

## Coyote Ramblings/Grumblings Four

Dorthea Lange's photographs have now become part of America's collective memory of the Great Depression. *Migrant Mother* (1936)—a portrait taken in a pea pickers' camp in California of a woman holding her baby and surrounded by her children—is perhaps one of the most reprinted images in history. Lange is famous, but . . . have you ever asked yourself: did the woman whose image she became famous for gain anything from it, any remuneration of any sort at all? (No, she did not.) How is it that the photographer is famous but the people whose lives she took a portion of, and which made her famous, are only background? I have become suspicious of photographers of common people, photographed in the midst of living their lives. The older I get the more I feel that what they are really doing is stealing a portion of other people's lives for money and fame under the guise of art.

Democratic capitalism (however equal or unequal it is at any particular time) is “a culture that hinges on the normalization of unequal standards and conditions, and then chooses exceptions to its rules, but only on its own terms.” Social democracy, on the other hand, is the normalization of equal standards and conditions. Why is it acceptable (and seemingly more moral) for the rich to game the system but when the poor do it, it's wrong (and immoral)?

When I was young, because I was so afraid, so filled with the wounds of my dysfunctional family, I was often incredibly angry and unkind. I look back upon it now with both shame and distress. But I know, too, that this is a common thing for young men in the United States to suffer. So confused, ignorant, and uninformed and yet suffering cultural demands to be knowledgeable, strong, unemotional, unafraid, and caretaking (in terms of knowing how to make money, provide for family, protect others from harm). It took decades for me to work most of that through, to soften, to become kind, to allow my better nature to come forward – to give up, surmount all that fear. Yet in looking back I also understand that without the rage I had then, without turning it into the energy to continue on despite my terrible fears, I would never have achieved all that I have. Still, I bitterly regret the bodies left along side the roads I have walked. Mark Twain and Robert Bly and a great many other men, toward the end of their lives, have spoken of this. It is so very common to wish we had been kinder. And when I think back on the people and moments I remember most strongly, it is the moments of kindness, when others extended themselves to help me in my moment of greatest need, wishing for themselves nothing in return. It is a tragedy that nearly all of us only understand that when we are old.

I heard a black woman refer to her skin color as “rape-colored” once. I have been thinking about that for awhile now. What keeps coming to my mind though is something Alice Walker said in one of her nonfiction books, when she was talking about writing *The Color Purple*. She said that as she went back into her past and her ancestors she eventually found the white slave owner who raped her distant relative. That man was inside her, woven into her genes, a part of her. Hating him would then become a kind of self hatred. It raised a question for me: What do we do when someone like that is part of our genes, an inescapable aspect of ourselves which lives on in subtle ways as part of our physical form but also in character traits and tendencies of mind and behavior? My mother, as many mothers have been, was terribly dysfunctional and quite cruel in her interactions with me. This left scars that have taken me years to come to terms with. But

eventually I came face to face with the fact that, irrespective of what I want or don't want, she still lives inside me, that it is not really possible to escape her presence. I look in the mirror and find parts of her face in mine. I move my body a certain way and find it an echo of movement patterns that I long disliked in her. Certain habits of speech and thought, psychological unkindnesses and ways of seeing the world. Ick. Now what? It took a very long time but sooner or later the only solution that made any sense to me was having compassion for her and how she came to be the way she was. It's the first step to forgiving her (but never forgetting what she did) and, as well, and far more difficult, forgiving myself for having her inside me.

Someone said to me that these are not really ramblings but more similar to grumblings. Hmmm, perhaps I change the name of these posts?

Where are the holy places of America? We are one of the only industrialized nations on Earth that will say it is the Grand Canyon or Redwood National Forest. The Europeans list the great cathedrals. As Wallace Stegner once put it: We have been subsumed by what we conquered. The animism of the native peoples of this land got inside us even as it and they were denigrated, shamed, murdered. The sacredness of these lands is inside us, too, despite all that has been done to them. What are we going to do now? Become the worst of ourselves? Or something better? Will we have the courage to allow ourselves to become indigenous, to become these sacred lands looking out of human eyes? We are the first of the colonized, everyone seems to forget that. The journey back to who we are under our domestication is very long, and very difficult, indeed.

Second-hand PTSD? Really? Define slippery slope.

Every so often someone emails me about an herbalist on the east coast who bad-mouths me in front of his students during apprenticeships. Sometimes former students of mine ask him to stop, sometimes they don't. There are a lot of people I don't like, just like everyone I suppose. Sometimes I don't like them because they don't like me. Other times I don't like them because of some consistent character trait that violates principles I hold and have spent a lifetime developing in myself. Those traits have cost me greatly (as they do everyone) while I learned as best I could to uphold and live by them. Nevertheless, I have always had an integrity glitch when it comes to running to the playground to tell the other kids about someone I dislike. It just seems, well, unseemly and I don't really understand why grown men and women do it. (The few times I slip and do it anyway, I feel like I have sinned in some way I can't quite define; it takes a long time to get over it.) It seems to me to be a mark of poor character, of unexpressed pain finding an easier outlet, of repressed rage making channels to the sea, or perhaps a better analogy, making the groove in the record deeper so that, after awhile, the needle just drops into the thing automatically, playing out the same old song over and over again – just more loudly. The thing is though, that herbalist has been a very useful adversary, as have several other people over the years. He has forced me to refine my thinking, to become more sophisticated in my work, to go deeper and further than I would have otherwise. Other adversaries have stimulated me to understand the limits of Linnean thinking, how it separates us from the natural world, encourages us to think of plants as things rather than sentient beings, as kin. Still others, their hubris irritating to me, challenged me to understand the limits of their thinking, to bring it into language, to become a Person of the Plant more fully. I don't think we can become who we are

meant to be without these kinds of adversaries. Those who love and believe in us help us to continue on when things are difficult, adversaries force us to affirm who we are -- to others yes but most especially to ourselves. And they force us to do so with great specificity and understanding – that is the nature of the process. Both our loved ones and our adversaries are essential to a lived life, to accomplishing the work that is before us, that we were brought into this world to do. It would be unseemly to not cherish and thank them for it. Every time I deposit a royalty check, I do spend a few minutes thinking of my adversaries. But only a few.

I can no longer understand why anyone in the US would ever call the police to help a family member in the midst of a mental health crisis. Cops are not the right people for this sort of thing and they kill far too many people who are simply in mental distress. Why is it that given all the news reports about it that people still call the police for help?

I really hate professional philosophers and Thomas Hobbes can go fuck himself, what a useless waste of life that guy was (as nearly all of them are). Give me a wild man or woman, someone with dirt under their fingernails, a person who immerses themselves in wild landscapes and allows it to shape their thinking, people who take on forest as a property of mind. People who live, who dare to disturb the universe, who are not polite, not civilized, who have passion, sexual energy filling their bodies, loud voices, and underneath it all, kindness (NOT niceness, what a tragedy that is), warmth of heart and love for the world and for themselves, who hate philosophers as I do and who believe that the common people possess a wisdom that can never be found in universities, a wisdom that is needed whenever elite systems fail as they always will fail simply from the fact that their inhabitants lack dirt under their fingernails.

We are a very malleable species, unfortunately awareness of the cosmic blacksmith has been lost despite its inevitable presence in our affairs. I have learned, the hard way, when I sense that blacksmith turning its attention toward me, to alter my behavior as quickly as possible.

Millions of people in the US have spent years training themselves to be the modern equivalent of very good buggy whip makers, wagon wheel makers, and typewriter repairmen because the culture told them that this is what they needed to do. So, they took out huge loans to get into the best training schools (Harvard perhaps) so they could learn these things and have a really good job for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately, when they graduated many of them found they had been sold a bill of goods. The one thing they did not learn was how to adapt to life, to create work rather than just to look for it, to think outside the box rather than just fill out resumes, to be the artisans of their own life rather than become domesticated consumers and workers. Now that things are falling apart, they are suddenly understanding their lack of skills, just how domesticated and dependent they have become. It is no wonder they are terrified.

The current focus on forcibly altering word usage is, in nearly every instance, merely Social Justice Theatre. It is *not* social justice activism. For the most part it is something that two primary groups do: 1) the fairly well off (which includes a multitude of students of various sorts) who seem to think that changing a few words and destroying the careers and lives of people who (sometimes inadvertently or innocently) use them actually changes the world and 2) people with unresolved wounds and a great deal of built up rage (the “I feel shitty and you deserve to feel

shitty, too” crowd, or as Eric Berne described them, people who play either NIGYSOB and Courtroom – or both. NIGYSOB is “now I got you you son of a bitch,” an interaction game built on the expression of archaic rage toward someone who has apparently transgressed even in the mildest of ways. Courtroom is a game – overlaying extreme rage for unresolved wounds – whereby the intellect is used to destroy an opponent’s public persona often through clever redefinitions and gaslighting, delivering a finding of “guilty” and then imposing of a sentence of one sort or another). None of this is particularly healthy but it does allow two benefits to the initiators: 1) they develop a sense of moral rightness and personal worth and 2) they get rid of a lot of built up archaic rage so that they feel better for awhile while gaining a feeling of moral righteousness and higher than thou personal worth (while at the same time experiencing a lingering sense of there being something wrong about what they are doing which actually never does go away until the game or games are stopped.) None of this does anything to alleviate the primary source of social injustice, that is, *inequality*. None of this gets a poor family more money or the father or mother a good job which pays them honorable wages. None of this reduces the brutality of the thugs known as police. None of this restores respectful treatment of the working class by the meritocratic elite (which includes most of the Social Justice Theatre activists). None of this makes anything in this culture better. Quite the contrary. It is behavior that is actually designed to (even if unconsciously) allow the current class system to remain in place while appearing to address its inequities.

Trickle down economics always reminded me of urinary dribbling. It still does. Neither activity is conducive to better social conditions.

They say that oil and water don’t mix. What then is hand cream?

Always remain aware of the Hell’s Angels factor. Antifur activists pour red paint on rich women walking out of stores; they don’t go into Hell’s Angels bars and pour paint on leather wearing motorcycle riders. This is the same reason that the fanatical left attacks moderate liberals. It’s just safer and easier to do so.

I particularly loathe the “attractively simplistic” in thinking, either left or right. Clichéd thinking . . . the sewer our minds have become.

I keep running across articles that say things like this: “Christianity first gained acceptance as a refuge from the ancient world’s terrible savagery.” Ridiculous. If you read with any depth into the history of christianity and its replacement of roman paganism what you find is absolute savagery. Further, as christianity became dominant, its savagery only increased. For the first time in the history of human habitation of this planet, religion became the rationale for the wholesale murder of millions of people, islam soon joined in with the same degree of savagery. What followed was wholesale slaughter of indigenous communities, jews, pagans, “witches,” homosexuals, and any groups deemed outsiders as the religions became dominant. The world had never seen the kind of savagery that institutionalized monotheism brought as it dominated the planet. Reading the Irish reports of what unwed mothers and their children experienced in catholic religious homes reveals just how recent that savagery is. Reading reports of the killing of homosexuals or adulterers or those who blaspheme or who marry outside their forced faith in

Christianized African nations or Islamic countries shows that the savagery has not ended. Despite what moderate monotheists insist both religions are inherently violent against any who do not share their faith. (They are exclusivist religions and a source of social unrest in many Asian and African countries where one member of the family becomes Christian and is then told to refuse to associate with family members who are not). They are inherently violent against any who transgress against their often unreasonable and oppressive behavioral codes. A close study of monotheist history shows that no matter what, this violent aspect continues to re-emerge from these two monotheist religions. In comparison, the ancient Roman Empire and Greek city states were models of restraint.

I have met a handful, perhaps a bit more, of those I consider to be true Christians. Oddly enough all of them tend to look, act, and speak like Mr. Rogers. I have spoken in depth with a number of them. They said that they felt it un-Christian to talk about their faith unless specifically asked. They felt it un-Christian to proselytize. They felt that their duty as Christians was to embody Christ in themselves and to then act from that orientation, that they must let their behavior demonstrate their faith – and only their behavior. I wish that the legions of false Christians that surround us would learn something from these few that live in their midst. All of us, and the world, would be better for it.

Has anyone who uses the word “progress” really thought past their blind, unconscious use of the word? I am doubtful. Progress in its exact meaning indicates movement toward a goal. So, what goal are we progressing toward? I don’t know and I don’t think anyone else does either. The word has been in use for such a long time now; it seems to have become a dominant rationale for the destruction of both the past and the present ever since industrialization took hold (this includes both the human and natural worlds, of course). In actual fact it seems to mean that those in power can do whatever they want to do with current social, work, infrastructure, and natural forms and landscapes simply because they can while implying that there is some utopianistic outcome that will occur because of their rapaciousness. Over the past half century of thinking on this, I have come to the perspective that the entire concept of “progress” and its unconscious articulation by people in Western cultures is evil and that it should be resisted as powerfully as possible.

Nearly all activists in the US (and many nonactivists) believe that the entire world population should live similarly to people in American suburbs, that that life-style is what *not-poverty* looks like. This does not take into account the fact that the suburban life style is not sustainable, that it is ecologically unsound, that it is based on assumptions that are themselves unexamined, unsustainable and ecologically dangerous to our sustainable habitation of this planet. Outhouses can be far more ecologically sound than septic systems or town waste treatment plants, in part because there is no technology necessary for their creation and maintenance over time. Houses built from mud (adobe) are far more ecologically sound than houses built from wood, they are also less technologically intense. What the US has often done (as well as American NGOs) is to place on other cultures the template of American housing and consumption on the assumption that it is better for people. Just pay attention to how often simple, non-technological infrastructure, that is, non-American suburban life styles are likened to poverty – even in the U.S. This is the kind of thing that is hard to get out of the mind once you begin seeing it.

People talk about “the world” but what they mean is the virtual reality that humans have created and which sits on top of the actual world, the planet itself. This confusion is human-centric and in a very real sense, narcissistically insane.

To find your porno name: Take the name of your first pet and your mother’s maiden name. Then combine them. Mine would be: Dixie Cox. See . . . porno name. (This is hard to stop thinking about for awhile.)

What happens to all those oil rigs in the sea as the industrial world falls apart? They will be like abandoned open pit mines that no one ever cleans up. What happens when they finally are broken apart by the sea, will the holes in the sea bottom automatically seal themselves or will some of them just break open and begin spewing oil endlessly into the ocean? I grow increasingly skeptical of human intelligence and rational agency. The Horizon oil spill and the resultant devastation of the ecology of the seabed in that region shows what will happen. When that broke loose, the industrial world was still supposedly functioning well; the outcome revealed what is really true about that functioning. We have set things in motion in our hubris and belief in our rational godliness that will never be undone, future generations of every form of life will pay the price.

The holders of deep Earth knowledge have to be made invisible for the corporate and scientific autopsy of the world to continue. To acknowledge these deeper knowledge systems is to recognize alternatives to the current system as well as their arguments as to why the current system is a terrible error.

The proper term is overschooled, not overeducated. It is not possible to be overeducated, but it is quite possible to be overschooled.

What if other people who think differently than you do, who have different perspectives, goals, hatreds, loves, political orientations . . . are an inevitable and irremovable part of life? What if serial killers, thieves, power hungry politicians, neo-nazis, racists, liars, political opportunists are and will always be part of the human world and will never ever be changed, will keep their orientation no matter what social manipulations or interventions occur? What if you have to accept all of it as just the way things are? What if the utopian orientation that you have been living with for so many years is not in fact going to happen in the real world? What do you do then? How do you orient yourself in space and time? In culture? Who are you if you are not identified by your difference from the groups that you dislike? What if you are just one of those people yourself?

I am not sure there is anything more foolish than taking life advice from television shows and films.

Both poland and ireland embraced catholicism as a way to covertly rebel against their colonialist governments, in one case the atheist soviet state, in the other the church of england and british rule. When they achieved independence, ireland in 1922 and poland with the fall of the soviet

state, the catholic religion implemented a totalitarian sharia rule. In ireland this meant massive control by the church of all civil rights, including what people could read and publish as well as how they could live. It has taken decades for the irish people to throw off the yoke of a repressive church. This is illustrative in that the united states has its own version of this with the embrace of perhaps one third of its population of a evangelical christianity that wants to institute a theocracy in the U.S. I don't think I like the god any of these people apparently worship.

It is instructive to think about why those from other countries, such as Russia and Afghanistan, who have advanced degrees in science always have those degrees recognized here in the US but if they are trained as MDs or engineers or architects they are unable to work in those professions. The reason is that the sciences are open professions, the others are closed trade unions which keep numbers artificially limited to protect their members' incomes and so they can maintain control over the professions.

Everyone just nods their head when someone says something like, scientific research has validated the use of hawthorn as a heart tonic. That is a very strange underlying bias for people to have, giving "science" (but actually scientists) the power to define what is true and what is not, what we can legitimately do and not do for our own health. How different things would be if people who were *kind* looked at scientific studies and then validated them on a scale of kindness. (What a novel concept.) Or if whole system ecologists validated scientific research based on how ecologically sound it was. Or if herbalists validated medical research. There is a knee jerk default to scientists as the arbiters of reality. What if scientists viewpoints and perceptions are actually expressions of their own biases and aren't really indicative of something about the exterior world? What if a lot of their research is skewed? What if the most important things in a human life and our habitation of Earth have nothing to do with what scientists say it does?

### **This last act of love**

Although the ancestors of my body lived and worked in the western hills of Kentucky I did not find my home there. I found my home, after long wandering, in the high mountains of Colorado. They entered into me, filling me with something that cannot be captured in human speech. In them I found meanings laid down at the beginning of this world, a form of speech that has spent ages growing itself so that all who are capable of being touched by it are changed in ways that the more civilized will never understand.

I miss those mountains. They run through me, remain, a river of meaning that I can explain to no one. It was not my destiny to remain among them, for time and the patterns of life moved on, another river of meaning was meant to find me, catch me up and carry me away into still other worlds. Yet those mountains will not let me be. I see them in my mind's eye. Feel their touch every day of my life. And I grieve, always, for those mountains that were my home, that *are* my home, the only home that one such as I can ever know.

Men in my world do not easily weep. Yet I weep daily for what I have lost. I grieve the great turning of time that takes from us all that we love, that will take me, in time, from those who love me. They will continue on for a short while before they, too, join me in that great river of time and memory that flows ever onward, that no one has the power to interrupt. But I grieve for them now, in the waning years of my life, wishing that I would be the last to remain, that I could companion them all the days of their life, that they would not be alone when they took that

last journey into the darkness that awaits us all. I wish I could be there, holding their hand, telling them with eye and touch and voice that they are not alone at this final moment. That I am here with them, that I will walk with them to the edge of that precipice from which no one returns. And that I would, if I could, sit with them, as they take that last breath, as their hand relaxes, as their eyes close upon this world. I want them to know, but cannot, that I was there at the end, that I never left or abandoned them, that I loved them as I loved no others. And I would, if I could, have them know that I would take care of the things that needed to be taken care of, that they would not have to worry about who would honor the things that they loved, that meant something to them, that had companioned them during the long years of their life. And they would know that I would lay their body down into the Earth that gave them birth, with love, with reverence, and do so with clarity of mind and heart. That I would not take my eyes or my heart away from any step of that journey, nor close my heart, nor fear to weep my grief and loss. That I would feel everything that must be felt, because that is what love does. And that I would do so gladly for a hundred thousand years, for they are my heart, my love, my breath, my life.

It took me years, but near the end of this life, I found its purpose: to companion those I love every step of the way so that they would never again know the loneliness that had been theirs before we met. I hold inside me and honor it every day of my life, that delicate presence that has emerged between us, that always emerges between those who love and, more importantly, trust each other. I hold it in the deepest regions of my heart. It is that nearly invisible, almost intangible presence that has companioned us as we journey through life. I would, if I could, take the loneliness and loss they will feel at my death, that will come from my leaving this world, as my own and hold it close inside me all the remaining days of my life. If I could, I would. If I could I would do this, my last act of love.