

SECTION V

THE RESISTANCE TO
CIVILIZATION



If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must also become purely “natural” again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts.

—Alexandre Kojève (1946)



We move now to offerings that attempt to light the way beyond civilization, to sources and modes of resistance and renewal. The deconstructionist Derrida applies the tactic of placing literary elements “under erasure”; here are some considerations for doing so to civilization.

Julia Kristeva recently rejected the postmodern refusal of narrative, or refusal of viewing the totality, in this way:

Psychoanalysis goes against the grain of the modern convenience that calls attention not to the end of the Story of Civilization, but to the end of the possibility of telling a story. Nevertheless, this end and this convenience are beginning to overwhelm us, and we have been led to criticize and reject them.

One need not adopt psychoanalysis as the answer to the postmodern dead end, but Kristeva’s conclusion is most important regardless, in refusing to accept an end to possibilities.

Another necessary rejection of limits concerns a more general or typical defeatism, in parallel to that of postmodernism. From a recent work by former 1960s activist Gregory Calvert:

It is, I believe, an error (and the weakness of certain kinds of anarchist utopianism) to assume that humanity can somehow return to the “organic” or “natural” societies of the neolithic world, or that there is an end to politics. Human beings have left forever their neolithic past and life in the human realm can never be a simple return to nature.

He means, of course, paleolithic not neolithic, for the latter is synonymous with the arrival of civilization. If there is consensus among authors represented in this section, however, it lies in their rejection of the argument that a “return to nature” is impossible. Calvert’s caveat is just another way of saying, “Here is civilization: accept it.”

The summer 1995 issue of the British Marxist journal *Aufheben* acknowledges that

civilization is under attack. A new critical current has emerged in recent years, united by an antagonism towards all tendencies that seem to include “progress” as part of their programme.

Indeed, a question heard with increasing frequency asks how much more progress we and the planet must endure. This critique challenges the basic categories and dynamics of civilization, and demands an altogether different present and future.