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Ernest Callenbach

# ECOTOPIA

The Notebooks and Reports  
of William Weston



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## WESTON'S NEXT ASSIGNMENT: ECOTOPIA

The *Times-Post* is at last able to announce that William Weston, our top international affairs reporter, will spend six weeks in Ecotopia, beginning next week. This unprecedented journalistic development has been made possible through arrangements at the highest diplomatic level. It will mark the first officially arranged visit by an American to Ecotopia since the secession cut off normal travel and communications.

The *Times-Post* is sending Weston on this unique and difficult investigative assignment in the conviction that a candid, on-the-spot assessment of Ecotopia is essential—20 years after its secession. Old antagonisms have too long deterred close examination of what has been happening in Ecotopia—a part of the world once near, dear and familiar to us, but closed off and increasingly mysterious during its decades of independence.

The problem now is not so much to oppose Ecotopia as to understand it—which can only benefit the cause of international good relations. The *Times-Post* stands ready, as always, to serve that cause.

*(May 3) Here we go again, dear diary. A fresh notebook with all those blank pages waiting to be filled. Good to be on the way at last. Alleghenies already receding behind us like pale green ripples on an algae-covered pond. Thinking back to the actual beginnings of this trip—almost a year ago? Those careful hints dropped at the White House like crumbs for the President's vacuum-cleaner mind to suck up. Until finally they coalesced into some kind of ball and came out as his own daring idea: okay, send some unofficial figure*

out there, purely informal—a reporter not to closely identified with the administration, who could nose around, blow up a few pretty trial balloons—can't hurt! A tingly moment when he finally broached it, after a big Brazil briefing session. That famous confidential smile! And then saying that he had a little adventure in mind, wanted to discuss it with me privately. . . .

*Was his tentativeness only his habitual caution, or a signal that if anything went wrong the visit (and the visitor) were politically expendable?*

Still, an important opening in our foreign policy—lots of weighty arguments for it. Heal the fratricidal breach that rent the nation—so the continent can stand united against rising tides of starvation and revolution. Hawks who want to retake 'lost lands of the west' by force seem to be growing stronger—need neutralizing. Ecotopian ideas are seeping over the border more dangerously—can't be ignored any longer, might be detoxified by exposure. Etc.

Maybe we can find a hearing for proposal to reopen diplomatic relations; perhaps trade proposals too. With reunification a gleam in the eye. Even just a publicizable chat with Vera Alwen could be useful—the President, with his customary flexibility, could use it to fend off both hawks and subversives. Besides, as I told Francine—who scoffed, naturally, even after three brandies—I want to see Ecotopia because it's there. Can things really be as weird there as they sound? I wonder.

Have been mulling over the no-nos. Must stay clear of the secession itself: too much bitterness could still be aroused. But fascinating stories there, probably—how the secessionists flched uranium fuel from power plants for the nuclear mines they claimed to have set in New York and Washington. How their political organization, led by those damned women, managed to paralyze and then supplant the regular political structure, and got control of the armories and the Guard. How they bluffed their way to a stand-off—helped, of course, by the severity of the national economic crisis that struck so conveniently for them. Lots of history there to be told someday—but now is not the time. . . .

*Getting harder to say goodbye to the kids when I take off on a long trip. Not that it's really such a big deal, since I sometimes*

miss a couple of weekends even when I'm around. But my being away so much seems to be beginning to bother them. Pat may be putting them up to it; I'll have to talk to her about that. Where else would Fay get the idea of asking to come along? Jesus—into darkest Ecotopia with typewriter and eight-year-old daughter. . . .

No more Francine for six weeks. It's always refreshing to get away for a while, and she'll be there when I get back, all charged up by some adventure or other. Actually sort of exciting to think of being totally out of touch with her, with the editorial office, in fact with the whole country. No phone service, wire service indirect: uncanny isolation the Ecotopians have insisted on for 20 years! And in Peking, Bantustan, Brazil there always had to be an American interpreter, who couldn't help dangling ties from home. This time there'll be nobody to share little American reactions with.

And it is potentially rather dangerous. These Ecotopians are certainly hotheads, and I could easily get into serious trouble. Government's control over population seems to be primitive compared to ours. Americans are heartily hated. In a jam the Ecotopian police might be no help at all—in fact they apparently aren't even armed.

Well, ought to draft the first column. Mid-air perhaps not the worst place to begin.



## WILLIAM WESTON ON HIS JOURNEY TO ECOTOPIA

On board TWA flight 38, New York to Reno, May 3. As I begin this assignment, my jet heads west to Reno—last American city before the forbidding Sierra Nevada mountains that guard the closed borders of Ecotopia.

The passage of time has softened the shock of Ecotopia's separation from the United States. And Ecotopia's example, it is now clear, was not as novel as it seemed at the time. Biafra had attempted

secession from Nigeria but failed. Bangladesh had successfully broken free of Pakistan. Belgium had in effect dissolved into three countries. Even the Soviet Union has had its separatist "minority" disturbances. Ecotopia's secession was partly modeled on that of Quebec from Canada. Such "devolution" has become a worldwide tendency. The sole important counterdevelopment we can point to is the union of the Scandinavian countries—which perhaps only proves the rule, since the Scandinavians were virtually one people culturally in any event.

Nonetheless, many Americans still remember the terrible shortages of fruit, lettuce, wine, cotton, paper, lumber, and other western products which followed the breakaway of what had been Washington, Oregon, and Northern California. These problems exacerbated the general U.S. economic depression of the period, speeded up our chronic inflation, and caused widespread dissatisfaction with government policies. Moreover, Ecotopia still poses a nagging challenge to the underlying national philosophy of America: ever-continuing progress, the fruits of industrialization for all, a rising Gross National Product.

During the past two decades, we as a people have mostly tried to ignore what has been happening in Ecotopia—in the hope it will prove to be mere foolishness and go away. It is clear by now, however, that Ecotopia is not going to collapse as many American analysts at first predicted. The time has come when we must get a clearer understanding of Ecotopia.

If its social experimentation turns out to be absurd and irresponsible, it will then no longer tempt impressionable young Americans. If its strange customs indeed prove as barbaric as rumors suggest, Ecotopia will have to pay the cost in outraged world opinion. If Ecotopian claims are false, American policy-makers can profit from knowledge of that fact. For instance, we need to assess the allegation that Ecotopia has no more deaths from air and chemical pollution. Our own death rate has declined from a peak of 75,000 annually to 30,000—still a tragic toll, but suggesting that measures of the severity adopted in Ecotopia are hardly necessary. In short, we should meet the Ecotopian challenge on the basis of sound knowledge rather than ignorance and third-hand reports.

My assignment during the next six weeks, therefore, is to explore Ecotopian life from top to bottom—to search out the reality behind the rumors, to describe in concrete detail how Ecotopia society actually operates, to document its problems and, where they are called for, to acknowledge its achievements. By direct knowledge of the situation in which our former fellow-citizens now find themselves, we may even begin to rebuild the ties that once bound them to the Union they so hastily rejected.

*(May 3) Reno a sad shadow of its former goodtimes self. With its lucrative California gambling trade cut off by secession, the city quickly decayed. The fancy casino hotels are now mere flophouses—their owners long ago fled to Las Vegas. I walked the streets near the airline terminal, asking people what they thought of Ecotopia out here. Most replies noncommittal, though I thought I could sometimes detect a tinge of bitterness. "Live and let live," said one grizzled old man, "if you can call what they do over there living." A young man who claimed to be a cowboy smiled at my question. "Waal," he said, "I know guys who say they've got over there to get girls. It isn't really dangerous if you know the mountain passes. They're friendly all right, so long as you aren't up to anything. Know what, though? The girls all have guns. That's what they say. That could shake you up, couldn't it?"*

*Had a hard time finding a taxi driver willing to take me over the border. Finally persuaded one who looked as if he had just done 20 years in the pen. Had to promise not only double fare but 2 percent tip besides. For which I got a bonus of dirty looks and string of reassuring remarks: "What ya wanta go in there for anyhow, ya some kind of a nut? Buncha goddamn cannibals in there! Ya'll never get out alive—I just hope I will!"*

## CROSSING THE ECOTOPIAN BORDER



On board the Sierra Express, Tahoe-San Francisco, May 4. I have now entered Ecotopia—the first known American to visit the new country since its Independence, 19 years ago.

My jet landed at Reno. Though it is not widely known, the Ecotopian government prohibits even international flights from crossing its territory—on grounds of air and noise pollution. Flights between San Francisco and Asia, or over the pole to Europe, must not only use a remote airport 40 miles outside the city, but are forced to follow over-water routes; and American jets for Hawaii must fly via Los Angeles. Thus to reach San Francisco I was compelled to deplane at Reno, and take an expensive taxi ride to the train station at the north end of Lake Tahoe. From Tahoe there is frequent and fast service.

The actual frontier is marked by a picturesquely weathered wooden fence, with a large gate, obviously little used. When my taxi pulled up, there was nobody around. The driver had to get out, go over to a small stone guard-house, and get the Ecotopian military to interrupt their card game. They turned out to be two young men in rather unpressed uniforms. But they knew of my coming, they checked my papers with an air of informed authority, and they passed the taxi through the gate—though only after making a point of the fact that it had required a special dispensation to allow an internal combustion engine to pass their sacred portals. I replied that it only had to take me about 20 miles to the train station. "You're lucky the wind is from the west," one of them said. "If it happened to be from the east we might have had to hold you up for a while."

They checked my luggage with some curiosity, paying special attention to my sleeping pills. But I was allowed to keep everything except my trusty .45 and holster. This might be standard garb in New York, I was told, but no concealable weapons are permitted in Ecotopia. Perhaps noticing my slightly uneasy reaction, one of the guards remarked that Ecotopian streets are quite safe, by day

or night. He then handed me a small booklet, *Ecotopia Explains*. This document was nicely printed but with rather quaint drawings. Evidently it had been prepared chiefly for tourists from Europe and Asia. "It might make things easier to get used to," said the other guard, in a soft, almost insinuatingly friendly tone that I now begin to recognize as a national trait. "Relax, it's a free country."

"My friend," I countered, "I've been in a hell of a lot stranger places than this country and I relax when I feel like it. If you're finished with my papers, I'll be on my way."

He snapped my passport shut, but held it in his hand. "Weston," he said, looking me in the eye, "you're a writer. We count on you to use words carefully while you're here. If you come back this way, maybe you'll be able to use that word 'friend' in good faith. We'd like that." He then smiled warmly and put out his hand. Rather to my surprise, I took it, and found a smile on my own face as well.

We drove on, to the Tahoe station of the Ecotopian train system. It turned out to be a rustic affair, constructed of huge timbers. It might pass in America for a monstrous ski chalet. If even had fireplaces in the waiting rooms—of which there are several, one a kind of restaurant, one a large, deserted room with a bandstand where dances must be held, and one a small, quiet lounge with leather chairs and a supply of books. The trains, which usually have only two or three cars but run about every hour, come into the basement of the station, and in cold weather huge doors close behind them to keep out the snow and wind.

Special facilities for skiers were evident—storage racks and lockers—but by this time of year the snows have largely melted and there is little skiing. The electric minibuses that shuttle from the station to ski resorts and nearby towns are almost empty.

I went down to my train. It looked more like a wingless airplane than a train. At first I thought I had gotten into an unfinished car—there were no seats! The floor was covered with thick, spongy carpet, and divided into compartments by knee-high partitions; a few passengers were sprawled on large baglike leather cushions that lay scattered about. One elderly man had taken a blanket from

a pile at one end of the car, and lay down for a nap. Some of the others, realizing from my confusion that I was a foreigner, showed me where to stow my bag and told me how to obtain refreshments from the steward in the next car. I sat down on one of the pillows, realizing that there would be a good view from the huge windows that came down to about six inches from the floor. My companions hit up some cigarettes, which I recognized as marijuana from the odor, and began to pass them around. As my first gesture of international goodwill, I took a few puffs myself, and soon we were all sociably chatting away.

Their sentimentality about nature has even led the Ecotopians to bring greenery into their trains, which are full of hanging ferns and small plants I could not identify. (My companions, however, reeled off their botanical names with assurance.) At the end of the car stood containers rather like trash bins, each with a large letter—M, G, and P. These, I was told, were "recycle bins." It may seem unlikely to Americans, but I observed that during our trip my fellow travelers did without exception dispose of all metal, glass, or paper and plastic refuse in the appropriate bin. That they did so without the embarrassment Americans would experience was my first introduction to the rigid practices of recycling and re-use upon which Ecotopians are said to pride themselves so fiercely.

By the time you notice you are under way in an Ecotopian train, you feel virtually no movement at all. Since it operates by magnetic suspension and propulsion, there is no rumble of wheels or whine or vibration. People talk, there is the clink of glasses and teacups, some passengers wave to friends on the platform. In a moment the train seems literally to be flying along the ground, though it is actually a few inches above a trough-shaped guideway.

My companions told me something about the background of these trains. Apparently the Boeing Company in Seattle, at the time of Independence, had never taken seriously the need to diversify its output from airplanes into other modes of transportation. The world market for new planes had become highly competitive, however, and luckily the Ecotopian government, though its long-range economic policies called for diversification and decentralization of production in each city and region, took temporary advantage

of the Boeing facilities to help build the new national train system. While the Germans and Japanese had pioneered in magnetic-suspension trains with linear motors, Boeing began production on the system only a year after Independence. When I asked how the enormous expense of the system had been financed, my companions laughed. One of them remarked that the cost of the entire roadbed from San Francisco to Seattle was about that of ten SSTs, and he argued that the total social cost per person per mile on their trains was less than that for air transport at any distance under a thousand miles.

I learned from my booklet that the trains normally travel about 360 kilometers per hour on the level. (Use of the metric system is universal in Ecotopia.) You get a fair view of the countryside at this speed, which translates as about 225 miles per hour. And we only attained that speed after about 20 minutes of crawling up and over the formidable eastern slope of the Sierra Nevadas, at what seemed less than 90 miles per hour. Donner Pass looked almost as bleak as it must have to the Donner pioneer party who perished there. We made a stop at Norden and picked up a few late-season skiers—a cheerful bunch, like our skiers, but dressed in raggedy attire, including some very secondhand-looking fur jackets. They carried homemade knapsacks and primitive skis—long, thin, with flimsy old-fashioned bindings. The train then swooped down the long canyons of the Sierra forests, occasionally flashing past a river with its water bubbling blue-black and icy between the rocks. In a few minutes we slid into Auburn. The timetable, which graphically lays out the routes and approximate schedules of a complex network of connecting trains and buses, showed three stops before San Francisco itself. I was glad to notice that we halted for less than 60 seconds, even though people sauntered on and off with typical Ecotopian looseness.

Once we reached the valley floor, I saw little of interest, but my companions still seemed fascinated. They pointed out changes in the fields and forests we passed; in a wooded stretch someone spotted a doe with two fawns, and later a jackrabbit caused great amusement. Soon we entered the hilly country around San Francisco Bay, and shot through a series of tunnels in the grass-

covered, breast-shaped green hills. There were now more houses, though rather scattered—many of them seeming to be small farms. The orchards, fields and fences looked healthy and surprisingly well cared for, almost like those of western Europe. Yet how dingy and unprosperous the farm buildings looked, compared to the white-painted farms of Iowa or New England! The Ecotopians must be positively allergic to paint. They build with rock, adobe, weathered boards—apparently almost anything that comes to hand, and they lack the aesthetic sense that would lead them to give such materials a coat of concealing paint. They would apparently rather cover a house with vines or bushes than paint it.

The drabness of the countryside was increased by its evident isolation. The roads were narrow and winding, with trees dangerously close to the pavement. No traffic at all seemed to be moving on them. There wasn't a billboard in sight, and not a gas station or telephone booth. It would not be reassuring to be caught in such a region after dark.

An hour and a quarter after we left Tahoe, the train plunged into a tube near the Bay shore, and emerged a few minutes later in the San Francisco main station. In my next column I will describe my first impressions of the city by the Golden Gate—where so many earlier Americans debarked to seek their fortunes in the gold fields.

*(May 4) General impression: a lot of Ecotopians look like oldtime westerners, Gold Rush characters come to life. God knows we have plenty of freaky-looking people in New York, but their freakishness is self-consciousness, campy, theatrical—a way of showing off. The Ecotopians are almost Dickensian: often strange enough, but not crazy-looking or sordid, as the hippies of the sixties were. Fanciful hats and hairdos, jackets, vests, leggings, tights; so help me, I think I even saw a coppiece—either that or the guy was supernaturally endowed. There's a lot of embroidery and decorations made of small shells or feathers, and patchwork—cloth must be terribly scarce they go to such lengths to re-use it.*

*And their manners are even more unsettling. On the streets there are electrical moments when women stare me directly in the eyes;*

*so far I've looked away, but what would happen if I held contact? People seem to be very loose and playful with each other, as if they had endless time on their hands to explore whatever possibilities might come up. There's none of the implicit threat of open criminal violence that pervades our public places, but there's an awful lot of strong emotion, wilfully expressed! The peace of the train ride was broken several times by shouted arguments or insults; people have an insolent kind of curiosity that often leads to tiffs. It's as if they have lost the sense of anonymity which enables us to live together in large numbers. You can't, therefore, approach an Ecotopian functionary as we do. The Ecotopian at the train ticket window simply wouldn't tolerate being spoken to in my usual way—he asked me what I thought he was, a ticket-dispensing machine? In fact, he won't give you the ticket unless you deal with him as a real person, and he insists on dealing with you—asking questions, making remarks to which he expects a sincere reaction, and shouting if he doesn't get it. But most of such sound and fury seems to signify nothing. There may be dangerous lunatics among the harmless ones, but I haven't seen any yet. Just hope I can preserve my own sanity.*



## THE STREETS OF ECOTOPIA'S CAPITAL

San Francisco, May 5. As I emerged from the train terminal into the streets, I had little idea what to expect from this city—which had once proudly boasted of rising from its own ashes after a terrible earthquake and fire. San Francisco was once known as "America's favorite city" and had an immense appeal to tourists. Its dramatic hills and bridges, its picturesque cable cars, and its sophisticated yet relaxed people had drawn visitors who returned again and again. Would I find that it still deserves its reputation as an elegant and civilized place?

I checked my bag and set out to explore a bit. The first shock hit

me at the moment I stepped onto the street. There was a strange hush over everything. I expected to encounter something at least a little like the exciting bustle of our cities—cars honking, taxis swooping, clots of people pushing about in the hurry of urban life. What I found, when I had gotten over my surprise at the quiet, was that Market Street, once a mighty boulevard striking through the city down to the waterfront, has become a mall planted with thousands of trees. The "street" itself, on which electric taxis, minibuses, and delivery carts purr along, has shrunk to a two-lane affair. The remaining space, which is huge, is occupied by bicycle lanes, fountains, sculptures, kiosks, and absurd little gardens surrounded by benches. Over it all hangs the almost sinister quiet, punctuated by the whirr of bicycles and cries of children. There is even the occasional song of a bird, unbelievable as that may seem on a capital city's crowded main street.

Scattered here and there are large conical-roofed pavilions, with a kiosk in the center selling papers, comic books, magazines, fruit juices, and snacks. (Also cigarettes—the Ecotopians have *not* managed to stamp out smoking!) The pavilions turn out to be stops on the minibus system, and people wait there out of the rain. These buses are comical battery-driven contraptions, resembling the antique cable cars that San Franciscans were once so fond of. They are driverless, and are steered and stopped by an electronic gadget that follows wires buried in the street. (A safety bumper stops them in case someone fails to get out of the way.) To enable people to get on and off quickly, during the 15 seconds the bus stops, the floor is only a few inches above ground level; the wheels are at the extreme ends of the vehicle. Rows of seats face outward, so on a short trip you simply sit down momentarily, or stand and hang onto one of the hand grips. In bad weather fringed fabric roofs can be extended outward to provide more shelter.

These buses creep along at about ten miles an hour, but they come every five minutes or so. They charge *no* fare. When I took an experimental ride on one, I asked a fellow passenger about this, and he said the minibuses are paid for in the same way as streets—out of general tax funds. Smiling, he added that to have a driver on board to collect fares would cost more than the fares could pro-

duce. Like many Ecotopians, he tended to babble, and spelled out the entire economic rationale for the minibus system, almost as if he was trying to sell it to me. I thanked him, and after a few blocks jumped off.

The bucolic atmosphere of the new San Francisco can perhaps best be seen in the fact that, down Market Street and some other streets, creeks now run. These had earlier, at great expense, been put into huge culverts underground, as is usual in cities. The Ecotopians spent even more to bring them up to ground level again. So now on this major boulevard you may see a charming series of little falls, with water gurgling and splashing, and channels lined with rocks, trees, bamboos, ferns. There even seem to be minnows in the water—though how they are kept safe from marauding children and cats, I cannot guess.

Despite the quiet, the streets are full of people, though not in Manhattan densities. (Some foot traffic has been displaced to lazy bridges which connect one skyscraper to another, sometimes 15 or 20 stories up.) Since practically the whole street area is "sidewalk," nobody worries about obstructions—or about the potholes which, as they develop in the pavement, are planted with flowers. I came across a group of street musicians playing Bach, with a harpsichord and a half dozen other instruments. There are vendors of food pushing gaily colored carts that offer hot snacks, chestnuts, ice cream. Once I even saw a juggler and magician team, working a crowd of children—it reminded me of some medieval movie. And there are many strollers, gawkers, and loiterers—people without visible business who simply take the street for granted as an extension of their living rooms. Yet, despite so many unoccupied people, the Ecotopian streets seem ridiculously lacking in security gates, doormen, guards, or other precautions against crime. And no one seems to feel our need for automobiles to provide protection in moving from place to place.

I had noticed on the train that Ecotopian clothes tend to be very loose, with bright colors striving to make up for what is lacking in style and cut. This impression is confirmed now that I have observed thousands of San Franciscans. The typical Ecotopian man wears nondescript trousers (even denim is common—perhaps from



nostalgia for American fashions of the pre-secession decades?) topped with an often hideous shirt, sweater, poncho, or jacket. Despite the usually chilly weather, sandals are common among both sexes. The women often wear pants also, but loose-flowing gypsy-like skirts are more usual. A few people wear outlandish skin-tight garments which look like diving wet suits, but are woven of some fabric unknown to me. They may be members of some special group, as their attire is so unusual. Leather and furs seem to be favorite materials—they are used for purses and pouches, pants and jackets. Children wear miniature versions of adult clothing; there seem to be no special outfits for them.

Ecotopians setting out to go more than a block or two usually pick up one of the sturdy white-painted bicycles that lie about the streets by the hundreds and are available free to all. Dispersed by the movements of citizens during the day and evening, they are returned by night crews to the places where they will be needed the next day. When I remarked to a friendly pedestrian that this system must be a joy to thieves and vandals, he denied it heatedly. He then put a case, which may not be totally farfetched, that it is cheaper to lose a few bicycles than to provide more taxis or minibuses.

Ecotopians, I am discovering, spout statistics on such questions with reckless abandon. They have a way of introducing "social costs" into their calculations which inevitably involves a certain amount of optimistic guesswork. It would be interesting to confront such informants with one of the hard-headed experts from our auto or highway industries—who would, of course, be horrified by the Ecotopians' abolition of cars.

As I walked about, I noticed that the downtown area was strangely overpopulated with children and their parents, besides people who apparently worked in the offices and shops. My questions to passersby (which were answered with surprising patience) revealed what is perhaps the most astonishing fact I have yet encountered in Ecotopia: the great downtown skyscrapers, once the headquarters of far-flung corporations, have been turned into apartments! Further inquiries will be needed to get a clear picture of this development, but the story I heard repeatedly on the streets today

is that the former outlying residential areas have largely been abandoned. Many three-story buildings had in any case been heavily damaged by the earthquake nine years ago. Thousands of cheaply built houses in newer districts (scornfully labelled "tricky-tacky boxes" by my informants) have been sacked of their wiring, glass, and hardware, and bulldozed away. The residents now live downtown, in buildings that contain not only apartments but also nurseries, grocery stores, and restaurants, as well as the shops and offices on the ground floor.

Although the streets still have an American look, it is annoyingly difficult to identify things in Ecotopia. Only very small signs are permitted on the fronts of buildings; street signs are few and hard to spot, mainly attached to buildings on corners. Finally, however, I navigated my way back to the station, retrieved my suitcase, and located a nearby hotel which had been recommended as suitable for an American, but still likely to give me "some taste of how Ecotopians live." This worthy establishment lived up to its reputation by being almost impossible to find. But it is comfortable enough, and will serve as my survival base here.

Like everything in Ecotopia, my room is full of contradictions. It is comfortable, if a little old-fashioned by our standards. The bed is atrocious—it lacks springs, being just foam rubber over board—yet it is covered with a luxurious down comforter. There is a large work table equipped with a hot plate and teapot. Its surface is plain, unvarnished wood with many mysterious stains—but on it stands a small, sleek picturephone. (Despite their aversion to many modern devices, the Ecotopians have some that are even better than ours. Their picturephones, for instance, though they have to be connected to a television screen, are far easier to use than ours, and have much better picture quality.) My toilet has a tank high overhead, of a type that went out in the United States around 1945, operated by a pull chain with a quaint carved handle; the toilet paper must be some ecological abomination—it is coarse and plain. But the bathtub is unusually large and deep. Like the tubs still used in deluxe Japanese inns, it is made of slightly aromatic wood.

I used the picturephone to confirm advance arrangements for a

visit tomorrow with the Minister of Food, with whom I shall begin to investigate the Ecotopian claims of "stable-state" ecological systems, about which so much controversy has raged.

(May 5) *Maybe they have gone back to the stone age. In the early evening I saw a group of hunters, carrying fancy bows and arrows, jump off a minibus, on which they had loaded a recently killed deer. Two of them hoisted it up, suspended on a long stick they carried on their shoulders, and began marching along the street. (A large hunting dog padded along with them—first pet I've seen in Ecotopia, where animals are evidently left as wild as possible, and people seem to feel no need of them as company.) A crowd gathered to watch them, little boys hung around excitedly. The hunters stopped near me for a rest—and also, I suspect, to allow people to admire their kill. One of them caught my eye and must have seen disgust in it. He rubbed his hand over the deer's wound, still damp with blood, then ran his finger across my cheek, as if to implicate me in the hunt. I jumped back, shocked, and the crowd laughed in what seemed an ugly way.*

*Later, talking with some of the people there, I learned the group had been hunting just outside town—where, apparently, deer are numerous. The hunters looked savage enough (long knives, beards, rough clothes) but they were evidently quite ordinary citizens off on a hunt. The deer would be butchered and the meat divided: game is said to be a source of considerable meat in the Ecotopian diet; it is prized for its "spiritual" qualities!*

*Whether such practices are forced upon them by scarcities, or are the result of some deliberate throwback policy, I don't yet know. But the scene, in the gathering dusk, was ghoulish enough. (Most Ecotopian streets are pitch dark at night—evidently their power policies have caused them to curtail night lighting almost entirely. Can't tell why this doesn't lead to the crime panic it would bring among us. Have asked people whether they feel safe at night, and they reply Yes without hesitation—claim they can see well enough, and turn the conversation onto something irrelevant: how bicycle lights look, bobbing through the night like fireflies, or*

*how fine it is to be able to see the stars even in the city. Good thing they don't have cars, or the accident rates would be spectacular.)*

*A little trouble with the maid last night, when she thought I took liberties. We had had a conversation about my picking some flowers on the street and bringing them up to the room. Evidently Ecotopians don't pick flowers, preferring to enjoy them where they grow, and she rather playfully set me straight on this. Maybe she was just trying to be friendly, but seemed to be giving me the eye, yet wouldn't play. Well, sublimation makes the pen grow stronger? (No, it makes me wish I could import Francine for a day or two.)*

*I like dressing well, but my New York clothes were making me stick out here; so have picked up a new wardrobe. Dark-green serape with a hood, soft but so tightly woven I am told it will keep off the rain (and probably make me smell like a wet sheep). A couple of loose shirts in suitably gaudy colors, a vest, a floppy suede jacket, two pairs of denim pants. Also a pair of heavy shoes—my elegant Italian street shoes clearly won't go here! I look in the mirror and laugh—if I rang Francine's doorbell in this outfit she'd call the police. (One game we've never played is rape by Ecotopian agent who sneaks into NY and seduces woman of prominent journalist to gain secret information.)*

*From what I could determine on my brief shopping spree, the clothes here do not include any nylon, orlon, dacron, or other synthetics. ("I need a couple of shirts, the drip-dry kind." Incredible clerk: "You mean some kind of synthetic fiber shirt? We haven't sold them for 20 years.") Followed by a lecture to the effect that too much electric power and water are required in the production of synthetics—and also they can't be recycled.) I noticed some garments with labels proudly declaring they were "re-used wool." Both fabrics and garments all domestic-made—and the prices seem sky-high.*

*Don't like the fetishistic avoidance of synthetics, but I had forgotten how nice a good cotton shirt feels to the skin. This quality is emphasized by the manufacturers—they make a point that the fabrics have been washed several times before being offered for sale. . . .*



San Francisco, May 6. When I arrived at the Ministry of Food for my interview with the Minister, I was unhappy to find that she was too busy to see me. I was introduced instead to an Assistant Minister, a man in his early thirties, who received me in a work overalls outfit. His office was also surprisingly unimpressive for a person of importance. It had no desk, no conference table, no soft chairs. Along one wall was a cluttered series of wooden filing cases, bookshelves, and tables covered with papers in utter disorder. Against another wall was a kind of laboratory set-up, with testing equipment of various kinds.

The Assistant Minister is, like many Ecotopians, unnerveingly relaxed, with a deep, slow voice. He sprawled on woven cushions in a sunny corner of the floor, under a skylight with some kind of ivy hanging near it, and his lab assistant produced hot water for tea on a Bunsen burner. I squatted awkwardly, and began by asking my carefully prepared questions about Ecotopian agricultural output. These were ignored. Instead the Assistant Minister insisted on giving me "a little background." He then began to discuss, not agriculture at all, but sewage. The first major project of his ministry after Independence, he said, had been to put the country's food cycle on a stable-state basis: all food wastes, sewage and garbage were to be turned into organic fertilizer and applied to the land, where it would again enter into the food production cycle. Every Ecotopian household, thus, is required to compulsively sort all its garbage into compostable and recyclable categories, at what must be an enormous expenditure of personal effort; and expanded fleets of garbage trucks are also needed.

The sewage system inherited from the past, according to the Assistant Minister, could only be called a "disposal" system. In it sewage and industrial wastes had not been productively recycled but merely dumped, in a more or less toxic condition, into rivers, bays and oceans. This, he maintained, was not only dangerous to the public health and the life of water creatures, but its very objective was wasteful and unnatural. With a smile, he added that some

of the sewage practices of earlier days would even be considered criminal if carried out today.

"In my papers over there," he said, "you can find historical reports of great sums being spent on incinerators to burn up sewage sludge. Their designers boasted of relatively smog-free stacks. We were of course accused of 'sewer socialism,' like our Milwaukee predecessors. Nonetheless, we constructed a national system of sludge drying and natural fertilizer production. After seven years we were able to dispense with chemical fertilizers entirely. This was partly through sewage recycling, partly through garbage composting, partly through reliance on some novel nitrogen-fixing crops and crop rotation, and partly through methods of utilizing animal manure. You may have seen from the train that our farm animals are not kept in close confinement like yours. We like them to live in conditions approaching the natural. But not only for sentimental reasons. It also avoids the gigantic accumulation of manure which is such a problem in your feedlots and poultry factories."

Naturally, this smug account roused all my skepticism, and I questioned him about the economic drawbacks of such a system. My questions, however, met a flat denial. "On the contrary," he replied, "our system is considerably cheaper than yours, if we add in *all* the costs. Many of your costs are ignored, or passed on through subterfuge to posterity or the general public. We on the other hand must acknowledge all costs. Otherwise we could not hope to achieve the stable-state life systems which are our fundamental ecological and political goal. If, for instance, we had continued your practice of 'free' disposal of wastes in water-courses, sooner or later somebody else would have had to calculate (and bear) the costs of the resulting dead rivers and lakes. We prefer to do it ourselves. It is obviously not easy to quantify certain of these costs. But we have been able to approximate them in workable political terms—especially since our country is relatively sensible in scale."

I obtained the detailed analyses on which his assertions are based, and have studied them at leisure. Extensive objective research would be necessary to confirm or disprove them. They do

appear to be surprisingly hard-nosed. Of course the Ecotopian situation has allowed their government to take actions that would be impossible under the checks and balances of our kind of democracy.

Next I asked the Assistant Minister about Ecotopian food production and processing. I knew he must be aware of the great achievements of our food industry in recent decades, not only in the introduction of synthetic meat and other protein foods, but also in pre-cooking and packaging generally. I was curious to see how he would justify the regressive practices that, according to many rumors, had returned western agriculture to the dark ages, and cooks to their chopping blocks and hot stoves (microwave ovens being illegal in Ecotopia). Again I quote his reply at length. It is, I am discovering, characteristic of the way in which Ecotopians justify extremist policies.

"You must remember," he began, "that Ecotopia at the beginning was faced with a stupendous surplus of food production capacity. California alone had produced about a third of the food eaten in the United States. Oregon and Washington had enormous fruit and grain production. We could produce, therefore, something like five times the amount of food needed by our own population. With food export to the U.S. ended because of the political crisis, our problem was how to shrink our agricultural output drastically. At the same time we wanted to end extractive and polluting practices in farming. Luckily, the new employment policies, which reduced the normal work week to about 20 hours, helped a lot. Also we were able to absorb some surplus farm labor in construction work required by our recycling systems. Along with simplification in food processing, we also achieved many economies in food distribution. As your grocery executives know, a store handling a thousand items is far less difficult and expensive to operate than one handling five thousand or more, as yours do. But probably our greatest economies were obtained simply by stopping production of many processed and packaged foods. These had either been outlawed on health grounds or put on Bad Practice lists."

This sounded like a loophole that might house a large and rather totalitarian rat. "What are these lists and how are they enforced?" I asked.

"Actually, they aren't enforced at all. They're a mechanism of moral persuasion, you might say. But they're purely informal. They're issued by study groups from consumer co-ops. Usually, when a product goes onto such a list, demand for it drops sharply. The company making it then ordinarily has to stop production, or finds it possible to sell only in specialized stores."

"But surely these committees are not allowed to act simply on their own say-so, without scientific backing or government authorization?"

The Assistant Minister smiled rather wanly. "In Ecotopia," he said, "you will find many many things happening without government authorization. But the study committees do operate with scientific advice, of the most sophisticated and independent type imaginable. Scientists in Ecotopia are forbidden to accept payments or favors from either state or private enterprises for any consultation or advice they offer. They speak, therefore, on the same uncorrupted footing as any citizen. Thus we avoid the unfortunate situation where all your oil experts are in the pay of the oil companies, all the agricultural experts in the pay of agribusiness, and so on."

This was too much. "No doubt," I said, "if is scientists of this type who have frittered away the great industrial heritage you possessed at Independence, and wrecked your marvelous street and highway system, and dissolved your fine medical centers. What benefits of civilization are they prepared to undermine next?"

"I will not speak to any but food questions," he replied. "I can provide you with whatever evidence you require to prove that Ecotopians eat better food than any nation on earth, because we grow it to be nutritious and taste good, not look good or pack efficiently. Our food supplies are uncontaminated with herbicides and insecticides, because we use cultivation for weeds and biological controls for insects. Our food preparation practices are sound, avoiding the processing that destroys food values. Most important of all, our agriculture has reached an almost totally stable state,

with more than 99 percent of our wastes being recycled. In short, we have achieved a food system that can endure indefinitely. That is, if the level of foreign poisons dumped on our lands by rain and wind doesn't rise above the present inexcusable figures."

The Assistant Minister scrambled to his feet, went to his shelves, and pulled down a half dozen pamphlets. "You will find some relevant information summarized here," he said. "Let me recommend that, after you have digested it, you follow Ecotopian ways in not wasting it."

This bad joke took me by surprise, but it did break the tension, and I laughed. He led me to the door. "You may phone if you develop further questions," he said gravely.

I returned to my hotel and read the pamphlets. One was a highly technical discussion of the relations between sewage sludge, mineral fertilizer requirements, groundwater levels and run-off, farm manure, and various disease organisms. Another, which struck me as particularly depressing because of its moralizing tone, surveyed food habits that had been common before Independence, analyzing the health hazards involved. Its humorless approach seemed to imply that soda drinks had been some kind of plot against mankind. Apparently, over a 30-year period, American soda manufacturers should have been held personally accountable for some 10 billion tooth cavities! This relentless tendency to fix responsibility on producers is, I begin to see, widespread in Ecotopian life—to the complete neglect of the responsibility, in this case, of the soda consumers.

My room boasts a trio of recycle chutes, and I have now, like a proper Ecotopian, carefully disposed of the pamphlets in the one marked P. It is a good thing Ecotopians do not have chewing gum—which chute would that belong in?

*(May 7) The stable-state concept may seem innocuous enough, until you stop to grasp its implications for every aspect of life, from the most personal to the most general. Shoes cannot have composition soles because they will not decay. New types of glass and pottery have had to be developed, which will decompose into sand*

*when broken into small pieces. Aluminum and other nonferrous metals largely abandoned, except for a few applications where nothing else will serve—only iron, which rusts away in time, seems a 'natural' metal to the Ecotopians. Belt buckles are made of bone or very hard woods. Cooking pots have no stick-free plastic lining, and are usually heavy iron. Almost nothing is painted since paints must be based either on lead or rubber or on plastics, which do not decompose. And people seem to accumulate few goods like books; they read quite a bit compared to Americans, but they then pass the copies on to friends, or recycle them. Of course there are aspects of life which have escaped the stable-state criterion: vehicles are rubber-tired, tooth fillings are made of silver, some structures are built of concrete, and so on. But it is still an amazing process, and people clearly take great delight in pushing it further and further.*

*(I was wrong to think more garbage trucks needed: actually Ecotopians generate very little of what we would call garbage—material that simply has to be disposed of in a dump somewhere. But of course they do need more trucks to haul away material from the recycle bins.)*

*These people are horribly over-emotional. Last night after supper I was sitting in my hotel room writing when loud screams began in the corridor. A man and a woman, threatening each other with what sounded like murder. At first I thought I'd better keep out of it. They went off down the hall and I figured were probably going out or returning to their room. But they drifted back, yelling and screaming, until they were right outside my door. I finally stuck my head out, and found three or four other hotel guests standing around watching, placidly, and doing absolutely nothing to interfere. It seemed to be a matter of a passionate affair coming to a bitter ending. The woman, hair half-covering her teary but beautiful face, screamed at the man and kicked at him viciously—still no action from the onlookers, some of whom in fact actually smiled faintly. The man, his own face red with anger, took the woman by the shoulders as if he was about to bash her head against the wall—and at this, finally, two of the Ecotopians present*

stepped forward and put restraining hands on his shoulders. Instead of knocking her brains out, therefore, the man was reduced to spitting in her face—whereupon she unleashed a horrible stream of curses and insults, things more personally wounding than I have ever heard (much less said) in private, not to mention with a bunch of strangers looking on. But the man did not seem humiliated or surprised—and indeed gave back insults just as dreadful as he got. The scene had gone on for perhaps 15 minutes, with more spectators gathering. It was more theatrical than anything I've seen in Italy. Finally the man and woman evidently ran out of fury. They stood limply, looking at each other, and then fell into each other's arms, crying and nuzzling each other wetly, and staggered off down the corridor to their room. At this the spectators began exchanging lively observations, making the kind of appreciative and comparative remarks we make after a particularly vicious round in a boxing match. Nobody seemed to care what it had all been about, but they sure got a kick out of the expression of intense feeling! Evidently restraints on interpersonal behavior have been very much relaxed here, and extreme hostility can be accepted as normal behavior.

Maybe I'm not as good a traveler these days. Don't have much appetite for the sugarless Ecotopian food, despite their pride in their 'natural' cuisine. Find myself worrying about what I'll do if I get sick or have an accident. The Ecotopians have probably turned medical science back fifty years. I have visions of being bled, like in the middle ages.

Even began thinking almost fondly, last night, of my years with Pat and the kids. Maybe I'm beginning to miss the comfort of just lying around at home. (Why should this particular jaunt make me so confused and tired? It's an exciting story, an unusual opportunity—all my colleagues envy me. I just can't quite seem to get my hands on it.) Kids used to come into bed with us Sunday mornings, and play Bear Comes Over the Mountain—giggly and floppy and lovable. Afterwards, when they'd gone out, Pat would infallibly ask when I was going away again. No man can live with reproaches before breakfast. But I loved her in my fashion.

\* \* \*

The Ecotopian work schedule and the intermixture of work and play can make the simplest things practically impossible to accomplish here. Went to the wire office to file my story yesterday. It has to go via Seattle and Vancouver, since there have been no direct transcontinental connections since secession. Different clerk in the office, picked up the copy, started reading it, laughed, tried to argue with me about the way I quoted the food guy. "Look," I said, "I'm just doing my job—how about you just doing yours? Put it on the fucking wire!"

He looked at me with real hurt, as if I'd just told him his office smelled. "I didn't realize you were in such a hurry," he said. "We don't get American reporters in here every day, you know, and what you're writing is really interesting. I wasn't trying to be boorish."

You can't argue with these people. "Go ahead, read it," I said, figuring to shame him into quick action. But he gave me an appeased glance, said "Thanks," and settled down to read. I drummed on the counter with my fingers for a while, but Ecotopian leisure time had clearly set in. Finally he finished, went over to the machine, sat down, turned and said, "Well, it's okay for a beginning. I'll send it real fast for you." Then he zapped the thing out at about 80 words a minute! And came back to hand me the copy with a broad, pleased smile. "My name's Jerry, by the way. I went to school with George (the Assistant Minister) and you got him down very well." I suppose I believe him. Anyway, couldn't help smiling back. "Thanks, Jerry," I said. "See you tomorrow."

## CARLESS LIVING IN ECOTOPIA'S NEW TOWNS

San Francisco, May 7. Under the new regime, the established cities of Ecotopia have to some extent been broken up into neighborhoods or communities, but they are still considered to be somewhat outside the ideal long-term line of development of Ecotopian living patterns. I have just had the opportunity to visit one of the strange new municipalities that are arising to carry out the more extreme urban vision of this decentralized society. Once a sleepy village, it is called Alviso, and is located on the southern shores of San Francisco Bay. You get there on the interurban train, which drops you off in the basement of a large complex of buildings. The main structure, it turns out, is not the city hall or courthouse, but a factory. It produces the electric traction units—they hardly qualify as cars or trucks in our terms—that are used for transporting people and goods in Ecotopian cities and for general transportation in the countryside. (Individually owned vehicles were prohibited in "car-free" zones soon after Independence. These zones at first covered only downtown areas where pollution and congestion were most severe. As minibus service was extended, these zones expanded, and now cover all densely settled city areas.)

Around the factory, where we would have a huge parking lot, Alviso has a cluttered collection of buildings, with trees everywhere. There are restaurants, a library, bakeries, a "core store" selling groceries and clothes, small shops, even factories and workshops—all jumbled amid apartment buildings. These are generally of three or four stories, arranged around a central courtyard of the type that used to be common in Paris. They are built almost entirely of wood, which has become the predominant building material in Ecotopia, due to the reforestation program. Though these structures are old-fashioned looking, they have pleasant small balconies, roof gardens, and verandas—often covered with plants, or even small trees. The apartments themselves are very large by our standards—with 10 or 15 rooms, to accommodate their communal living groups.

Alviso streets are named, not numbered, and they are almost as narrow and winding as those of medieval cities—not easy for a stranger to get around in. They are hardly wide enough for two cars to pass, but then of course there *are* no cars, so that is no problem. Pedestrians and bicyclists meander along. Once in a while you see a delivery truck hauling a piece of furniture or some other large object, but the Ecotopians bring their groceries home in string bags or large bicycle baskets. Supplies for the shops, like most goods in Ecotopia, are moved in containers. These are much smaller than our cargo containers, and proportioned to fit into Ecotopian freight cars and onto their electric trucks. Farm produce, for instance, is loaded into such containers either at the farms or at the container terminal located on the edge of each municipality. From the terminal an underground conveyor belt system connects to all the shops and factories in the vicinity, each of which has a kind of siding where the containers are shunted off. This idea was probably lifted from our automated warehouses, but turned backwards. It seems to work very well, though there must be a terrible mess if there is some kind of jam-up underground.

My guides on this expedition were two young students who have just finished an apprenticeship year in the factory. They're full of information and observations. It seems that the entire population of Alviso, about 9,000 people, lives within a radius of a half mile from the transit station. But even this density allows for many small park-like places: sometimes merely widenings of the streets, sometimes planted gardens. Trees are everywhere—there are no large paved areas exposed to the sun. Around the edges of town are the schools and various recreation grounds. At the northeast corner of town you meet the marshes and sloughs and saltflats of the Bay. A harbor has been dredged for small craft; this opens onto the ship channel through which a freighter can move right up to the factory dock. My informants admitted rather uncomfortably that there is a modest export trade in electric vehicles—the Ecotopians allow themselves to import just enough metal to replace what is used in the exported electric motors and other metal parts.

Kids fish off the factory dock; the water is clear. Ecotopians love the water, and the boats in the harbor are a beautiful collection

of both traditional and highly unorthodox designs. From this harbor, my enthusiastic guides tell me, they often sail up the Bay and into the Delta, and even out to sea through the Golden Gate, then down the coast to Monterey. Their boat is a lovely though heavy-looking craft, and they proudly offered to take me out on it if I have time.

We toured the factory, which is a confusing place. Like other Ecotopian workplaces, I am told, it is not organized on the assembly-line principles generally thought essential to really efficient mass production. Certain aspects are automated: the production of the electric motors, suspension frames, and other major elements. However, the assembly of these items is done by groups of workers who actually fasten the parts together one by one, taking them from supply bins kept full by the automated machines. The plant is quiet and pleasant compared to the crashing racket of a Detroit plant, and the workers do not seem to be under Detroit's high output pressures. Of course the extreme simplification of Ecotopian vehicles must make the manufacturing process much easier to plan and manage—indeed there seems little reason why it could not be automated entirely.

Also, I discovered, much of the factory's output does not consist of finished vehicles at all. Following the mania for "doing it yourself" which is such a basic part of Ecotopian life, this plant chiefly turns out "front ends," "rear ends," and battery units. Individuals and organizations then connect these to bodies of their own design. Many of them are weird enough to make San Francisco minibuses look quite ordinary. I have seen, for instance, a truck built of driftwood, almost every square foot of it decorated with abalone shells—it belonged to a fishery commune along the coast.

The "front end" consists of two wheels, each driven by an electric motor and supplied with a brake. A frame attaches them to a steering and suspension unit, together with a simple steering wheel, accelerator, brake, instrument panel, and a pair of headlights. The motor drives are capable of no more than 30 miles per hour (on the level) so their engineering requirements must be modest—though my guides told me the suspension is innovative,

using a clever hydraulic load-leveling device which in addition needs very little metal. The "rear end" is even simpler, since it doesn't have to steer. The battery units, which seem to be smaller and lighter than even our best Japanese imports, are designed for use in vehicles of various configurations. Each comes with a long reel-in extension cord to plug into recharging outlets.

The factory does produce several types of standard bodies, to which the propulsion units can be attached with only four bolts at each end. (They are always removed for repair.) The smallest and commonest body is a shrunken version of our pick-up truck. It has a tiny cab that seats only two people, and a low, square, open box in back. The rear of the cab can be swung upward to make a roof, and sometimes canvas sides are rigged to close in the box entirely.

A taxi-type body is still manufactured in small numbers. Many of these were used in the cities after Independence as a stop-gap measure while minibus and transit systems were developing. These bodies are molded from heavy plastic in one huge mold.

These primitive and underpowered vehicles obviously cannot satisfy the urge for speed and freedom which has been so well met by the American auto industry and our aggressive highway program. My guides and I got into a hot debate on this question, in which I must admit they proved uncomfortably knowledgeable about the conditions that sometimes prevail on our urban thoroughways—where movement at *any* speed can become impossible. When I asked, however, why Ecotopia did not build speedy cars for its thousands of miles of rural highways—which are now totally uncongested even if their rights of way have partly been taken over for trains—they were left speechless. I attempted to sow a few seeds of doubt in their minds: no one can be utterly insensitive to the pleasures of the open road, I told them, and I related how it feels to roll along in one of our powerful, comfortable cars, a girl's hair blowing in the wind. . . .

We had lunch in one of the restaurants near the factory, amid a cheery, noisy crowd of citizens and workers. I noticed that they drank a fair amount of the excellent local wine with their soups and sandwiches. Afterward we visited the town hall, a modest wood structure indistinguishable from the apartment buildings. There I



was shown a map on which adjacent new towns are drawn, each centered on its own rapid-transit stop. It appears that a ring of such new towns is being built to surround the Bay, each one a self-contained community, but linked to its neighbors by train so that the entire necklace of towns will constitute one city. It is promised that you can, for instance, walk five minutes to your transit station, take a train within five minutes to a town ten stops away, and then walk another five minutes to your destination. My informants are convinced that this represents a halving of the time we would spend on a similar trip, not to mention problems of parking, traffic, and of course the pollution.

What will be the fate of the existing cities as these new minicities come into existence? They will gradually be razed, although a few districts will be preserved as living museum displays (of "our barbarian past," as the boys jokingly phrased it). The land will be returned to grassland, forest, orchards, or gardens—often, it appears, groups from the city own plots of land outside in the country, where they probably have a small shack and perhaps grow vegetables, or just go for a change of scene.

After leaving Alviso we took the train to Redwood City, where the reversion process can be seen in action. Three new towns have sprung up there along the Bay, separated by a half mile or so of open country, and two more are under construction as part of another string several miles back from the Bay, in the foothills. In between, part of the former suburban residential area has already been turned into alternating woods and grassland. The scene reminded me a little of my boyhood country summers in Pennsylvania. Wooded strips follow the winding lines of creeks. Hawks circle lazily. Boys out hunting with bows and arrows wave to the train as it zips by. The signs of a once busy civilization—streets, cars, service stations, supermarkets—have been entirely obliterated, as if they never existed. The scene was sobering, and made me wonder what a Carthaginian might have felt after ancient Carthage was destroyed and plowed under by the conquering Romans.

*(May 8) Something peculiar is going on in this place. Can't yet exactly locate the source of the feeling. It's like waking up after a*

*dream and not being quite able to remember what it was about. The way people deal with each other—and with me—keeps reminding me of something—but I don't know what. Always takes me off guard, makes me feel I was confronted with some fine personal opportunity—a friendship, learning something's important, love—which by then has just passed. . . . And they often seem to be surprised, a little disappointed maybe—as if I was a child who was not proving a very fast learner. (But what am I supposed to be learning?)*

*Then sometimes life here seems like a throwback to a past I might have known through old photographs. Or a skip ahead in time: these people, who are so American despite their weird social practices, might be what we will become. (They miss no chance, of course, to tell me we should get on with it.) Also keep feeling I have gotten stuck on vacation in the country. Partly it's all the trees, and maybe the dark nights (which still make me feel a power blackout must have struck), and also it's hard to get used to the quiet. Must be doing something to my New York paranoia system, geared to respond to honking, screeching, buzzing, bangs, knocks, not to mention a shot or a scream now and then. You expect silence in the country. But here I am in a metropolitan area of several million, constantly surrounded by people—and the only really loud noises are human shouts or babies crying. There's no "New Man" bullshit in Ecotopia, but how do they stand the quiet? Or for that matter, how do they stand their isolation from us? Has bred a brash kind of self-sufficiency. They seem to be in surprisingly good touch with the rest of the world, but as far as we're concerned, they're strictly on their own—like adolescent children who have rejected their parents' ways. They'll probably get over it.*

*Ecotopians a little vague about time, I notice—few wear watches, and they pay more attention to things like sunrise and sunset or the tides than to actual hour time. They will accede to the demands of industrial civilization to some extent, but grudgingly. "You'd never catch an Indian wearing a watch." Many Ecotopians sentimental about Indians, and there's some sense in which they envy the Indians their lost natural place in the American wilderness. Indeed*

this probably a major Ecotopian myth; keep hearing references to what Indians would or wouldn't do in a given situation. Some Ecotopian articles—clothing and baskets and personal ornamentation—perhaps directly Indian in inspiration. But what matters most is the aspiration to live in balance with nature, "walk lightly on the land," treat the earth as a mother. No surprise that to such a morality most industrial processes, work schedules, and products are suspect! Who would use an earth-mover on his own mother?

Hotel was okay for a while, but has gotten kind of boring. Have taken to spending a good bit of time a few blocks away, down near the waterfront, at "Franklin's Cove," a sort of press commune, where maybe 40 Ecotopian journalists and writers and TV people live. They've been extremely hospitable—really make me feel welcome. The place must have once been a warehouse, and is now broken up into rooms. They cook collectively, have work rooms (no electric typewriters, I notice, but lots of handy light video recorders), even a kind of gym. Beautiful wild garden in back where people spend a lot of time lying around on sunny days—part of it in crumbling ruins of one wing of the warehouse, which nobody has bothered to wreck and haul away. ("Time is taking its course, and we just let it," replied one of the residents when I asked why this unsightly condition was tolerated.) Center of things is a lounge-library filled with soft chairs and sofas. I've been there so much I even have a favorite chair.

Ecotopians, both male and female, have a secure sense of themselves as animals. At the Cove they lie about utterly relaxed, curled up on couches or floor, flopped down in sunny spots on little rugs or mats, almost like a bunch of cats. They stretch, rearrange themselves, do mysterious yoga-like exercises, and just seem to enjoy their bodies tremendously. Nor do they keep this to themselves, particularly—I've several times walked in on people making love, who didn't seem much embarrassed or annoyed—it was hardly different from walking in on somebody taking a bath. I find myself envying them this comfortableness in their biological beings. They seem to breathe better, move more loosely. I'm experimenting, trying to imitate them. . . .

Especially in the evenings, though of course they have a lot of free time during the day as well, people gather round and talk—the kind of leisurely talk I associate with college days. Jumps around from topic to topic, and people kid a lot, and cheer each other up when need be, but there's some thread to it usually. Last evening spent quite a while talking to an interesting guy I've met at the Cove—Bert Luckman (that seems to be his real name). He was studying at Berkeley at the time of Independence—bright Jewish kid from New York. Had gone through Maoist phase, then got into secessionist movement. Politics and science writer (not an odd combination here) for the S. F. Times. Has written a book on cosmology, has a mystic streak, but still a reporter's reporter: tough, wry, well-organized writing. Is surprisingly skeptical about U.S. science, which he regards as bureaucratically conspired and wasteful. "You made the dreadful mistake," he said, "of turning your science establishment over to established scientists, who could be trusted. But it's mainly young and untrustworthy scientists who get important new ideas. —You still have a few things happening, but it's lost the momentum you need." (I wonder. Check when get back.)

After some drinks the conversation got livelier and more personal. Thought I'd do some probing. "Doesn't this stable-state business get awfully static? I'd think it would drive you crazy after a certain point!"

Bert looked at me with amusement, and batted the ball back. "Well, don't forget that we don't have to be stable. The system provides the stability, and we can be erratic within it. I mean we don't try to be perfect, we just try to be okay on the average—which means adding up a bunch of ups and downs." "But it means giving up any notions of progress. You just want to get to that stable point and stay there, like a lump."

"It may sound that way, but in practice there's no stable point. We're always striving to approximate it, but we never get there. And you know how much we disagree on exactly what is to be done—we only agree on the root essentials, everything else is in dispute." I grinned. "I've noticed that—you're a quarrelsome

lor!" "We can afford to be, because of that root agreement. Besides, that's half the fun of relating to each other—trying to work through different perspectives, seeing how other people feel about things."

"It's still flying in the face of reality, this striving for stability." Bert took this more seriously: "Is it? But we've actually achieved something like stability. Our system meanders on its peaceful way, while yours has constant convulsions. I think of ours as like a meadow in the sun. There's a lot of change going on—plants growing, other plants dying, bacteria decomposing them, mice eating seeds, hawks eating mice, a tree or two beginning to grow up and shade the grasses. But the meadow sustains itself on a steady-state basis—unless men come along and mess it up."

"I begin to see what you mean. It may not look so static to the mouse."

After his student years Bert traveled a lot—in Canada, Latin America, Europe, Asia. Even thought of going to the U.S. sub rosa—but didn't do it (or says he didn't). Attached to a charming giddy woman named Clara, some years older and also a journalist—they have separate rooms at the Cove. Bert seems to be a wanderer—they also worked on papers in Seattle, Vancouver, and a little California coast resort town called Mendocino. We exchanged life histories, and he pumped me for inside intrigues on my travels, my relations with sources in our government, and so on. Caught me in a couple of prevarications, but seems to take their measure quickly and understand them. We went on talking in a frank and almost brotherly way, so I tried harder to be candid and scrupulous. Told him about Francine; he wanted to know precisely the nature of my relationship with her, and seemed surprised that it is so tentative, even though it's gone on for three years now. "It seems contradictory to me," he said. "You live in separate apartments, see each other a couple of times a week, spend weeks on end away from each other altogether. At the same time you don't have a group of people to live with, to support you emotionally, to keep your collective life going on actively and strongly while you're apart. I'd think that during one of these absences you'd have split up long ago—one of you would have taken up seriously with someone else,

and then there'd be two other little separate worlds, instead of the two you have now. I'd find that very scary."

"It is very scary," I said, "and once or twice we have gotten involved with someone else. But we have always come back to each other." "It still sounds frivolous to me," he said, frowning. "It gives too much power to loneliness. Here we try to arrange it so we are not lonely very often. That keeps us from making a lot of emotional mistakes. We don't think commitment is something you go off and do by yourselves, just two of you. It has to have a structure, social surroundings you can rely on. Human beings are tribal animals, you know. They need lots of contact."

"You might be right," I said doubtfully. "I never thought of myself that way particularly. Though at one point I remember wondering if having lots and lots of children might not be a good thing." "Well, there are other kinds of families, you know," he said gently and with a slight smile. "I'll take you to visit some."

Have also had some good talks with Tom, a writer for a major magazine called Flow. He's maybe 35 but has a face that already shows lines; also a temper, and he was swearing at somebody who had challenged his view of recent American strategy in Brazil. I had kept quiet at first, but it happened I knew Tom was right: we had set up a system of electronically fenced enclaves in São Paulo as a means of controlling guerrilla movements, though it had been portrayed as an urban-redevelopment measure. "Look," said Tom finally, "we have a goddamn American reporter right here, why don't we ask him?" "All right," said the other guy to me, "do you know anything about it?"

"Yeah," I said, "I do. Tom's got it straight. There are sensor fields all over São Paulo. Anything that moves, the army knows about." "How did you get your information? Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. I heard the President give the order—and I also heard him tell the press that he'd deny it if we reported it." Tom burst out laughing. He and his opponent didn't speak for several days after that, but Tom and I made up for it. Talked not only about Brazil—also about functions of journalists, and the changes in man-woman relationships that have occurred in Ecotopia. According to him, women in Ecotopia have totally escaped the depen-

dent roles they still tend to play with us. Not that they dominate over men—but they exercise power in work and in relationships just as men do. Above all, they don't have to manipulate men: the Survivalist Party, and social developments generally, have arranged the society so that women's objective situation is equal to men's. Thus people can be just people, without our symbolic loading on sex roles. (I notice, however, that Ecotopian women still seem to me feminine, with a relaxed air of their biological attractiveness, even fertility, though I don't see how they combine this with their heavy responsibilities and hard work. And men, though they express feelings more openly than American men—even feelings of weakness—still seem masculine.)

Tom's bright, and cynical as any good newspaperman is, yet strangely optimistic about the future. Believes that the nature of political power is changing, that the technology and social structure can be put at the service of mankind, instead of the other way round. Skeptical but not, I notice, bitter. Must be comfortable to think like that.

Am missing Francine's reliably amiable "attentions." (Whenever I'm away I realize anew what a faithful playmate she is; despite our having deliberately resolved never to be faithful to each other.) Have the awful suspicion that every woman around me is secretly, constantly fucking and that I could have them if I only knew the password—but I don't. I must be missing something—can the women journalists at the Cove simply find me unattractive in some mysterious way? They are friendly enough, direct, open; they even touch me sometimes, which of course feels good and gives me a warm rush. But again, it's sisterly: if I touch them back, they seem to feel I'm making an improper advance, and back off. There must be some move, when a woman here comes close to you, that I don't know how to make? Yet I watch the Ecotopian men, and they don't seem to do anything, except maybe smile a little, and then things go on from there, or sometimes don't—it's all very casual and nobody seems to worry about it. Very confusing all around; makes me feel hung up on my own patterns. Many Ecotopian women are beautiful in a simple, unadorned way. They're not

dependent for their attractiveness on cosmetics or dress—they give the impression of being strong, secure, pleasure-loving people, very honest and straightforward emotionally. They seem to like me: in the Cove as on the streets they meet my eyes openly, are glad to talk, even quite personally. Yet I can't get past that stage to any real action. Have to think about that some more. Maybe I'll learn something.



## THE UNSPORTING LIFE OF ECOTOPIA

San Francisco, May 9. American sports fans would have a miserable time of it in Ecotopia. They would find no baseball and no football, no basketball, not even ice hockey. The newspapers have what they label "sports pages," but these are devoted to oddball individual sports. Skiing, especially cross-country style, gets big coverage. Hiking and camping, which are usually lumped with fishing and hunting, are treated as sports. Swimming, sailing, gymnastics, ping-pong, and tennis get a lot of attention. So does chess! There's no boxing or wrestling in Ecotopia, and no roller derby. In short, for the sports enthusiast Ecotopia is about as dull as you could imagine: the sports scene is set up purely for the benefit of the participants.

On the other hand, from a physical-fitness point of view ordinary Ecotopian citizens are remarkably healthy looking. An American like myself tends to feel a little flabby here. Ecotopians are used to walking everywhere, carrying heavy burdens like backpacks and groceries for long distances, and they have a generally higher level of physical activity than Americans. The women, especially, look marvelously healthy, even though they do not adhere to our standards of style. The fat and broken-down people we are accustomed to seeing on our city streets are absent here, and even oldsters seem surprisingly fit and hearty. To my questions about this, Ecotopians have replied, "Well, nature has equipped us well, and we lead active physical lives," or some such phrases. It

apparently does not occur to them that human beings in other countries are *not* in equally good shape.

But my inquiries, pursued further, have turned up an extensive network of unobtrusive physical activities which, in fact, seem almost Spartan in their intensity, and participation in some kind of minor sport is virtually universal among Ecotopians. Even volleyball, God help them, is a favorite pastime, and at noon or indeed other hours you can see teams cavoring in factory yards or on the streets. It doesn't look terribly competitive, but is obviously fun.

Ecotopians also love to dance, which is good exercise; and walking a lot, which is forced on them by the prohibition of cars, probably has the compensation of being good for the health. (Runners, whether for health or haste, are common sights here.) Ping-pong tables seem to be one of the commonest items of furniture, and I must confess that when I challenged an awkward-looking teenager to a friendly game, I got stomped!

Ecotopian schools, with their looser scheduling (and better climate) give children far more outdoor time than ours. So the youngsters have a high level of physical activity throughout their school years. School groups often go on expeditions: it's common to see six-year-olds, with heavy backpacks, trudging along with older kids on hikes which, I am told, may last four or five days, and in quite forbidding country. As they move on into higher levels of school (the term "grade" is not used in our sense) much of the children's time is allotted to training in fishing and hunting and survival skills, at the expense of basic educational skills. They are forced to learn not only the basic techniques but also how to improvise ecologically acceptable equipment in the wild: hooks, snares, bows, arrows, and so on.

Some parents and other adults participate voluntarily in the children's field trips—for meat as well as sport, since wild game has returned to the reforested areas in great numbers. Thus mountain lions, wildcats, bears (including grizzlies), and wolves may now be hunted, along with deer, foxes, and rabbits. (Hunting is usually done with bows and arrows, not firearms, though most Ecotopian living units possess shotguns.) The experiences of the children are closely tied in with studies of plants, animals and

landscape. I have been impressed with the knowledge that even young children have of such matters—a six-year-old can tell you all about the "ecological niches" of the creatures and plants he encounters in his daily life. He will also know what roots and berries are edible, how to use soap plant, how to carve a pot holder from a branch.

A big sports role is played by Ecotopian rivers and lakes, which seem to be a magnetic attraction to young people even though the coastal waters are freezing cold. Shortly after Independence, an expropriation law made all waterfront properties into "water parks." Beautiful exclusive estates were seized and turned into fishing communes, schools, hospitals, oceanographic and limnological institutes, museums of natural history. Public boating, fishing and swimming were permitted in lakes that had formerly been enclosed in fenced, guarded private developments. The new government even went so far as to dynamite some of the dams which had been built on the rivers—on the dubious grounds that they prevented "white-water" recreational boating or interfered with the salmon runs—which have been reestablished with great effort and enjoy much public support.

A curious physical fitness aspect of Ecotopian life is that in school the classes in carpentry and other tool work (which are taken by most students, girls as well as boys) carry out construction projects that often involve the handling of timbers, masonry and other heavy materials.

But the strangest thing about Ecotopian sports for an American is to understand how Ecotopians get along without the thrills, drama and suspense provided by our pennant seasons, the pageants of our bowl games, or the opportunity for boys to identify with star players. Apparently, the excitement we focus on our major sports has been entirely diverted in Ecotopia to what they call "the war games." These are never described in the sports pages, however, nor indeed anywhere else in print. People have been evasive when I have asked about these "games," but rumors that have reached us outside Ecotopia suggest that rather bestial practices are involved. From conversations I have overheard, especially among young men, it is clear that Ecotopians are intensely concerned with

these bloody rituals—in which it appears that hundreds of Ecotopian youths perish every year. Soon I hope to make an eyewitness report on one of these controversial spectacles.

(May 10) No progress in my efforts to set up an appointment with President Allwen. Her assistant friendly enough, however. Says it will happen in due course, but why don't I look around the country some more first, "so you have something to talk about." Asked me pointedly to make sure they get early copies of all my dispatches. Are they waiting to see what I write before they decide whether to give me my precious appointment?

Saw Allwen on a TV event—dedication of a solar-energy plant. Altogether unlike our ribbon-cutting ceremonies. Here the people who do the ceremony are the people who did the work. Camera-men wander around among everybody; it's all quite helter-skelter, there seem to be no passive bystanders, everybody is talking to everybody else. The camera has been with various groups for a while, one of them including this rather plain but strong unidentified woman who's chatting and laughing with them. They're showing her some papers, she's joking with them. After a while it turns out she is Vera. But nobody calls on her for a speech. She turns to a woman nearby and says, "Why don't you tell everybody how this all got started?"

Seriously but with absolutely no pomposity, the woman describes the background of the plant—why it was needed here, how the people involved in the communities it would serve decided what kind of plant it should be, how some novel scientific developments got worked up. Then she turned to other people, and they talked about the actual construction—funny stories, mainly, not at all our kind of solemn, contribution-to-the-ages sort of stuff. Certain aspects of the installation are evidently far from perfect—at least in some eyes—and the criticisms weren't kept under cover in the slightest. When this got a little heavy, Allwen re-entered the conversation. But she didn't play the heavy arbiter or mother role, she talked about some other case where something had gone wrong, and told a political anecdote about how the people had finally

gotten together and more or less fixed it up. The mood lightened, mutual confidence returned.

And then, when everybody seemed to have said what they wanted to say, the group just sort of amorphously decided it was time to turn on the switch. Amid jokes that maybe it wouldn't work after all, a child was brought forth to actually push the switch. It worked. Lightbulbs lit; people cheered and hugged each other; and then, as champagne was brought out, the camera crews put down their equipment and picked up glasses, and we saw no more. I've also been using spare time watching some of Allwen's collected speeches on my videocassette player. (Bought a full set to take back with me.) Clearly a remarkable woman: a powerful personality with a gift for folksy yet highly political speaking. There is a lot of warmth, yet a certain menace too: you wouldn't want to be her enemy. Maybe the old Queen Elizabeth was like that? At the same time Allwen never seems to rely on the us-against-them gambit. The underlying point is always some kind of unity; there's a family feeling even when she's chastising someone. I doubt if anyone, whatever their politics, could be entirely in her bad graces! She has a way of seeming to take the viewer into her confidence, so that you share the logic and conviction of her argument. It would be hard to feel she was selling you something, the way too many of our television speeches do. Instead she seems to be giving—clarity, strength, wisdom. Maybe as much a religious leader as a politician? Head of the state ecological church, chief priestess? Doesn't look it, God knows! But anyway a force to be reckoned with.



## ECOTOPIAN TELEVISION AND ITS WARES

San Francisco, May 10. Ecotopians claim to have sifted through modern technology and rejected huge tracts of it, because of its ecological harmfulness. However, despite this general technological austerity, they employ video devices even more extensively than we do. Feeling that they should transport their bodies only when it's a pleasure, they seldom travel "on business" in our manner. Instead, they tend to transact business by using their picturephones. These employ the same cables that provide television connections; the whole country, except for a few isolated rural spots, is wired with cable. (There is no ordinary broadcasting.) Video sets are everywhere, but strangely enough I have seldom seen people sitting before them blotted out in the American manner. Whether this is because of some mysterious national traits, or because of the programming being markedly different, or both, I cannot yet tell. But Ecotopians seem to use TV, rather than letting it use them.

Some channels are apparently literal parts of the government structure—something like a council chamber with a PA system would be. People watch these when the doings of local governments or the national legislature are being transmitted. (Virtually no government proceedings are closed to press and public anyway.) Viewers not only watch—they expect to participate. They phone in with questions and comments, sometimes for the officials present, sometimes for the TV staffs. Thus TV doesn't only provide news—much of the time it *is* the news. The routine governmental fare includes debates that involve public figures, or aspirants to public office; many court proceedings and executive meetings; and meetings of the legislatures and especially of their committees. Running comment is interspersed from a variety of sources, ranging from the narrators to vehemently partisan analysts. There is no rule of objectivity, as with our newscasters; Ecotopians in general scorn the idea as a "bourgeois fetish," and profess to believe that truth is best served by giving some label indicating your general position, and then letting fly.

Other channels present films and various entertainment programs, but the commercials are awkwardly bunched entirely *between* shows, rather than scattered throughout. Not only does this destroy the rhythm we're used to on TV—commercials giving us timely respites from the drama—but it increases the tendency for the commercials to fight each other. And this is bad enough anyway, because they are limited to mere announcements, without impersonated housewives or other consumers, and virtually without adjectives. (Some prohibition must exist for all the media, since ads in magazines and newspapers are similarly bland.) It's hard to get excited about a product's specifications-list, but Ecotopian viewers do manage to watch them. Sometimes, I suspect, they watch merely in hopes of a counter-ad to follow—an announcement of a competing product, in which the announcer sneeringly compares the two.

Also, the commercials may seem watchable because they are islands of sanity in the welter of viewpoints, personnel, and visual image quality that make up "normal" Ecotopian TV fare. Some channels even change managements entirely—at noon, or 6 p.m., a channel that has been programming political events or news will suddenly switch over to household advice, loud rock music, or weird surrealistic films bringing your worst nightmares to garish life. (Ecotopians don't seem to believe overmuch in color tuning. The station engineers sometimes joke around and transmit signals in which people deliberately come out green or fuchsia, with orange skies.) Then again you may come upon a super-serious program imported from Canada or England. And there are a few people who tune in American satellite signals and watch our reruns, or laugh it up at our commercials. But this seems to be an acquired, minority taste—and it also requires an expensive special adapter to pick up the signals directly.

Television, incidentally, may be an important reason for Ecotopians' odd attitudes toward material goods. Of course many consumer items are considered ecologically offensive and are simply not available, so nobody has them: thus electric can openers, hair curlers, frying pans, and carving knives are unknown. And to curb industrial proliferation the variety which is so delightful in our

department stores is much restricted here. Many basic necessities are utterly standardized. Bath towels, for instance, can be bought in only one color, white—so people have to dye their own in attractive patterns (using gentle natural hues from plant and mineral sources, I am told). Ecotopians generally seem to travel light, with few possessions, though each household, naturally, has a full component of necessary utensils. As far as personal goods are concerned Ecotopians possess or at least care about mainly things like knives and other tools, clothing, brushes, musical instruments, which they are concerned to have of the highest possible quality. These are handmade and prized by their owners as works of art—which I must admit they sometimes are.

Objects that are available in stores seem rather old-fashioned. I have seen few Ecotopian-made appliances that would not look pretty primitive on American TV. One excuse I've heard is that they are designed for easy repair by users. At any rate they lack the streamlining we're used to—parts stick out at odd angles, bolts and other fasteners are plainly visible, and sometimes parts are even made of wood.

I have, however, observed that Ecotopians do repair their own things. In fact there are no repair shops on the streets. A curious corollary is that guarantees don't seem to exist at all. People take it for granted that manufactured items will be sturdy, durable, and self-fixable—which of course means they are also relatively unsophisticated compared to ours. This state of affairs has not been achieved easily: I have heard many funny stories about ridiculous designs produced in the early days, lawsuits against their manufacturers, and other tribulations. One law now in effect requires that pilot models of new devices must be given to a public panel of ten ordinary people ("consumers" is not a term used in polite conversation here). Only if they all find they can fix likely breakdowns with ordinary tools is manufacture permitted.

An exception of sorts is made for video and other electronic items. These are required to be built of standard modularized parts and shops must stock component modules as well as test equipment, so users can isolate and replace defective components. And of course much electronic gear is now so small that it must simply

be recycled if it stops working. The Ecotopians, indeed, have produced some remarkably miniaturized electronic devices, such as stereo sets no larger than a plate, ingeniously responsive controls for solar heat systems and industrial processes, and short-range radiotelephones built into a tiny earphone. These evidently satisfy a national urge for compactness, lightness, and low power requirements.

*(May 11) This morning got my first look at that curious Ecotopian practice known as cooperative criticism. Had stopped in at one of their little open-front cafes where you can get an overwhelmingly hearty breakfast. Family-style tables, but it was still early, and conversation desultory. A man near me who had ordered scrambled eggs broke the quiet after the waiter brought his plate.*

*"Look at those eggs!" he demanded—not of the waiter, as we might do, but of the cafe at large. He held them up for all to see. "They're totally dried out!" At this point, I expected the waiter to try to soothe the customer and offer him a new plate of eggs. Instead both customer and waiter headed for the kitchen area, which was off to the side of the room but separated only by a counter. (Ecotopians take pleasure in being able to inspect ingredients and see their food being cooked. Their kitchens are always open to view, and they watch the cooks rather as we watch a pizza-thrower.) "Who cooked these eggs?" the customer asked. One of the cooks, a woman, put aside a pot and walked over to look.*

*"I did. What's wrong with them?" The man repeated his complaint, the woman took a fork, sampled the eggs. "You must have left them lie on the plate," she said. "The plate's got cold too." Several hands reached out to touch the plate, and sub-arguments broke out about that, the consensus being that the plate was still pretty warm, and the woman must indeed have overcooked the eggs. "Why weren't you watching them?" the customer asked. "Because I have two stoves and about 14 orders going!" retorted the woman.*

*At this, some happy customers chimed in, saying that Ruth was a phenomenally careful cook and had done their eggs to perfection.*



So then the problem of Ruth's workload was examined by all present, loudly. (Meanwhile, new customers were drifting in and all were joining into the discussion, and every breakfast in the place was getting stone-cold; nobody cared.) Somebody asked Ruth why she didn't yell for help when she got behind, and she blushed and said, with a resentful glance at her fellow cooks, that it was her job and she could do it. One of the other customers, who seemed to know Ruth, said he knew she wouldn't ask for help from the other cooks, who were also busy, but what would be wrong with admitting that occasionally the load got extra heavy, and yelling for help?

Here many customers chimed in, telling her they'd be glad to step into the kitchen and pitch in for a few minutes. At this, Ruth began to weep, whether from shame or relief. A couple of customers came into the kitchen, hugged her, lent a hand; she probably dropped salty tears into the next couple of orders, but everybody else went back to their tables, seeming very satisfied with the whole episode, and the complainer ate his new eggs with gusto, after thanking Ruth loudly and elaborately when she personally brought them out to him—with many smiles all around them.

Little emotional dramas like this seem to be common in Ecotopian life. There's something embarrassing and low-class about them, but they're delightful in a way, and both participants and observers seem to be energized by them.

Usually on my trips I feel pretty frustrated sexually after a couple of days and try to get taken care of, somehow or other. Am still totally puzzled why these independent Ecotopian women don't react to my signals. It certainly isn't because they are out of touch with their own sexuality! Was kidding around with one I picked up on the street. "Look," she said after a bit, "if you just want to fuck why don't you say so?" and marched off in disgust. That got to me, somehow. Realized I don't just want to fuck, as I usually think when I'm away. I really want to figure out what goes on between men and women out here, and try getting with it: they obviously deal with each other in ways I don't know about. I feel envious and left out, but also challenged and curious. Sometimes

my confusion settles into a feeling of readiness, patience, calmness: as if I must soon run into somebody who will make it all clear. But it doesn't make it any easier that Ecotopians are very noisy at their lovemaking. Groans and gasps and shudders and moans percolate through my hotel walls, even though they aren't particularly thin. Evidently they don't have any inhibitions about others hearing what's going on.



## THE ECOTOPIAN ECONOMY: FRUIT OF CRISIS

San Francisco, May 12. It is widely believed among Americans that the Ecotopians have become a shiftless and lazy people. This was the natural conclusion drawn after Independence, when the Ecotopians adopted a 20-hour work week. Yet even so no one in America, I think, has yet fully grasped the immense break this represented with our way of life—and even now it is astonishing that the Ecotopian legislature, in the first flush of power, was able to carry through such a revolutionary measure.

What was at stake, informed Ecotopians insist, was nothing less than the revision of the Protestant work ethic upon which America had been built. The consequences were plainly severe. In economic terms, Ecotopia was forced to isolate its economy from the competition of harder-working peoples. Serious dislocations plagued their industries for years. There was a drop in Gross National Product by more than a third. But the profoundest implications of the decreased work week were philosophical and ecological: mankind, the Ecotopians assumed, was not meant for production, as the 19th and early 20th centuries had believed. Instead, humans were meant to take their modest place in a seamless, stable-state web of living organisms, disturbing that web as little as possible. This would mean sacrifice of present consumption, but it would ensure future survival—which became an almost religious objective, perhaps akin to earlier doctrines of "salvation." People were to be happy

not to the extent they dominated their fellow creatures on the earth, but to the extent they lived in balance with them.

This philosophical change may have seemed innocent on the surface. Its grave implications were soon spelled out, however. Ecotopian economists, who included some of the most highly regarded in the American nation, were well aware that the standard of living could only be sustained and increased by relentless pressure on work hours and worker productivity. Workers might call this "speed-up," yet without a slow but steady rise in labor output, capital could not be attracted or even held; financial collapse would quickly ensue.

The deadly novelty introduced into this accepted train of thought by a few Ecotopian militants was to spread the point of view that economic disaster was not identical with survival disaster for persons—and that, in particular, a financial panic could be turned to advantage if the new nation could be organized to devote its real resources of energy, knowledge, skills, and materials to the basic necessities of survival. If that were done, even a catastrophic decline in the GNP (which was, in their opinion, largely composed of wasteful activity anyway) might prove politically useful.

In short, financial chaos was to be not endured but deliberately engineered. With the ensuing flight of capital, most factories, farms and other productive facilities would fall into Ecotopian hands like ripe plums.

And in reality it took only a few crucial measures to set this dismal series of events in motion: the nationalization of agriculture; the announcement of an impending moratorium on oil-industry activities; the forced consolidation of the basic retail network constituted by Sears, Penney's, Safeway, and a few other chains; and the passage of stringent conservation laws that threatened the profits of the lumber interests.

These moves, of course, set off an enormous clamor in Washington. Lobbyists for the various interests affected tried to commit the federal government to intervene militarily. This was, however, several months after Independence. The Ecotopians had established and intensively trained a nationwide militia, and airlifted arms for it from France and Czechoslovakia. It was also believed that at the

time of secession they had mined major eastern cities with atomic weapons, which they had constructed in secret or seized from weapons research laboratories. Washington, therefore, although it initiated a ferocious campaign of economic and political pressure against the Ecotopians, and mined their harbors, finally decided against an invasion.

This news set in motion a wave of closures and forced sales of businesses—reminiscent, I was told, of what happened to the Japanese-Americans who were interned in World War II. Members of distinguished old San Francisco families were forced to bargain on most unfavorable terms with representatives of the new regime. Properties going back to Spanish land-grant claims were hastily disposed of. Huge corporations, used to dictating policy in city halls and statehouses, found themselves begging for compensation and squirming to explain that their properties were actually worth far more than their declared tax value.

Tens of thousands of employees were put out of work as a consequence, and the new government made two responses to this. One was to absorb the unemployed in construction of the train network and of the sewage and other recycling facilities necessary to establish stable-state life systems. Some were also put to work dismantling allegedly hazardous or unpleasant relics of the old order, like gas stations. The other move was to adopt 20 hours as the basic work week—which, in effect, doubled the number of jobs but virtually halved individual income. (There were, for several years, rigid price controls on all basic foods and other absolute necessities.)

Naturally, the transition period that ensued was hectic—though many people also remember it as exciting. It is alleged by many who lived through those times that no one suffered seriously from lack of food, shelter, clothing, or medical treatment—though some discomfort was widespread, and there were gross dislocations in the automobile and related industries, in the schools, and in some other social functions. Certainly many citizens were deprived of hard-earned comforts they had been used to: their cars, their prepared and luxury foods, their habitual new clothes and appliances, their many efficient service industries. These disruptions were

especially severe on middle-aged people—though one now elderly man told me that he had been a boy in Warsaw during World War II, had lived on rats and moldy potatoes, and found the Ecotopian experience relatively painless. To the young, the disruptions seem to have had a kind of wartime excitement—and indeed sacrifices may have been made more palatable by the fear of attack from the United States. It is said by some, however, that the orientation of the new government toward basic biological survival was a unifying and reassuring force. Panic food hoarding, it is said, was rare. (The generosity with food which is such a feature of Ecotopian life today may have arisen at that time.)

Of course the region that comprises Ecotopia had natural advantages that made the transition easier. Its states had more doctors per capita, a higher educational level, a higher percentage of skilled workers, a greater number of engineers and other technicians, than most other parts of the Union. Its major cities, without exception, were broadly based manufacturing and trade complexes that produced virtually all the necessities of life. Its universities were excellent, and its resources for scientific research included a number of the top-notch facilities in the United States. Its temperate climate encouraged an outdoor style of life, and made fuel shortages caused by ecological policies an annoyance rather than the matter of life or death they would have been in the severe eastern winters. The people were unusually well versed in nature and conservation lore, and experienced in camping and survival skills.

We cannot, however, ignore the political context in which the transition took place. As Ecotopian militants see the situation, by the last decade of the old century American control over the underdeveloped world had crumbled. American troops had failed to hold Vietnam, and the impoverished peoples of many other satellite countries were rebelling too. Evading Congressional controls, the U.S. administration continued secret wars against these uprisings, and the burden of outlays for an enormous arms establishment caused a profound long-term decline in the world competitiveness of American civilian industry. A slow drop in per capita income led to widespread misery, increased tension between rich and poor, and ended citizen confidence in economic gains; for a

time, wildcat strikes and seizures of plants by workers required the almost constant mobilization of the National Guard. After the abortive antipollution efforts of the early seventies, the toll of death and destruction had resumed its climb. Energy crises had bred economic disruption and price gouging. And chronic Washington scandals had greatly reduced faith in central government.

"All this," one Ecotopian told me, "convinced us that if we wished to survive we had to take matters into our own hands." I pointed out that this had always been the claim of conspiratorial revolutionaries, who presume to act in the name of the majority, but take care not to allow the majority to have any real power. "Well," he replied, "things were clearly not getting any better—so people really were ready for change. They were literally sick of bad air, chemicalized foods, lunatic advertising. They turned to politics because it was finally the only route to self-preservation." "So," I replied, "in order to follow an extremist ecological program, millions of people were willing to jeopardize their whole welfare, economic and social?"

"Their welfare wasn't doing so well, at that point," he said. "Something had to be done. And nobody else was doing it. Also"—he shrugged, and grinned—"we were very lucky." This gallows humor, which reminds me of the Israelis or Viennese, is common in Ecotopia. Perhaps it helps explain how the whole thing happened.

*(May 13) Mysteriously, the Ecotopians do not feel 'separate' from their technology. They evidently feel a little as the Indians must have felt: that the horse and the teepee and the bow and arrow all sprang, like the human being, from the womb of nature, organically. Of course the Ecotopians work on natural materials far more extensively and complexly than the Indians worked stone into arrowpoint, or hide into teepee. But they treat materials in the same spirit of respect, comradeship. The other day I stopped to watch some carpenters working on a building. They marked and sawed the wood lovingly (using their own muscle power, not our saws). Their nail patterns, I noticed, were beautifully placed*

and their rhythm of hammering seemed patient, almost placid. When they raised wood pieces into place, they held them carefully, fitted them (they make many joints by notching as well as nailing). They seemed almost to be collaborating with the wood rather than forcing it into the shape of a building. . . .

Got a strange call on the hotel phone last night, from a gruff-sounding man who asked if he and a couple of friends could see me. He had his phone picture switched off to start, but after I said I'd be glad to talk to him, he turned it on. We met at a coffeehouse he suggested, which turned out to have the atmosphere of a men's club: dark wood panelling, newspapers on racks along the wall, beer, good coffee, pastries. They started out by saying how pleased they were to hear of my visit, and that they hoped relations between the two countries would now begin to improve.

This was news: no Ecotopians I've met so far have seemed to give much of a damn about relations with the U.S. one way or the other. I began to study my companions more closely. They were evidently businessmen of some kind—there is a way in which business people tend to assume proprietorship which seemed familiar. I began to see who they probably were: the Opposition!

The gruff one introduced us all. Then, rather gingerly, they began to explain their position: that, while many of the ecological reforms of the new government were of course necessary and desirable, others stifled their spirit of enterprise. "The economy, as you have seen by now, has been going downhill steadily. It's terrible, what we have lost. Worse, we are on a collision course with the U.S."

"How is that?" I asked.

"Let's face it. We are a small nation on the periphery of a very large one. Persisting in this ecological craziness will sooner or later lead to an armed conflict, and we will be wiped out. We know what you did to Vietnam, what you're doing now in Brazil. Our atomic mines might turn out to be a bluff. Then it could happen here too."

"So what can you do?"

"We could take a softer line—make a few compromises. We're

excited by your coming because it could lead to resumption of normal relations between the two countries. From that, we could see the exchange of pilot plants, to show what happens when you let the managers manage—and gradually a growth of economic interdependence. In time, we could get our economy going again on modern lines."

"Isn't the Progressive Party working in that direction?"

There was a pause. "Yes, but they only put up a token struggle. They pay lip service to the idea of change, but when it comes to real changes, they drag their feet. They're really almost as bad as the Survivalists. We've just about given up on them."

"So what are you going to do?"

They shifted uneasily. "We have great hopes from your visit, first of all. We urge you to speak for the idea of normalization of relations, here and when you get back to Washington. We hope that will get things moving. But we also want you to know that we are prepared to fight for our ideas."

I looked at them, startled. "Fight?"

They looked back, very solemnly, and then must have decided to take their big chance. "We have been led to believe that the U.S. government supports clandestine groups in countries with governments thought to be unfriendly. The time is coming when normal means of political action may no longer serve. Ecotopia has to be made to realize that it must change course. We are ready for anything. But we need help."

"You aren't afraid of being taken simply for American agents?"

"It's a chance we'll have to take. We would of course ask for materials that can't be traced to U.S. sources." It was my turn to pause. "You mean you are asking for explosives, guns?" They looked at me a little disappointed. "Of course. We will then be in a position to dramatize that the present course has unacceptable costs. There is only one way to do that."

"Well," I said, "you must realize I am a journalist, not a CIA agent!" They smiled politely but skeptically. "However, I suppose I could pass on what you have told me to people who might be interested. How much popular support can you demonstrate for your proposed actions?"

"You know how people are—they go along with what's popular at the time, even when it's against their own best interests. But dramatic action will generate immense enthusiasm."

I looked them over. They are not a terribly convincing lot of prospective terrorists—but then probably that's the way most any terrorists look. A couple of them are over 50, people who in the U.S. would be members of Rotary or country club—normal, productive citizens—but here find themselves misfits. A couple are young, hot-eyed, resentful, dangerous. —How they got that way, I have no idea, but they would probably be against the regime whatever it was or did. So far, I see no signs they would have any substantial social backing. All the same, I made notes of how they can be found. Coming out of the coffeeshop, we could have been businessmen who had just worked out a division of the territory. . . .

(May 15) Marissa Brightcloud. A self-adopted Indian-inspired name—many Ecotopians use them. Met me at train yesterday, to bring me to the forest camp where I am to observe lumbering and forestry practices for a few days. Assumed at first she must be some kind of PR or government person. Later learned she is one of seven members of elected committee that runs camp and tens of thousands of acres of forest. Strong, warmly physical woman—slender but with solid hips; dark curly hair, large intense eyes. I'd guess at an Italian family background. It was still damp morning—she wore a rough knitted sweater, denim pants, some kind of hiking or work shoes. Only decoration a light silk scarf at her neck—flowery, subtle pattern.

She had arranged bicycles for us. Panic: I haven't been on a bike in years! Wobbly at first. She watched me get onto it again with calm amusement, then we headed out through the station town and into the woods. She said little, but watched me curiously. Once we stopped on a hill, at a good view over a tract of forest. She gestured, then put a hand on my arm, as if awaiting my reaction. Nice forest, but all I could think of to say was, "Beautiful view." She looked at me a trifle impatiently, as if wondering what kind of person I could be, anyway.

"This forest is my home," she said quietly. "I feel best when

I'm among trees. Open country always seems alien to me. Our chimp ancestors had the right idea. Among trees you're safe, you can be free." This with a mysterious smile.

I could think of no reply. She pedaled off. Seemed faster—or was I just getting tired? Had a little trouble keeping up, thought I concealed it. Finally we reached the camp.

It's a group of ramshackle buildings in a grove of very large trees. Old and unpainted, but with a certain sturdy grace, like old summer camps, arranged erratically around large central mess-hall meeting-room building. Off at one side a barn filled with machinery, beyond that an open nursery area of many acres, with thousands of tiny trees sprouting. The whole place foresty-smelling, as of needles slowly decomposing into a springy layer of humus underfoot. Light filtering down through the great trees—strange, soft atmosphere—made me feel a little odd, like a dark church.

As we arrived, several dozen people poured out of the buildings to greet us. A visitor is an event for them, evidently. Marissa stood rather protectively beside me as they came up and surrounded us. Barrage of questions—what I've seen so far, where I live in the U.S., what I want to see here, what is my favorite tree (all I could think of was "Christmas tree"—botany was not a good subject for me—but it got appreciative laughs). Wisecracks about how I don't look like much of a lumberjack. Suddenly realized that about half the group are women. Assumed at the time they must deal chiefly with the nursery and the planting of young trees; later learned they also cut trees, operate tractors, and drive big diesels.

"Before we show him our work, our guest must have his bath," Marissa declared with a smile. Led me away for the ceremonial bath with which Ecotopians greet people who come to stay with them—even if, like me, they've only been an hour on the way. More talkative now. She has lived in this camp for several years, but has an occasional month in the city—part vacation and part a change-of-pace assignment, evidently. Obviously very hard-working person. At the same time lively and female, rather mischievous about the members of the camp crew who are city people doing their "forest service." Before people can buy a large quantity of lumber (for instance to build a house) they are obliged to put in a

period of some months of labor in a forest camp—planting trees, caring for the forest lands, and supposedly setting in motion the new growth that will one day replace the wood they are buying. (Poetic but foolish notion—though it may make people have a better attitude toward lumber resources.)

She wanted to know whether I had a family, who made up my household (seemed surprised that I didn't even live with wife and children, much less grandparents, cousins, friends, colleagues, but in my own place, 30 miles away, all by myself, though I spend a good deal of time with another woman). Asked what my pleasures were—a question I found hard to answer frankly, but I tried, and her curiosity made it seem easier. "First a sense of power—of reaching out to people, to masses of them and to key people who can act—through my work. Then feelings of craftsmanship in my writing, of intelligence, of knowing I have the background and the originality to grasp strange events and put them into perspective. And love of luxury, or at least fine things: eating in the best restaurants, wearing the best clothes, being seen with the best people." Marissa interrupted teasingly, "Is your woman friend one of the best people?"

"Well, in a way. Or rather, the best people like her a great deal, even though she is not really one of them."

The bath house is a couple of hundred yards off in the woods. By the time we got there the conversation had taken an oddly personal turn. "You haven't mentioned pleasures between yourself and other people, men or women. Don't you have friends, don't you like to love people?" "Well, of course!" I replied, feeling taken off guard. She opened the door to the bath house, and led me into the dark interior, holding my hand. Turned on the bath water tap, threw some more wood on the heating fire, gave me a warm, wry smile, came nearer, put a hand on my shoulder. "Do you want to make love with me?"

I have been feeling frustrated the last few days, but her assertiveness unnerved me a moment. She's not at all submissive or attentive. She just wanted to get close to me, to play, and to make love. I figured this will happen after the bath, but found myself

pushed down onto the wood floor of the bath house. Jesus, I said to myself, this woman is stronger than I am!

But I mustered my forces, rolled her over. We were both instantly very excited. She giggled at the rapid fumbling we did with our clothes. We got enough of them off to manage—she looking at me intensely now, no more smiles. Her legs are muscular; as I went into her she wrapped them tightly around me. It was hard and brief and sweaty; her sexual odors are powerful. I lost consciousness of the hard floor beneath, and of the hot water steadily running into the huge round tub. Afterward she laughed and disengaged herself. "That was nice," she said; "I guessed you wouldn't mind some contact, when I met you at the train." She looked at me curiously. "Did you think of making a move when I stopped to show you the forest? I know a nice spot there, and I thought—"

"I guess I still felt like too much of a guest to focus on anything like that."

"Well, I thought of it. I liked you, you're a serious person, even if you're not a great bicyclist! You just seemed so—distracted or something. Anyway, we don't make that much of a distinction about guests. You're expected to join into everything. We'll have you at work tomorrow. Now I'll show you how we wash."

We scrubbed each other with an odd-shaped sponge, using a dishpan to scoop water from the tub. (There seems to be no shower.) Then we climbed in to soak, Marissa smiling contentedly. Seemed to me a ravishing presence in a way I have never before encountered. Not exactly beautiful, at least by my usual standards. But sometimes, when she looks at me, my hair stands up as if I'm confronting a creature who's wild and incomprehensible, animal and human at once. Eyes dark brown, hard to fathom. She was a little rough as we splashed around in the water—bit me, jumped away. Finally realized she wanted me to stop being gentle with her. Kept relapsing into a kind of silly tenderness. She'd bring me out of it with a push or a bite.

This got very exciting. Eyes shining, she leapt out of tub and ran out the door, dripping. I looked after her, surprised. She jumped back in the door, did a comic but enticing little dance, out the door,

laughing, in again, and never saying a word. I sprang out and after her, down a forest path. She's damn fast, and also good at dodging around trees. We got into deeper forest. Suddenly, ducking around a particularly huge redwood tree, she disappeared into a hollow at its base. Springing in after her, I found myself in some kind of shrine. She was lying there on a bed of needles, taking deep, gasping breaths. Dimly visible, suspended on the charred inside of the tree, were charms and pendants made of bone and teeth and feathers, gleaming polished stones. It was as if I was being sucked into the tree, into some powerful spirit, and I fell on her as if I were falling freely through the soft air from a great height, through darkness, my reportorial self floating away.

*We must have made love for hours. Cannot describe. Will not.*

Finally we got up and returned to bath house, Marissa pausing as we left the tree, mumbling something I couldn't catch. Dawned on me that it was a prayer of some kind and that this incredible woman is a goddamn druid or something—a tree-worshipper!

My feet hardly touched the ground as we went back to camp. When we got there everyone was in mess hall having lunch. Noisy, cheerful scene, big long tables. People smiled at us, made room. (Couple of women didn't smile—but looked me over appraisingly, or so it seemed. Are they all like Marissa, I wonder?)

Later in day, talking with one of the men, learned that Marissa has a reputation for being one of the most responsible and hard-working people on the executive committee. Difficult for me to focus on that side of her personality, even though I saw her operating in that role later in the afternoon. It turns out she has a regular lover in the camp. But has somehow arranged it so she can be with me during my stay. Lover is blond, shy, blushes a lot about other things but doesn't seem at all jealous about his woman having made love with me. Evidently there are other women he can console himself with! Wasn't sure till nightfall who would sleep with whom. But she came to the little cabin I'm assigned to, quite unanxious about the whole situation.

*What we do sexually is different from anything that has ever happened to me. Now that the beginning is over, we are utterly*

relaxed. We hug, we wrestle, we lie absolutely quietly looking at each other, we touch each other with feathery touches that are sometimes erotic and sometimes not. There seems to be no agenda: I feel no compulsion to fuck her, though she is enormously desirable to me. She never says in words whether anything pleases her or not. It's as if the whole American psychodrama of mutual suspicion between the sexes, demands and counterdemands and our desperate working at sex like a problem to be solved, has left my head. Everything comes from our feelings. Sometimes there is excitement in a mere look. Sometimes we get to almost terrifying orgasmic climaxes. But one doesn't really seem more important than the other. In any case, what happens between us is so extraordinary that I find myself utterly unconcerned with her regular lover, or what she might do with him.

Only one thing I don't like: she won't let me use my mouth on her breasts. "You're not a baby," she said, and pushed me away, moving my hand onto one of them instead: they are firm, fit my hand perfectly, very sensitive to arousal. "Have you had any children?" I asked. "Not yet," she said, "but I will soon." "With Everett?" "Oh, no! We're just good friends—fucking partners, not mates." "How will you find your mate?" She shrugged. "What a question! Don't you know?"

I thought about Pat. "I believed I knew, once, but we turned out to be just—well, living partners. We had two children, but then we broke up." "That must be terribly hard for the children, in your country? It's bad enough here, where children have many others besides their parents to love them." "Yes, it is. If I was doing it again I wouldn't leave." She looked at me—I thought approvingly—in the dim light that filtered through the forest canopy and into the cabin. Then she gave me a hug, and turned over to go to sleep.

generally. Ben lost no chance to point out how Americans and their technology had been in the forefront of this tragic and irreversible process. And indeed I hadn't realized how far it has gone: it is a horrible story. Our role in it was heavy, and thousands of marvelous creatures that once inhabited this earth have now vanished from the universe forever. We have gobbled them up in our relentless increase. There are now 40 times more weight of humans on the earth than of all the wild mammals together!

Marissa mostly stared at the displays of whale life (Ecotopians have incredible wildlife photographers—they must literally live with the species they are filming—though as far as I can tell Ecotopians don't take ordinary snapshots of our quick-freeze-the-moment type.) It turns out she has swum with dolphins, but won't say much about the experience except that it was enormously exciting and quite scary.

On the way back we passed shrimp boats and other small fishing craft—apparently the Bay, once an open cesspool, has again become the fertile habitat which estuaries naturally are (thus my ardent informant). Was proudly told how many metric tons of tiny, succulent Bay shrimp are consumed and shipped out daily; even clams, whose shells the local Indians once piled into huge refuse mounds, have returned to the mudflats.

Windblown, a little sunstruck, a little drunk, we returned at dusk to the Cove and to bed. "Ben's really a good brother to have, but I've never been able to get him to know where to stop," Marissa said apologetically. (I had noticed her lecturing him on the dock as we were stowing the boat's gear away.) "He cares about me a lot, even if I've never gotten him to understand me. He never likes to see me taking risks. It's a relic of the family past, I guess—when women supposedly had no independence at all. But without taking risks, I wouldn't feel I was alive." She smiled at me, with a sweet but inscrutable coppanionableness, and lay down in my arms.

What can I possibly mean to this incredible woman? She evades my questions about what she thinks of me. When she is back at the lumber camp, she evidently sleeps and lives with Everett as before; yet little by little, she spends more of her free time with me. Yet she makes good-humored fun of me, correcting my ecological mistakes

(like wasting wash water or electricity) as if she was the highly advanced person and I a kind of bumpkin, not yet fully acclimated to civilized life.

Sometimes, when I say something about how Ecotopians, or she herself appear to me, she becomes very quiet and attentive. The other night I mentioned their way of holding eye contact for what seems to me excessively long times, and how this stirred up feelings it is hard for me to handle. "What feelings?" she asked. "Nervousness, a desire for relief, to look away for a while." "And if you withstand the nervousness and go on looking?" (All this, of course, with her great dark eyes intent upon mine.) "Then I guess tenderness, and a desire to touch.—It makes me afraid I'll cry." "You strange person—of course you can cry!" She gave me a long, strong hug.

I had to explain. "Not in our country! Maybe here you can teach me, though. I don't have to be so guarded here with you." "All right," she said, a faint puzzlement in her eyes. Can I be, for her, some kind of Mysterious Stranger—exotic in spite of myself?



## SAVAGERY RESTORED: ECOTOPIA'S DARK SIDE

Marshall-by-the-Bay, May 24. After much negotiation, I have now been permitted to observe that monstrous custom which has inspired so much horror toward Ecotopia among civilized nations: the Ritual War Games. Yesterday I became, so far as I know, the first American ever to witness this chilling spectacle. My companions and I rose before dawn and took a train north from San Francisco to the town of Marshall. Then a walk of 20 minutes (passing two of the small homemade shrines that dot the Ecotopian landscape) brought us to a hill overlooking a rolling, open piece of country with a creek flowing through it down to the marshy edge of the water.

When we got there, preparations for the ritual were well under



way. Two bands of young men had gathered, one on each side of the creek. Perhaps 25 were on each side. Each group had built a fire, and prepared some kind of drink in a large cauldron—apparently a stimulant to anesthetize themselves against the terrors to come. Each man (they ranged from about 16 to 30) had a large, dangerous spear, with a point of sharpened black stone. And each man was painting himself with colors, in primitive, fierce designs.

After a time, when several hundred spectators had gathered, a signal was given on a large gong. At this, the spectators became tense and silent. The "warriors" deployed along both banks of the creek, taking up positions about a spear-length apart. One group, seeming more aggressive, began a war chant that sounded quite blood-thirsty, though also perhaps a bit reminiscent of our athletic cheers. When the other side seemed to hesitate and back off from the creek, the aggressive group crossed it, brandishing their spears, and began a series of rushes up the other side.

The defenders, however, could not be panicked. Whenever a number of attackers pressed hard against one of their men, his neighbors gathered to his defense, shouting and bringing their spears to bear, and this flexible, fluid, shifting pattern of offense and defense seemed to prevail all along the line. Occasionally a group would gather and rush at the opponents' line. But this rush would soon be countered, though often at the cost of very close calls with the sharp obsidian blades.

This went on, with much shouting and the crowd growing increasingly excited, for perhaps half an hour—the warriors returning occasionally to their cauldrons for refreshment. Then suddenly a scream went up from one end of the line. My attention had been elsewhere, so I did not actually see the fatal blow, but others later told me a warrior had slipped on the grass during one of the rushes, and an opponent had seized the chance and managed to run a spear entirely through his shoulder.

At this, all hostilities miraculously ceased. The two tribes retreated to their original positions. Partisans of the "winning" side appeared joyful, almost ecstatic, slapping and hugging each other; the losers' partisans were downcast. Doctors appeared from among

the onlookers, and began attending to the wounded man. There was a lot of blood on the grass, but from comments around me I gathered that the victim was not in grave medical danger despite his nasty wound.

The victors now began a dance of celebration. Their partisans came down the hill to join them. Musicians struck up, and dancing began. The warriors shared their cauldron with all, in an atmosphere of excited jubilation. Some of the leading warriors on the winning side went off with women into the bushes. On the losing side there appeared to be a good deal of lamentation, crying, and writhing around. After a time the fires were stoked up again, food was brought out, and a feast began to take shape. This was held at the camp of the winners; they magnanimously offered to feed the defeated side—who accepted deferentially.

I learned that an ambulance which had been standing by would shortly carry away the wounded man (now neatly bandaged up) so I went over to speak to him. They had laid him out on a kind of stretcher made of red cloth with a white cross on it. His body was arranged in a startlingly crucifix-like way, with straps on wrists and ankles. Several women leaned over the stretcher, moaning and from time to time wiping his forehead with a damp rag.

"Oh, how you have suffered!" cried one. "I have done a man's thing," he replied, in a rather rote tone. "Your poor body has been hurt, you might have died!" the women said. "Do not think of me, think of our family: I bear wounds for them." "We all suffer!"

At this, the young man looked at them in an almost pitying way. "It is finished," he said quietly, and closed his eyes. From the way he spoke, I thought for a moment that the doctors had been mistaken, and he was dying. But apparently it was just a signal for the women to leave him—for after they did, he opened his eyes again and looked around in perfectly cheery spirits.

I seized the opportunity and went up to him. "How do you feel?"

"I feel like a man," he said, relapsing into his former rote manner. "Once more I have survived." "Can you tell me what the

fighting was about?" "It was us against them, of course, to see who would win." "No other reason?"

He gave me a curious look. "It also is to test ourselves—don't you understand how good it feels to be frightened, and come through?" "Would you do it all over again?" "Sure. We will do it again, probably on the second full moon from now. —Are you a stranger?"

"I'm an American newspaper reporter," I said, "writing articles for my paper. Can I take your picture?" I pulled out my camera, expecting no objection, but the young man replied, "NO! Absolutely not! Have you no decency?" At this a group of men nearby turned toward us in a menacing way.

"Excuse me," I said, realizing I had made a serious blunder. I put the camera away quickly. (Later I learned that Ecotopians think photography has a dark-magic side, as a way of trying to freeze time—to cheat biology and defy change and death, so it would be especially out of place at such a time.) The Ecotopians, however, did not leave it at that. One of the older men asked me to come and sit beside him. He offered me a meat-stuffed pastry, and proceeded to lecture me on the meaning of the war games I had been witnessing.

Ecotopians, he began, had always regarded anthropology as a field with great practical importance. After Independence they had begun to experiment in adapting anthropological hypotheses to real life. It was only over a great deal of resistance that a radical idea such as ritual warfare had become legally practicable, even with the ingenuity of the best lawyers. But its advocates had persisted, convinced as they were that it was essential to develop some kind of open civic expression for the physical competitiveness that seemed to be inherent in man's biological programming—and otherwise came out in perverse forms, like war.

They hoped that Ecotopians would not be forced to fight any actual wars, since they knew the utter destruction that would result. On the other hand, it seemed indisputable that man was not a creature built for a totally and routinely peaceful life. Young men, especially, needed a chance to combat "the others," to charge and flee, to test their comradeship, to put their beautiful resources of

speed and strength to use, to let their adrenalin flow, to be brave and to be fearful. "In America," my companion pointed out with a smug grin, "you accomplish some of the same objectives with your wars and your automobiles. They let you be competitive and aggressive and allowed to risk smashing each other. Of course, you also have professional football. But it is only a spectator sport—and besides, the players do not possess lethal weapons. Though I admit we took some ideas from it."

He went on to argue that Ecotopian ritual war games actually result in very few fatalities—something like 50 young men die in the games each year, a figure he insisted on comparing with our highway toll of about 75,000 a year and our war dead, which tend to average out to around 5,000 a year. It appears, by the way, that women never participate in the war games; but before our feminist militants leap on this point, they should know that the games were established as part of the Survivalist Party's generally cooperation-oriented program, and that Ecotopians prefer to focus women's competitiveness in other ways: through contests for political leadership, through organizing work—at which women are believed to excel—and through rivalry over men to father their children.

It is thus chiefly young men who participate in the games, and the meets are set up largely between neighboring groups, something like our high-school athletic contests but on an even smaller scale. The game today, for instance, was between two communes that occupy neighboring territories. One group raises sheep for wool and cows for milk; the other "farms" oysters in an estuary of the Bay. Apparently in the cities competition is usually between neighborhoods or work groups—factory against factory, store against store, as happens in our industrial bowling leagues. However, there are no leagues, pennants, and so forth. Each ritual session is a self-contained event, an end in itself.

"What about the cross?" I asked.

"Well, Ecotopia came into existence with a Judeo-Christian heritage," was the reply. "We make the best of it. You will find many expressions of it in our culture still. In this case, obviously the young man is indeed suffering for his family or 'tribe.' We have a lot of poetry and music that focuses precisely on this

suffering, as well as on courage and bravery. There's also a little ceremony for when a wounded man comes back from hospital. You might guess what it's called: the raising. He stands up and walks."

It is clear, thus, that the abhorrent spectacle of fine young men deliberately trying to kill each other is a semi-religious rite and a practice not lightly instituted, no matter what we Americans may think of it. It may indeed have antecedents in the institution of bullfighting, in football, in the Mass, or in the ritual wars of savage tribes. But its senseless violence, the letting of blood without a justifying cause, must surely remain a blot on Ecotopia's name among civilized nations.

(May 25) *Goddamn woman is impossible! Got really turned on at the war games—stayed beside me during the fighting, explaining it to me in low, excited voice. Then afterward rushed away to the cauldron, drank an enormous cupful, looked around in an inviting fashion, and made no resistance when one of the winning warriors came up, propositioned her, and literally carried her away. (She weighs about 130, as I happen to know, but this didn't faze him.) Not a glance in my direction.*

*Later, when rest of us were eating, she sauntered back, flushed and sweaty. Ignored my obvious ill humor. Later, when we went back to the Marshall hotel, she was relaxed and floppy, and I tossed her around on the bed a little roughly, wouldn't let her up, more or less raped her. She seemed almost to have expected this. I felt odd when it began, confused between hatred and desire, but then they merged in a kind of hard, tightly holding embrace—a welcoming back on her part, and a deep acceptance of her on mine. I love her freeness, even when it hurts.*

*Just before waking up and writing the war-games story, had awful dream about it. Myself all painted up, ready for battle. Body greased and shining and beautiful—feel very alive, very strong. Women smile from the sidelines, I want to make love to all of them.*

*Then there's a terrible gong sound—reverberates in my head, and panic strikes. Grab my spear and rush off with the other men. But when we get to the fighting line and begin to feint and jab, suddenly they turn and look at me with amazement, realizing I am not one of them. Then utter despair seizes me, for I know this means they will not fight for me: I am not one of their Tribe, and I am out there alone, exposed to the sharp spears of the enemy, and my time has come. . . .*

*Woke up sweating, hands clutched tight on dream spear. Wished I was home safe in New York.*

*Savages!*

## THEIR PLASTICS AND OURS

San Francisco, May 25. One surprising similarity between Ecotopia and contemporary America is that they both use huge amounts of plastics. At first I took this as a sign that our ways of life have not diverged so drastically after all. However, closer investigation has revealed that, despite surface resemblances, the two countries use plastics in totally different ways.

Ecotopian plastics are entirely derived from living biological sources (plants) rather than from fossilized ones (petroleum and coal) as most of ours are. Intense research effort went into this area directly after Independence, and it contraries. According to my informants, there were two major objectives. One was to produce the plastics, at low cost and in a wide range of types: light, heavy, rigid, flexible, clear, opaque, and so on—and to produce them with a technology that was not itself a pollutant. The other objective was to make them all *biodegradable*, that is, susceptible to decay. This meant that they could be returned to the fields as fertilizer, which would nourish new crops, which in turn could be made into new plastics—and so on indefinitely, in what the Ecotopians call, with almost religious fervor, a "stable-state system."