hardships of life in nature we are deviating from a natural and therefore “correct” way of living to which ultimately we will have to return. Thus, in the chapter following the narrator’s confrontation with his boss, we have the following passage:

We [Marla and the narrator] go upstairs to her room, and Marla tells me how in the wild you don’t see old animals because as soon as they age, animals die. If they get sick or slow down, something stronger kills them. Animals aren’t meant to get old.

Marla lies down on her bed and undoes the tie on her bathrobe, and says our culture has made death something wrong. Old animals should be an unnatural exception. (103)

Here Marla contrasts the popular misconception of the survival of the fittest as a law of nature with “our [modern] culture”. Her claim that in nature if an animal gets sick or slow “something stronger kills them” perfectly captures the central ethos of the fight club where physical supremacy is contested and decided. The narrator’s dominance of his boss through the implicit threat of deadly violence, and his alter ego’s use of violence, machismo and force of will to impose his will on the members of fight club and Project Mayhem are therefore presented as at least “natural” in that they observe the law of survival of the fittest and the dominance of the stronger over the weaker. Thus, the real aim of the campaign to smash technological civilisation described in the novel is the wiping away of the artifices of modern machine civilisation in an attempt to regain ethical clarity and revitalise society by once more realigning it with nature:

“Imagine,” Tyler said, “stalking elk past department store windows and stinking racks of beautiful rotting dresses and tuxedos on hangers; you’ll wear leather clothes that will last you the rest of your life, and you’ll climb the wrist-thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower. Jack and the beanstalk, you’ll climb up through the dripping forest canopy and the air will be so clean you’ll see tiny figures pounding corn and laying strips of venison to dry in the empty car pool lane of an abandoned superhighway stretching eight-lanes-wide and August-hot for a thousand miles”.

This was the goal of Project Mayhem, Tyler said, the complete and right-away destruction of civilization.

What comes next in Project Mayhem, nobody except Tyler knows. The second rule is you don’t ask questions .(125)

The imagery here, contrasts the artifices of modern civilisation – the department store windows and the beautiful dresses and tuxedos – with the supposed organic wholeness, ethnical clarity and most of all authenticity of a life lived in acceptance of nature’s laws. Accepting these laws, of which the first is the survival of the fittest and the dominance of the weak by the strong, therefore justifies and requires acceptance of Durden’s fascist leadership, not on rational or intellectual grounds of the common good, but simply in virtue of his supposed supremacy and force of will.

Seen from this perspective, the fascist leadership of the narrator as Tyler Durden is, paradoxically, a liberation, as Durden promises to emancipate humanity from the “false” comforts of materialistic modern society and lead them back to a world in which they will be truly, authentically “free” in the sense that they will engage with the world as an individual based on their own

strengths rather than as a cog in the machine of technological society.¹⁰³ Therefore, Palahniuk's creation of Tyler Durden can be seen as a Zarathustrian figure, trying to teach the Overman, or *Übermensch*, to the contented masses. Zarathustra warns of the approach of the "last men" who identify happiness as merely the absence of want, he cautions that the time is coming when the spirit of man may be crushed by the ironing out of all difference, all striving and struggle, and therefore humanity must reject the deadening attractions of soulless comfort and ease and seek salvation in chaos and struggle. By his flight to madness, then, the narrator actually finds redemption, and transcends the rationality of modernity, a central message of *Fight Club* as Palahniuk revealed in an interview:

Interviewer: "What is the one thing you truly want people to get out of *Fight Club* and your other books?"

Palahniuk: "That we need to be more comfortable and accepting of chaos, and things we see as disastrous. Because it is only through those things we can be redeemed and change. We should welcome disaster, we should welcome things that we generally run away from. There is a redemption available in those things that is available nowhere else". (Kleineman, "Chuck Palahniuk – Author of *Fight Club*". n. pag.)

Seen from this perspective, the narrator's flight from the crushing rationalism, sterile safety, and oppressive "equality" of modernity into irrationality and madness is a psychotic break which ultimately proves to be his salvation. The fascistic attributes of Tyler Durden and Project Mayhem which have aroused so much critical ire are therefore morally ambiguous within the context of the novel as a work of literature. They are presented as both a disaster for the narrator and a

¹⁰³ A premise also reprised by the Wachowski brothers in their 1999 film *The Matrix*, which posed the question of whether a life of artificial ease and comfort would be preferable to a life of genuine hardship and struggle.

redemption which ultimately enables him to more fully realise his humanity. The narrator's encounter with Tyler Durden leads, via mental breakdown and psychotic break, to the destruction of his home, the loss of his job, and his descent into fascism with its glorification of violence as a means to achieving radical changes in short order. But this utter disaster, seemingly complete in its catastrophe, actually contains within it the seed of the change the narrator needs to stop existing and begin living as a human being on an emotion level, having real connections with other people. We're told *en passant* at the beginning of the novel that somehow all the madness "is really about Marla Singer" (14). But the narrator is unable to form the emotional bond required to truly connect with others. He can't *feel* anything at this point, and neither can Marla who likewise clings to the pathos of the support groups for vicarious catharsis:

All her life she never saw a dead person. There was no real sense of life because she had nothing to contrast it with. Oh, but now there was dying and death and loss and grief. Weeping and shuddering, terror and remorse. Now that she knows where she's going, Marla feels every moment of her life. (38)

This is ironic, of course. Marla only feels her life by contrast with the death and suffering she sees at this point. But the connection, however tangential with the unpleasant facts about the human condition at least serve to begin to break down the neurasthenia of safe and clean modern civilisation. As the narrator tearfully confesses when he believes he is momentarily about to die in the lights of an oncoming truck: "My tiny life. My little shit job. My Swedish furniture. I never, no, never told anyone this, but before I met Tyler, I was planning to buy a dog and name it 'Entourage'. This is how bad your life can get. Kill me" (146).

The narrator's anhedonia, his inability to feel pleasure or indeed *any* kind of real, human connection obviously drives the narrative of *Fight Club*. To note this is merely to state the obvious ("I

want you to hit me as hard as you can”) but it still needs to be stated, as it highlights the paradoxical way the novel works (Marla can only feel life in the presence of death, being physically attacked is the only opportunity the narrator has to feel connection to another human). The fascist aesthetic in the novel, then, is merely the supreme ambiguity, the supreme irony, that it would take induction into the disciplines and sacrifices of a fascist brotherhood to make people realise that by their own volition (or more accurately, lack of volition) they are prisoners of civilisation. Fascism and the fascist aesthetic are absolutely necessary to *Fight Club* precisely because they are ideologies or themes based on irrationalism and paradox: “We have to show these men and women freedom by enslaving them, and show them courage by frightening them” (Palahniuk 149).

Indeed, there may be indications of this deliberate ambiguity within the text. It is unfortunate that the film has so far surpassed the novel in both the popular and the critical imagination that most journal articles refer primarily to the film. This, I believe, has led to these ambiguities and subtleties being missed from critical interpretations. Henry Giroux’s condemnation of *Fight Club* for what he sees as its patriarchal, quasi-fascist content is a prime example. For Giroux, *Fight Club* is “a morally bankrupt and politically reactionary film” that should be reviled for its “proto-fascist politics” (17 & 22). Amongst the work’s defenders, there is the same focus on the film to the effective exclusion of the novel. Gary Crowdus, for example, rebuffing those critics whom he claims “became absolutely apoplectic about what they perceived to be its ‘fascist’ politics” argues that such critics “seem to wilfully ignore the film’s inherent criticisms of Tyler’s terrorist actions, which is consistently expressed through Jack’s voice-over narration and the privileging of his increasingly condemnatory point of view” (48).¹⁰⁴ This focus on the film is a shame, because the

¹⁰⁴ “Jack” is the putative name or label given to the nameless narrator of the work which comes from the narrator’s habit of reading out *Reader’s Digest* articles on health where an organ is described in the first person: “I am Jack’s liver” for example. Later on, the narrator describes his emotional state using the same template. No critic, so far as I am aware, has considered the irony inherent in having this most alienated individual “named” by this use – that is, by the consideration that an organ only has meaning and use by reference to its function within the larger body. These, and other biological metaphors for alienation and belonging in the book (and the movie for that matter) seem to have gone entirely unconsidered.

novel contains complexities that the film cannot translate. The narrator, as I have shown, is a far more complicit character in the novel than in the film. It is ironic then that even while focusing on the film to the exclusion of the novel, criticism of the film has seen little symbolism in Durden's splicing of pornography into family movies whilst working as a projectionist. This, I will now argue, is a mistake, as the symbol of the projector is an important one in the novel as it builds on and reinforces the idea of irrational interlude which provides the structure of the work.

In splicing in graphic pornographic stills of genitalia into idealised family movies, Durden is once more forcing on others an interlude of "reality" into the safe, sanitised depiction of life that the audience is viewing; he forces the realisation that ultimately we are animals with physical needs and visceral desires which must be repressed in order for complex societies to work. I noted at the beginning of this chapter that the use of the unreliable narrator, the idea of the psychotic break, and the extremely bleak humour of the novel are all devices that serve to give authorial distance from the ideas the work explores. But in the context of *Fight Club* and the pursuit of the irrational, such devices also work on another level as a commentary on the text as a manic interlude in our own lives. As I also argued above, we have to invest on an emotional level in *Fight Club* in order to understand it. We are forced to accept, at least on a temporary basis, that violence can be a way of connecting with others, that fascism, with its anti-materialism and emphasis on society as an organic whole, held and might still hold immense attraction for the alienated in modern society as it did in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, just as fascism was a psychotic break in the rationalism of the twentieth century, just as the narrator's descent into it in the book was a manic interlude in his life, and just as Durden's intentionally distressing splicing of hard core pornography into idealised family films was an irrational hiatus, so the novel itself is an irrational episode that we have to consider on its own terms, as it challenges the strictures of rationalism, probity, and acceptable boundaries that govern the rest of our lives.

It is important to realise the nature of Durden's single-frame splicing, as I believe that as I stated above, it is analogous to the novel's interruptive nature in the consciousness of the reader. This part of the novel has been criticised as an imposition of patriarchal male power on the rest of society, an exultation of pornography as affirmation of phallic male supremacy. In a sense, this is not incorrect, but I believe it is woefully superficial. It leaves unspoken so much of the transgressive, paradoxical nature of the work which the projectionist symbolises. To unfold my meaning here, consider the following description of Durden as transgressive projectionist:

This is one of those pet adventures, when the dog and cat are left behind by a travelling family and must find their way home. In reel three, just after the dog and cat, who have human voices and talk to each other, have eaten out of a garbage can, there's the flash of an erection.

Tyler does this. (30)

Durden's splicing of the erection into the movie here is irrational in that it interrupts the narrative of the film on a subconscious level (its appearance is too brief to be consciously registered), and yet ironically it has its own rationale in that it forces an image of humans as just another species of animal into a narrative that anthropomorphises animals that sanitises and neuters them. Tyler's splicing here thus anticipates the narrator's pathetic admission later in the novel that he had considered buying a dog and naming it "Entourage" as a substitute for human relationships and the respect of his peers. Durden's intrusion of humanity's essential animalistic nature into anthropomorphic idealisations therefore prefigures not only the subsequent intrusion of each meeting of fight club as an animalistic interlude in the sanitised existence of modern humanity, but also the intrusion of the novel's irrational and fascistic narrative into the reader's construction of what is acceptable. Similarly, in refusing to play his part as a projectionist in propagating the myths that sustain modern society, Durden intrudes personal will and volition into the smooth running of

the corporate machine, turning the tools of technological society against itself just as Abbey's monkey wrench gang used technology in their battle with machine civilisation.

Considering the use of the fascist aesthetic in *Fight Club* within the broader context of anti-technologism, I think it is apparent that it manifests dissatisfaction with what Zeev Sternhell and others have characterised as the enlightenment project, the goal of peace, prosperity, and equality reached through rationalism and material advancement. In that sense *Fight Club*, as I mentioned earlier, may be situated with reference to such works as Huxley's *Brave New World* as it rebels against a kind of somnambulant, neutered consumerist existence where happiness is equated merely with the avoidance of pain and need. In this respect, the opposition of spiritualism and emotion to materialism and rationalism that anti-technologism makes is readily apparent. This can be a noble and morally praiseworthy project, but because of its irrationality it can also be an extremely dangerous one, as the fascist experience shows. Thus, whilst *Fight Club* may seem to be a rejection of tradition, with Durden's rhetoric of ending civilisation and denying the validity or importance of history, in actuality it enacts a longing for a previous era which it perceives as having more meaning, an era before welfare and widely available white collar office work. In this respect *Fight Club* highlights the way that anti-technological literature is often, superficially at least, a literature of revolt but which at the same time enacts a semi-suppressed desire for a return to what are seen as simpler times. It is the eruption of the reactionary consciousness into the anti-capitalist and anti-materialist dialogue of progressive politics, the dark, irrational side of the rejection of material wealth and comfort as a measure of progress.

In its neat embodiment of these contradictory longings, *Fight Club* is the perfect example of the use of the fascist aesthetic in anti-technological literature. Perfect, in that it is not just transgressive but in the final analysis perfectly ambiguous: a point nodded to in the last words of the novel after the narrator has made the realisation that Durden was his irrational projection of

his suppressed needs and “killed” him by shooting himself. In a final, parting irony of the novel that the film elides for the traditional Hollywood romantic ending, the narrator is placed in a mental institution until he recovers his sanity and reason. Clearly he is not being held criminally responsible for the murders and acts of terror committed by or under the leadership of his schizophrenic alter ego, Tyler Durden. As soon as he has been rehabilitated, the narrator can retake his place in modern society. If he wants to.

But I don't want to go back. Not yet.

Just because.

Because every once in a while, somebody brings me my lunch tray and my meds and he has a black eye or his forehead is swollen with stitches, and he says:

“We miss you Mr. Durden.”

Or somebody with a broken nose pushes a mop past me and whispers:

“Everything's going according to the plan.”

Whispers:

“We're going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world.”

Whispers:

“We're looking forward to getting you back.”

-- Ending of *Fight Club* (207-8).

Conclusion.

In this thesis, I have tried to delineate the characteristics, motivations, and anxieties of a cultural and literary trend which I identified as anti-technologism. My concern throughout has been first to analyse and explicate this particular strain of antipathy towards technology, and second, to consider how it seemingly embodied – or at least facilitated – a convergence of progressive and reactionary ideals and motivations. I identify anti-technologism as a manifestation of sublimated fears over the rising power of the masses, both in sheer numerical terms as well as in terms of their access to power and influence on culture. I considered a range of texts from the 1930s to the present day to show how these concerns became translated from a discussion about degeneracy, cosmopolitanism, and the restless urban masses, to a more abstracted narrative which identified technology as the root cause of the perceived malaise. What I would like to do now is to draw together my analysis of anti-technologism and situate it within a broader cultural and literary framework.

One of the most striking features of anti-technologism uncovered in this thesis is its reliance on an organicist and vitalist view of society and history. In this, it can be clearly related to negative classicism as analysed by Patrick Brantlinger and culture as analysed by Raymond Williams. For this reason, anti-technologism tends towards the apocalyptic, as it perceives culture and civilisation in organic, Spenglerian terms as having a limited life-span composed of genesis, growth, maturity, senescence, and dissolution or death. Thus, technology is never seen as merely changing society and culture, but is invested with greater potency because it is seen as the product of the final stages of civilisation.

Such a cyclic and organic view of culture and civilisation obviously implies a very complex and contradictory view of technology and technological society. It is seen as both final flower of civilisation and the culture which produced it, but also as its promised and encapsulated dissolution

or death. Perhaps “dissolution” hits the mark more nearly here, as the dissolution of the old, calcified civilisation is held to contain the seed of a renewed, vibrant culture based once more on a close relationship with the living soil. Thus, anti-technological texts from Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* to Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* see the destruction of one world as heralding the promise of a new one. This is seen most obviously in those texts which I examined in my chapter on anti-technologism and catastrophe. All of the texts considered in that chapter – JB Priestley’s *A Summer’s Day Dream*, Pat Franks’ *Alas, Babylon*, Edmund Cooper’s *The Overman Culture*, and James Howard Kunstler’s *World Made by Hand* – are noticeably elegiac in their recreation of an idealised and solidly conservative, stable, and hierarchical society of a type that never actually existed, but is always held to have existed (as, for example, analysed by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*). Thus, there is, as with negative classicism in general, a generalised ambivalence in anti-technologism towards the idea of the collapse of modern technological civilisation, as it represents both death *and* incipient renewal.

This contradiction – of both desiring and fearing the decline and collapse of modern technological civilisation realises a further contradiction or paradox, which is anti-technologism’s position on intellectualism and instinct. Intellectualism and abstraction is seen as the human counterpart of the shift from organic culture to petrified civilisation: “*Culture and Civilization – the living body and the mummy of it*” Spengler claimed in *The Decline of the West* (250)¹⁰⁵. Intellectualism is seen as a form of malaise, a petrification of the human spirit which leads to childlessness and subsequent depopulation and decline (as I discussed in my chapter on Tolkien). The salient feature of all new worlds in anti-technological fiction – whether actualised in fiction or fantasised – is their fertility and vitality, which is figured as essentially Dionysian in its overflowing vitality. This fertility is the reassertion of organic culture over petrified civilisation; it is a sign that the cycle has been completed and growth can begin again. Hayduke’s fantasy of “wild women” and

¹⁰⁵ See my chapter on anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism for analysis of this aspect of anti-technologism. My chapter on Tolkien also contains relevant analysis here.

hunting for red meat “under the light of a reborn moon” in *Monkey Wrench Gang*; Emily telling Michael ““I want to have many of your children” in Cooper’s *The Overman Culture*; and the crop of fair-haired children in the Shire after Sam has spread the seed and soil from Galadriel around, all very clearly tie intellectualism and rationality with sterility and decline, and instinct with fertility and renewal. Hayduke, the hard-drinking, multiple-gun-carrying ex-Green Beret is the antithesis of the modern liberal intellectual; Emily vouches her promise of fertility “hardly even knowing what she meant”; and Sam Gamgee is, of course, the very type of Spenglerian eternal peasant fictionalised.

Yet, by the same token, at other times anti-technologism seems to also castigate instinct and bemoan what it sees as the decline in intelligence in machine civilisation, as in Huxley’s *Island*. Hence we have, for instance, the figure of the “mucker” in Brunner’s *Stand on Zanzibar* with his “conspicuous erection”, bloodied weapon, and bulging biceps, barely articulate. How, then can instinct be both affirmative in anti-technologism, and yet terrifying and disgusting? As I observed in the introduction to my thesis, as well as in my chapters on Tolkien and on over-population, anti-technologism sets up a distinction between “true” fertility and artificial and unsustainable fertility. “True” fertility, as I have just considered, is identified with instinct, but it should be observed that this instinct is closely bound in with identification with the native soil. A deep and lasting commitment to the soil must be affirmed in some meaningful way, whether by action, affirmation, or ritual. By extension, as the texts cited above exemplify, there is “true” instinct – rising from a life lived in close harmony with the native soil – and artificial instinct, a perversion engendered by mass culture and communications.¹⁰⁶ Natural instinct is identified with procreation, family, community, and culture, whereas the “artificial” instinct of the cosmopolitan city and the technological world is coarsely sexual and grossly materialistic.

¹⁰⁶ This artificial instinct is not the same as Marxist “false consciousness”, though it has similarities. Where Marxist false consciousness is predicated on economic grounds, and is concerned with the misleading and alienation of the workers to their true status in society, this artificial instinct is concerned with themes of uprooting and dislocation and how this leads to unrest and discontent in people lacking community, culture, and hierarchy.

In terms of representation, then, natural instinct in anti-technologism is identified with the peasant, intimately connected with the soil and cycles of growth, and artificial instinct with the urban masses: formless, cultureless, and undifferentiated, a product of the modern city, whose instincts are gross and carnal. Thus, intellect and instinct in anti-technologism are intimately bound up with ideas of sterility and fertility, petrification and renewal. Intellectuals are excoriated because their tendency towards abstraction, to seek universal laws and axioms, undermines culturally specific beliefs that bind society together in a fixed hierarchy. The masses are held responsible for their own base desires which have estranged them from their “correct” place in the hierarchy and the intellectual is condemned for instigating the undermining of cultural norms that bind a culture and a people together. Culture gives way to civilisation, civilisation gives rise to intellectualism, and intellectualism undermines culture, so that rather than a “people” and culture there are only the cities and the masses.

In this respect, anti-technologism’s roots in negative classicism and degeneracy panics are very clearly apparent, which goes some way towards elucidating its paradoxical and even contradictory nature, as I discussed in my introduction and in my first chapter. In regard to anti-technologism’s negative classicism, in my thesis chapters I have focused almost exclusively on Spengler, yet if we consider another of the classic works of negative classicism, Jose Ortega Y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses* (1932), we can see how the key ideas of anti-technologism fit the mould of negative classicism in other texts as well. Ortega makes an interesting accusation, in that he accuses the scientist and technician of being, in their specialisation, the very type of the “mass man” because they deny and ignore the authority of tradition and culture and so typify the “demoralisation” of modern civilisation. In this tendency of modern civilisation to deny authority and tradition, Ortega believes, can be found the genesis of the modern barbarian, the “mass man” of liberal democracy and technicism, and, as a consequence of this, civilisation’s eventual and inevitable destruction. Hence anti-technologism, following negative classicism, is both repulsed and yet fascinated by the spectre of collapse and barbarism. The decline in standards (which is of course

a subjective assumption) that leads to barbarism is fiercely condemned, as standards must be upheld and venerated, yet at the same time the modern “barbarians”, in their vitality and disdain for intellectualism and abstraction, seem to contain the vitalist qualities which hold out the hope of cultural renewal.

So, for example, Ortega spends much of *The Revolt of the Masses* condemning and deriding the idea of democracy as according to him the masses, in their barbarism, can only act through violence. Yet, in identifying what he sees as the normalisation of violence in modern civilisation, he claims that “it [the normalisation of violence] has reached its full development, and this is a good symptom, because it means that automatically the descent is about to begin” (116). The rise of violence, and the return to savagery, therefore, is both feared and welcomed, as it heralds (ultimately) cultural renewal and revitalisation. In anti-technologist fiction this is represented in the idea of the savage or barbarian as repository of essential humanism and vitality. Thus, Huxley’s savage, John, in *Brave New World* is the repository of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, the discovery of which awakens in Bernard Marx the realisation that he is a vital, natural creature, and that reproduction and renewal should, in all senses, spring from nature. Crucially, just as the savage doesn’t really comprehend Shakespeare but rather recites it as though the words themselves were instinct with some preternatural power, so Marx responds to Shakespeare not intellectually, but instead on an almost instinctive, incantatory level:

The strange words rolled through his mind; rumbled, like talking thunder; like drums at the summer dances, if the drums could have spoken; like men singing the Corn Song, beautiful, beautiful, so that you cried; like old Mitsima saying magic over his feathers and his carved sticks and bits of bone and stone . . . it talked to *him*; talked wonderfully and only half-understandably, a terrible beautiful magic, about Linda; about Linda lying there snoring . . . (114).

The implicit message here illustrates Ortega's paradox: the civilisation of *Brave New World* has advanced too far to appreciate "high" or "true" art because such appreciation of them requires an instinctive response. It has become a civilisation that has left behind and cast off its culture; in advancing too far it has degenerated. Culture, Huxley seems to suggest, reminds us of our essential humanity, our closeness to nature and our own wild nature. In reawakening Bernard Marx's realisation of his own sexual nature, it is also reawakens an appreciation of culture. Of course, this is not to argue for Huxley as some sort of primitivist, advocating a return to the Neolithic, but rather to emphasise how closely Huxley's ideals in this respect parallel Orwell's in the sense he fears that the removal of struggle and pain from everyday life might not lead to human advancement but to an atrophy of the soul and to the type of affectless dystopia the novel describes.

Linda, meanwhile, is reminiscent of Ortega's scientist as archetypal "mass man" in her compartmentalised and specialised knowledge. She remains impervious to the magic of Shakespeare and culture, deeming it uncivilised nonsense. When questioned by one of the savages about her role in the modern technological world she is unable to provide any substantive answers, because she herself doesn't have any. A mere cipher, a cog in the machine, Linda does not even know where the bottles of chemicals she uses in embryology are from, as this knowledge is outside her speciality. "It's the Chemical Store people who make them, I suppose," she responds uncertainly, "Or else they send to the factory for them. I don't know. I never did any chemistry. My job was always with the embryos" (113). Huxley's savage, as Bernard Marx comes to see, is infinitely preferable in his holism, his vitality and even his violence, compared to the affectless scientism and compartmentalisation of the technological world in which he lives. As Carey notes, it is the savage's "contempt for mass values" a contempt endorsed by nature herself, that Huxley is keen for us to recognise here (89).

Ortega is at pains to emphasise that the "mass man" he warns of, the new barbarian, is not like the barbarians of old, outside the gates of civilisation but rather "is an automatic product of

modern civilisation” and so already within the gates (101). He or she is, for Ortega, the result of both over-abundance (thanks to modern technology, science, and medicine) and egalitarianism, the belief that the common mass man or woman is entitled to the abundance they find around them by right, when really (Ortega asserts) such abundance is the result of the struggle and labour of those few who far surpass the common mass of humanity. Thus for Ortega, modern machine civilisation “may be summed up in the two great dimensions: liberal democracy and technism” (107). Ortega defines “technism” in the sense that he uses it here as a technology that arises from “the union of capitalism and experimental science” which recognises no limits to its seeking for knowledge, and no superior authority or wisdom (107). This union, of capitalism, experimental science, and liberal democracy, Ortega asserts, has brought about the “mass man” in both a quantitative sense (enabling the steep rise in population from 1800 onwards) and a qualitative sense inasmuch as people in such a society come to view themselves in scientific and legalistic terms, rather than cultural and hierarchical terms. Therefore, “the rebellion of the masses” he declares, “is one and the same thing as the fabulous increase that human existence has experienced in our time” (125).

For Ortega, then, the denial of the authority of tradition, the repudiation of hierarchy, and the specialisation of science, in service to speculative capital, these are the characteristics of the modern, technological world. As people cease to view themselves in an organic sense, as part and product of a soil and culture, and start to see themselves instead in metaphysical and legalistic terms as citizens with inalienable rights and duties they – crucially – see themselves as complete in and of themselves without reference to their geographical and cultural roots. This, Ortega warns, is the “self-satisfied man” and his appearance on the scene is a signal that it is time “to raise the alarm and to announce that humanity is threatened with degeneration” (102). This is the counter-enlightenment position that all anti-technological texts take, that the self-interest of the masses in a liberal society will ultimate result in chaos. Thus, the testimony of Dr Julius Overman in Cooper’s *The Overman Culture* is that England has become “corrupt and decadent” as has the world, and that the

only possible response is to wait “until time and the will of God have wrought great and cleansing changes”, which in this case is the war and subsequent ecological disaster that wipes out all other cultures and ethnicities except the carefully preserved genetic material of “British donors of Caucasian stock” (173 & 185). It is the ultimate cause of the disaster that overtakes civilisation in Huxley’s *Ape and Essence*, as it is in Kunstler’s *World Made by Hand*. In all these works, as in anti-technologism generally, the real enemy is not technology itself but the masses in secular, individualistic liberal democracy that are perceived to be pursuing their own selfish desires in the absence of any cohesive structure or cultural tradition.

Anti-technologism is the expression of the desire to try and ameliorate this threat inherent in mass democracy by a heartfelt but ultimately futile attempt to “fix” people and society in place, to prevent urbanisation, cosmopolitanism, and degeneration by locating individuals not just in terms of their status within the hierarchy, but also geographically, by reference to their locale. Hence, as the discussion above pointed to, anti-technologism condemns the intellectual precisely because of their intellectualism – that is, their dealing in abstract concepts that are (at least in theory) axiomatically true independent of culture, ethnicity, or nationality.¹⁰⁷ Ortega’s charge that the intellectual “demoralised” society stemmed from his belief that the intellectual’s universalism undermined belief in, and allegiance to, tradition and authority. This belief informs anti-technologism as well. Anti-technological works such as Edward Goldsmith’s *The Stable Society* (1978) typify this belief in attacking universalism as a dissolvent of culture and society. Citing the example of Zeno from ancient Greece, Goldsmith, in *The Stable Society* condemns attempts to fix meaning independent of specific cultural and societal referents and warns of the inevitable result of universalism: “their message was world citizenship and the universal brotherhood of man. Needless to say, it failed” (Goldsmith 48).

¹⁰⁷ This is not to say that intellectuals do not or cannot consider culture or ethnicity of course. But such considerations are conducted with the belief that certain concepts and laws are “true” or valid independent of society or culture.

In this perception we can see how anti-technologism has its ultimate roots in the counter-enlightenment. It decries the abundance and ease brought by science, technology, and liberal democracy as ultimately pernicious and self-defeating, and stresses the importance of hierarchy, cultural, and tradition in people's self-identity. Most of all, it decries the universalism of the enlightenment and rationalism, and in opposition, stresses the importance of cultural and historical specificity. It rejects the intellectual's search for universal laws, universal axioms, and – most of all – universal rights. My analysis of anti-technologism and overpopulation (especially, for example, in my discussion of Huxley's *Island*) shows how a central feature of this aspect of anti-technologism was its conviction that science and technology are self-defeating when they are unmoored from any allegiance to culture and authority.

Acknowledging this, I have argued throughout my thesis that, for the less essentialist administrative strain of anti-technologism at least, it isn't so much that all technology was bad per se, but rather that unrestricted access to technology proves dangerous. Perhaps, in view of the above discussion, I can now refine that position further and argue that for administrative anti-technologism, technology and liberal democracy combined are dangerous. Liberal democracy is seen as unmooring science and technology and its use from considerations of obligation and hierarchy, and allowing it to be indiscriminately used and applied without any reference to any cultural or traditional context. Anti-technologism's attack on technology and the technological society is therefore also an attack on the undifferentiated individual. That is to say, an attack on the individual perceived as uprooted from a specific cultural context, and without regional provenance, agglomerated in the city into what is perceived as an unstable and inchoate mass. Orwell's repeated reference to "real food" with "provenance" as contrasted with tinned food of no determinate provenance in *Coming Up For Air* functions as a marker for this idea, as I explored in my first chapter. As I noted there, Carey's analysis of tinned food as a literary symbol showed how it functioned as a representation of the soulless urban masses. The literary and cultural elite view of the masses as

soulless and therefore effectively dead (or at least less than human) was a common trope in the literature of the first half of the twentieth century, and anti-technologism carries that trope forward into the second half of the century. In situating human identity with reference to particular cultures, ethnicities, or societies, anti-technologism implicitly denies the liberal enlightenment ideal of universalism, the belief that someone's individuality and personhood is innate to them and not simply predicated on their belonging to a particular culture or ethnicity. Though this has the benefit of recognising the importance of society and culture to self-identity, it often leads to a reductive view of the urban, cosmopolitan individual as "de-cultured" and even lacking in identity or soul.

The supposed tragedy that anti-technologism points to, then, is that in following a promise of political self-empowerment and material progress the individual in modern, democratic civilisation sheds all cultural and hierarchical ties and in so doing loses his identity and, ultimately, their "soul". Yet, in a world which was growing more and more democratic, populous, and shaped by technology and mass culture, making this argument became increasingly fraught with the risk that the writer would be charged with elitism (though in fact, that is often exactly what the writer was arguing for, whether they realised it or not). Furthermore, in the second half of the twentieth century, in societies struggling to come to terms with the horrors of fascism, such elitism and condemnation of the masses was increasingly unacceptable. In the aftermath of the gas chamber and the concentration camp, portraying a section of humanity as soulless and without any real identity was of course to invite widespread condemnation. In this historical context, the existence of elite literary and cultural appropriations of the masses as akin to tinned food and other mass-produced, machine-made articles served a crucial function as displaced metaphor, as I explored in my chapter on Orwell. Like the masses they represented, such artefacts of machine civilisation were viewed as mediocre and paltry, the triumph of quantity over quality. Indeed, as I made clear in my first chapter and elsewhere, early movements involved with anti-technological themes, such as AJ Penty's Guild Socialism, with its emphasis on quality over quantity, owe much to eugenic theory and

its influence, a pseudo-science founded on the mistaken belief that quantity must naturally displace quality.

However, rather than a replacement of technological artefact (for instance a tin of food) for the individual in modern machine civilisation in any straightforward, simplistic fashion I believe the displacement was more subtle, because mostly unconscious, and consisted largely of supposed characteristics of the degraded masses being mapped on to technology, technological society, and technological artefacts. For instance, the inexorable and horrific fertility and growth of the scientifically engineered super-grass in Ward Moore's novella *Greener Than You Think* (1947) is an excellent early example of this tendency. The artificially engineered grass cannot be said to directly represent or symbolise the masses in any straightforward way, but in its characteristics and attributes – each blade of grass individual and yet indistinguishable from the mass, its fertility and seeming imperviousness to all attempts to contain its power, its uselessness and yet ultimate success and triumph – it stands in for mass man in the modern age. This is a point reinforced in Moore's novella both by repeated references to a decline in standards as the grass advances on society, and by the fact that the hapless villain of the story (a struggling salesman who by chance comes into possession of the discovery of the grass) consolidates his power and wealth by forming "Consolidated Pemmican and Allied Industries" a tinned food company that purchases food worldwide "to process and ship back in palatable, concentrated form" (125).

Technology and the technological artefact in anti-technologism, then, can be said to parallel the conception of the masses in both negative classicism and in associated fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Just as Carey (following Williams) observes that the figure of the peasant was a popular one in literature (as it represented to a largely metropolitan literary elite the ideals of rootedness, vitality, and contact with nature, and most of all acceptance of hierarchy), so anti-technologism, in an era without peasants, looks instead to the figure of the

primitive as the survival of Spengler's "eternal peasant" as a way of denying the individualism of the urban masses in modern liberal society.

To elaborate on this idea, I wish to consider Carey's comments on Virginia Woolf's description of an old beggar woman outside a London subway station in her *Mrs Dalloway's Daughter* (1925). Woolf's description runs to several pages and meditates on how "through all the ages – when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise – the battered woman – for she wore a skirt . . . stood singing of love – love which has lasted a million years" (qtd. in Carey 37). As he points out, this aestheticisation of the woman,

Is a way not of describing but eliminating old women who beg outside Regent's Park Tube Station. By converting her into a peasant or super-peasant, timeless, immemorial, mixed up with soil and tree-roots, Woolf deprives the woman of the distasteful social reality which she would possess as a member of the mass asking for money. The beggar disappears in a primitivist cosmetic haze. (37)

In the same manner, anti-technologism's appropriation of the primitive serves not so much to elevate the primitive, but rather to deny the existence and individuality of the urban masses. Edward Abbey's admiration of the Native American, as I showed in my chapter on anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism, was very brittle, and any deviation from an approved "authentic" lifestyle was met not just with condemnation but also with derision. The primitives in Abbey's work, and in other anti-technological works are not individuals, but types. This is so because the primitive's real function, for

Abbey, for Robinson Jeffers, and for anti-technologism in general, is to vouch for the validity and rightness of a way of life antithetical to modern civilisation and actually existing liberal democracy.¹⁰⁸

Tolkien's hobbits are, of course, another prime example of this elevation of the peasant as an embodied rejection of the masses, a point not lost on Michael Moorcock who notes acerbically that peasants "are always sentimentalized in such fiction [fantasy] because, traditionally, they are always the last to complain about any deficiencies in the social status quo" (183). As Moorcock further points out, Tolkien's orcs are conversely portrayed as the "Mob . . . the worst aspects of modern urban society represented as a whole by a fearful, backward-yearning class" (185-6). The Hobbits in *Rings* want largely the same thing as the masses – their aspirations are simply plentiful food, cheap beer, and tobacco to smoke – and yet their rootedness and acceptance of their lowly but honourable place in the hierarchy redeem them. Their sense of place, of tradition and hierarchy (with genealogical records kept and memorised) and respect for authority, are seen to give them a sense of identity which of course is utterly lacking in the Orcs who represent the unstable and grasping urban masses of the world. It is in the organicism of the peasant and primitive, that anti-technologism locates their identity and by comparison, highlights the lack of identity or soul in the modern urban masses.

Given the prevalence of such fundamentally reactionary attitudes in anti-technologism and anti-technological literature, both as discussed here and analysed in the body of the thesis, the most immediately pressing question would seem to be how such works came to be viewed as forming part of a progressive canon of counter-cultural literature. Undoubtedly, a large part of this stems

¹⁰⁸ By this I mean modern liberal democracy as it actually exists now in the world with all its imperfections, rather than any utopian aspiration. This is no petty distinction: accepting the validity of liberal democracy requires accepting that people have short-term goals, that they care about themselves and their family more than others, and that they don't always espouse the "correct" views on the issues of the day. To claim to believe in liberal democracy but only on the basis of people holding the "right" views is specious and, of course, neither democratic or liberal. The appeal of primitive, agrarian, post-apocalyptic or quasi-medieval worlds in anti-technologism is they enact a world shorn of the supposed fantasies of liberal democracy in a highly technological society. As I discussed in my consideration of Kunstler's *World Made by Hand* in the chapter on anti-technologism and the Catastrophe.

from historical circumstance, where technology was seen to be employed in horribly asymmetric wars such as Vietnam, a conflict that epitomised the scenario of a distant, militaristic empire projecting its power across the world on to a largely undeveloped society and country. This historical circumstance led to a popular mood against such militarism and anti-technologism's isolationism had resonance to a world and a generation which identified technology with imperialism. Spengler's condemnation of the expansionary drive behind "Faustian" civilisation and imperialism as its final stage, and E M Forster's isolationist, "Little Englander" condemnation of the imperialist as a "destroyer" must have seemed particularly prescient in the latter twentieth century, especially when seen outside of the context in which they were formed. Hence the anti-imperialistic tendencies of anti-technologism, as I discussed in my third chapter.

Other fundamental themes of anti-technologism also played a large part in ensuring that works which, on analysis can be seen to embody some particularly reactionary ideals, came to be seen as progressive works, and to have influence on progressive politics. Reactionary obsession with resources and population, for example, became a theme which was echoed decades later in the growing environmental movement. *Famine in England* (1938), and *Alternative to Death* (1943) by the fascist admirer, Gerard Wallop, ninth Earl of Portsmouth, and *Road to Survival* (1949) by the eugenicist William Voigt (also discussed in my third chapter) traded on notions of racial superiority and fears of immigration and even potential reverse colonisation, but this animus was skipped over by later readings in favour of their more overt message regarding the mismatch between resources and population. Thus, the xenophobic and eugenicist beliefs which underpinned these texts were sublimated but not extinguished in readings by later generations (Desrochers and Hoffbauer 78-9). Similarly, Weston A. Price's concern with "general physical degeneration" caused by processed food and other degenerative influences in modern society as part of his wider effort in "preventing race decay and deformities" were played down in later readings which tended to focus instead on more acceptable readings which emphasised nutritional arguments over the supposed nutritional and

environmental benefits of organic food (5).¹⁰⁹ Authors such as Paul Ehrlich, Garrett Hardin and others, along with writers such as Julian and Aldous Huxley, carried forward pre-war preconceptions and prejudices regarding fit and unfit populations, and the necessity of resource allocation and rationing, into the nascent post-war environmental movement.¹¹⁰

Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain now the extent to which the far-right reactionary politics of many leading members of earlier groups with an anti-technological bent, such as the Soil Association, helped to a significant degree to shape some of the fundamental concepts of the modern environmental and Green movements (and hence, an important aspect of modern, progressive politics and culture). Pondering this, Philip Conford is drawn to the conclusion that it would be unwise to believe that they *didn't* have a considerable impact:

Tracy Clunies-Ross has suggested that the organic school of the 1930s and '40s was something quite distinct from the [organic] movement which emerged as part of the wider environmental movement of the 1960s and '70s, following the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Yet it seems inherently improbable that a well-organised group of energetic, dedicated and fluently articulate propagandists should fade away and have no impact on people concerned with the same issues less than two decades after. (211)¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Price's arguments can be found reproduced in any number of New Age and alternative or countercultural books. Though the overt references to race and dysgenics are largely omitted, the identification of modern processed foods as degenerative is still very prevalent, showing the continuance of themes of organic form versus urban degeneration into contemporary discourse.

¹¹⁰ For the influence of the Huxleys, Hardin and other eugenicists on post-war culture see Allan Chase *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (1977). For the continuing involvement of the Ehrlichs (Paul and his wife Anne) in xenophobic anti-immigration movements, see the section on "Nativists and Environmentalists: A Timeline" in the publication "Nativists, Environmentalism, and the Hypocrisy of Hate" at the Southern Poverty Law Centre <http://www.splcenter.org/greenwash-nativists-environmentalism-and-the-hypocrisy-of-hate/greenwashing-a-timeline>.

¹¹¹ Conford's hypothesis here seems to be borne out by anecdotal evidence. For example, Robert Lamb's history of the Friends of the Earth (FoE) movement in the UK quotes one of their early directors, Tom Burke, as saying that in the early 1970s "ideas like Green weren't in anyone's mind. There was no theory, nothing to theorise about, just bad things happening . . . but Environment was driven out of a population, resources,

Similarly, Janet Biehl (1995) has pointed to the numerous and important links, both ideological and personal, between post World War Two fascism and the early years of Germany's Green Party, the first in Europe.¹¹² Britain's Green Party, which began as the "Movement for Survival" (named after *The Ecologist's* hugely influential "Blueprint for Survival" manifesto) was co-founded by Edward Goldsmith of *The Ecologist*, who himself provided a living link between the reactionary politics of early associations such as the Soil Association, later more left-wing, progressive movements such as the British Green Party, and (contemporaneously) Far Right organisations such as the French Nouvelle Droite (Krebbers et al.).

All of these factors – horror at the development of nuclear weapons and other technologies of war, the pre-war strain of isolationist anti-imperialism, the xenophobic or eugenicist warning of resource depletion and famine that predated later environmentalist warnings, and the closeness in chronology between earlier conservation movements and the latter social justice and environmentalist movements – came together. They had the net effect that, along with a commitment to greater fairness, justice, equality, and a sense of stewardship towards the environment, post-war progressive movements very often adopted ready-made some beliefs and preconceptions which had been formed decades earlier, by people and institutions who shared their distaste for *laissez-faire* capitalism and industrial growth, but whose politics beyond that mutual ground were almost entirely antithetical to the post-war progressive movements. Though works like Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) or The Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* (1972) were a spur to environmental and progressive movements, the "explosive mixture of conservative values, enshrined in an agriculturally based world-view, and the more radical finite resource economists and scientists had already formed" (Bramwell *Ecology in the Twenty First Century* 120). The ideological

pollution tradition" (qtd in Lamb 80). In yet another example of Edward Goldsmith's pervasive influence on early Green politics, his "Blueprint for Survival" manifesto provided this missing theoretical structure and was hailed by Burke as "the seminal document for the birth of the modern environment movement. It created a framework of ideas for the first time" (qtd in Lamb 45).

¹¹² Janet Biehl, "'Ecology' and the Modernization of Fascism in the German Ultra-Right" in *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (1995). 32-73.

worldview that stressed cultural and agricultural integrity, purity, and self-containment, was already extant and waiting to be discovered by those who believed that trade with other countries (especially less developed ones) inevitably involved exploitation and who stressed the values of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

To cite just one example of this “explosive mixture” will be sufficient to show not just how deeply the reactionary values of the old Right percolated down to the “New Left” and Green movements, but also how anti-technologism was absolutely fundamental to this crossover. As I noted in the introduction, the British Green Party was formed by a small group of people centred around *Ecologist* owner and editor, Edward Goldsmith, and was founded as a result of his extremely successful publication of “Blueprint for Survival”.¹¹³ As historian of the British Fascist movement, Graham Macklin, notes in *Very Deeply Dyed in Black* (2007), the *Ecologist’s* editorial staff in its early years was the same team that had edited the Soil Association’s *Mother Earth* journal under the editorship of British Union of Fascists’ Agricultural Secretary, Jorian Jenks, thus ensuring a continuity of ideals between the two publications. As editor of *Mother Earth*, Jenks had propounded an “anti-modernist philosophy embracing land reform, the paramountcy [*sic*] of agriculture, the subordination of mechanisation to organicism, the localisation of economies and a cultivation of a consciousness of the ties of blood and soil” (Macklin 65). As the Soil Association began the slow march towards political respectability, repudiating its fascist past by hiring Left-Wing American environmentalist Barry Commoner to replace Jenks, these ideas, and the editorial team which espoused them found a new home in *The Ecologist*, “The Journal of the Post Industrial Age”.

Yet, despite these circumstantial factors, the apparent disparity in politics is so great that it seems there must surely be some common ideological ground, some arena of discussion, which allowed reactionary ideals regarding culture and race (for which, as this these has argued, anti-

¹¹³The party was originally called The Movement For Survival, before changing its name to The People’s Party and then later to the Green Party (Bramwell *Ecology in the Twentieth Century* 120-1).

technologism is a vehicle) to be propagated and appropriated by later progressive movements. What was it that allowed the fascist ideology of Jenks and his ilk to be passed on, barely modified, and presented in a new journal as though it were voicing some new alternative, progressive agenda? How could an icon of the New Left literary scene such as Ted Hughes be such an admirer of Henry Williamson that he spoke at his funeral when even his (Williamson's) old university seemed anxious to disown him? And how was it that the work of "a supporter of [Spanish fascist leader] Franco" like Tolkien came to be inspirational as an alternative for the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s and 70s? (Veldman 1). Most of all, why was the common ground an antipathy towards technology and the technological society?

Answering this brings me back to the points first raised in my introduction about Monaco's definition of the reactionary consciousness and Sternhell's conception of the counter-enlightenment tradition in Western culture and society, as well as William's references to this dichotomy in Western civilisation in *Culture and Society*. These theses deal with reactions to modernity – perhaps it would be better to say that they deal with an alternative or reactionary modernity, which emphasises historical tradition, cultural context and tradition in opposition to ideals of universalism, individual rights, and liberal democracy.¹¹⁴ Throughout this thesis, I have shown how anti-technological literature is deeply invested in these themes of cultural identity, vitality, and renewal, and how it sees the mobility and ease of technology and the liberal democracy it makes possible as injurious and dissolving of community and cultural cohesion. In the conclusion so far, I have already considered how anti-technologism builds on a history of negative classicism and its themes of degeneration, decline and hoped-for renewal.

In the second half of the conclusion I want to discuss the thematic connections between the tradition of romantic protest, as defined by Veldman, and anti-technologism, and show how both

¹¹⁴ Implicit in Monaco's work, and explicitly stated in Sternhell's is the realisation that the reactions to modernity they analyse are in themselves products of modernity. Williams' work, which has a more literary focus, locates culture itself as the product of the tensions between these two modernities.

can be located within the same counter-enlightenment tradition. Specifically, in light of the work done in this thesis, I want to consider how romantic protest's emphasis on cultural and spiritual aspects of society, and its concern with community and tradition in an age of rapid change, resulted in a convergence between reactionary conservatism and progressive ideology. My ultimate aim in this final section will be to argue that anti-technologism in literature belongs to the counter-enlightenment tradition which, in the final analysis, relies on arguments from tradition and authority, based on false analogies with the natural world.

In the introduction to her work on the relationship between fantasy literature and post-war alternative progressive politics, Veldman gives a definition of post-war romantic protest that situates it within a mood of disenchantment and alienation with the perceived rationalism, scientism, and uniformity of the modern world:

The fantasies of Lewis and Tolkien, the campaigns against the British H –bomb, and the warnings of the early Greens were fundamentally romantic . . . They shared a suspicion of technology and technocracy and a reluctance to recognize empiricism and pragmatism as paths to truth. Together they affirmed that the past should serve as a guide for the future. They also insisted that reality extended beyond the material realm and that nature was a living entity worthy of respect. Fundamental to these postwar romantics was the faith that community had once existed, that it had disappeared from postwar Britain, and that it needed to be restored. (3)

The same themes of suspicion of technology and intellectualism, of anti-materialism, and a search for community and roots that transcends the modern world all illustrate how closely Veldman's definition of romantic protest tracks Monaco's definition of the reactionary consciousness. Though it is hard to imagine more diametrically opposed political ideologies than old Toryism and the New

Left, Fascism and the Green party, nevertheless, the fact remains that they are ideologies shaped by reaction to a perceived loss of community and cultural identity engendered by technological efficiency, liberal democracy, and materialism.¹¹⁵

Viewed from this perspective, anti-technologism, and anti-technological literature can be seen as enacting a desire for a renewed feeling of community, and for cultural differentiation and identity and a repudiation of the materialism, expansionary drive, scientism, and unrestrained thirst for knowledge that came to be identified with the horrors of World War Two and the militarisation that followed it. This repudiation helped spur the environmental movement that was and is such an important part of post-World War Two progressive politics, perhaps just as much as a growing realisation of the damage pollution and unrestrained “development” were doing.¹¹⁶ What is certain is that the spectacle of heavily militarised global superpowers facing off on a global stage, whilst entire countries, cultures, and peoples were trampled under the feet, disgusted many people who also turned away from the seemingly corrupt philosophies they espoused (Capitalism and Communism) and looked to putatively more “authentic” pre-modern cultures which were subsequently re-imagined as innocent of the crimes and corruption of modern societies and nations.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ The argument that post-war progressive and Green politics in the UK were shaped in reaction against materialism and a perceived loss of identity is largely the argument of Veldman’s work, especially pages 180-201 (“E P Thompson and the New Left”) so I do not reproduce it here. However, whilst it would go beyond the bounds of this thesis to explore it here, it is relevant to consider in this context Sternhell’s assertion that “[in the counter-Enlightenment tradition] ‘materialism’ is the classic code word for the rejection of liberalism and democracy, the autonomy of the individual, and the conception of society as a group of individuals governed by laws that they provided for themselves” (Sternhell *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* 217). Of course, anti-materialism does not always have to imply anti-democratic values, but as Williams and others have shown, most anti-democratic movements invoke anti-materialism, however hypocritically. Thus, as I hope my thesis has shown, there is always the danger that progressive movements that emphasise anti-materialist themes may unwittingly advance reactionary ideals.

¹¹⁶ Once again, it will be noticed that I do not reference the nuclear arms race in this context. This is because, whilst no doubt significant, I see the concern over nuclear weapons as an intensifier rather than an originator of such concerns. The animus against technology that I deal with in this thesis existed before nuclear weapons appeared, and I believe would have continued to exist even if they had never been invented.

¹¹⁷ The classic case here is that of genocide which is often held up as the ultimate expression of the horror of modernity’s alienation from humanity by such writers as Edward Abbey. Such an accusation conveniently omits the memory of such genocides as those perpetrated by the like of Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, and the

In the search for uncorrupted culture, and a worldview which stressed the virtues of self-sufficiency and self-containment as opposed to exploiting, invading, or even trading with other countries, the reactionary challenges to technology, liberal democracy, and speculative capitalism (according to Ortega and Spengler the three main causes of the West's decline) offered a seductively appealing message. Such reactionary, Right-wing texts condemned imperialism and foreign adventuring, unrestrained capitalism (often with thinly disguised references to Jewish control of the banks), globalisation, and cosmopolitanism. They spoke instead of the conservative values of self-reliance, tradition, community values, authority, agrarianism, nature, and most of all "harmony" and "stability". Such writings mixed attacks on capitalism and technology with paeans to nature, the "natural order" and cultural differentiation, in a way that superficially at least resembled multiculturalism or at least an appreciation of other culture's right to exist and express themselves. They identified cultural differentiation with biological diversity and technology with an urban, cosmopolitan critical aspect which was degenerative and homogenising.

A striking example can be found in the following passage from Ludwig Klage's 1913 speech, "Man and Earth", written for the German back-to-nature *wandervogel* youth movement, republished in 1980 as an early text accompanying the program of the German Green party, and translated into English in 2013 as part of a "repackaging" of Klages and his work under the title *The Biocentric Worldview*:

Make no mistake: "progress" is the lust for power and nothing besides, and we must unmask its method as a sick, destructive joke. Utilizing such pretexts as "necessity", "economic development", and "culture", the final goal of "progress" is nothing less than the destruction of life. This destructive urge takes many forms: progress is devastating forests, exterminating animal species, extinguishing native cultures,

Crusades. At the same time, it re-imagines pre-modern cultures in a particularly patronising fantasy of childlike innocence and harmlessness.

masking and distorting the pristine landscape with the varnish of industrialism, and debasing the organic life that still survives. It is the same for livestock as for the mere commodity, and the boundless lust for plunder will not rest until the last bird falls. To achieve this end, the whole weight of technology has been pressed into service, and at last we realize that technology has become by far the largest domain of the sciences. (Klages n. pag.)

Klages goes on to condemn speculative capitalism, over-consumption, and most of all Christianity (which, like Spengler, he identifies as the source of the imperial drive behind technological expansion), all of which anticipate by many decades the post-Second World War counter-cultural revulsion with science, militarism, and consumer culture. The essence of Klages' attack is that the destruction of wild nature and animal species is an inevitable and foreseeable result of the nature of modern technological society. In its determinism, it charges modern liberalism, science, and laissez-faire capitalism as being the antithesis of culture and tradition, destroying in decades what took hundreds or even thousands of years to develop. Like Spengler and Ortega, Klages saw liberalism, mass democracy, and scientific inquiry as standing in opposition to the values of tradition, authority, and historical and cultural context. The abstract, universal laws of the Enlightenment were for him not liberating, but flattening, removing all distinctions of class, gender, status, hierarchy and culture. The destruction of biological diversity, Klages argued, was only the most visible outcome of the Enlightenment worldview which sacrificed the "real" differences of history, tradition, and culture in the name of abstract ideals such as equality and egalitarianism.

Klages' condemnation of technology conflates biological diversity with cultural diversity, and thereby sets up cultural differentiation and heterogeneity as an unquestionable good in its own right, one which technology destroys:

The roll call of the dead, which could be inscribed here, even were it to be restricted to the most important names, would far exceed the list of fallen animals. It will suffice to commemorate a few prominent victims: where are the popular festivals and sacred customs, which for uncounted millennia served as perpetual springs for myth and poetry? Where is now the rider on the meadow who sows the precious seeds? And where can we find the procession of the Pentecostal bride and the torch-bearer running through the cornfields? Where is now the intricate richness of traditional costume, in which every folk could express its own nature, on its own landscape? The rich pendants, the multicolored bodices, the decorated waistcoats, sashes adorned with precious metals, and the light sandals? (Klages 1913)

This polemic against science anticipates by decades many of the charges of Lynn White's famous 1967 essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" – written following a conversation with Aldous Huxley (1903) – in which he affixes the blame for pollution and technological imperialism on the door of a supposedly Western imperialist worldview, but it also anticipates the bioregionalist philosophy which I discussed in my chapter on anarcho-libertarian anti-technologism. Klages' conflation of biodiversity with cultural diversity, his veneration of traditional identification with the land and his condemnation of technology and modernity all anticipate Sale's bioregionalism. This is not to suggest that Sale takes his cue from Klages, but rather to show the patterns of conformity and continuance between various counter-enlightenment ideologies that stress cultural and environmental links above individual self-determination. Klages' speech, then, seems to be an extraordinarily precocious avocation of some important progressive ideals many decades ahead of time. This despite the fact that Klages was "throughout his life politically archconservative and a venomous anti-semitic" described by historians as a "Volkish fanatic" and "an intellectual pacemaker for the Third Reich" whose work "paved the way for fascist philosophy in many important respects" (Biehl 11).

The importance of Klages' speech for my focus, though, lies in the *kind* of appeal it makes in the course of attacking technology and the technological society. More than anything else, the speech relies on the implicit belief that diversity and difference are not only desirable (a sentiment many of us would subscribe to) but somehow sacred as well. It relies on the belief that such cultural differences must be preserved at all times and crucially that external differences such as national costume, song, and speech – are expressions of the qualitatively different nature of the people shaped by the soil and their relationship with it: “Where is now the intricate richness of traditional costume, in which every folk could express its own nature, on its own landscape?”. The appeal of Klages' speech, and the fact that it seems to anticipate many of the concerns which would only take centre stage decades later, demonstrates that it is precisely in the rejection of critical, rational modernity and the search for deeply felt “authentic” ways of life in nature based on non-rational intuition or emotion, that anti-technologism – like romantic protest – provides such fertile ground for cross-pollination of reactionary with progressive ideals and ideologies.

As my fifth chapter made clear, the analogy between ecological and cultural diversity, central to Klages' rhetoric, is a staple of anti-technologist argument, for it uses pseudo-ecological justifications to pass ethnic and cultural judgements, particularly with reference to ethnic tension in urban areas. Goldsmith, in his “Limits to Growth in Natural Systems” essay of 1971, demonstrated this conflation of nature and society by informing his readers on supposedly ecological grounds that “the ever-growing chaos associated with the uncontrolled proliferation of culturally undifferentiated people must set a further limit to economic growth” (Goldsmith 60-1). Similarly, the passage from Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* which I cited in the chapter on anti-technologism and overpopulation also uses analogy to try to conflate three very separate issues – biological diversity, indigenous communities, and xenophobia. Likewise, “futurologist”, academic, and novelist W. Warren Wagar (1989) makes a very similar argument in his fictional history of the future which reveals even more

clearly how concerns about overpopulation, and allusions to community and cultural diversity in anti-technologism employ the biological metaphor to justify exclusion:

The word was therefore passed from community to community that, although everyone had the right in the new era to reproduce to their heart's content, responsibility to the biosphere dictated restraint. Communities that exceeded the carrying capacity of their land found gates closed everywhere when they tried to export their human surplus. (*A Short History of the Future* 262)

Anti-technologism, then, by identifying and then continually reinforcing an analogy between biological and cultural diversity allows legitimate concern for biodiversity to be applied to critiques of culture and society.

As the noted biologist Stephen Jay Gould put it, "nature has no automatically transferrable wisdom to serve as the basis of human morality" (225). Yet the appeal to nature to justify exclusion in the search for some putatively "authentic" pre-existing culture appears to be perennial; anti-technologism, in its organicism and disdain for the supposedly synthetic and artificial, allows the conflation of good with purity, and cosmopolitanism with pollution and contamination. Though these are typically archconservative themes, it is obvious how much the themes of romantic protest identified by Veldman – a suspicion of technology, an instinctive anti-rationalism, an organicist tendency to view nature in holistic terms, an emphasis on the importance of community cohesion, and a reverence for tradition and cultural provenance – were in sympathy with a pre-existing ideology that stressed irredentism, and respect for tradition. The well-established tendency of this ideology to decry speculative capitalism (as contrasted with capitalism based on owning agricultural property and produce) certainly did not harm its appeal.

However, as I have emphasised throughout this thesis, though anti-technologism draws on themes of antipathy towards aspects of modernity it is itself a product of modernity, a reaction to the effects of the shift from rural to urban life, from rootedness to mobility, and from artisanship and cottage industry to industrial manufacturing. In a recent comprehensive study on the ideology of genocide historian Ben Kiernan observes that technological change very often generates “a concomitant ideological reaction” against that very change, and that such “antimodern thinking, whether politically invented by leaders or authentically summoned by supporters accompanies genocide and fuels it” (26). Kiernan’s point supports Monaco’s analysis of the reactionary consciousness in modern European culture and illuminates the (literally) reactionary nature of anti-technologism: the democratising and emancipatory aspects of technology disrupt many of the traditional structures and hierarchies of society, and conversely engender a search for continuity, for something authentic and lasting that can stabilise a society seemingly in flux. The desire for a return to the apparent authenticity of the past, then, manifests itself in “neotraditional ideologies” that are “not based on material progress but reacting to it and masking it” (26). In other words, technological advances drive change (urbanisation, emancipation, gender equality, liberal democracy, mass communication and entertainment) that causes a reaction, a concern that such a state of affairs is somehow against nature and must necessarily come crashing down (Kunstler’s “egalitarian pretenses of the high-octane decades” which disappear when the technology that sustains them can itself no longer be sustained).¹¹⁸

Kiernan’s observation, together with Monaco’s analysis of the reactionary consciousness, helps illuminate the paradoxical and seemingly contradictory nature of anti-technologism: paradoxical, because ultimately (as I proposed in the introduction and earlier in this conclusion) it is not technology itself per se that is really being discussed but the search for authenticity, tradition,

¹¹⁸ Similarly, in an essay for *The Ecologist* entitled “Social Disintegration: Causes” Goldsmith argued that technology, liberal democracy, and welfare were the essential causes of societal breakdown. For example, he blames “the proliferation of tinned and frozen foods” and domestic appliances for the breakdown in the basic unit of the family, as well as “the development of an educational system in which women acquire the same information and are provided with the same social and economic aspirations as the men [which] has led to a further disintegration of the family” (259).

and stability in a changing society. In this search, progressive ideals run the constant and very real danger of finding common cause with traditional Toryism and even Far Right ideologues, because the progressive ideal of cohesive communities with authentic culture (that is, their own culture specific to their region rather than cultural ideals received from mass communication and entertainment) are akin to the traditional Tory aristocratic ideal of disdain for speculative or industrial capitalism, as Martin Weiner and others have shown. The “organic” conception of society propounded by such as Ruskin in the nineteenth century, stressed “interrelation and interdependence” so emphatically because, as Williams succinctly put it in *Culture and Society*, “the common enemy” was Liberalism rather than Capitalism or Communism (140). Terms such as “interdependence”, “stability”, and “balance” are clearly not radical but deeply conservative terms which unavoidably condition how we think about society and have the effect institutionalising and justifying inequalities and injustices under the rubric of “diversity” or “natural order”.

In the final analysis, then, the anti-democratic ideals of reactionary writers and thinkers such as negative classicists like Spengler and Ortega have an influence that is often largely unacknowledged and thus difficult to ascertain, requiring careful unfolding of their ideas and tracing of influences through different writers and different texts, something I have simply not had sufficient time to do here beyond initial observations of influence on a handful of writers. But what I hope this thesis has made abundantly clear is that the theme of resistance to technology proves over and over again, in a wide range of contexts, to be in essence a protest against mass democracy, against the ideal of liberal democracy and against the ability of people to decide what is in their own best interests. Anti-technologism in literature, as I have analysed it in this thesis, is a reaction not against the artefacts of technology themselves but rather against the perceived chaos of modern secular liberal democracy, which is held to lack any cohesive bond beyond a common self-interest.

Rejecting the enlightenment ideals of universal reason, universal rights, and the sovereign individual in favour of cultural or ethnic specificity based on a false analogy with nature, does not lead to a utopia of happy, cooperative communities, but to exclusionary ideologies and practices that figure the “other” as pollution or contamination and indulge in apocalyptic fantasies of cultural renewal following a destruction of civilisation that is overtly decried and yet secretly longed for. The writers I examine in this thesis are not morally repugnant fanatics who wish to see civilisation destroyed in their hatred of humanity, but rather well-meaning people who believe that just as the root of modernity’s problems lie in materialism, which they see as cutting people off from both wild nature and their own nature and leading to alienation and ennui. Accordingly, they look instead for answers to these perceived ills in their opposites: in spirituality rather than materialism, in instinct and emotion rather than rationalism and intellectualism, in nature rather than society or politics, and in acceptance of the need for order rather than self-interest as an organising force. Sadly, in their search for answers, they struggle or fail to resist the appeal of dividing people into spurious subjective categories and drawing conclusions about what is natural and what is unnatural in society. Anti-technologism is in many respects the dark underbelly of romantic protest. Its attacks on technology and the technological society are a displacement of fears and concerns regarding materialism, the masses, and the sustainability of modern liberal democracy. It allows for expression and exploration of anxieties which would otherwise be unacceptable in modern society.

I would like to close with a quote from Walter Benjamin’s 1930 essay “Theories of German Fascism” which I mentioned in my final chapter on anti-technologism and the fascist aesthetic. As the dark clouds of fascism and World War Two were already gathering on the horizon, Benjamin reviewed *War and Warriors* (1930) by Ernst Junger, a militarist and former *wandervogel* naturalist whose writings endowed war with an element of mysticism and nobility as a “primal experience”.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Bizarrely, after the Second World War, this most conservative and militaristic of figures became something of a risqué countercultural icon in Germany and elsewhere, writing of his experiences taking LSD with its

Using his review as a platform for commenting on the broader anti-technological animus of his own era, Benjamin issued a bleak warning of the consequences of where such a train of thought was heading:

All the light that language and reason still afford should be focused upon that “primal experience” from whose barren gloom this mysticism of the death of the world crawls forth on its thousand unsightly conceptual feet. The war that this light exposes is as little the ‘eternal’ one which these new Germans now worship as it is the “final” war that the pacifists carry on about. In reality, that war is only this: the one, fearful, last chance to correct the incapacity of peoples to order their relationships to one another in accord with the relationships they possess to nature through their technology. If this corrective effort fails, millions of human bodies will indeed inevitably be chopped to pieces and chewed up by iron and gas. But even the habitues of the chthonic forces of terror, who carry their volumes of Klages in their packs, will not learn one-tenth of what nature promises its less idly curious but more sober children, who possess in technology not a fetish of doom but a key to happiness. (128)

I trust that the work of this thesis has shown that though it might spring from entirely understandable and even laudable intentions, we should at least be aware of the attraction of a literature of irrationality and mysticism that denigrates rationality, intellectualism, science and technology in the name of authenticity or intuition, that privileges cultural specificity and historical tradition over universal rights extended to each individual regardless of their place in their culture. I hope it has shown that apocalyptic scenarios of modernity are in fact sublimated fantasies of cultural exclusion and revitalisation, and most of all that the need to argue the case for modernity, for

inventor, Albert Hofman, and authoring an anti-technological novel *The Glass Bees* (1957) which warned of a dystopian future where technology crushed individualism and heroism.

secular liberal democracy, and even for technology is an important argument that needs to be made now, just as it needed to be made in Benjamin's era.

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