

Interview with John Zerzan

■ Arthur Versluis, *Michigan State University*

John Zerzan (born 1943) is the most prominent living American anarchist and primitivist philosopher. His works criticize modern civilization as inherently oppressive, and encourage modern people to draw on “primitive” ways of life in developing new cultures. His rhetorical attacks on modernity are intense and extend beyond technology to even more basic elements of civilization, like domestication, language, symbolic thought (such as mathematics and art), and the concept of time. His books include *Elements of Refusal* (1988), *Future Primitive and Other Essays* (1994), *Against Civilization: A Reader* (1998), and *Running on Emptiness* (2002). He has published articles in *Telos*, *Green Anarchy*, and *Fifth Estate*, and is widely published on the web. He has been featured in articles in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, and he has been influential both in intellectual and in activist circles for several decades. According to a recent article on him in *Orion* magazine, his thought is the wellspring for much contemporary radical activism. We spoke with him in a café during his visit to Michigan in the spring of 2007. It is perhaps symbolic that our digital voice recorder broke just prior to the interview, and the two substitute recorders also malfunctioned during the interview. Nonetheless, the conversation provides insight into Zerzan’s thought and into how he came to his radical ecological critique of contemporary technological society.

AV: Maybe we should start by talking about the fact that we are so enmeshed in technological society. Even coming here, we had to go back and forth by email and through cell phones. We’re dependent on machinery and on getting the digital voice recorder to function for the interview. There is a comical

element, in some respects, to the degree to which we're immersed in this technology. I wondered what sorts of remarks you might have about that?

JZ: That's for sure—there is an ever greater amount of mediations. People have brought up the question of direct experience and what's happening to it with the welter of technological mediations, because you can't do anything now that isn't technologically mediated. How do you get out of this morass? Think about the technoculture and how enveloping it is. That's probably the central question: If you come up with an indictment against it, then, well, what are you going to do about it?

I am an editor of *Green Anarchy* magazine, and we use the computer in every respect, from the layout, and of course the email that you mentioned—all of it. I resent it, having to get email, since a few years ago, but there is no way around it. Of course, then one is subjected to that very criticism. I was in London a few years ago, and a guy jumped up and starting yelling, "How did you get here, how did you get here, did you swim here, did you swim here?" I said, "Oh no, I took a big smelly jet, of course I didn't swim here—no, you got me." We are all part of this: these contradictions are here, like it or not. I could go live in a cave, as some people have suggested, but I am trying to be a part of the dialogue, trying to make some kind of contribution here. So that is just the nature of the reality that we are in.

AV: One of the questions that I have concerning that, though, is how one practically moves toward what you see as a more stable way of existing in the world, or a more balanced one, given the pervasiveness of the machinery. You have written recently that Marxism is dead, and that there may be some liberatory potential from the death of the Left as a whole. Ideologically one can understand that, but on a practical level I'm not seeing how one gets from A to B. In other words, what kind of transitional framework or means do you see to achieve the society you envision?

JZ: That's just a profound challenge: how to make a break from our contemporary, technological society. Marxism is on the side of the whole of the technological imperative, going back to one of the core aspects of it, which is production. Baudrillard pointed out in the *Mirror of Production* that Marxism is just like the bourgeoisie, in terms of wanting more technology, and wanting to constantly expand the means of production. That's the definition of progress; it's not in opposition. But when you raise the question of resisting it or wanting something qualitatively different—returning to the earth if you

will, or reconnecting with the natural world, that sort of thing—you come up right against that. How could you get away from modernity, when we are just held hostage in every single way? From health to communication to anything else, shelter and so forth and so on.

To me the ultimate thing is that it isn't going to change until people decide that it's not worth it. I don't think that is conceivably that far off. There is a barrenness about all of this movement, there is something that is just zapping the life out of social existence, out of society. We are seeing all kinds of signs of this, it seems to me, and it's not a happy thing. Of course, people aren't going to listen to anarchists or anyone else on a technophobic level or line of attack—no, nobody is interested. I don't think that's really what is afoot. It's just stripping away so much that's just not paying off. There are so many ways, I think, of already seeing that ours is not a vibrant life or culture. It's just becoming more and more empty and desolate. There are two parts of this. One aspect is the ecocidal: the disaster to the physical environment that is looming so sharply in front of us, picking up speed. Global warming, to use that euphemism, and the accelerating extinction of species.

On the other level, which is to me even more compelling, are the school shootings, the everyday stuff of how many drugs do you need to get through the day? I could go on for hours on that too. What part of this is healthy? What part of this has a future in terms of the personal psyche or soul or the physical environment and all the things in between? It's not working out too well and everyone says, "Well, it's inevitable, it's just the inexorable movement of modernity." Well yeah, it is, but I don't think it's irresistible at all. I think we're going to be seeing less and less—people are less and less enamored right now, it strikes me.

AV: I think it's true there's activity—publication of works, your own included, but also other works by people like Derrick Jensen, for example, and a variety of others—publications like *Green Anarchy* that are highly critical of industrial civilization or industrial society. Jensen is quite explicit in the recent volume of *Endgame*. He comes out and espouses anarchist cells, which would go forth and blow up dams, for example; he proposes attempts to actually bring down the system. He argues about potentially, for instance, how 50 or 60 people might end or bring down significant parts of the entire technological apparatus. I wondered what your thoughts were about that, because it gets to this question of means of transition? What are your thoughts about Jensen—and to a lesser extent Kaczynski—but we might stick with Jensen because it's quite recent?

JZ: That book, the two-volume *Endgame*, is pretty recent. Derrick is a friend and colleague, but I think actually in a way he is arguing for a technological solution. Jensen feels that the whole apparatus, the whole web, of modern technology is so interdependent and vulnerable, and I think that's true: one satellite missing can throw off enormous repercussions. But I think the question of civilization really is more a matter of what people want in relationships, rather than whether or not the system can function at the same level if some parts of it are dismantled. I mean, I am not saying that is an uninteresting question, that's part of it too—we could talk about the Earth Liberation Front and so forth—but I don't think the ultimate solution lays in that way. I think the real thing is what people want, what people are satisfied with. If they want technology, then it will be resurrected. Forty or 50 people can't stop society from reestablishing it. Of course right now I would say that probably, sadly enough, that is probably exactly what people would do. Well, we can't do without this and that, that is what everybody on the Right and the Left agrees upon.

I guess I put more faith or more of my energy in terms of dialogue. If people start making some of these things public and demanding that they become politics or antipolitics or whatever you call it, then we might be able to move forward with the new kind of public dialogue or conversation that puts these things on the table. I'm hopeful that that can happen, and I think reality will almost force that to happen as it's unfolding. I just feel like, I certainly respect Derrick's thinking, but my emphasis is a little different. Some people are virtually giving up on what happens in society with the greater number of people and what they still desire or don't desire. To me that's a pivotal thing.

AV: I understand your doubts, because Jensen's book presents anarchist violence as if it's a new idea, and yet actually the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reveal a history of cells and attempts to usher in a kind of violent transformation of society that didn't work. It wasn't part of what people desired broadly. What I am still working through, though, is what exactly—and I didn't get a clear sense of it from your earlier answer—what you envision as a more balanced society?

Your critique of domestication and of language—your critiques of the fundamental aspects of contemporary society, things that we take for granted—I think it's striking for how bracing it is and how deeply it goes. What I wonder though—and what my students have wondered as well—is what's on the other side of that? That is what I was pushing you towards in the earlier question,

and that's what I wanted to come back to, because it has to do, then, with transition to what exactly?

JZ: Well, I think the context is important with that. First of all, we're careening along toward, I would say, pretty certain disaster with population growing as it is, with China in hyperdrive, with industrialization. It's all speeding up, and the system has no answer—it's just going to be a horrendous result, I think that is unmistakable. So what are the things that make it go this way, and what would be the arresting features or the countervailing things that we would want to see, first to stop that disastrous end and also to reinstall life ways that did work?

For example, I am very inspired by the literature of the anthology and archaeology areas, which talk about, for example, band society—forager society, hunter-gather society—the only successful adaptation, in general terms, to living on the earth. With domestication and so forth, that adaptation was lost. We have been on a 10,000-year move toward this crisis that we are facing right now. So, a world without domestication would be to me a completely decentralized, deglobalized, depopulated world—otherwise you have a very negative turn of events. I think that population, for example, is more of an effect than a cause; it's more of a symptom of things like domestication. The population started going up with domestication, not the other way around. It used to be thought that, for example, when you have a certain number of mouths you have to feed, your mode of production has to keep up with that. So then you got to have agriculture because too many people. Well, we know now it didn't start going up until after agriculture; it's the other way around. So if you pull the plug on domestication—these are rough general statements here, but it seems to me it's logical that would pull the plug on the spiraling population thing. That needs a whole long discussion, I think, to really get into that, but I think that is part of it, or maybe the guts of it right there.

I'm not afraid of using that term “go back.” Everybody says we can't go back. Oh no, well, we want to go forward then, over the cliff? We better go back, or else this is hopeless. It has to do with that basic social institution, domestication, and also even, anterior to that, even more basic specialization, division of labor. If those are the alienating causes of all these things, well then, let's have less of that. Let's have radically, radically less of that. My personal thing is no domestication, because that's the domination of nature and its internal logic leads to what we have right now. As the late Paul Shepard pointed out to Gary Snyder, nanotechnology and all the *Brave New World* stuff—cloning, genetic engineering—it's all implicit in the first step. Jared

Diamond said the same thing: agriculture is the greatest mistake humanity ever made, and it sets us on this course. If you don't want to change that, then you have to accept the consequences.

You need a radical critique of that, you need to indict that and move to do something about that. Otherwise we are trapped in this ever-worsening, ever more empty ridiculous world that doesn't have any future, like it or not. I don't even know if I could deal with that on a personal level, but there it is. I also would say we should reconnect with the world and learn from the indigenous experiences in various ways. It would be more healthy and robust to just have a life that is in sync with our place on the planet.

AV: Well, certainly I know people who have undertaken life experiments. For example, my sister and her husband and their family live fairly close to a subsistence existence on 80 acres in northern Michigan. Have you undertaken experiments of that kind? Communal living or living in a more remote location?

JZ: Not really. I have certainly studied some of these, and I lived in a housing co-op in Eugene, Oregon, for 15 years. I haven't gone out there and actually walked the walk, but I am just so excited that people are doing that. Also resisting too; I mean, the agenda is for more and more and more of this—more superhighways, more high-speed trains, more dams, all of it, on any continent you want to look at. But you can also see the resistance, because this primitive stuff isn't just a theory somewhere; people are actually out there fighting progress. But no, I haven't done much of it, and I am sorry that I haven't. I am more of a writer, like Derrick, instead of doing these living experiments and really seeing how it works and how you do it: What is the so-called edible landscape, as some people have said? How have the indigenous people lived? How can you live on even a small area of the earth? Some people do that. Some of that is not so mysterious. Just take food: the average distance it travels is ever crazier; it's something like 1,500 miles now. That stuff could grow in your backyard, even though that concept of backyard is one we will probably dispense with, in my hope anyway. That's irrational. That isn't any way to live. That's just wasting everything; it's wasting people's time, it's polluting, it's wasting the energy. There is no sense to it, but the world system demands it. But that doesn't mean it's a rational way to feed people and feed yourself. When you start examining things, they are not givens, they are just crazy pseudo-solutions that are driving things worse, constantly getting worse. It's not some solution; in just

a few seconds of thinking about it, it shows you that. And yet people talk about antiglobalization. Is it okay if I go into that a bit?

You know the antiglobalization, or whatever happened to the antiglobalization movement? Well, there weren't any antiglobalization people that I can see. The reporter will come over and say at some of these big demonstration summit kind of things, "So why are you against globalization?" The answer is always, "We're not against globalization. We want the nice globalization from the bottom up." Well, those are other words for industrialization. If you want an industrial world, then you really have no fundamental problem with globalization. Sure you want to reform it, and that's fine, but that's not the answer. That's just the world system: it's been globalizing from the beginning. Do you have a real problem with it, or not? Some of us do: we don't want any globalization, period. You can say that's crazy, but this is why we think that.

AV: I wanted to talk a little bit, in exactly this vein, about globalization and the fate of the Left. There are different aspects to this that we could talk about. One is what your relationship was to the New Left, for example, or to Marxism, and for example, why you write about the liberatory potential within the death of the Left. I think that line of thought ties in with what you are talking about in terms of globalization. A case in point would be China, or communist China (so-called), and what sort of a hybrid creature that is exactly. It seems to me that what one sees in China at this point is not an alternative—for example, to the kind of thing you [are] decrying—but an even more intense example of it. So it comes back to the theme that we discussed at the very beginning, which is the pervasiveness of technology and the industrial system—globalization, and the fact that one can't avoid it. All of this—and here I am stepping back a little—all of the critique that you developed has come from, I think, a larger intellectual context. It emerges within the context of a rejection of half measures or missteps of the Left. I think that's a great deal of what I see within your work. So I wondered whether you would talk about the death of the Left in relation to globalization and some of these other themes?

JZ: I think it's a necessary step. It's in the way of what I think of as liberatory; the Left has always basically subscribed to more and more industrialization, more and more expanding the means of production. That's the heart of Marxism, as I said before. That break just seemingly cannot really be made. There is lip service, and some support here and there to whoever it is, maybe its victims, but the Left just doesn't take that on. Globalization is a good case

in point. Well, we have to have all this: We have to have the modern world. We have to have the modern technology apparatus ensemble. Oh, well then: Do you want to go down in the mine? Do you want to have a more mass-production-oriented world? There is a fundamental choice here.

One of my favorite little pithy proverbs is Walter Benjamin's "Mass production is the production of the masses." There are thousands of books obviously about all the problems of mass society. How about one that says: okay, let's get rid of it? If you like mass society, you do everything you can to try and fix it up and keep it going. That's what the Left does.

China: well, who can really argue? So you have million-ton plumes of pollution. You have the twenty biggest shopping malls on the planet. You have all the horrendous stuff that we already know about coming on, in even uglier forms perhaps. But who are we to say, "Oh gee, we couldn't reject that, could we?" Well, that's the choice: Can you or can't you? I hear nothing; I hear not a word about that from the Left. I saw this piece, in the *New York Times*, just recently—talking here in April '07—about how China offers a better model of raising the standard of living.

AV: China is a great model? Harvesting of organs from prisoners and all the rest of the political repression? All of that is a wonderful model, then?

JZ: Yeah. To me, even if they didn't have those excesses, those horrible things—by no means am I slighting the horrors involved in those things you just mentioned—just going to the mall, just having a life of going to the mall or the Wal-Mart, requires someone being on the assembly line. That's what you have to have. If you want the techno world, somebody's got to do it.

There was a thing on public television—I think it was maybe it was ten years ago now—a forum. Part of it was a little encounter between Jerry Brown, who used to be governor of California back in the 1970s, and Henry Kissinger. It was really delightful: it really encapsulates a lot. Jerry Brown really is no radical, as anyone who knows anything about him recognizes. He was sitting next to Kissinger, and he launches into this ferocious indictment of all the blood that Kissinger has on his hands, and it's mostly along environmental lines: you know, "You've contributed to this horrible situation, and the planet is dying," and stuff, and on and on. And everybody is waiting for Kissinger, and I too: how is he going to respond? Brown was building the case, he was just laying it on, he was real articulate, he's just blasting Doctor Strangelove—you know, our friend Kissinger. Kissinger is sitting there; he's just waiting until [Brown] gets done. And then, as if swatting away a fly, he says, "Oh, let me get

this straight: you want a car and a computer and a credit card, but people in China or India, they don't get those things, eh?" And Brown had no answer, no answer at all: he was speechless.

Well, we do have an answer. We don't want cars, we don't want factories, we don't want freeways, we don't want paving the planet, we don't want more of this stuff at all. We don't. Not that we are prescribing you don't get one, but our position puts that ideology into question. There is an answer, but of course, Jerry Brown wasn't going to give it as a liberal leftist, or whatever he is—you know, mild leftist or something. To me that sums up the whole thing. There is the choice: you can rail about stuff, you can say how horrible it is, and then just go ahead and endorse the whole project, really. If you want to do that, then why don't you just stay home and keep your mouth shut? Because you are not really addressing the thing, in my opinion.

AV: In relation to that, the Canadian philosopher Mick Smith has asserted that ecological radicalism—radical ecology—is the first genuine challenge to the Enlightenment itself. It goes back before industrialism to the Enlightenment project itself, and that's really at the center of what one has within green anarchism—primitivism. Do you think there is some truth to that?

JZ: Yeah, I bet we are both familiar with the piece he wrote for the journal *Environmental Values* a few years ago, when he started introducing that line of thinking. I think it totally involves that; it totally implicates that. That's the choice again: you want enlightenment, progress, modernity—how's it working out? What are these promises? Have any of them been kept, really, in a meaningful way in the context of what's going on in the whole basic direction of things? Fewer and fewer people would say yes, I think. You can zero in on this stuff. It's like another version of it a little more closer to home, I guess, is the American dream. Who really believes in it? Who even goes there? I think it's more like, this is it, here it is, be on board, or get screwed—you are left out. But it's not: this is so wonderful, your kids will have it better than you, it's a bright rosy future. The system doesn't even say that anymore, because no one believes that.

AV: You mean that idea of indefinite progress of the kind that was possible, to some extent, during that unique period of the 1950s–1960s?

JZ: Right, exactly. Progress is a very hollow deal, to say the least, it seems to me. But there has been a shift in the winds, I would say, a shift in terms of

how many people are swallowing that stuff. You can just resort to polls on that topic, as a matter of fact. They have lost the ideological fight to some degree.

It used to be, just a few years ago, that stuff like I would say, or several other people, of course, would just be treated as kind of loony—maybe mildly interesting as a novelty or something, but having nothing to do with anything. Maybe it still doesn't have a great practical meaning, maybe that's a fair point, but now people are listening because the other stuff isn't flying, it really is felt as bogus. Maybe still the critique of progress is not out on the table, it's not out there being discussed, yet, but very much that will come, I think.

There is potency in a group like ELF taking action and risking something by taking action at a directed target, which doesn't involve any loss of life, and then offering the critique, the vision, of explaining why, because you do have people's attention. So now let's open the conversation. Sometimes I felt like, without stuff like that, or say, Seattle or whatever it is, you can have all the good ideas in the world, but so what? They are a dime a dozen, and nobody is listening—no one cares.

AV: You differentiated in an earlier conversation between movements of desperation—like Weather Underground, for example, or the Symbionese Liberation Army—and the kind of thing that one sees with Earth Liberation Front, where there is a symbolic gesture that generates, potentially, changes in people's perception.

JZ: Yeah, and my personal ethic, if you will, is that the SLA killed people, and so did Kaczynski, but the Earth Liberation Front has never even harmed any life form—that's their credo. Through action, you can get people's attention anyway—insofar as that's the real logic, insofar as it's necessary to get people's attention. I'm not even saying that's what motivates them; I don't even know. It could be as simple as feeling "I had to take action." I've heard that from people who are in prison. They have to answer the question [of] whether it was worth it: now you're in a cage for lots of years. I know people like that. There's a lot of stuff that is pretty important to sort out.

I'm from the sixties, I was in Berkeley and San Francisco, I remember that time. It was a real blow and some people didn't even survive it; the movement was over, the war was over, and we lost. It's not going to be fun for a while, maybe never, but turns out it wasn't never. I think it's coming on again in new ways. I can understand why people didn't want to just accept the defeat of the movement of the sixties, they just didn't want to.

AV: So you see those groups that we mentioned—like SLA—as manifestations of widespread belief that the sixties have really ended, and out of that came a kind of disheartenment and then also a sense of desperation, a sense that things had ended. At what point during that subsequent period did you start thinking along primitivist or anarchist lines? In the seventies, was it then, or does it go back earlier than that?

JZ: It goes back a little bit earlier. I wasn't that conscious of it; it was just a slow process. I was a union organizer in the late sixties and early seventies, and we had this kind of anarchist union, a kind of do-it-yourself union in San Francisco. We didn't really use the word "anarchist" much—I don't know if we ever used it actually, but that's what it was. It was real individually based, and we didn't have paid people. If you wanted to fight something, we would help people do it, grievances and whatever. I found myself writing more in my union activity, and later I started exploring the history of unions, and somewhere around that time entered the picture—the appearance of factories, the industrial revolution, all that at the beginning of unions, say in England—and it started to occur to me as I studied it, as it had occurred to people before me, that's for sure, that there was a kind of social intentionality to the factories. It was a way of disciplining people. It was economics to be sure, but it was also, how do you get these people who are prone to riots? They are so independent, they do weaving at home. How do you manage to dominate those people? Well, you herd them into factories. That's the simple answer—part of it, that's not the whole picture. I never thought of that at all.

So then it was a real easy jump to the further question: maybe technology has always been that way. Maybe it always has a value thing: it's not neutral, it's expressing the values of the dominant society. So that was kind of the beginning in the seventies; it wasn't primitivist because it wasn't questioning domestication or civilization at that point, but I guess it kind of led to that. I was writing along those lines, working in that area. You follow something, and it leads one to the next thing, and you're wondering, gee, how far back does this go? Or at least, that's the way it was striking me. Maybe some of these same issues are always around.

AV: I wonder about the link between your line of thought and the sixties, in particular the movements like the cross-country hippie caravan inspired by the charismatic leader Stephen, for example. There is a kind of socially transformative ethos built right into that. It resulted ultimately, as you know, in the farm in Tennessee, which still to some extent exists. I can see that your

line of thought ties in with some of the things that he was saying back at that time. It just occurred to me.

JZ: Yeah I never thought of that either. I lived in the Haight, and I had friends who were part of that movement, no doubt. The sixties and the aftermath of that were important for me. That was the period when significant numbers of people began to question the status quo of technological society.

But I also have been deeply influenced by Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School. Benjamin saw the onslaught of new technology, and he was thinking in that context [that] he wasn't too happy with it. He was very popular, you would have to say, because of that collision; he was putting out something else. He wasn't a positivist. He wasn't swallowing the whole "how do we get technology and science to work harder for us?" and all that. That wasn't his thing at all.

[Digital recorder change.]

AV: We are talking about Walter Benjamin and the whole question of intellectual predecessors. We had talked a little bit about Hegel and Hegelian notions of progress underlying contemporary society. I want to recapture a little bit of the discussion. You had talked about your reading of Adorno and Benjamin and how their work was instrumental for you in starting to think critically about the intellectual inheritance of the West more generally and maybe of the Left as well. So let's continue from there.

JZ: Yeah, Adorno and Benjamin were helpful; they were stimulating points of reference. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example: What is civilization? How did it operate? One of the main points there about myth—well, enlightenment—put myth to flight, and yet enlightenment is full of myth and it's still repression.

Speaking of the sixties: We didn't do a good job at all; it was ridiculous stuff, just absurd theoretical stuff, all this Marxism. The only thing more preposterous is that some people are still holding onto something so absolutely discredited, that was such a monumental failure, it's just mind-boggling to me. You have time to move on and try to be open to things.

AV: Part of the course to breaking free of some of that earlier intellectual baggage for you was anthropology and discovering some perspectives that exist

outside of that trajectory of what you could call, roughly, Western intellectual heritage.

JZ: Right right, that's something that comes in from some other area, and I guess my single most important influence is Marshall Sahlins, who pointed out some incredible stuff, just so radical in their application. For example, the original affluent society stuff, which became Stone Age economics back in the seventies. He pointed out very simply that if your needs are met, you are not poor, even if you own nothing. Of course, he was talking about these pre-civilized peoples of different kinds. And conversely, if you own all kinds of stuff and you got to have more, you are not rich, you are poor. It's a cultural thing, as obvious as that is, that's worth thinking about. Do we have more now? This is not more to me, as he pointed out.

Another thing that it just amazed me—just so profound and I'm not sure he understood it; I know I don't understand it. He pointed out simply that the more symbolic culture you have, the more work you have. What is the promise? Just the opposite: "Oh, technology will free everybody." It hasn't quite worked that way. That opens up virtually every lie there is about technology, and that's such a core thing to me. What if all these things are false? Well, they are false, so what do you make of that? Where does that take you? Let's look at these claims: they are preposterous, they just are. It brings us together, technology? Hmm. Then why has there never been so much isolation? Empowers people? Oh, then we must not be more disempowered than ever, must we? But we are. You just go down the list: they are just flagrant lies, they are simply not true at all upon examination. It's not quite that simple I grant you, but it's just crazy [that] they are just selling us this stuff, which is nonsense.

Think of other examples, too. One is variety, the richness of all, the access to all this variety—while Jameson said there has never been such a standardized culture in the history of the planet. It's true, there is variety, but what do you mean by "variety"? Sure, you can look up information; I do it all the time. But is that variety? Is that a richness of something? Then why is it the most standardized society that has ever existed? And you don't even have to say that technology is everything, but you can't leave it out. You can't examine these claims and validate them without looking at the role of technology. It's making these claims, if you will, to use a rarefied formulation. It's not true, that's another reason I'm hopeful. If they are just spewing out lies that are easily unmasked, then we've got something. There you go—the enemy is already at a disadvantage, it seems to me.

AV: What many people interpret as a pessimistic narrative of decline—the end of technology—is actually rather an opportunity for rethinking things and looking toward, optimistically, toward the future?

JZ: Yeah it is to me, if you can see a way out. If you have decided that this is a really bad direction, then the whole imperative is leading to one bad thing after another, then find an opening, and let's shed some light in there.