

THE METAREVOLUTION

2ND EDITION

GRANT BARTLEY

INTRODUCTION AND FIRST THREE CHAPTERS

**IF THE HUMAN RACE
REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT
WHAT IT WAS DOING, IT
WOULD BE DOING A
METAREVOLUTION**

Punked Books

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INTRODUCTION

A MANIFESTO FOR AN ETERNAL REVOLUTION

Do we know the truth?

Of course we know the truth. We read it in the papers every day. We see it presented on the TV. It stares us in the face every minute of our waking lives... Yet from the distance we can hear an alternative message: “Now is the time for *real* truth. Our anti-ecological global economic stupidity is self-destruction. Now is the time to free ourselves from the chains of consumerism! With wisdom we’ll create a better society!”

That’s enough of the revolutionary clichés, though. Truth? Freedom? We’ve heard claims to those things before, and by now such claims look unrealistic. All romantic revolutionary ideals have now been discredited. The only thing each blossoming rose of idealism has ever done, is spill blood. The blood cries out to us across history, and the futility is not easily forgotten. So provocative news of another utopia is just not interesting anymore. Instead, all challenges to the state of things now quickly get lost. All information drowns in the oceanic seething mash of easily-forgotten ideas and images we call culture. But I want you to commit an act of resistance. Don’t simply assume that what you’re told is true is true. This attitude is more than revolutionary.



This book is a *metarevolutionary manifesto* — a theory about revolutions with practical implications. The question inspiring this book is, *What would be the most intelligent thing the human race could do to benefit itself?* As I will explain, I think the answer is to behave as intelligently as we can. The purpose of the metarevolution is for us to understand history so that we can guide our progress as intelligently as we can. Or a less grand way of thinking about the purpose of this manifesto, is that with it I want to start a research programme into the new (?) discipline of *ideology*. Not

disappointingly, ***ideology*** is *the study of ideologies*.¹

The Metarevolution starts off as a traditional revolutionary manifesto, advocating a rational reconfiguration of the global economy. In this segment I'll argue that because capitalism is driven by profit, a continuing pressure for economic growth is created. *Unfortunately*, there cannot be unlimited expansion in a closed space. You can't blow up a balloon inside a box forever. Similarly, we can't have continual industrial expansion within the confines of a small planet, with a fragile ecosystem and limited resources. This means we're driving ourselves at speed toward socioeconomic and ecological *catastrophe*.

No news there. But this does imply that we need to change the nature of the global economic process, so I suggest an idea for a stable global economic system. This would be happy for market forces to operate, but it has complementary mechanisms designed to mitigate the market's expansionism.

This revolutionary analysis is only the first third of the book. After the ecomanifesto, I consider the sort of future which might happen if we get something like the revolution we need. That is to say, I consider what might go wrong with it.

You can easily envisage the sort of problems which could ensue with a deliberate reconfiguration of the global economy. Imagine for instance that to organise the global distribution of resources in ecological stability, something akin to the UN gains ultimate say about the world economy. This could all-too-plausibly lead to an Orwellian media-controlled global totalitarianism, or another sort of authoritarianism. In any case, I argue that *however* it works, the proecological stabilisation of the global economy will *somehow* go wrong: major problems in the working of the new society are going to become apparent *whatever* form our industrial downshift.

The revolutionary world will itself be imperfect. But the fact we can foresee the limitations of change doesn't mean we don't need to. So, how should we respond to this paradox?

¹ Here, *words* in bold and italic will be frequently followed by their *definitions* in italics.

The first intelligent thing to do is to understand the problem we're responding to: the problem with revolutionary change itself. The threat of the coming revolution is symptomatic of a general problem with revolutions and other significant social changes. This is where the book starts being *metarevolutionary*. ***Metarevolutionary thinking*** is *considering revolutions from a higher perspective* (*meta* is Ancient Greek for 'beyond').

One default principle of metarevolutionary thinking is that ***no matter how well intentioned or thought-out any ideology or its idealism may be at the start of its application, there are always limitations with this thinking which only become clear as the ideals are applied***. For a historical example, it's evident Marx did not adequately take human power-lust into account in formulating his version of communist ideology. An understandable theoretical oversight, maybe — but this limitation was the crack in his ideals which let in Mao, Stalin and Pol Pot. And even if any new ideology were *ever* impeccable, and impeccably applied to start with, changes brought about through the implementation of its ideals, or just through time stirring things up, will mean that even once-benign ideals will soon become obsolete. In time, pursuit of the ageing ideals is no longer beneficial, and may become destructive. This is part of what's wrong with capitalism, for instance. What incontrovertibly has been a force for wealth creation for many is now in addition becoming a force for environmental destruction.

I believe no unchanging ideals or their applications can handle the complexity of the real world. Unfortunately, and somewhat ironically, a ***fundamental cycle of history*** is set up through the ongoing unchanging implementation of ideologies: *ideologies and their social systems are continually being replaced*. As they jostle their way along the valley of time, the multiple branches of human society continually mutate from one social system, one way of thinking and living, to another. I'll claim that being stuck in this rut of *serial social inadequacy* is a most basic problem for humanity. In some ways it's the most fundamental problem of human historical progress.

How then should we respond to this deep problem from the limitations of all our bright ideals? This spawns a metarevolutionary question, a question about revolutions: *How can we create a culture which is responsive to the limitations of our ideals and ideologies?* or to rephrase this: *How can we continually overcome the limitations of our deepest ideas to progress towards the best world we can create?* So the answer to these questions may also answer the question ‘What would be the most intelligent thing the human race could do for itself?’ This book is my answer to these questions. A *metarevolution* is the most intelligent thing I could think of for the human race.

The proposed metarevolutionary solution says that first we need to recognise the problem: we must be aware that there are ideological assumptions guiding human behaviour patterns and social growth, and that this thinking is always limited, and often rotten. The response I recommend to this recognition is *to nurture an attitude and subculture which pursues an ongoing critique of the fundamental assumptions of ideologies and applied ideals*. This critique would preferably act at the heart of global culture. My aim is that, once engaged, the application of this metaideal would facilitate humanity developing the best way it could, by us growing in understanding what the best developments would be for human society and how we can go about pursuing them. Indeed, maybe the most intelligent thing for a purposeful being is to be having the right goals, which in social terms means for society to be developing the right ways. Yet we won’t know what the right directions are until we consider what we’re trying to achieve, and *keep on considering it*. The metarevolution precisely concerns promoting this continual growth in our understanding of our ideals, and applying this understanding. Or I could equally say it’s about forever researching to the core or most basic level what the right thing to do is, and doing it. This is why I see a metarevolution as a blueprint for instigating the highest realization of human development/intelligence. It’s at least one way for us to most intelligently apply our intelligences, I think. The practical benefit of this would

be felt through the continual recreation of society by application of what's being learnt as a result of the pursuit of the basic truths of social life to ever deeper levels.

The ultimate metaideal would, I argue, be the continual seeking and reapplication of fundamental truth in every major category of understanding, and not just (*sic*) ideologically. If we achieved such an 'eternal renaissance culture', society would assuredly be being enabled to develop as intelligently as it can, according to the ongoing basic discoveries we'll be making even about development. I optimistically predict that continuing to widely seek the foundations of knowledge will open up worlds of understanding we can't even imagine now. Thus a mature metarevolution would encourage *ongoing renaissance* in all distinct spheres of thought, knowledge blossoming through history in waves of revelation of truth and beauty.

On the negative side, I say that a metarevolutionary culture encouraging the ongoing criticism of ideologies and ideals will entail people coming face to face with bad assumptions in their own and their own culture's thinking: that is, in thinking which they were so sure of that they didn't even know there were assumptions. Metarevolutionary questioning means much doubt, even in the most protected areas of one's assurance. But it's doubt undertaken in the hope of gaining deeper truths.

Truth is *correctness of description* for whatever is being described. Full truth would be accurately describing the world in all its myriad dimensions. If you're not interested in truth, I'll have nothing to say to you. But truth does matter. The tragedy of ideological falseness is shown in most of the big mistakes of history: many of our most desperate mistakes are perpetrated as a result of bad information or erroneous thinking. One of the principles argued for early in this metamanifesto, is that people and peoples get caught into various significant lies, and the acts and lives that follow these corrupted conceits, and consequently they, *we*, lose, often quite severely. One moral of this sad and long story, a moral of history itself as we might say, is: Don't let your-

self or your society get cornered into living through any basic ideas which aren't quite the truth. Keep evolving ideologically, because being trapped in a lie is literally a journey to a dead end. The freedom of thought and life *for the truth* is important, then, because to live we continually have to break free from what's false in our changing circumstances, to apply truth. By the time you finish this book I hope you'll be persuaded about *this* truth, at least. I also hope that you'll clearly see that we must escape the trap of the fundamental lies prevalent in our own culture... which will bring us neatly back to the revolutionary agenda I'll start with.

There are other surprises in here, but I won't spoil them.



This book isn't a work of scholarship. It's not meant to be taken in an academic way. Neither do I want to indoctrinate you with an ideology (I'm a liberal Christian, and *vice versa*, if you're wondering). Instead, these words are meant to be an inoculation against all forms of subtle ideological manipulation, blatant brain-washing, and unnecessary profoundly uncritical stupidity. You could say it's a book of *ethical epistemology*, written to inject a set of liberating thoughts about what we do and don't know into the brains of anyone willing to read it. My deepest wish in this bundle of words is to provoke you into nurturing a type of profound critical thinking about life.

Hopefully then you can understand that I want to do something much more subtle, delicate and powerful than smash the system. Instead, the metarevolution wants to *transform the system* from the inside out, for the sake of intelligence. I want us to together transfigure global culture. I want you to help human civilization subtly alter its way of thinking, into a critical, but rational and beneficial wise self-awareness. Then I want humanity to develop through the understanding which emerges from this continuing ideological self-examination. This is my goal.

Should you read these words, then? Should you wade into

this muddy stream of ideas, to travel these thundering black lines until this river of rhetoric crashes down on you like a waterfall, then cascades out across the world like a fountain?

Maybe the only precious things you'll find hidden in this gilded grotto of words are a trick or two for your mind... Seductive echoing whispers will slyly tempt you with questionable offers of wisdom and knowledge — and these as yet vague, intangible suggestions will be made to you at a price still yet to be revealed and negotiated. Personally, I think this is one of the best offers you're ever going to get. So do come inside.

Contained cradled in these pages is an unrefined attempt to upgrade how you think. However, if you're *already* intelligent, you know you shouldn't just believe what you read; at least not until you've figured out what's actually going on. All is not what it seems. So be as wise as a serpent, and as innocent as a sacrificial dove, and be very careful as you start to descend the glowing, winding stony steps leading deep underground.

ONE IT GOT US WHERE WE ARE TODAY

SOME WAYS IN WHICH GLOBAL CAPITALISM IS EVIL

Here's the truth: the desire and the paranoia pervasive to human life pump up our glitzy but unstable global economy.

Some news, huh? But I'm now going to display my hand with some important basic ideas about where me and you are socioeconomically. So don't read this chapter (or this book), unless you're willing to risk revolt stirring in your blood.

The Workings Of The Machine

I mean by the *global socioeconomic system*, *how global society works through its economics*. The System is the machinery of our financial and social circumstances, it's what pulls our strings. Its nature is spoken of in awed yet subdued tones in the corridors of wealth. But now I'm going to blow its cover. Let me take you on a journey into the heart of the beast.

There's something obvious to emphasise first of all. This is, we're all victims of, and to a great extent trapped by, our social, economic and political conditions. What this fundamentally means, is that we're caught under the wheels of an economic juggernaut which is often called progress. We oil the wheels of industry, the cogs of the thundering global automaton, with our time and blood. But as we continually stoke the Machine, the power and the pressure are building up. *Something's gonna blow* — some time soon, probably.

To understand this conclusion and its importance, let's start by synchronising our concepts. Let me give provisional definitions of some essential concepts we'll make use of in this book. First, let's say that *materialism* will in this book refer to *the desire for or the attachment to possessions inordinately beyond material subsistence needs*. In this use, materialism is a state of mind where

material acquisition has become either an end in itself, or the significantly addictive but socially-condoned means to other goals, such as status, security or power. Similarly, *consumerism* is *an addictive attitude which sees consumption as an end in itself, or as a means to other ends.*

As global capitalists we're part of a materialistic and consumerist society by definition, as should be pointed out. Moreover, the global economic engine pays high rewards to us only if we live in a way which results in us strengthening and expanding this same materialistic, consumerist system. People need to make and sell a lot of stuff or expensive services in the consumer society to become a successful part of the consumer society, for instance. But this means feeding the consumerism. Hopefully you can see that if that's true, then we're in an economic machine which tends to continually further entrench its consumerism. Or more generally, we're in a society slickly geared towards the increase of (someone else's) wealth, in terms which nurture materialism, I think. (I'm not a communist by the way, in case you're prone to jumping to conclusions.)

It's very simple, the way it works. We all have to do what we need and can do to stay alive. So we must be realistic about doing what we need to do to succeed. Visible success means material success, and in our society this means urgently making and selling stuff or services. This is the essence of the free market. Our free market economic system works in such a way that people are continually pressurized to produce and market things that others will be strongly encouraged to want, far beyond subsistence considerations. This is the way to make a profit in this very materially-judged world. It's a question of sink or swim, really — or it might be called 'sell or fall'. But in this way — through the constant cycle of the social and survival pressure for material success leading to the marketing of more goods and services — the grip of consumerism and materialism around our society's throat must inevitably become tighter, without theoretical limit. (And I do mean theoretical.)

Let me put this vortex in slightly more everyday terms. Living in a capitalist system means that we're under great stress to become capitalists ourselves. To buy from the market, I need to produce something I can sell. But it's not going to just be immaterial *services* sold. If the opportunity is there, there'll always be opportunists who'll wish to benefit humanity by creating a new line in goods for us to consume. And because they have to sell the stuff to make a profit, and because entrepreneurs generally want to make big profits, they may need to create a desire for the stuff they're selling. Hence advertising is often used to pretend, lie, or somehow convince people you've got stuff they need. But the result of convincing people that they need the stuff you're selling, is to make them ever more consumerist and materialistic. So as people are continually provoked to desire to consume more stuff, this further and ever-more-powerfully constrains them to themselves make more money and sell more stuff — thus ever more firmly establishing the whole process. Our free market economic actions both expand and strengthen the materialism and consumerism which is market capitalism's unsurprising expression.

This cycle might seem obvious, now I've pointed it out. One doesn't have to reflect very far, for instance, on the power of advertising, to come to this conclusion. But it's significant to our society that each step in the application of the process of materialistic capitalism further entrenches its power.

The more stuff there is to buy, the more stuff always has to be created, and sold, to buy it. We could equally say, if there's got to be more *capitalists*, then there's necessarily got to be more *capitalism*; and the increase in capitalism reinforces the need for people to be capitalists... The conclusion is that because of the way the market system works, we're in an increasingly self-strengthening and pervasive system of consumerism and materialism, whether we like it or not. (Most people don't even think about it.) This self-strengthening cycle can go on forever, theoretically. Capitalism is *a positive feedback loop*, and so therefore is consumerist materialism. Thus, our world is a socio-

economic system in which materialism and consumerism are set to increase, through a self-reinforcing cycle. That's the bottom line.

Exploit This

Our globalising economy thrives on *exploitation*.

Let's say as a provisional definition that ***exploitation*** means *a person or group is used as a means to an end, to their significant economic, physical, social or psychological detriment*. In our enlightened economy exploitation occurs all the time, everywhere. If you're not doing a job you want or appreciate for fair rewards (which means a living wage, at least), you're being exploited. That's a big chunk of global society.

Exploitation happens because the bondage of people to their survival instincts means a powerless person often has no choice but to become exploited just to survive. People are forced to do what is possible, not what they desire, so people often must do things which are not equitable to them. It's tellingly systematic to free market economics, that so many people have to do jobs they would never want to do, for bad pay. By the above slightly tight definition, this means they're being exploited. A position of constant need is not a strong position to improve your life from, so significant harm is systematically done to the exploited in terms of social mobility, too.

For individuals, exploitation is a source of much insult and mean disempowering, and a sickening waste of human potential, as economics in the free world continually tries to grind the plebs into a sort of grudgingly-contented, choiceless, pointlessly consuming pulp. All over the world, people are forced by their basic needs to do monotonous profit-creation, making or selling products which no-one needs or ultimately benefits from, from the mass marketing of unending plastic junk, to the built-in obsolescence of consumer high technology. The global economy systematically makes lives into sad farces.

So what, though? It's only your own fault if you're not smart

or strong enough to exploit the opportunities available and climb, right? ‘Exploit or be exploited’ is the unwritten slogan of the free market, as it upholds civilization. But as long as we’re limited to those two options, exploitation must inevitably continue. Doesn’t this seem regrettable, somehow?

The situation becomes even more difficult to justify when we look at the panoramic view. Let’s go global. In the case of the financial exploitation of developing countries by powerful ones, the present free economic order is a major contributor to famine, political instability, corruption and deprivation across many societies, I’d argue. The mechanism of economic interaction on the global stage is set up so that the rich countries exploit the vulnerable economic and political positions of the poorer. We rich get cheap primary resources, and the poor of the nations producing them don’t get anything substantial back. So our wealth-creating global economic system is also a source of chronic poverty, with all its ills. (Kleptocratic regimes form the other big contributor to the problem of poverty, I think.)

So I now invite you to coolly judge from a wider perspective the free market system by which we live — and thus reach a verdict on your own responses to it. Do you think it is really so good (good meaning ‘having structural integrity’ as well as ‘ethically justifiable’ here)? Honestly? What’s our economic system got to do with being benevolent, if it offers only exploitative over-consumerism forever, for instance? It doesn’t look like great love or intelligence at work, to me, anyway.

*

Any justifiable mission for any society must involve that society benefiting its members. Any other concept of socio-economic purpose would be dysfunctional, at best. So, if the refined economic system of a developed global civilization such as ours *doesn’t* explicitly work to facilitate the brightest experience of life for its people, is it really so perfect? To me it shows that global

economics still works through the same snares of need that have always chained humanity up in an enfolding darkness of unnecessary misery, while discouraging the seeking of the social-scale creation of a positive and open experience of life. But if the effects of global capitalism's free marketeering is in fact the spreading of a bloated, materialistic, consumerist society which cultivates greed, jealousy and disappointment, this would make pursuing our present global ideal a serious sin against humanity, wouldn't it? That's pretty insane isn't it? Which doesn't mean it's pretty.

Feeding The Beast

Upon further analysis it gets worse.

A capitalist economy is fuelled by profit. But having profit as its goal makes the market economy inevitably *expansionist*. This means *our economic system inevitably creates a continual pressure for economic expansion*.

This is bad.

Profits are *finances surplus to the cost of delivering a product or service*; or we can more precisely define **profit** as *financial ability surplus to the financial ability used by a group or individual in producing and delivering economic output*. By 'financial ability' I mean the ability to create and organize resources. This is what **money** is: *a medium to facilitate resource creation and reorganisation*. So as you know, making profits is about getting more money than you start with.

The *purpose* of profit is to buy stuff or services other than the individual or group produces. And the aim of those producing this further stuff or services profits buy, is also to make a profit. In our world, everybody wants more than they can produce. This is the soul of market capitalism, and it's not difficult to perceive. But it means that there's a 'profit cycle'. This cycle provides the impetus to the expansionism which is an essential aspect of the free market. Through the continual necessary profit-making, additional finance

is continually being ploughed into the economy for additional investment. This is precisely what I mean when I claim that a profit-based economy is expansionist. The definition of profit is money made in addition to whatever is used to make available what's being sold. But this additional money is invested back into the economy by people buying even more stuff with it, in one form or another. In this way, profit creates space for further economic activity, which then itself wants to expand. More profits must be made; and more economic activity is needed to make use of this... Thus a profit-driven economy, such as capitalism, is intrinsically expansionist. Or we could turn the analysis around and say instead that the more stuff that's created, the more surplus-to-need finance is needed to pay for it. The more money is needed to pay for the increasing amount of stuff, the more profits need to be made, so the more stuff needs to be sold, so the more stuff needs to be made. (*Overall* expansion is ongoing, even if the process does occur in cycles and waves.)

Let's examine part of this argument in more detail. As long as there's *profits*, this *by definition* means there's money made available in excess to what's used in the provision of the goods or services sold. In our materialistic, consumerist society, one of the chief goals of life is to make bigger profits, because there's so much to buy... And there will always be people ready to fulfil the opportunities being created by the excess finance available: there will always be people wanting or needing to create goods and services in return for other peoples' profits. In a profit-driven economy they do this so that they themselves can make a profit, so that they too can live a wealthier life.²

² One of the traps in materialism comes from the fact that the benefit to self-worth gained through material acquisition is comparative, not absolute: the psychological benefit of materialism depends on how you compare yourself with other people. So as people increasingly rely on wealth to feel better about themselves, they need more, more, more! This is an arms race of unlimited potential, but which doesn't achieve its target. See next chapter.

Thus profit means an expansion in product creation, and hence resource use; but this further resource use and economic creation is also itself undertaken for profit. Further profit then creates opportunities to create even more profit. This self-inputting cycle means ever more goods or services must continually be turned out to absorb the profits that have already been created. Each step in the expansion creates more profits from new business, opening up the way for still further expansion of the general economy. This means a profit-dependent economy must *keep on expanding* simply to absorb the purchasing power from the profits continually being created. So, again, the profit motive means we're in a theoretically limitlessly expansionist economy. Practically, it means there's continual investment into the creation of more goods and services. This is supposed by the coarser free-marketeters to be good.³

In a sense it doesn't matter if you agree with this analysis of why our economic system must systematically push for potentially limitless expansion. All that's necessary for us to continue together towards revolutionary conclusions, is for you to agree that the global economic system we live by is such that, if otherwise unchallenged, its economic output will tend to increase without limit, especially as the population involved continues to expand. Capitalism has not yet evolved brakes.

³ One alternative I can imagine to expansionism within a profit-guided economy, would be if the profits were all absorbed into existing economic outlets. This is the hypothetical economy of a self-sufficient, self-contained society. (Maybe a similar result is also seen in the recent over-priced housing market. The dramatic increase in house prices over recent decades is an exercise in profit absorption without economic expansion. In this case property acts as a sort of financial battery: that is, *property stores resource organisation potential*.) The closest humanity has been to a beatifically stable self-contained social estate, might be said to be with the dubious feudal system, of which there are various historic examples. Unfortunately, the fact that in the West feudalism organically gave way to capitalism hints that even an initially low-key operation of the profit motive will create a destabilisation from an otherwise material subsistence society, towards economic expansionism, until we get the aggressively expansionist economy we have today.

The Problem With Unlimited Economic Expansion

One pertinent way of expressing the problem with unlimited economic expansion is that *it's impossible to have unlimited expansion in a closed system*. You can't blow a balloon up inside a box forever, even if the box is a planet. (Here's a question for optimistic industrialists: What happens to the balloon?)

Despite some popular fantasies, the Earth presents a closed system for resources. Meanwhile, as we've seen, our global economic process is a theoretically-unlimitedly-expanding process with strong resource-consuming tendencies. The *essence* of our economic system is to press for more resource use.

It seems then that some catastrophe inevitably haunts our future. The economic bubble's going to burst spectacularly. Maybe not tomorrow; but eventually, something *big's* going to snap under the strain of our self-encouraging but badly-managed global ambition. Yet the world at large still don't seriously admit this to itself. *That* situation's got to change, for a start.

The boring truth is, we're stuck in the closed system of this small, isolated, rare jewel of a planet. To try to spread our economic dysfunction out into the universe would be neither an efficient nor insightful way to tackle our resource-use issues. Even if the mission were viable, it wouldn't address the underlying forces which create the problems which make flying away from our spoilt paradise seem desirable in the first place. But instead of science fantasy, the inescapable truth is that the cities are getting fuller and tighter, bursting with people being squeezed over the edge of civilization; and the fertile countryside is getting smaller and dryer and deader. Meanwhile, the self-glorifying, proudly-advertised ambitions of big business aren't shrinking — they're *inevitably* becoming more and more exalted! That's all a natural manifestation of economic expansionism. The visionary commodores of industry blithely string the ideals and aims of their somewhat economically-trapped but nevertheless loyal, credulous, or maybe self-deceiving workforce along with them. After all, we

all need to make a profit in life. We all need to be seen to be achieving *something*. To survive, we have no choice, but to produce. In developed economies there has been a movement away from the use of material resources in manufacturing goods, towards the service and information industries, but the free market is still open to all sorts of resource-use opportunism, locally and globally. People will still take advantage of any opportunity available to them to make a living — meaning, to strive for material success. And as far as the market is *free*, by definition this means that there are no constraints to prevent expansion through the development and marketing of more goods. So as globalisation opens up opportunities, there's nothing built into the process to stop the increasing materialisation of the world.

However, I ask you now, in seriousness: How realistic do you believe our manufactured fantasy future — society's present dream — really is? How much do you believe the illusion you're being sold every day as *the life*? Do you really think our expanding economic process *can* go on expanding forever?

I know I'm being tediously ecological and conscientious, but what's the truth? Will the beaches, the seas, the forests, the jungles and the fields have to be pumped full of poisons and rapaciously devastated by our troubled egos before we take seriously the nature of our socioeconomic process? And how long will it take now before we get what we deserve from it, actually? Chaos, disaster and massive social upheaval may not be hanging over us Westerners as sharply now as in the poorer world: but does that mean we the economically-powerful should simply keep on pushing and pushing and pushing the world's luck, in the wrong direction? How long can we keep turning refugees away from our borders, for example? And the natural disasters are starting to effect even us even now.

Bleak Conclusions

As it turns out, any idea of *free market capitalism as the*

unqualified good for society must be based on various (self-) deceptions. I've begun to expose some of the ideological fabrications, but will an exposé of the lies even nudge how you think?

What lies? Well, if your media incessantly subliminally informs you of the unconstrained good of consumerism for the sake of a profit-dependent economics, implying an apparently infinitely-materially-expanding future, then it's *lying* to you, profoundly and perniciously. And it does seem that most entertainment and advertising does not acknowledge the truth about the larger economic context. Instead, market culture promotes our dumb expansionism with all the attendant social and psychological dysfunctionality and short-sightedness of such a lie. The wise world is grossly misleading as far as it implies that it's right for you to give your life without thinking into a false and ultimately self-destructive ideal. The media are implicated in the deception insofar as they reinforce deceptive life-style ideals, whether they acknowledge they're doing so or not.

I suggest you think of our 'mature market culture' more as a quasi-Orwellian media brainwashing of the population for business purposes (ie, so the rich can remain so without accountability). Hypnotism might be okay when the purposes are sound. But hopefully you recognize that we could be basing our lifestyles and hopes upon some ultimately dangerous ideals: it's possible that we could be living some sort of globally-destructive conspiracy of a consumerist sham. What are you going to do about this niggling knowledge of the possibility of the Lie, set before you like a famine in the midst of a feast? Your only *honest* choice now is to sit at this table, I suggest.

Maybe you already know that the socioeconomic process of our world is unsatisfactory in many ways, albeit those ways are only vaguely defined in your mind. But now I've graphically sketched the problem out for you, as clear as a black-brushed, dark-burning crimson-skied landscape: an oil-slick painting of accumulating catastrophe potential. Let me ask you, then: Do you want to live in the cold deceit of today's turbo temptation to status

consumerism, and pretend everything's okay? Or do you want to do the difficult thing, and be honest about the wider situation? Would you prefer to try and recognize the undesirable truth, or do you prefer the fool's gold, because it shines, and because it seems easier to dig for?

I think I know how most people will respond, unfortunately. But if nothing is done to change the nature of the process, then our rapacious economy will endeavour to continue in the same vainglorious direction, until its doomed expansion does have critical implosive consequences, one way or another. The balloon can stretch only so far, you see.

TWO THE FORCES OF HISTORY

PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONS OF HISTORY-MAKING

Sex, Status, And The Pursuit Of Stuff

Our survival instincts naturally inform our life-styles, that is, our economic behaviour. For instance, sexual selection forces strongly stimulate materialism. Because of instinctive encouragement from our mammalian sexuality, people push for the human peacock's resplendent sexual displays of power, money and honour. This adds weights to peoples' backs and supports *expansive materialism* as our society's manner of progress.

Materialism happens when we see what others have, and thereby come to think of that stuff as desirable, even our *right* to acquire, as a signifier of our social worth, apparently: you tell others and yourself you're having a successful life through your possession. Thus *materialism*, the desire for material goods beyond strict need, *is about social status*. But the desire for social status is intimately connected with (evolutionary) sexual selection forces. As an over-simplification, social status through wealth and power is often what makes men attractive to women: for 'good provider' natural selection reasons, woman have an tendency to instinctively evaluate a man as a mate through his ability to provide resources, as seen through his accumulation of wealth. So male materialism is an expression of the mating instinct. (To some degree *vice versa* too, although men are still the more economically powerful gender.)

That material wealth should be a seal of male attractiveness is hardly surprising. It's likely to be an instinct developed in the feminine brain to select for reproductive fitness. The idea, from evolutionary psychology, is that for a long time in the line of descent the male was the provider of resources, and because the squaws of hunters who could hunt were more likely to have

surviving children than the squaws of hunters who couldn't, through natural selection women have come to instinctively desire good hunters/providers. Yet this wouldn't on its own explain the virulence of *materialist excess* in human society. One large psychological element pumping out a desire for wealth, as opposed to merely adequate levels of material security, is the *sexual* element, and that has to do with status, which is comparative. Wealth is also a comparative thing, and thus ideal for the status competitions of human mating rituals.⁴

Generally for animals, social status confers desirability because it's a means of displaying relative reproductive fitness. Although not absolutely reliable, the position in a group's social hierarchy is perhaps the only practical indicator of relative position in that group's genetic fitness table. Or to put it another way, the alpha male is the one with the harem, and the most fertilisable female also has the most admirers. Just so, our animal brains point us, male or female, to desiring people with higher positions in social hierarchies (through whatever means these positions are evaluated). This makes the need for perceived status a fundamental force in human life. Through history's contortions, the instinct to acquire and display status has become a desire for wealth. So materialism is a natural, if historically contingent, manifestation of sexual selection forces.

An instinctive force such as the reproductive impulse can be frequently sublimated by our sensitive minds, meaning disguised as more sophisticated desires. Thus, we need to maintain a high consumer lifestyle because we have an image to maintain, or because we desire to be seen as a success, or to see our lives as a success ourselves. Keeping up with the Joneses is the pursuit of perceived social status as a sublimated expression of sexual selection forces, if you didn't know that already.

The materialist way of perceiving and conferring status doesn't

⁴ In *absolute* rather than *relative* terms, 'rich' means having more than a subsistence level of material goods — that is, more food than you can healthily eat.

just affect the rich, evidently. For all types of people, for most people, life is about improving their material situation as a means of improving their perceived social status. Thus the majority of the globalised population conspicuously feel the need to use conspicuous consumption, and it doesn't have to be a new Rolls Royce, it can be a new pair of trainers, a new TV, or a phone. We need bigger houses, cars, designer clothes, more money, more power; and the original source of these desires is sexual selection. This need to appear desirable by appearing successful provides a real boost to the economy.

Evidently, there are other strong motivations for materialism aside from the subliminal sexual element — such as seeing wealth as a means to autonomy or self-determination. Self-determination is what some people mean by 'freedom', although it's not freedom from materialism here, clearly. Wealth can assuredly bring a sense of security too. The need to feel secure is about as fundamental a need as the sexual, I'd say, and as difficult to sate. These other compulsions I take to contribute to the materialist arms race as much as the sexual, for just as apparently you can never have too much status, apparently you can never have too much freedom, security, etc. For a guess at what caused and causes us as a race to pursue materialism with such commitment, I'd say it has unfathomably deep roots in a long history of unrationalized instinctive insecurities and desires. This profound psychopathology, our poisonous frailty, has worked itself out to produce the economic process we're caught up in now; and the spectres of fear and greed still inescapably overshadow the human situation, since they're within us. We still have irrational needs. We all still have neuroses and desires, and the agendas to go with them. We all need something. You could say the world is a crown of thorns for us, and we've all been snagged by its jagged teeth.

Materialist consumerism's link with social status is also, ironically, why an increase in possessions beyond a basic level of comfort and security will unfortunately generally not make you any happier, unless this material increase also improves your place

in the social league table in your head.

Gigantic

Because human social status desires have come to be expressed through materialism, as wealth has become *the* status necessity, an *arms race* of materialism and consumerism has been set in motion. In the developed world at least, most people have materially much more than their subsistence needs; but so many of them perceive what others have and are chronically unhappy, because they do not have the wealth (that is, the status) they perceive they need. So they're highly (instinctively) motivated to try to get it. And so are their competitors... As in any arms race, in the wealth or consumerism stakes, you need to gain more and more to retain the same relative position in competition with your evolving rivals. This fact is what keeps arms races going. It's what makes an arms race an arms race, we might say.

How does the arms race dynamic work for materialism? The terms in which status is judged is power, and in human terms power is most often associated with wealth. Your social status is relative to everyone else (otherwise it wouldn't be *social*). Therefore, to *improve* your social status, not only do you have to become rich in absolute terms, you have to become *richer* than those you're competing for status with. Yet, as ever with arms races, there's no boundaries to the extent things can develop in the attempt to remain competitive. Like deer stags evolving unfeasibly large antlers — attractive to does as status establishers, but otherwise useless — sexual selection forces have set in motion as a major feature of global economics a ***materialist gigantism***. In our social system, more and more possessions are needed to obtain the same comparative social status/reproductive desirability. Those of us who are not naturally physically attractive, and even those who are, use wealth to increase attractiveness; and the more wealth, the better (arms race). And to a certain extent ostentatious display *is* an easy way to persuade other people of your worth and des-

irability, even as these others are thus being sucked into the same vortex of panic, desire and insecurity that's got you.

I think the materialist arms race is *the* main problem with our society's over-growth. Or, as I said in Chapter One, sexual and other psychological pressures such as desire for control have established a *positive feedback loop* of expansive materialism and consumerism. (Arms races are archetypal positive feedback loops.) Unfortunately, the competition for status through wealth results in chronic dissatisfaction for everyone but the rich, the stupid, the attractive or the enlightened.⁵ But worse even than the institutionalised psychosocial scaring, materialist gigantism, as the signal feature of our globalising society has encouraged much faster, greater resource use than is necessary for comfortable survival, or ecologically sustainable. The wealth race stimulates the market's expansionism, but quite apart from the irrationality, headache and heartache, this process is turning out to be very bad for the environment.

Progress And Illusion

One way of summarising history from the Industrial Revolution on, is *investors' and other powerbrokers' application of technology through industrialisation and warfare*. 'Progress' has come to mean 'the application of increasing knowledge to gain increasing power' — which is another pithy way of characterising human history, too. Perhaps the most obviously relevant feature of history for our present purposes, is that through science and

⁵ Who benefits from it? Long and languid supermodels hang on to the arms of rapacious millionaires and billionaires — bold business emperors, baby. The film stars and starlets, rock gods and pop goddesses, and all the other chaotic celebrities who glamorise material success, get their unfair share of status too. And the rest of us, who don't quite make the A-list, can only waste our lives dreaming it, just as we're encouraged to do by constant media hype. That's the global program, now — even though to have our minds continually saturated with unfulfilable desires *inevitably* leads to widespread unhappiness and frustration in our advanced, civilized society. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Eat my stardust, sucker...

technology we gained the tools to transform the world, otherwise and human. Technology means power: over nature, over the lives of individuals, and for one society over another. Power *within* society is initially why we came to have industry: the Industrial Revolution was initially motivated by the psychological engines of social status/wealth we just looked at, as channelled through the arms race called capitalism, which was the economic form facilitating this evolution of means. But we Westerners also found we could use our technological power to take over the world as well. The capability produced through industrially-applied science enabled the merchant and military imperialism which consolidated Western global economic sovereignty. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries thoroughly demonstrated to the world that both within societies and over them, economic and political advantage is produced as a result of technology applied through industrial capitalism. On the large scale, industrial capitalism enabled industrialised imperialism, which basically meant the European powers taking over much of the rest of the world. And because this system created power for its users over less technologically-productive economic systems, and over your co-patriots who don't modernise, it dug itself firmly into the globe. Anything less powerful than mass-mobilised technology isn't going to beat it in the game of power, obviously. Non-industrial powers were forced to compete in like terms or drop out of the race, and since competitive advantage is what most people are after, this system will also spread through other societies from within, that is, at the level of individual's lives, through the desires of the most ambitious non-Westerners. A stronger method of self-advancement inevitably swallows up a less effective system if only because people have a compulsive appetite for supremacy. There will always be people willing to grab any power made available. Some people will invest their whole lives even in the *hope* of power. The need for visible achievement is hard to avoid for all of us. (I'm not saying I can avoid it. This book is my display thing.) We're stuck in the situation, we can tell ourselves, so we might as

well enjoy it.

We can say then that global industrialisation and the consequent global economic expansionism which is the sign of a healthy capitalist economy, are the results of natural selection (ie, competition for status) at work both within society and between societies. Now our expansionist, resource-hungry technology-based capitalism is how the *world* works. Through the sly tricks and crazy, crafty details of all the twists of fate, the search for power has turned up for us a Faustian card which overwhelmingly advises our minds to invest in technological improvement and economic expansion. This is where we are.



In diverse ways ‘socioeconomic Darwinism’ has got us where we are today — and the world today is one in which *expansionism, industrialisation, materialism, consumerism, technology-obsession, manipulation* and *exploitation* still triumph. These vices have a vice-like grip upon the neck of contemporary global culture. In particular, materialism has become so much a default aspect of how the world is that the expression of this attitude, the focusing on the material aspects of life, is pretty much the naturally-accepted, often unquestioned goal and method of life for too many people across the world, and all the time more are being seduced into joining the queue.

Generally, one’s attitude to the nature of one’s socioeconomic situation is an acceptance cultivated from birth; and so it is with us in our materialism and consumerism. We just roll easy with it, jostling with the splintering glacial flow... But it might nevertheless be intelligent for us to ask ourselves where our huge unpiloted socioeconomic machine is taking us.

The answer is, over the edge.

THREE HISTORY QUAKEs

A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE FUTURE

Catastrophe Is A Statistic

The only rational long-term mode of behaviour would be to live in stable harmony with one's self and one's surroundings. But the balancing act is difficult; and if so for the individual, even more so for societies. Unfortunately, in thinking about the potential future of the human race, we must think in terms of *potential large-scale social instabilities*.

We'll benefit from a good model of how to understand social change, or *history*, as it's also known. The understanding I want to use here comes from *catastrophe theory*, which is a branch of *science concerned with understanding the laws of how things change in complex situations*. We'll use some of the insights of catastrophe theory to understand history.

Catastrophe theory mathematically analyses topics ranging from bush fires to fashion trends: anything (?) you can give statistics of change about. There are many ways a once stable and smooth situation can collapse into chaos with catastrophic consequences: a forest flaring into flame from one lightning-struck tree, or a congested road opening up in the wrong direction as a result of an earthquake. One important principle catastrophe theory has found is that there are regularities in the frequency at which events of specific types and scales occur. The theory has further, distilled the statistical laws indicating how often there will be given events of various magnitudes; for example, earthquakes. In other words, science demonstrates that types of events at a given level of impact occur at statistically-specifiable intervals. In further words, given enough data, catastrophe theory can tell the sort of period of time you'd expect an event of a given magnitude to occur in. And just as it can tell you about the expected frequency of earthquakes of a

given magnitude, catastrophe theory can also be applied to the sort of repetitive events which define human history. As earthquakes are the result of geological faultlines, there are faultlines in human life and society also, of many types and sizes. This means there are many chances for chaos. Social faultlines are the sort of faultlines which result in *events*, and together, events make history.

We can formally say that an *earthquake* is a *realized geological instability*: an earthquake happens when the friction between two tectonic (continental) plates puts the faultline between them under so much stress that what was once stable is suddenly destabilised, slipping, with a shock. So, in keeping with quake phraseology, we'll call any *sudden realization of a social instability* a *societyquake*. Or if you prefer, a *historyquake* can be thought of as *a sudden change in direction for life and its processes*.⁶

'Earthquake' proves a useful metaphor. You can easily imagine the effect on society of the realization of instabilities as the political equivalent of volcanoes, tidal waves and cracks in the landscape. 'The realization of a historical-scale instability' may sound innocuous, but by a large historyquake, I mean for instance the collapse of one of the major mechanisms allowing the happy processes of life. A global economic quake is a very significant thing, for example, as is a world war.

Good things can happen to humanity too. Positive medicinal quakes were caused by the discoveries of penicillin and anaesthetics, for examples. Both of these discoveries proved to be as significant historical epicentres as the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. Politics itself yields examples of benign revolutionary developments or regime changes too. Here the metaphor decays to meaninglessness, as it's difficult to imagine a positive earthquake. We'd need a non-quake metaphor for good social shifts as well as bad. Yet the purpose of this book is not to explore the consequences of history going right, but the implications of it going

⁶ One scientific definition of an *explosion* is *the precipitous realization of an instability within a closed system*. I find it instructive to also apply this way of speaking to our economic process and its approaching consequences.

wrong. So for our purposes a quake metaphor and its accessories will do just fine.

Changes can be beneficial as well as malignant, and often they're both; but social-scale changes are hardly ever *unequivocally* beneficial. This is a truism of politics, unfortunately. On a historical scale no good deed goes unpunished, as it were.

Consider that the invention of the internal combustion engine, the isolation of cocaine, or indeed, the discovery of America, are all quite ambivalent historical boons⁷, though the music and movie industries would be nowhere without them, admittedly.

Just as the size of an earthquake can vary from minor tremor to calamity, so with quakes in life: the magnitude of a realized instability in human life can vary from insignificant to disastrous. Some of the faultlines in human life operate on a truly grand scale, undeniably. (*Paradigm avalanche* might be equally appropriate terminology for the more seismic, *revolutionary* historyquakes.) There are many *types* of faultlines too — many categories of potential disruption to the provident flow of being; different types of situations where what appears seamlessly smooth for individuals and societies can snap. Social faultline instabilities are realized whenever the smooth social process suddenly changes direction.

The extent and nature of quake damage is always unforeseeable. *Smaller-scale social tremors* might mean strikes, food shortages, minor diplomatic incidents, or other everyday front-page news. The Credit Crunch might be called a *medium-scale* social quake. The *large-scale* realization of instabilities in socioeconomic faultlines means war, runaway inflation, pandemics, famines — all the really bad stuff affecting whole societies. These are some areas in which something going wrong at the wrong time can disrupt the whole world. Conversely, the Agricultural Revolution was a *good* large-scale quake. The largest societyquake is the collapse of a society of nation states. This happened with the Roman Empire, for instance. Maybe a fracturing happens to all

⁷ Especially if you're a Native American with a crack habit living under a busy freeway.

united states, eventually.

Quakes may be called significant when things go right or wrong enough to noticeably affect a society. (This is also called *politics*.) A major societyquake means a descent to disruption on a socially-determining scale, or alternatively, a global reason to be cheerful, like curing smallpox. One mathematical law catastrophe theory has discovered is that the longer one waits for a quake, the bigger it will probably be when it comes.⁸

We're in a *global* society now. Transcontinental.

The Scales Of History

In an attempt to imitate scientific precision, in place of the categories of *small*, *medium*, or *large-scale* events/changes, let me suggest a more precise scale of social-historic upheaval. This scale is similar in concept to the Richter Scale for earth tremors and quakes, but its principles apply to history rather than geography. Think of it as *a societyquake scale*, if you like.

History is the story of the events of the human race. The quanta of history are ideas and actions. That is to say, ideas and their actions brew up the atoms of *events*, and events are what make up the plot of the story. To clarify this: events do not *determine* the course of history, they *are* the course of history.

Clearly events have different levels of impact or significance for human experience. So one interesting scale for thinking about the story of humanity, would see history in terms of the level of the effects of and on human ideas and behaviour. This would be a scale showing the significance to which events determine, create, or otherwise effect, ideas and actions, these ideas and actions leading on to other events, of course. (There may be no other workable way of quantifying the story of human civilisation. Think of another, if you can. You'd be doing *scientific ideology*, which is a good thing, I'm going to argue.)

⁸ See eg *Ubiquity* by Mark Buchanan for the science of this hopefully worrying claim.

The level an event is found at on the following scale denotes the scale of the impact of that idea, action or event on experience, just as the Richter scale denotes the scale of impact of a quake event on the earth. Technically, Richter's scale is a logarithmic scale of the amount of energy released at the quake epicentre. The history scale is not so exact, but is still *generally* of the form $y=kx^2$. It's meant as only a rough guide.

Simply put, the history scale is meant as a scale of *the degree to which events effect immediate experience*. First, it's only relative to *experience* that an event (or anything else) has significance. Second, the scale must be concerned with *immediate* effects rather than impacts into the future, because we can't calculate the future effects of any event. Fortunately, what 'immediate' means is flexible here. It's also important to remember that this history scale is neutral to what are from a human perspective 'good' or 'bad' effects: it only refers to the level of *significance* of events. Furthermore, the significance of an event is relative to the contemporaneous population size: the Napoleonic Wars and World War I were both world-scale.

The History Scale, then:

1. *The level of the simplest human thoughts, acts or events*. This involves coming to everyday conclusions, such as the idea to have a cup of coffee, or not; and practical small-scale actions, such as those necessary to making the coffee. This level includes the sort of thought or physical event which might make you take one step to the right, for example. The events are noticeable, but minimally. It's the type of event which will at most determine your actions for a few minutes, and not alter your greater path.
2. *More significant everyday events* — actions or decisions which determine what you might be doing for a couple of hours, or the rest of the day, say. It could, for example, be a traffic jam which makes you late for work. (Like any other, this event

could work out good or bad. You could miss the important beginning of a meeting; or you could miss the boss in a bad mood, looking for a scapegoat. And so it goes at all levels of event significance.)

3. *Events effecting medium term life, over weeks or months.*
4. *Activities which effect the ongoing course of your life: getting a new job, getting married, adopting or having a baby, changing religion. These can be called epiphanies. We can also start talking about social-scale events at this level of significance, I think. So included in this category are events at the local community level NOT significant enough to change the direction of the local community's evolution. That is to say, many lives are affected without the general direction of their interactions being changed. Putting in a new set of street lights, or opening a new shop, would be minor (level 4) society events, for examples.*
5. *Local headlining events which DO shift the direction of development of local community life — perhaps the opening of a new supermarket, or the election of a new mayor. Or events which significantly disrupt local community life, eg strikes or emergencies, perhaps the isolating of a town.*
6. *National-or state-scale events which DO NOT fundamentally change the direction of growth of the nation/state — such as inconclusive civil unrest or general strikes, typically the death or appointment of an unexceptional Prime Minister, President or other ruler. Level 6 also encompasses some popular international cultural movements. The birth and growth of rock music, for instance, is international, but hasn't made a dent in any society's direction or momentum. If it does it belongs in category*
7. *National-or state-scale events which DO fundamentally change the direction of growth of the state. Terrorist skirmishes, famines, General Elections, coups, civil wars. On a similar*

level of significance, we can include here smaller impact *international* events, such as recessions.

8. *Events of international direction-changing significance.* Wars, invasions, the fall of countries. Events such as the Great Depression, minor pandemics, some inventions, etc.
9. *World-direction-changing events.* World Wars, the collapse of empires, major pandemics. Some sorts of discoveries or inventions also fall into this category, such as the invention of the steam engine, or Columbus not falling off the edge.
10. *The end of this world.* Giant comet crashes, ice ages, etc.
11. *Interstellar events.* The sun going supernova; events all the way up to galaxies colliding and exploding.
12. *The universe ends:* Cosmic Armageddon, Big Crunch, etc. (Any of these more-or-less ultimate last three levels of events could be considered good, bad, or impossible, depending on your attitude and metaphysics.)

I call this *the Bartley Scale of Historical Events*. You can call it the *News Scale* if you prefer something more popularist and less egotistical. Whatever you call it, it's a useful scale for historical analysis, I think, especially in conjunction with the interests and conclusions of chaos or catastrophe theories.

The scale can be greatly improved, and improved on, no doubt. For instance, a version could be drawn up which gives a negative value for negative effects. That sort of scale might be very useful in quantifying real human progress, for example.

For the sake of convenience, and somewhat by fiat, *changes in thought* we'll call **cultural** changes, and *changes in behaviour, social* changes, for *all* levels on the scale of events.

The Texture Of Life And Death

On the scale of centuries, the texture of history stays the same. The same *sorts* of events happen at the same *sort* of rate, as cata-

strophe theory would concur. That science says that the frequency of given events is statistically lawful at any given scale. The fascination of the human story may lie in the unending variety of its detail, but catastrophe theory would indicate to us that revolutions, conflicts and discoveries happen at the same sorts of frequencies for the same sorts of (relative) scales of significance. For example, ‘grade one revolutions’ seem to happen *about* once a century — although the twentieth century had at least three grade one political revolutions: the Chinese, and the Eastern Bloc and back again. The eighteenth had the American Revolution of Independence (as it may be called); the nineteenth century had several near misses; and so on. History also indicates a world-scale *war* about once a century or so. There were those Napoleonic wars at the end of the eighteenth, and massed global imperialism for a couple of centuries before that. The twentieth century was a busy period, because along with revolution fever, it also had the distinction of conducting two World Wars. (One ‘benefit of technological progress’ is to speed life up, in many ways.)

One uncomfortable implication of history’s consistency, is that we’re about due another global-scale war; and it’ll be increasingly due as the twenty-first century gives birth to the twenty-second. By the second half of this century we’ll be working against the shape of history to prevent WWII. To me this indicates we should start suing ourselves for world peace now.

This is not saying that a world war is inevitable. But it is to say that the science of catastrophe tells us that from the evidence of history, a world-scale war is becoming increasingly likely. Or, to turn this statistical conclusion into wise counsel: unless we work strenuously for a firmly-established global peace, the human race should be becoming increasingly scared. Catastrophically speaking, if we don’t get a world-sized war by the end of this century, we’ll be either very intelligent or very blessed indeed, and presently, the signs are not encouraging.

A texture is not quite the same as a pattern.

Rumble In The Jungle

Long-term stability seems especially unlikely for our untamed global culture, with its in-built pressure to economically expand. In fact, technically speaking, ***global capitalism is a dedicated positive feedback system generating potentially huge historical instabilities.*** This is bad news. It means major quakes and collapses are waiting to be triggered across the global economy and its society, it seems. Some sort of precipitous avalanche of the socioeconomic structure seems *inevitable*, if we consider that our economic process must keep on pushing us out of equilibrium with both the natural environment and with ourselves. *If we continue in resource-based economic expansion (that is, an expansion in resource use, not just an increase in economic complexity) we logically must eventually push resource use beyond what is practically stable in our small and delicate world. So if our economy keeps on growing in our present expansionist manner, some sort of major historical quake is inevitable.* The only things unknown about this truth are when and how the tipping points will be reached; and, other than regrettable, what the results will look like.

I am persuaded that the fault lines of greatest potential threat for global society and so the human race are found where the pressures of expanding resource-use strongly push against the world's capacities to adapt to this use. Meanwhile, we continue to shore up our global market ever more delicately... Unfortunately, the increasing sophistication of our spinning plates act makes the slip likely to be a big one when it comes.