

answer to nature, but because all these tools serve him.

He doesn't recognize in the gun and tools and cameras at hand technology having its own purposive density, its own internality. He takes for granted in his equipment the intensiveness of applied cognition which its material form objectifies. He lets himself forget he relies on objects which others have made for this purpose. The modern hunter knows his weapon only in the external grace of execution, the skilled individualism it makes possible, not in its made-ness, its indebtedness to the organized efforts of others. He knows his technology only in the disproportionate power it focuses in his trigger finger.

While utterly dependent on intensive technology and organized activity in his hunt, the modern hunter imagines himself a lone, instinctual predator. He doesn't see that his tools and weapons and cameras do not only extrapolate, but also mediate his sentience and his will.

The videoing is just the next (techno)logical step in this obscuring of the real context of the modern hunt. This high fidelity trophy only re-presents what was already present in the hunt itself, the denial of the actual industrial context on which it depends. In this regard these videos are typical of most contemporary media, which tend to render their subject matter as though with immediacy, obscuring their own mediating role from view. Such media exacerbate, and maybe produce, the chronic North American appetite for immediacy. These same popular media, by severing events from real contexts, end up placing the real world of viable action and responsibility at one further remove.

In exposing the hunt to the video camera, the hunter also further removes himself from the actual event. His desire for multiple camera angles and slow motion shots leaves the modern hunter "on the outs" with a nature that is sheer externality. Nature is reduced to what is transparent to the camera eye. These videos recall Jean Baudrillard's description of "the era of hyperreality" in *The Ecstasy of Communication*. In these videos image supersaturates event. The event of the hunt is replaced by the myriad recorded angles and speeds. External verisimilitude thus replaces the internal content of the event, the killing and the death. The effect is comparable to that of the high-resolution pilot's-eye-view images of detonating missiles, which came to us out of the Gulf War's version of production value. With such excess of visual image over lived event, these videos cross the line Baudrillard would mark between spectacle and obscenity:

Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, ... when every-thing becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication.

The modern hunt is obscene before a camera even enters the picture. The video is pornographic because it records the prior fact of this obscene event. And it is pornographic because in producing another explicit trophy, it converts death from grave indignity to "raw" information.

Which is to say death is missing here. The video production of the hunt both immerses us in the hyperreal immediacy of the hunter's kill, and puts us at one further remove from the animal's death. With his video camera the hunter produces a reviewable trophy of his Real Experience. His video record further confirms his hunt as an action that produces freedom from a world of impermeable externality. He ignores the fact that he himself determines nature as explicit, material surface, in order to then free himself from it.

We should be worried, living in an info-milieu which makes byte-sized, two-dimensional units of all events, even death. On the news we watch an inhabited building, videoed by the missile that destroys it. The image may fade to grey, but death withdraws from such a scene, in which it is no longer even implicit. The unrecognized disappearance of death is the trophy of the video hunter. The failure to realize death is also, though, the implicit truth of the "explicit immediate" media in which we are, with killing anonymity, immersed.

So much killing, so little death.

Steven Whittaker is a freelance writer living in Nanaimo, B.C.

Further Reading and Viewing

- Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1988).
- Autumn Antlers* (Wildlife Quest, 1990).
- The Bear Facts with Bow and Arrow* (Eagle's View Productions, 1990).
- Big Timber Bears* (Chamberlain SD: Tom Miranda's Outdoor Films, 1989).
- Bowhunting Monarchs of the North* (Dave Coleman Productions).
- Fight for the Right* (Tecumseh MI: Dan Fitzgerald Hunting Videos, 1990).
- Horns of Plenty* (Spokane WA: Sun West Films).
- Hunting Dall Sheep and Caribou in the N.W.T.* (Calgary, Alta: Lifestyle Home Videos, 1986).
- Techniques for Instinctive Bow Shooting* (Ashboro NC: White Tail Visions, 1988).
- They're Goin' Down* (Tecumseh MI: Dan Fitzgerald Hunting Videos, 1991).

Edward Palmer Thompson 1924-1993

Cultural Studies, which has become something of a buzz-word for those who see themselves as dissident academics in North America and the Antipodes, did not, of course, spring ready-made out of Larry Grossberg's imagination of what the British were up to in the 1960s and 1970s, but was a product of a very real struggle involving all the political definitions that were present then and have become more pronounced now. Those of us who marched to Aldermaston and back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, who helped to establish the New Left Club (at the Partisan Coffee House at 7 Carlisle Street in Soho, London), who discovered Jazz with Eric Hobsbawm, who taught evening classes for the Workers' Educational Association, who fought with the Fife Socialist League, who defended (equally) Tom M'boya, Lenny Bruce, Wole Soyinka, C.L.R. James, Vic Allen are surprised to discover that what we were doing was inventing Cultural Studies.

The death of Edward Thompson pulls us up short. Cultural Studies has become the gossip of this and that. In Thompson's case this involved the petulant diatribe against Perry Anderson in the 1960s, the cantankerous outrage against Stuart Hall and Richard Johnson in a History Workshop conference in an old church in Oxford in the late 1970s, the absurd pomposity recorded by those who only knew him from the outside. And, of course, the labeling: in the Oxford meeting he said, "I reject without reservation the identification of the Marxist tradition of historiography of which I have been taken as one representative of 'culturalism.' This term is Richard Johnson's invention." But, of course, Thompson was all and none of that. It is impossible to think of any of these disputes without recognizing that they were not academic in the arcane sense that much cultural theory is couched, but directly political. On the other hand there was nothing that was technically 'academic' which was not equally political. Ultimately, even the very personal was political. From the death of his brother by a firing squad in Bulgaria in World War II (which he recounted in his first book) to his last book on Blake (Thompson becomes Blake), the literary, the historical, the political, the personal are one.

His legacy was to compel us to engage with human others, to think ourselves into their situation, whether they were the late eighteenth-century working class making themselves, or those, in the twentieth century, living under the terror of nuclear power, who chose to resist the ultimate death machine. If Thompson was the ultimate Luddite, it was because he was convinced that the mechanization of everyday life was not conducive to our social health.

The central feature of Edward's life and work was that it was not academic in the narrow sense of the term. He was not part of condescending academia which saw itself as setting rules, in order to create an academic 'culture' that was sealed off from the everyday world. Quite the contrary. That academic world was just as culpable in compounding the problems that face us as were the multinational corporations, or the politicians who constantly speak of our venalities. The real test of our scholarship was how it measured up against the harsh realities of every-day life. His venom was directed against those (politicians, academics, even Marxists) who behaved as if their rules, their tribal customs, were the only ones that mattered.

But Thompson will be remembered primarily for the marvellous books on social and cultural history (*William Morris, The Making of the English Working Class, Whigs and Hunters, Blake*), his many pieces of journalism (in particular, perhaps, those collected under the title *Writing By Candlelight*), his ferocious intervention in the theoretical concerns of the New Left (*The Poverty of Theory*), and his systematic campaigns against nuclear weapons from the late 1950s to his death. Ultimately, however, his major contribution was to a complete rethinking of how history is written, involving the reclamation of people's history, and the involvement of non-academics in the research and writing of that history. More than any other thinker in the British New Left, Thompson, to use Gramsci's phrase, helped to create Organic Intellectuals. Anyone concerned with Cultural Studies today who forgets his legacy does so at his or her peril.

Ioan Davies
September, 1993

