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EN111

MC Harper

April 2009

Our physical world is finite, its expanses reach only so far past the horizon, yet we humans seem ever expanding, pushing limits of availability and sustainability. I am human, and thus I find it hard to step back and view the interactions between human and environment as an objective observer. However, if asked to define the way in which we as a species interact with the world or the relationship between us, I would say it was sado-masochistic with tendencies of domination. To make clear my meanings, sadism is the derivation of pleasure from the pain or suffering of others while masochism is the derivation of pleasure from ones own pain or suffering, while dominance is the imposing of ones control.

If this definition of the human to world relationship seems odd or wrong, consider this. Say someone intentionally burns down their home, razes it to the ground and watches it burn with no effort to stay the flames. Who is harmed in this situation? Not only the utterly destroyed home, but those that lived there. Our homes are where nourishment is, where safety lies, where life takes place. Yet we find it “normal” to change our environment (our home) in such a way that makes it nearly useless. Of course normal is a subjective term. But a universal behavioral pattern is that every culture, every person, all throughout history has done the physical world at least some harm. Essentially we embody the sparks that start the fire that burns our home, we harm earth and in turn we ourselves are harmed, Still we derive pleasure from our way of life. This is sado-masochism.

When the values of humanity are prioritized, can we place happiness, this pleasure in our

way of life above the logic of long term species survival and stay a viable organism? Of course comfort is no sin, seeking to provide ourselves and our loved ones with not only the necessities but with their desired goods is human nature. The devil as they say is in the details. The caveat comes in the how. How do we attain comfort, how do we grasp and hold happiness. This all brings me back to my original point, we throttle the world to shake loose the means of our everyday life. The routine of living, the clockwork pendulum of our motions moving through our world seem to condemn earth to a fate we ourselves design.

When waking in the morning, the bulk of our six billion do not head to the waterfall with birch branches to beat the dirt from the previous day, off of ourselves, we walk to a room where water is delivered at a temperature we find suitable and we wash with soaps from a store, which came from a manufacturer that obtained resources from the earth. When we are hungry, with six billion empty stomachs, we could all go out and hunt or gather for a meal, but many open a refrigerator or pantry door where food is ready, packaged, and safe for consumption. There are middle jobbers between individuals and survival now. There are lines of shipping, productions, cultivation, slaughter, retail, delivery all between you and a meal, or an article of clothing, or a nights rest. We no longer need a fire to clear a forest quickly, or a disease to thin a population, or an earthquake to split the earth. Someone will do it for us if we order enough leather recliners from La-Z-Boy.

Humanity sits atop a world we have dominated, crafted to suit our life in motion, to see this in action look no further than *Crossing Three Wildernesses*, the memoir of U Sam Ouer which chronicles his life in Cambodia and abroad. While captivating as a study of U's psyche as he survived under the rule of a genocidal regime, the Khmer Rouge, the draw for me and my assertion comes from Cambodia the land, under the Khmer Rouge's green thumb.

There is a perceived correlation between those nations and people we see as third world, or undeveloped and intrinsic reverence of the natural world. This perception is a myth, a folk tale, if you don't think I'm right then think of it this way. You are surrounded by trees, beautiful, ancient, awe inspiring trees, plants that provide food and healing properties, natural formations that shelter and protect you, your earliest memories involve games around this verdant earth, but you see it day after day year after year until it becomes mundane, a resource to be used if not exploited. Instead of a member of your life it has become nothing more than the backdrop.

Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge was still by our standards undeveloped, with few paved roads, a rudimentary communications system, and no implementation of crop rotation. The traditional farmers, the rural folk, even the military we see in *Crossing Three Wildernesses* are those examples that we seek, the underdeveloped people who supposedly hold nature in such high regard that they shed tears when bearing witness to the detrimental machinations of the West's modern lifestyle and the detritus that accompanies it. This is only perception. In reality U Sam Ouer witnessed deforestation, clear cutting of rural land, and year round crop growth (that's one type of crop in one field over and over). As U Sam Ouer was herded from forced labor camp to forced labor camp the true nature of the Khmer Rouge's plans for Cambodia become present. U Sam Oeur explains: "Please note that this was not the usual time of year for growing rice. The Khmer Rouge had already set in motion their plan to grow rice on a year round basis, or as close to it as possible, regardless of conditions (211)." He continues: "That tale about clearing the mountains came back to haunt me, because sure enough, they ordered us to cut down trees and vines to transform the jungle into vegetable fields (240)." And when a particular piece of land has been depleted of its usefulness to agriculture, the people we rely on to take care of the earth

slash and burn elsewhere.

There is a great schism between humans and the world we live in. A chasm bisecting our organic mind and body from the natural state, from the conglomerate of carbons attached to oxygens attached to nitrogens, cut from the same cloth as the soil beneath us. Where this divide occurs we do our best to build a bridge, at once we strive to be dually the master of our universe and conscientious caretaker of nature. This bridge, however we place it, seems more prevalent in the westernized world in those civilizations that have truly become dominant, not over other people but over something much grander, the earth itself, defying laws of nature to stand atop the rubble of mountains we have moved. If we the westernized world have an ache, a starving esurience [just say “gluttony” so the audience gets your point?] for returning to humble beginnings, then someone will feed us, not the truth, only what it is that we want to hear. For example, have you ever seen commercials or ads prompting us to travel to a tropical island. When we see the ads imploring us to visit Jamaica for instance, we see paradise. There is crystal clear ocean as far as the eye can see, pristine tropical foliage where hammocks hang, and locals who never work just frolic as if this island were a place where the creeping hand of civilization forgot.

This is the myth of Jamaica, the Eden we so deeply lust for, the place where nature is natural, this place where a man is supposedly moral because of his ties to nature. Then there is the reality of Jamaica, a country as beset with the same pitfalls of society as any other nation. This is the place where lines blur. Jamaica relies on tourism to support its economy, so it manipulates us, showing only the best of its world, the world we want to see. We explicitly tell the undeveloped world our fantasy and when they show us that they have created our refuge, we go, not because it is truly the land untouched, rather because it is the land touched only enough to

tame it.

But domination can only account for some of the way humans interact with the world. The ebb and flow of manipulation is not just domination. It is sado-masochism. The ultimate goal is pleasure, a situation in which we, especially we of the westernized world, become sadists, watching nature and people contort to what we crave on a base level. Those on whom we heap attention become masochists, binding themselves to the developed world. Humanity is both the sadist and the masochist, our pain, our pleasure, melded together becoming strands, intricately woven, forming the tapestry of being. Where one is removed another is weakened, our ties that bind.

How the west was won seems to take on new meaning when studied in relation to the myths of development and undeveloped Eden. Do we shake harder, grasp tighter, bend the earth to our mighty will with greater force than those around us? Is it an inevitability to dominate the wildernesses, to give and receive pain and call it pleasure. The natural world seems to be writhing, bucking us, trying to ease the noose which every day we tighten. When do we reach equilibrium? Can there be no sustainability so long as we continue to survive as a species? Ladies and Gentlemen, I say welcome to Eden, the only home we have must be reckoned with rather than kept under our boot heel. The only question is how.

#### Works Cited

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- Ouer, U Sam. *Crossing Three Wildernesses*. First Edition. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2005.