



Manifesto

WOODBINE, APRIL 6, 2014

1. “The collapse of civilization” is not an event coming in the future, food shortages, the next Sandy or the walking dead. We insist: the devastation they’re now calling the Anthropocene is just as much a spiritual, existential, human devastation as it is an environmental one. Kilometers of receding ice and lengths of coastline lost to the sea, the growth of the desert, the expansion of pharmaceuticals (for humans, for pets, for plants), the endless anxiety (that great public secret harbored by everyone in New York) and, above all, our separation from the world and from each other: they’re all part of the same disaster, a metaphysical historical disaster, that is the very texture and environment of our lives. As it was recently put by an Iraq vet in the *New York Times*, this civilization is already dead.

2. We are living, then, at an historical crossroads. If the one certainty of the 90s was that nothing would ever change—the end of history, LA riots, Nirvana, Columbine—today if anything is certain, it’s that the future’s going to look different, that everything is changing. The question, then, is how?

3. We refuse to leave that answer to imbeciles like de Blasio or the megalomaniacal lunatics at Google. Whether a ‘resilient’ future of perpetual crisis management (where Manhattan huddles behind storm walls and we’re shoveling water out of the basements, learning to be grateful for MREs) or a future composed of screens and contact lenses to analyze our tears (for Google even our sorrow can be reduced to information, feedback) — we see two versions of the same bleak, intolerable future.

4. So. Our starting point: this is the end of a world, and it is up to us, everywhere, to build the new worlds that will replace this one. Not worlds like the old worlds, not worlds like this

world, but —beginning from where we are, using all our available means— new, sensible worlds that will take on their own particular shapes. “A world of lies cannot be defeated by its opposite, but only by a world of truth.” (Kafka)

5. We begin, then, from the reality of New York life. This city crams us into apartments, jobs and roles that make it hard for us to live, breath, even to love each other. From school to work to my phone that never stops vibrating, this city makes us work incessantly, competing constantly, each one for for him or herself. Buried under my worries, my style, my job, where the only connection allowed is that of fleeting conversations, romance, or the bar, and where everything’s an event you attend then go home, meanwhile we live like grown infants, tethered to a plethora of life support systems (Keyfood, Con Ed, ipad) that we don’t understand, that we don’t control, and to which we are held hostage. (“But hey, what’re you gonna do?” “I’d love to, but there’s an opening.” “Well we all have to do our part to help the MTA...” This civilization has a million ways to say “nothing else is possible,” and the fact that it shouts all the more vehemently today is only proof of the opposite.)

6. We accept this state of frantic isolation and dependence because it seems inevitable. It’s not. Sometimes the magnitude of the devastation we face seems insurmountable. It’s not. Remember: this way of life is a mindboggling anomaly in the history of humanity. Then turn everything around: human beings are and have always been capable of so much more than this. We can organize ourselves. We can live otherwise. We simply have to give ourselves the means to do so.

7. Science, poetry, building materials, friendships, prayers, long-lost rituals, oysters; fighting techniques, culinary techniques, engineering techniques; agriculture, horticulture, pickling, hacking: we’re really talking about the material and spiritual reconfiguration of life.

Today what is expected of us is that we circumscribe our horizons to match those of a dying civilization and its government. We’re expected to be surviving machines, resilient surviving machines, that is, to explicitly become what we already are, what we’ve been since the day we were born, people that just survive and get by. We refuse this. Skills are not just “technical” means to hang on, nor are they aesthetic or moral concerns (“I only cut kale with my obsidian hand axe on a salvaged olive wood cutting board”)— what we experience in doing, learning, knowing them, together, is something qualitatively better and richer than what we’re given. It’s about living better and more fully- not just surviving. Not just a Bear Grylls knife and a backpack, but as John Kane put it, “removing the dust” from our shelved knowledges, practices, and capacities. A new sensible education.

8. Woodbine is an experimental hub in Ridgewood, Queens for developing the skills, practices, and tools for inhabiting the Anthropocene. We host public workshops, lectures, discussions, and serve as a meeting and organizing space. Above all, Woodbine is a place to meet, to find each other, and to get organized, here and now. Revolution is not an event off in the future, but a line we trace in the present.

