

Boris Forkel (ed.)



VOICES OF RESISTANCE

STIMMEN DES WIDERSTANDS

Derrick Jensen: Thought To Exist In the Wild & other Essays



Vol. 3

English Edition



For the land I live on.
For the Neckar River.
For the salmon, the otters, the stag beetles, the spotted salamanders.
For the American bison, the European bison, the wolf, the bear, the lynx and all other victims of our culture.
For those people who are still able to feel sincere empathy and love.
For Leo, my loving little sunshine, and for all the innocent little children who's future is being destroyed.
For life on planet Earth.
For PachaMama, Gaia, Mother Earth.
My absolute loyalty belongs to you.

Boris Forkel (ed.)

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Preface: How and Why?

The most influential thinkers for me have been Bill Mollison and Derrick Jensen. Bill, stunned by the destruction that agriculture –especially the industrial model– brought about in his homeland, the relatively undisturbed Island of Tasmania, was primarily driven by the “how” of this destruction. Derrick, as a survivor of domestic violence and abuse, is primarily driven by the “why.”

Bill spent his life searching for solutions. By returning into the wilderness and studying the patterns of nature, he developed an approach he named *Permaculture*. Born of British descent in Tasmania, he was fully aware that the beautiful wild land he lived on had, only a few decades before, seen the genocide of its native population. For Bill as well as for Derrick, indigenous peoples are a deep influence as role models for their thinking. Indeed, much Permaculture is simply an approach to rediscover indigenous ways to relate to the landbase.

While Bill, mainly with agriculture in mind, focused on the question *how can we do it better*, Derrick focuses on the questions *why are we doing this* and *why aren't we stopping it*.

Those are the most important questions of our time. And while Bill Mollison's work is of utmost importance, we also must ask: If we even know a solution, *why* isn't it being applied in a broad sense?

I love the work of Erich Fromm. But somehow, I always had a feeling that he was missing something. Erich often ended with proposals and hope for cultural change (again asking the question *how can we do it better*), which I always sensed was, after strong and clear analyses, the weak part of his work.

Derrick starts where Erich Fromm ends. He dedicated his epic work *Endgame* to Tecumseh, a Shawnee warrior and leader of a large, multi-tribal confederacy, who understood, more than 200 years ago, that the European colonialists are insane, driven by an urge to destroy. He understood they must be stopped by any means necessary. Derrick's analysis is deeply influenced by a long history of native American struggle.

He paints on a huge canvas, and the picture he shows is devastating and heartbreaking, beautiful and ugly, disturbing and ... *just horrifically true*.

For those of us who are trying to get over abusive relationships or domestic violence, Derrick's work can be incredibly helpful. For those who are haunted by the inherent violence of our culture, it is an epiphany.

What makes his work so controversial for many people is that he is very clear about one thing: Between the "why" and the "how" stands something that most people - including Erich Fromm and Bill Mollison- can't or don't want to see:

Resistance.

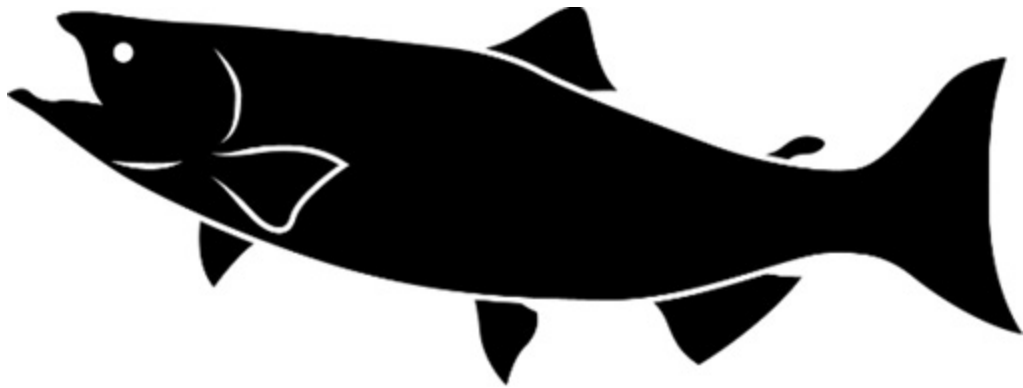
That said, and since we'll see a lot more of Derrick's writing on the following pages, I like to end this preface with a quote by Bill:

"I think it's pointless asking questions like 'Will humanity survive?' It's purely up to people - if they want to, they can, if they don't want to, they won't."

I'm sure Derrick will agree.

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Intro: Loaded Words

Recently, I've been thinking about something I wrote fourteen years ago, which has become one of my most quoted passages: "Every morning when I wake up I ask myself whether I should write, or blow up a dam." Despite having faith in my work as a writer, I knew that it wasn't a lack of words that was killing salmon in the Northwest. It was the presence of dams.

Since that time, things have gotten much worse for salmon, and for almost everything on the earth. By now we all know the numbers, or we should. Two hundred species per day driven extinct, 90 percent of the large fish in the oceans extirpated, more than 98 percent of native forests destroyed, 99 percent of prairies, and on and on. Virtually every biological indicator is pointing the wrong direction. Native communities —human and nonhuman—are under assault. Where I live, frog populations have collapsed, as have newt populations, butterfly populations, crane fly populations, dragonfly populations, banana slug populations, songbird populations. Crow populations have collapsed. Bat populations. Woolly bear populations. Moth

populations. Bumblebee and solitary bee populations. And these are just some of the absences I've noticed. Salmon of course have continued to collapse. At this point I give salmon fifteen years. If we can bring down industrialized civilization in the next fifteen years, I think salmon, in time, will be fine. Much longer and they will not survive.

So where does writing fit in? Far too many of us have forgotten, or never knew, that words can be used as weapons in service of our communities. Far too many of us have forgotten, or never knew, that words *should* be used as weapons in service of our communities. For far too long, too many critics and teachers have told us that literature should be apolitical (as though this were possible), and that even nonfiction and journalism should be "neutral" or "objective" (as though this, too, were possible). If you want to send a message, they told us, use Western Union. I once spoke with a nature writer who refused to lend his name to a campaign to protect a species about whom he had written, giving as his reason, "I'm a writer. I have to remain neutral."

When the world is being murdered, such a position is inexcusable. It is immoral. And it reveals a great ignorance for what it means to be a writer. Have these people never heard of Steinbeck, Dickens, Crane, Hugo? Charlotte Perkins Gilman? Rachel Carson? Frederick Douglass? Harriet Beecher Stowe? Alexandra Kollontai? George Eliot? Katharine Burdekin? Zora Neale Hurston? Andrea Dworkin? B. Traven? Upton Sinclair? A little Tolstoy, anyone?

I would not be who I am and I would not write what I write without having learned from some of my elders who refused to believe that writers should or can be apolitical or neutral or objective. The truth is most important, they said. It is more important than money. It is more important than fame. It is more important than your career. It's more important than your preconceptions. Follow the truth—follow the words and ideas—wherever they lead. Words matter, they said. Art matters. Literature matters. Words and art and literature can change lives, and can change history. Make sure that your words and your art and your literature move people individually and collectively in the direction of justice and sustainability. They said literature that supports capitalism is immoral. A literature that supports patriarchy is immoral. A literature that does not resist oppression is immoral. But you can help to create a literature of morality and resistance, as each new generation must create this literature, with the help of all those generations who came before, holding their hands for support, just as those who come after will need to hold yours.

I was also taught that art can be and is and, to be moral, must be a combat discipline.

Recognizing that art can be a combat discipline is part of a process necessary for social change, but it's not all of it. If too few of us remember that words can be weapons, even fewer of us remember that, as weapons, words cannot fight alone. Words themselves do not topple dictators, they do not stop capitalism, they do not stop oppression, they do not halt species extinction, they do not stop global warming, they do not remove dams. At some point someone actually has to *do* something. At some point someone needs to physically dismantle the infrastructures that allow

capitalism to metastasize, oppression to continue, species extinction and global warming to accelerate, dictators and dams to stand.

That job is up to all of us.

A friend and mentor once asked me, "What are the largest, most pressing problems you can help to solve using the gifts that are unique to you in all the universe?" That question shows precisely where I have succeeded as a writer and human being, and precisely where I have failed.

There are many ways my writing life could so far be considered a success far beyond anything I daydreamed about when I was younger. I have twenty books out. People seem to enjoy reading them and coming to my talks, both of which honor me beyond belief. Despite the truth of the old cliché about writing, that it is a terrible way to make a living and a great way to make a life, for at least the last few years I've been able to financially support myself through writing. More important than all of these, however, is that I have been true to my muse, and have at least attempted to tell the truth as I have come to understand it. And I have sometimes succeeded in articulating some of those things I know in my heart to be true, and in so doing have, I hope, helped some others to articulate some of those things they may know in their hearts to be true.

This is all to the good. But the fact remains that if we judge my work, or anyone's work, by the most important standard of all, and in fact the only standard that really matters, which is the health of the planet, my work (and everyone else's) is a complete failure. Because my work hasn't stopped the murder of the planet. Nor has anyone else's.

We haven't even slowed it down. It's embarrassing to have to explain why this is the only standard that really matters, but at this point embarrassment is the least of our problems. The health of the planet is the only standard that really matters because without a living planet nothing else is important, because nothing else exists. Compared to this, the number of books one has published doesn't matter. How beautifully or poorly they are written doesn't matter. Financially supporting oneself doesn't matter. Life itself is more important than what we create.

These days when I wake up, I'm even less certain that my decision to write is the right one. I know that a culture of resistance needs every form of action, from writing to legal work to mass protests in the streets to physically dismantling destructive infrastructures. And that too few people are calling for actions that are commensurate with the threats to the planet. And so, for better or worse, most mornings, articulating the truth and defending it and rallying others to defend it in whatever ways they know how is the method of combat I choose.

The time for waiting is long gone. It is time to stop this culture from destroying life on earth. So take my hand. Take the hands of all those who came before us. But keep your other hand free, to make a fist or to pick up a pen. The health of the oceans, the forests, the rivers, the salmon, the sturgeon, the migratory songbirds, are all more important than you or I individually, and they are more important than your or my accomplishments. Their health will be the measure of our success.



Premises

Premise One: Civilization is not and can never be sustainable. This is especially true for industrial civilization.

Premise Two: Traditional communities do not often voluntarily give up or sell the resources on which their communities are based until their communities have been destroyed. They also do not willingly allow their landbases to be damaged so that other resources—gold, oil, and so on—can be extracted. It follows that those who want the resources will do what they can to destroy traditional communities.

Premise Three: Our way of living—industrial civilization—is based on, requires, and would collapse very quickly without persistent and widespread violence.

Premise Four: Civilization is based on a clearly defined and widely accepted yet often unarticulated hierarchy. Violence done by those higher on the hierarchy to those lower is nearly always invisible, that is, unnoticed. When it is noticed, it is fully rationalized. Violence done by those lower on the hierarchy to those higher is unthinkable, and when it