

タイトル	Not Norma Times : Post-Collapse Apocalyptic Novels (Part Two)
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引用	北海学園大学学園論集(154): 41-78
発行日	2012-12-25

Not Normal Times: Post-Collapse Apocalyptic Novels (Part Two)

Patrick O'BRIEN

ABSTRACT

The years since the September 9, 2001 terror attacks in America have been a time of heightened anxiety for many Americans. The increased sense of vulnerability, the slow progress of two overseas wars, and very serious economic instability have combined to make this period a challenging one for Americans. As a result, novels that conceive of a catastrophic collapse of society have gained attention. This essay is the second part in a series that will examine such novels. The work addressed here comes from author and blogger James Howard Kunstler. It is *World Made By Hand* (2008).¹

“. . . [C]ollapse presents such opportunity for rebirth.”²

Introduction

James Howard Kunstler is a well-known pundit highly critical of postwar America's choices in urban planning, suburban construction and expansive exurban sprawl. Based on cheap fossil fuels — particularly gasoline — these pervasive building styles are, in Kunstler's view, unsustainable in what he believes to be a post-peak oil era, an era that will sooner rather than later face contraction which, if not intelligently managed, will lead to unstructured collapse. Two signature non-fiction books by Kunstler about these themes are *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) and *The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005). Following both books to their logical conclusions, Kunstler imagines a post-collapse America and situates a fictional story in the upstate vicinity where he actually lives, Saratoga Springs, New York.

Appropriately for our Internet age, Kunstler has maintained a homepage (<http://www>.

kunstler.com/index.php) which includes information on his numerous books, a weekly blog, his professional schedule, list of writings, paintings, podcasts, and contact information, among other things. His weekly blog contains reiterations of themes from the above-mentioned non-fiction works, which he repackages often in slightly different wrappings. For instance, in his blog for the week of Sept. 3-7, 2012, his article “Join Up!”³ again offers a common theme. Suggesting that neither Republicans nor Democrats have anything realistic to offer in this 2012 presidential race, he wryly allows that there is a third party named “Reality.” This reality, of course, is composed of Kunstler’s own views: “Reality knows we have entered a long-term compressive economic contraction; that there is no way we can persist in the current living arrangement; and that the necessary outcome to avoid immense human suffering can be described as the downscaling and re-localizing of everything we do.”

Expanding upon this theme, he continues:

Reality knows that the shale oil “game changer” is a mirage. By 2014, the “sweet spots” of the Bakken will deplete faster than new wells can be drilled, and the impairments of banking will constrict the supply of capital investment for that hypothetical future drilling. All the deregulation in the world will not alter the fact that future oil is expensive, exists in places where it is hard to work, and entails unappetizing geopolitical contingencies. Reality favors letting go of automobile-based living and the adoption of walkable communities connected by inland waterways and railroads.

No more gasoline, no cars, walking miles a day and riding railroads. These are the ingredients of Kunstler’s mantra, and we shall see most of them in the novel addressed here. At the core of his fiction is his belief in collapse, envisioned here in one of his typical blogs:

All the major banks of Europe are functionally insolvent and all of the nations that charter the banks are structurally insolvent, and the economies that depend on the circulation of funds around this Euro organism really cannot escape some sort of cascading collapse. The big unknown element of the story is how angry and batshit crazy the citizens of all these countries will get when summer ends. I don’t believe they will fight each other just now, but it is very likely that the lampposts of all these lovely towns and cities will be decorated with swinging corpses of bankers, ministers, and a choice selection of politicians while a fight over the table scraps of a 30-year-long debt banquet occupies the folks in the streets . . .

The distracted, degenerate public of tattooed soccer moms and men wearing baby clothes have no idea how quickly the supermarket shelves can go empty. The

banking system is headed over Niagara Falls and it will take all our comforts and conveniences with it as it goes over.⁴

In the first part of my “Not Normal Times” series, I outlined a number of collapse scenarios.⁵ In America today, talk of collapse is now a mainstream topic, as evidenced by a plethora of books, television series and radio shows about the possibility. The theoretical groundwork for societal and political collapse can be found in Joseph Tainter’s 1988 classic work, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, where he states:

Complex societies are problem-solving organizations, in which more parts, different kinds of parts, more social differentiation, more inequality, and more kinds of centralization and control emerge as circumstances require. Growth of complexity has involved a change from small, internally homogeneous, minimally differentiated groups characterized by equal access to resources, shifting, ephemeral leadership, and unstable political formations, to large, heterogeneous, internally differentiated, class structured, controlled societies in which the resources that sustain life are not equally available to all. This latter kind of society, with which we today are most familiar, is an anomaly of history, and where present requires constant legitimization and reinforcement.

The process of collapse . . . is a matter of rapid, substantial decline in an established level of complexity. A society that has collapsed is suddenly smaller, less differentiated, and heterogeneous, and characterized by fewer specialized parts It may decompose to some of the constituent building blocks (e.g. states, ethnic groups, villages) out of which it was created.⁶

This theoretical approach plays out in popular culture as well. For instance, young American writer Suzanne Collins penned a novel titled *The Hunger Games*, featuring a sixteen-year-old female protagonist living in a post-apocalyptic North America, one in which Canada and America have been supplanted by the fictional nation of “Panem.” The premise of the story is that each year a young boy and a young girl from twelve different areas of the country must fight to the death in a televised battle. In 2012 a film version directed by Gary Ross was released, thus far earning over half a billion dollars. *Chicago Sun-Times* film critic Roger Ebert praised the film as “effective entertainment” and gave it three out of four stars.

On the smaller screen, *National Geographic* has a program on its cable television channel called “Doomsday Preppers,” described this way: “*Doomsday Preppers* explores the lives of otherwise ordinary Americans who are preparing for the end of the world as we know it. Unique in their beliefs, motivations, and strategies, preppers will go to whatever lengths they

can to make sure they are prepared for any of life's uncertainties. And with our expert's assessment, they will find out their chances of survival if their worst fears become a reality."⁷ From September 2006 until March 2008 the television network CBS ran a series called *Jericho*, described as "an American action/drama series that centers on the residents of the fictional town of Jericho, Kansas, in the aftermath of nuclear attacks on 23 major cities in the contiguous United States."⁸ It ran for twenty-nine episodes. Another example is the new NBC series *Revolution*, a science fiction drama about life in a post-apocalyptic world. The opening to the premier reads:

*We lived in an electric world. We relied on it for everything. And then the power went out. Everything stopped working. We weren't prepared. Fear and confusion led to panic. The lucky ones made it out of the cities. The government collapsed. Militias took over, controlling the food supply and stockpiling weapons. We still don't know why the power went out. But we're hopeful someone will come and light the way.*⁹

NBC has already contracted for twenty-two episodes.

Texas radio host Alex Jones is pushing the frontier of electronic media with his *Alex Jones Show*, which has a radio format (with downloads available), a television arm called *prisonplanet.tv*, and a dedicated YouTube channel boasting that "Alex Jones and his team of Infowars reporters are breaking down the electronic Berlin Wall of media control by reaching millions of people around the world — with more waking up every day. Circumventing the dying dinosaur media systems of information suppression, Infowars and the Alex Jones Channel are a beacon of truth in a maelstrom of lies and deception"¹⁰ Conspicuously featured in his multi-media programs are stories about a coming collapse (often with a conspiratorial background story to them), a theme robustly bolstered by frequent advertisements for survival goods.

Pundits, experts and government officials also now routinely predict imminent collapse. As but one example, Richard Duncan, formerly of the World Bank and chief economist at Blackhorse Asset Mgmt., recently told the television news station CNBC that America's \$16 trillion federal debt had escalated into a "death spiral." The resulting depression, in his view, will be so severe that he does not "think our civilization could survive it." Many Americans agree. For instance, "According to polls, the average American is sensing danger. A recent survey found that 61% of Americans believe a catastrophe is looming — yet only 15% feel prepared for such a deeply troubling event." The online article notes that

“A team of scientists, economists, and geopolitical analysts believes they have proof that the threat is indeed real — and the danger imminent.” Chris Martenson, a member of this team, summarizes their findings:

We found an identical pattern in our debt, total credit market, and money supply that *guarantees* they're going to fail. This pattern is nearly the same as in any pyramid scheme, one that escalates exponentially fast before it collapses. Governments around the globe are chiefly responsible.

And what's really disturbing about these findings is that the pattern isn't limited to our economy. We found the same catastrophic pattern in our energy, food, and water systems as well.

According to Martenson: “These systems could all implode at the same time. Food, water, energy, money. Everything.”¹¹ Commenting on this, Michael Snyder concludes, “The truth is that a massive worldwide financial collapse is coming. It is inevitable, and it is going to be extremely painful.”¹²

Pastor Chuck Baldwin, who recently relocated from the crowded multicultural Pensacola, Florida region to the Kalispell area of “the great State of Montana,”¹³ also stridently predicts collapse:

One does not have to be a prophet to know that we are on the precipice of some potentially catastrophic — or at the very least, challenging — days. In fact, most of us are already in challenging days, and some are already enduring catastrophic events. That is, if one would call being out of work, losing one's home, facing life-threatening medical conditions without any prospect of medical insurance, several families being forced to live in one house due to homes being foreclosed, etc., catastrophic.

The potential for an escalation of cataclysmic events, however, is very real. Only a “blooming idiot” would call someone who attempts to prepare for “the day of adversity” a Chicken Little now. Anyone who does not see the storm clouds on the horizon isn't paying attention.

For example, can one imagine what would happen if Russia or China launched a nuclear attack against the United States? (Once again, I encourage readers to watch the CBS TV series “Jericho” to get an idea of how quickly life, and even civilization, could change.) Imagine if there was another 9/11-type event. What would happen if some form of Zimbabwe-style inflation hit the US? What would happen if anything disrupted the distribution of Welfare checks, or food to local grocers?

Imagine a Hurricane Katrina-style natural disaster in your town. I think people everywhere are beginning to awaken to just how vulnerable we all really are.¹⁴

This is the general *Weltanschauung* in which Kunstler writes.

World Made by Hand

World Made By Hand is set in upstate New York in the town of Union Grove. Modern life has been eradicated by economic blunders and malfeasance, nuclear war, famine, pestilence, and small-scale warfare. Survivors of Union Grove still remember the days of whirring machinery, big-screen televisions offering one hundred channels, supermarkets stocked with myriad goods from all over the world (no matter the season), and a federal government still ruling over the entire society. Survivors also remember when most of their family members were still alive.

Robert Earle, carpenter and widower, is the narrator of the novel and is clearly meant to be Kunstler's alter ego. His best friend, Loren Holder, is the local minister, and their relationship is complicated by the fact that Earle is sleeping with the reverend's wife — by mutual consent among the three of them. The third major character is a newcomer to Union Grove, Brother Jobe, charismatic leader of a nomadic group of Evangelical Christians. These men and others exist in a close community that is akin to ones common to America in the nineteenth century when automobiles had not yet afforded people unprecedented mobility, and personal ties were deep, meaningful, and often critical to survival. In addition to internal tensions and challenges in and around Union Grove, those generated by people outside threaten as well. This situation gives Kunstler a chance to dramatize what he has written about in his earlier non-fiction, particularly *The Long Emergency*.

Technically, *World Made By Hand* is not apocalyptic because the world is not destroyed and end times do not ensue. The term *apocalypse* is familiar to both Jews and Christians, as it was a central theme in biblical writing between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200, appearing in the Book of Daniel and more prominently in the Book of Revelation. Authors Mathew Barrett Gross and Mel Gilles tell us that the Greek word *apocalypse* — “the lifting of the veil” — is less appropriate than the term *apokalupsis eschaton* — “the revelation of knowledge at the end of times.” In more common understanding, however, Americans understand the term to be an assumption “that the end of our way of life . . . is imminent.”¹⁵ That is the sense in which Kunstler describes life in *World Made By Hand*.

The key trope Kunstler uses to describe before and after America is “not normal times.”

Before societal breakdown, life in the second half of the twentieth century is referred to as “normal times,” as in this passage:

In normal times, Wayne Karp would have passed through life as just another lumpen American Dreamer, a hardworking consumer of shoddy products, chemically tweaked foods, and rude popular entertainments, a taxpayer subject to the ordinary restrictions of the social contract. (28-9; subsequently, all numerals in parentheses refer to pages in *World Made By Hand*)

At another point, a young widow who would like to move in with Earle soon after her husband is killed explains why she elects to ignore what people might think:

“But I need a helping hand, and these are not normal times. I’m old enough to remember the difference. I once had my own television. My mom drove a pickup truck. We used to go to the Target in Glens Falls and buy stuff when she got paid. Those days are gone, and so is any idea of what’s normal or decent We can help each other, you and me.” (122)

Normal times, however, were not without their imperfections, one of them being financial shenanigans at all levels of society. Occurring at the top, however, they helped bring down the union:

“Fiat currency: that’s what did us in,” Rod Sauer said.

“I don’t believe there’s going to be any U.S. dollar in ten years, way things are going,” Jason LaBountie said. “I do almost all barter these days, myself. Unless someone has hard silver.”

“Then how come we don’t get some kind of barter agreement out of these people over at the school?” Cody DeLong said. “Payment of some kind in lieu of cash.”

“Funny, coming from a would-be banker,” Dale said. “I thought you liked money, Cody.”

“Money’s important, all right,” Cody said. “You don’t have civilization without it. But these aren’t normal times.” (105)

Kunstler is vague about the exact chronological order of warfare and societal breakdown, but this vagueness in fact serves to show us how local life has again become. Inhabitants really only know what they themselves experience or hear from people they know. Print media is gone, and without electricity there is no radio, television or Internet. Events more than a few valleys away remain either unknown or are passed down through

increasingly unreliable accounts. Villagers do know about a terrorist bombing, however, as Reverend Holder reveals when first conversing with Brother Jobe. “The last real news we had was when the bomb went off in Los Angeles,” Holder says, to which Brother Jobe replies:

“California got dealt a bad hand, all right, but things are rough from sea to shining sea. It’s no fun in Phoenix or Albuquerque either, so I’ve heard. From Texas clear to Florida, there’s folks shooting each other and trouble between the races and all like that. Seems like the law is on the run everywhere. We were on our way up out of Virginia when the other bomb hit Washington, D.C. Pennsylvania wasn’t no picnic after that, I can tell you. We tried it for more than two years, but it wasn’t any go for us there. We pulled out the end of April.”¹⁶ (8-9)

Later we learn that American involvement in the Middle East — the “Holy Land” throughout the novel — turned sour and jihadists were responsible for the nuclear assault on Los Angeles, which “tanked the whole U.S. economy.” Officials were forced to inspect all shipping, and the result was near paralysis at major ports such as Seattle, Norfolk, Baltimore, New Jersey and Boston. Ships carrying imports returned with their cargo untouched. “The earth stopped being flat and became very round again” (23).¹⁷

Not surprisingly, nuclear bombs going off in American cities make for confused politics. Though Union Grove people can never be sure, the general consensus is that a man named President Sharpe was removed from office by a military officer (who may have assassinated Sharpe). Fellow generals who still had lingering loyalty to the Constitution then removed their comrade from office and installed the Vice President (15). Rumor has it that someone named Harvey Albright is now running the country but is doing so from Minneapolis. Prior to that, he may or may not have been in Chicago (142).

What really winnowed the population were the epidemics and plagues that visited many regions. Mexican flu had laid great waste to the land and significant numbers of people had died (7), including Earle’s only daughter. His wife Sandy fell during an outbreak of encephalitis (14). To show how devastating disease can be when modern medicine becomes unavailable, Kunstler inserts a passage about the local state prison — seventy percent of the prison population died when the flu swept through (29).¹⁸

The novel, however, does not immediately make clear what had happened to Earle and his fellow citizens. Rather, it slowly introduces each character and adds shards of information about their lives before and after the fall. Earle, for instance, had lived a fast-paced life as an executive outside Boston. As he remembers, “In those days, in a life that now seemed

as if it had taken place on another planet, we lived in Brookline, Massachusetts, and I worked for a software company called Ellipses I multitasked so hard I had panic attacks Then, within a short span of time, our world changed completely.” Earle and his wife sold their house at a loss and moved to Union Grove, the wife’s hometown (22-3). Little did he know it, but soon he would be alone.

As with many of the other survivors, Earle found an inner reserve and stoicism that allowed him to adapt and go on living. With carpentry skills and a good set of tools to fall back on, he turned to a manual way of making a living, earning a solid reputation in the process. He also became adept at gardening and home cooking, both of which become the norm in settings such as his. Thus the years passed and Earle and the others settled into routines. The immediate environment returned to that of a pre-industrial area. “Once the radio went off you could hear roosters battling for supremacy of the village. Some people were annoyed by them, but I found them pleasantly reassuring. Their crowing and the vapors of the hot sauce helped clear enough room in my head to think about what I had to do” (24).

Union Grove also begins to assume an air of an earlier era. Returning to town early one summer evening, Earle looks about him: “The streetlamps were off, as usual. Many of the houses we passed were dark. I would venture that the population here was down by three-quarters. The safety net for the elderly had dissolved, with so much else, and since a disproportionate number of houses in town had been owned by older folks who had died off, many were now vacant.” A big white wooden church, Reverend Holder’s seat, returned to its former luster as villagers again became parishioners without distractions such as television and shopping (13). Earle’s own home was over a century old but in good repair. “The front porch was deep and graceful, though I had lately been using it as a woodshop in the warm part of the year. Inside it was generous for a bungalow, with four bedrooms in all, and it had many fine touches, including oak wainscoting, a cozy inglenook beside the fieldstone fireplace, built-in bookshelves everywhere, and graceful windows with arched sashes that still slid beautifully and closed snugly after more than a hundred years” (14).

The town still has a dentist and doctor. Larry Prager is the dentist but he is reduced to using a 1920s pulley drill, which his wife Sharon powers with a foot treadle. Limited to opium and marijuana for anesthetics, Prager finds that his practice has become a necessary but brutal burden on the town’s citizens (25). The town doctor, Jerry Copeland, makes his own medicine and ministers to people at his house. Behind the house there is a spacious springhouse that Earle had helped construct. Without mechanical refrigeration, people

fortunate enough to have a spring on their property can use the cool running water to keep temperatures down:

It must have been thirty degrees cooler inside. Meager light seeped through a small triple-pane transom window above the door. I remember fitting it into the fieldstones there, scribing the wooden sashes. Now, the light filtered through an additional layer of cobwebs. A long wooden slab table stood inside with trugs and wooden bowls of the year's first peas and radishes, along with shelves of preserved fruit, straw-filled bins where they kept onions and squashes, and hams hanging from the ceiling with their protective coats of mold. Even under the circumstances, you couldn't fail to notice that the Copeland's food supply was impressive. As the town's only doctor, he received a bounty in barter for his services. (52)

Earle, Reverend Holder, the doctor and dentist are fairly typical denizens of America during these times. Brother Jobe, on the other hand, is far different. Introduced in the opening chapter of the book, Jobe is The Other around whom Earle rotates. The two men provide the dramatic tension in the book, competing in various ways, but also holding out the hope for cooperation between unlikely bedfellows. Brother Jobe's introduction sets the scene:

Loren and I were both lost in our own thoughts when we heard horses at a distance coming up behind us. We turned together.

It was an open cart with two wooden-spoked, iron-rimmed wheels, not the old automobile tires that you used to see on a common utility wagon. You could still find rubber tires here and there, but you couldn't get patch kits or the kinds of adhesives that would stand up to a repair job anymore, so we had no choice but to go back to wooden wheels with iron rims. This sort of vehicle was sometimes referred to as a Foley rig. I couldn't tell you who Foley was, but that's what it was called. There were stories, as about so many things in these new times, where the actual facts were sparse or elusive, but they named the rig after him. There were two figures aboard, a man driving and a woman beside him.

The rig came trotting out of the twilight, bouncing on the rough road, until it reached us and the driver slowed his team to a walk. They were fine, tall, stout matched blacks with some feathering on their lower legs, a mix of some kind. Since the world changed, there had not been much time to breed horses, so around here anything distinct from the American quarter horse or a common draft animal tended to stand out. These looked like they had some Percheron or other cold blood in them and their size, at least sixteen hands, was another sign. The driver brought them to a halt beside Loren and me.

He was a stranger, a clean-shaven, middle-aged man, with a nose too small for his face. It made him look oddly boyish. Among men in Union Grove, beards were the norm so any clean-shaven man was apt to look young. He took off his broad-

brimmed straw hat so as to show off, or so it seemed, his full head of black hair with a few strands of gray at the temples. His skin had a pinkish cast, as though he spent a lot of time indoors.

“Brother Jobe,” he said, reaching down from his seat to press our flesh like a politician. We would learn later that he spelled it this way, with an *e* on the end. (5-6)

Originally from Virginia, Brother Jobe had started a congregation that moved north as the seasons became uncomfortably warm. Called the New Faith Brotherhood Church of Jesus, for two years they had tried to settle in Pennsylvania. When he hears that, Reverend Holder asks him why they left. “We weren’t comfortable,” comes the reply. Kunstler shows his ear for dialogue when he has Brother Jobe describe what the congregation had found on their recent travels: “Hardship. Not a whole lot of brotherhood” (8-9). Such understatement succeeds in elevating the import of Brother Jobe’s utterances, leaving it to the reader’s imagination what concrete horrors the congregation might have met.

Kunstler is brilliant at crafting folksy speech for Jobe, with lines such as: “Come on out now, boys, and let me buy you a ding-danged dram of life’s righteous comfort, praise Jesus” (62). Another is, “This is exactly the kind of lawless monkeyshines we saw everywhere coming up from Virginia” (201). After attending a “heck of a fandango” the night before, Brother Jobe, who had imbibed liberally along with the others, recounts the condition of his head: “Earlier on it felt like it was filled with weevils and hornets, but the good Lord has come through and blew them clean out and filled up the space with fresh air, sunshine, and love of fellow man” (232).

Now in Union Grove, the New Faith group has acquired the abandoned modern high school building and is converting it into quarters and a place of worship. Consisting of seventy-three adults, the newcomers intend to make Union Grove their home. Clearly outsiders, Brother Jobe and his men try to reassure the more secular townspeople that their intentions are harmless. For instance, Brother Jobe is willing to help Reverend Holder establish a laundry in an abandoned factory. He has many able-bodied young men, and they also have the skills to see the project to fruition. First, however, they must repair the dilapidated town water system, and toward that end they begin with the earthen dam above town:

The service road up to the dam was overgrown after years of neglect, and a crew had evidently worked hard to clear it the past week. The pungent smell of freshly

cut trees and raw disturbed earth made for an exciting aroma of enterprise. The scale of the operation was impressive when you consider it was all done without machines or power tools. We hadn't mounted a collective effort like this in town for years. Some New Faith men were working at a sawbuck there, cutting the felled trees into eight-foot lengths to send back down below for stove wood. (199)

Twenty New Faith men were at work, including Brother Jobe. Earle "stood back and watched them lay a six-foot length of ten-inch-diameter concrete pipe in a trench, about a hundred yards from the dam. They had rigged up a portable crane out of the timbers and a chain winch, with a box at the leverage end for fieldstone counterweights, and this allowed them to jockey the heavy pipe into place" (200).

A chief value to the town of Brother Jobe's congregation, however, revolves around the military prowess of its members. In fact, these military veterans also help Stephen Bullock, an important landowner living a few hours from Union Grove who oversees a large operation revolving around farming, small-scale production, and trading down the Hudson River. In recent days four of his men have gone missing while taking a load of goods down river to Albany, the old capital of New York. Brother Jobe is interested in getting the wheels of justice turning again, while Bullock wants his men and boat back. Toward that end, they make a deal, and Brother Jobe selects four of his men, "Holy Land vets," "stout fellows, upright and fearless," and sends them on a mission to Albany. As town mayor and one who can identify the missing men, Earle also goes along.

As it turns out, only three of the four men are stout — Brothers Joseph, Elam and Seth. The fourth, Brother Minor is skinny and "had a weasely face and a joking demeanor . . . He joked incessantly" (124). For instance, one joke goes this way: "Sometimes I think I'm a chicken. Felt this way ever since I was an egg" (126). Or this: "How do you stop a fish from smelling? Cut off it's nose." Or this: "What has big sharp little teeth, a tail, scales, and a trunk? Pikey fish going on vacation. Y'all are slow. Maybe retarded" (136). One of his more off-color jokes runs: "Listen up. A momma mole, a daddy mole, and a baby mole lived in a hole in the ground up by yonder house. One day, the daddy mole poked his head out of the hole and said, 'Mmmmmm, I smell bacon a'frying!' The momma mole stuck her head outside and said, 'Mmmmmm, I smell pancakes!' The baby mole tried to poke its head out of the hole but couldn't get past the momma and the daddy. 'Dang,' he said, 'all I can smell is mole-asses'" (180).

Brother Minor's presence is important, for he introduces a new element into the story: the supernatural. On the way to Albany, for example, Earle has a blister on his hand that

breaks open. To tend to it, Brother Jobe chews some leaves, wraps the wad in a bandana and ties it to Earle's hand (135). The next morning, Earle awakes to find the blister healed. When asked how this was possible, Minor replies, "Solomon's seal has powers. But you add a little Jesus juice to the mix and that puts her into overdrive, so to say" (151). Another cryptic episode occurs shortly after when Minor chastises a man for beating a mule. The next day in Albany, they awake to find the man dead of a gunshot wound, but Minor denies having shot him (152). Later, returning from Albany, Earle and the New Faith men run into an elderly man actually driving a Ford Explorer. He is feisty and gets into an argument with Minor, who is pressuring him to come to the Lord. When the man won't, Minor calls him "a godless old sumbitch." The old man then motors on but within a hundred yards kills himself with a gunshot wound to the chest. Brother Joseph immediately accuses Minor of causing the death, but it is ambiguous if the charge is that Minor's verbal berating caused the suicide or if something more sinister and supernatural was involved (182-85). These mysteries will deepen later in the novel.

Returning to the case of the four missing men in Albany, Earle and the brothers eventually confront the warlord running what is left of Albany's commerce. He is a tyrant and routinely confiscates cargoes that arrive without a proper tax. He also imprisons men and boys and holds them for ransom, which, alas, is the fate of Bullock's four men. The warlord tells Earle and Brother Joseph what the ransom is, then adds, "Oh, if you don't come to get them in twenty-four hours, I'll have to hang them. They're cluttering up my jail" (162). Fortunately, the brothers use their military experience to solve the problem: they shoot the tyrant and some of his henchmen and save the four hostages. At another juncture in the story, Brother Jobe's men bring a renegade to justice by infiltrating his armed compound and apprehending him after a gun-battle. Trained, God-fearing muscle is a distinct asset in post-collapse times.

Perhaps the most valuable thing Brother Jobe and his group bring is a new sentiment — or, rather, a return to an old one: solidarity. Modern America afforded so many opportunities, and various safety nets provided protection for most unforeseen eventualities, that people became more and more individualistic, more atomistic. For his part, Brother Jobe grasps the fact that in these newly turbulent times, united we stand, divided we fall. "You see, all these individuals in the town trying to live like it's still old times, each on its own, each family alone against the world. You can't have that in these new times or things will fall apart," Brother Jobe explains. "Everyone has a part to play and does its job and the whole adds up to more than the sum of the parts," he concludes (90). It is this lesson that Earle and

the other townsmen resist, but gradually learn to accept as a new truth.

Kunstler portrays the New Faith people as genuinely upright, which is at odds with his normal views on White Christians (more on which later). Upright or not, however, some congregation members have quirks. Back at the congregation's campus, for example, Brother Jobe takes Earle on a short tour and introduces him to his mother, "Mary Beth Ivanhoe of Lynchburg, Virginia." She is no ordinary woman, however, beginning with her quarters and her appearance:

The floor was covered with layers of carpets. At the center of the room stood a large, heavy canopied bed with gauzy mosquito netting hung off it, and on it an extremely fat woman reclined in a posture of oriental luxury, propped up by many pillows. Curiously, her head seemed tiny in relation to the rest of her body. Perhaps it was because she was wearing a tight black headdress or turban. Her skin was extremely pale, almost pearl-like. She wore a shiny yellow satin tunic embroidered with glittery things, rhinestones or sequins . . . It seemed to barely contain her waxy flesh, in particular her heaving, lumpy bosom. Her arms extruded from their shirt sleeves like a couple of country hams. Everything below her hips was concealed in a sacklike robe of yellow satin. Altogether she gave the impression of something not exactly human. The odors in the room seemed to emanate from her. (259)

"Precious mother," as Brother Jobe addresses her, also has fits, as Earle witnesses:

The fat lady appeared to hyperventilate. Her left eye rolled up again, and she fell into another spasm, more profound this time, like an epileptic seizure. In the process, she knocked the little tray of sweets off the bed. Her body went rigid and tremored. She spit up more food. If it had been up to me, I would have rushed to make sure her airway was clear, or to put something in between her teeth to keep her from biting her tongue, but the others went about their business as if they'd seen it happen a thousand times, and perhaps they had. The sister with the fan just fanned. The singers kept chanting. The fit lasted less than a minute. Then the fat woman subsided in place and seemed to fall instantly into a deep fathomless slumber, her aspirations noisy and full. (261)

More impressively, she can see the future and perhaps read minds. In a bombshell revelation, she says about Earle to her son, Brother Jobe, "Did you know this old boy was a Jew, JB?" By introducing this fact, Kunstler has added a new dimension to the reading of *World Made By Hand*.¹⁹ Before discussing that new dimension, however, the most overtly supernatural aspects of the novel need unpacking.

Early in the book there is a murder. A group of misfits and “motorheads” occupy an old dump where they procure needed goods that can no longer be manufactured. Wayne Karp, the leader, is not an evil sort, just bad enough to keep his misfits in line. One day, one of the misfits shoots and kills Earle’s companion for no good reason. Since law is nonexistent, Karp, though not unsympathetic, is not going to turn in one of his own men. When Earle tells Karp that the people back in town will want to know why a young father was murdered, Wayne answers:

“I know they are. You go with it, Fiddler. Tell your story, whatever you think you understand about this unfortunate accident. Give them the weapon if you feel like it. Whatever you need to do. We’ll do what we need to do.” He came closer and pushed me a few yards away so the others were out of earshot. “Lookit, we both know who done this. It was a reckless act of stupidity, and I will tell you so straight up this one time only. But it’s done and nothing I can do will bring this young man back to life. This will all come out in the wash, I promise you. But don’t expect too much from the law. The truth is, we’re our own law in these times, like it or not. Apart from all that, I’m personally sorry this has happened, and I wish you luck in dealing with it. Who was he anyway? I know I seen him.”

“He was a hand on Mr. Schmidt’s farm. Shawn Watling.”

“Watling? I once bought a double lot from that Watling agency.”

“That was his parents. They’re dead.”

“Well God bless us the living, anyway.” (48)

By and by, town officials decide to arrest Karp, Brother Jobe’s men secure him, and he is placed in the town’s newly revamped jail. Sadly, Brother Minor is shot and killed in the assault, and his body is put in Doctor Copeland’s springhouse until the funeral. By coincidence, Brother Jobe is also in jail because his men gave shaves to unwilling customers at their new barber shop. Both Karp and Jobe are in separate cells when Earle goes to sleep, but by morning Jobe is gone, though the lock and chain have not been disturbed. In the other cell, Karp is dead, shot through the eye and mouth.

Earle goes to the old school to find Brother Jobe and is directed in Jobe’s direction up a pasture. Jobe is drinking whiskey though it is still morning. Somehow he already knows about Brother Minor’s death, though no one could have told him. As the two men chat, Earle finally gets round to sharing the bad news:

“I was shocked to hear about Brother Minor. We spent a week together riding down to Albany and back, you know.”

“I know.”

“He was considerate of us who rode with him. I was fond of him.”

“Yes, he was a spirited young man,” Brother Jobe said. “Brave, righteous. Helpful. Cheerful. I had high hopes for him. He was my son.” (307)

The most supernatural part of the affair comes when Doctor Copeland lays out the bodies of Brother Minor and Wayne Karp; the wounds to their eyes and mouths are uncannily similar: “They’re absolutely identical Identical fractures across the supraorbital ridge and then diagonally down the malar bone. Same length of fracture to the millimeter. The eyeball is gone in both Now look here. Three teeth are broken off: numbers two, three, and four” (310-11). Though the doctor took two bullets from Minor’s head and neck, bullets shot from the guns of Karp’s men, neither bullets nor exit wounds are found in Karp’s case. Legend eventually got around that Karp’s murder was “an eye-for-an-eye”²⁰ (313).

To return to Precious mother’s telepathic powers and the question of Robert Earle’s identity as a Jew, we find this passage, beginning with the line from above:

“Did you know this old boy was a Jew, JB?”

“He’s a member in good standing at the Congregational, far as I know, mother,” Brother Jobe said.

“Ain’t it so, Robert?” she said. “Born Ear-lick or something like that.”

“Ehrlich,” I said.

“That a fact?” Brother Jobe said.

“What of it?”

“You’re chosen,” the fat woman said.

“I never felt special,” I said.

“I’m anointing you, son, on behalf of you know who. Don’t be thick. Take the responsibility, or be goddamned.”

“May I ask what you’re choosing me for?”

“To be a father,” she said. “No, to be more than a father.”

“I’ve already been one.”

“Then you’ll know what to do.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You will. In all your trials. Oh . . .” (260-61)

Kunstler himself is Jewish, as he mentions in one of his blogs, writing, “The Democratic party case is more interesting to me, being a life-long registered Democrat, perhaps partly accounted for by my Manhattan Jewish upbringing.”²¹ But why does he introduce this fact of identity into the novel? I can see no way that it adds or detracts from anything in the

narrative. Still, this admission must be accounted for and unpacked. Two factors come to mind: First, we have the underlying theme of the Jewish man's love of the "*shiksa*," or gentile woman. Second, as a Jew writing about a Jewish protagonist, we must reconsider the depiction of genuine Christians in the *World Made By Hand*.

The Shiksa

Professor Frederic Cople Jaher, for one, gives a brief but useful description of the *shiksa* and her impact on Jewry: "The *shiksa* obsesses many Jews: Rabbis see her as an intermarital threat to the survival of Judaism; parents fear that she will lure their sons away from family and faith; and Jewish men fantasize about her sexual and social desirability. She figures prominently — even compulsively — in popular movies and bestsellers by Jewish directors and writers."²² I explored this theme in an article in these pages called "The Jew in Modern American Cinema": "Back in 1951 a Gentile woman was working in a strip joint, where she met the youthful Lenny Bruce (played by Dustin Hoffman). By way of introduction she asks about his name, prompting Bruce to explain that his original name, Leonard Schneider, was 'too Jewish.' Their romance explodes. Early on, Bruce buys a roomful of flowers for his lover, and when he arrives to meet her, he sees her posed naked on the bed among the flowers. 'Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It's a *shiksa* goddess."²³ A long quote I used to illustrate how *shiksa* longing is portrayed by acclaimed author Philip Roth in his bestselling novel *Portnoy's Complaint* catches the depth and fervor of the emotion:

Shiksies! In winter, when the polio germs are hibernating and I can bank upon surviving outside of an iron lung until the end of the school year, I ice-skate on the lake in Irvington Park I skate round and round in circles behind the *shiksies* who live in Irvington . . .

But the *shiksies*, ah, the *shiksies* are something else again. Between the smell of damp sawdust and wet wool in the overheated boathouse, and the sight of their fresh cold blond hair spilling out of their kerchiefs and caps, I am ecstatic. Amidst these flushed and giggling girls, I lace up my skates with weak, trembling fingers, and then out into the cold and after them I move, down the wooden gangplank on my toes and off onto the ice behind a fluttering covey of them — a nosegay of *shiksies*, a garland of gentile girls. I am so awed that I am in a state of desire *beyond a hard-on*. My circumcised little dong is simply shriveled up with veneration How do they get so gorgeous, so healthy, so *blond*? My contempt for what they believe in is more than neutralized by my adoration of the way they look, the way they move and laugh and speak — the lives they must lead behind those *goyische* curtains! Maybe a pride of *shiksies* is more like it . . .

So: dusk on the frozen lake of a city park, skating behind the puffy red earmuffs

and the fluttering yellow ringlet of a strange *shikse* teaches me the meaning of the word *longing*. It is almost more than an angry thirteen-year-old little Jewish Momma's Boy can bear. Forgive the luxuriating, but these are probably the most poignant hours of my life I'm talking about — I learn the meaning of the word *longing*, I learn the meaning of the word *pang*. There go the darling things dashing up the embankment, clattering along the shoveled walk between the evergreens . . .

I want Jane Powell too, God damn it! And Corliss and Veronica. I too want to be the boyfriend of Debbie Reynolds — it's the Eddie Fisher in me coming out, that's all, the longing in all us swarthy Jewboys for those bland blond exotics called *shiksas* . . .²⁴

Whatever erotic attractions Roth's *shiksas* might have, they certainly are no intellectual match for a Jew, as Roth shows in a following passage. Having just recited a famous poem, Portnoy reveals to his blonde lover (whom he calls "The Monkey") the name of the poet: "William Butler Yeats wrote it,' I said, realizing how tactless I had been, with what insensitivity I had drawn attention to the chasm: I am smart and you are dumb . . ."²⁵ Later, Portnoy happens upon a note she has written: "No, no, I am just face to face with my first specimen of The Monkey's handwriting. A note to the cleaning lady. Though at first glance I imagine it must be a note *from* the cleaning lady . . ."

**dir willa polish the flor by bathrum *pleze* & dont
furget the insies of windose mary jane r**

Portnoy reads the note three times, finding new meaning with each reading, the most significant of which he describes:

Oh that *z*, that *z* between the two *e*'s of "pleze" — this is a mind with the depths of a movie marquee! And "furget"! Exactly how a prostitute would misspell that word! But it's something about the mangling of "dear," that tender syllable of affection now collapsed into three lower-case letters, that strikes me as hopelessly pathetic This woman is ineducable and beyond reclamation.²⁶

In this passage the hostility toward gentiles is explicit, in contrast to the previous passage about ice skating, where the contempt for gentile society is overshadowed by Portnoy's longing. In the whole of the novel *Portnoy's Complaint*, one may safely say that Jewish hostility is in strong evidence. We now turn toward that hostility.

Hostility toward the Goyim

If it's bad it's the goyim, if it's good it's the Jews!

Alexander Portnoy²⁷

The issue of Jewish hostility toward outgroups is less commonly discussed in modern Western cultures than the converse: Outgroup hostility toward Jews, everywhere known as anti-Semitism. A leading scholar of the former type of hostility is Kevin MacDonald, professor of psychology at California State University, Long Beach. Author of three books about Jews and Judaism, published by the respected academic press, Praeger Publishers, MacDonald adopts what he terms a “social science view of intergroup hostility.” Using social identity theory, MacDonald postulates that the “social categorization process results in discontinuities such that people exaggerate the similarities of individuals within each category,” where, in this case, “both Jews and gentiles would sort others into the category ‘Jew’ or ‘gentile,’ and that under conditions of intergroup comparison they would exaggerate the similarity of members within each category.” “When intergroup conflict occurs,” MacDonald continues,

the dimensions are likely to be imbued with great subjective importance, so that, for example, Jews would be expected to exaggerate the extent to which gentiles share characteristics and gentiles would be expected to exaggerate the extent to which Jews share characteristics. As T. W. Adorno notes, Jews are perceived “through the glasses of stereotypy” and even in the ancient world there was a strong tendency among pagan writers “to make facile generalizations about *the* Jews.” . . . similar stereotyping processes are evident in Jewish perceptions of gentiles . . .

Perceptions of Jewish group homogeneity are quite possibly behind the very prominent theme of much anti-Semitic writing that despite appearances to the contrary, Jews are working together in a vast interlocking conspiracy to dominate gentiles. Such “conspiracy” theories . . . tend to overlook the extent to which different elements of the Jewish community have adopted different and even incompatible strategies vis-a-vis the gentile community. Such attributions are readily explicable within a social identity theory of anti-Semitism: outgroup members are conceptualized as having a set of stereotypically uniform negative qualities, and majority group members tend to overestimate the consensus within the minority group.²⁸

MacDonald refers to Zborowski and Herzog’s *Life is With People* to show how humanity was denied to outgroup members: “Both Jews and gentiles referred to the other with imagery of specific animals, implying that the other was subhuman. When a member of the other group died, the word used was the word for the death of an animal The peasant will

say, ‘That’s not a man, it’s a Jew.’ And the Jew will say, ‘That’s not a man, it’s a goy.’”²⁹ MacDonald writes that “at the extreme,” when Jews are highly committed to the ingroup, “the world becomes divided into two groups, Jews and gentiles, with the latter becoming a homogenized mass with no defining features at all except that they are non-Jews.” He goes on to note that

The prominent Zionist author Maurice Samuels (1924) makes the interesting comment that “the unbelieving and radical Jew is as different from the radical gentile as the orthodox Jew from the reactionary gentile. The cosmopolitanism of the radical Jew springs from his feeling (shared by the orthodox Jew) that there is no difference between gentile and gentile. You are all pretty much alike [;] . . . a single temper runs through all of you, whatever your national divisions. The radical Jew (like the orthodox Jew) is a cosmopolitan in a sense which must be irritating to you: for he does not even understand why you make such a fuss about the most obvious of facts — that you are all alike.”³⁰

MacDonald has continued to research and write about what he views as Jewish hostility toward non-Jews. For instance in “Jews as a hostile elite — again,” he notes that immigration activist Peter Brimelow ends his recent article “‘Redneckophobia?’ Why Obama Is Attacking Arizona” by concluding that “Our political class may live in a fantasy world, but the motive for its immigration enthusiasm is all too real: a relentless hatred of the historic American nation.” MacDonald next notes that Jewish scholar Paul Gottfried, in “The Death of the WASP,” claims that MacDonald himself — who has written reams on the subject — “has hardly scratched the surface in delineating the nastiness with which the children and grandchildren of Eastern European Jewish immigrants clawed their way to the top of the academic-media industry, on the backs of those they often despised. And all the while they appealed with brilliant success to a guilty WASP conscience.” In short, MacDonald sees the problem this way: “What is toxic is that such a substantial portion of our elite — especially that part of the elite that is ensconced in the media, the financial, and the academic world — hates (loathes, despises) the traditional people and culture they rule over.”³¹

Such an evaluation is not rare, not even among Jewish writers. For instance, *Commentary* magazine, founded in 1945 by the American Jewish Committee, published an essay that clearly spelled out this uncomfortable insight. Author David Gelernter, the Yale University computer scientist nearly killed by an explosive package sent by the Unabomber, wrote about America that “the old elite used to get on fairly well with the country it was set over. Members of the old social upper-crust elite were richer and better educated than the public

at large, but approached life on basically the same terms.” The new elite is not only different from the masses — i.e., it is heavily Jewish — “it loathes the nation it rules.”³² Jews form a vastly disproportionate role in this new elite. The loathing of this new elite for the rest of America may be considered a Jewish value — as was controversially argued by none other than Rabbi Meir Y. Soloveichik, then a Resident Scholar at the Jewish Center in Manhattan and a Beren Fellow at Yeshiva University. Titled “The Virtue of Hate,” the article noted that “the Hebrew prophets not only hated their enemies, but rather reveled in their suffering, finding in it a fitting justice.” Soloveichik related how a nun working in Israel concluded that “hatred is in the Jewish religion.” To which Soloveichik replied, “She was right.”³³

Another example appeared in a cover story in *New York* magazine, which featured many examples of negative views toward White Americans of European descent. In the article “Being Jewish” Philip Weiss set the tone with his comments on gentiles: “. . . the Yale students, who I pictured as blond and slightly dull-witted . . . sought out our intelligence. But they could never fully understand us. And as for ourselves, we held them in a certain contempt.”³⁴ Attempting to come to grips with his own hostile views toward gentiles, Weiss explored the views Jews around him had of gentiles. For instance, a speech by famed attorney and Jewish activist Alan Dershowitz caught his attention:

Four years ago, Dershowitz published a book, *Chutzpah*, filled with bitter assertions about Jews’ “emerging second-class status” in America. The Christian right was conspiring to marginalize us, Dershowitz said; Jews must “combine” and accumulate power so as to protect themselves, he urged. No matter its vintage, anti-Semitism made the author of *Chutzpah* angry and defensive. Martin Luther should be “forever cursed” by Protestant churches because of the beliefs he held about Jews — and on it went to George Bernard Shaw, H. L. Mencken, and Immanuel Kant Then he made a statement I can’t imagine from the author of *Chutzpah*: “There is in our tradition, understandably but tragically, an anti-Gentile bias that we must root out.”³⁵

In his article, Weiss shared some very candid aspects of his past:

I now see the culture of the *shtetl* in everything about my extended family as I was growing up: in its mistrust and sometimes hatred of outsiders My family regarded Wasps with considerable mistrust. They were cold and aloof; they had bad taste. We made fun of their clothes and their mindlessness. They had wooden relationships with their children. They were responsible for violent, idiotic mis-

adventures like Vietnam and *Bonanza* and riding motorboats around at night. They wasted time on sporting and the outdoors, for which there was nothing to show, and, lacking the ability to express themselves to one another, doped themselves with alcohol.³⁶

Scholar John Murray Cuddihy captured this pervasive sentiment in his classic 1974 work *The Ordeal of Civility*. Here, for instance, he cites one representative American example:

“We were in some ways, . . .” Leslie Fiedler writes of his Freshman Composition class at City College of New York in the late thirties, “like a class in an occupied country, a group of Alsatians or Czechs, say, under a German master.” “We were forbidden Yiddishisms as we were forbidden slang; and though we had our censors outnumbered, our ignorance and shame kept us powerless.” Thus were urban Jews force-fed a language “whose shape was determined by antiquated rules of etiquette (usually called ‘grammar’), . . . a language capable of uttering only the most correctly tepid Protestant banalities no matter what stirred in our alien innards.” Fiedler enlisted in a *kulturkampf* against these WASP “standards of an established alien taste I would know,” he writes, “what I wrote against as well as for: against their taste as well as for our own.”³⁷

Next, let us return to the young Philip Roth, who, better than perhaps any other contemporary Jew, can be seen as an “informer to the goyim,” mercilessly skewering his family and other Jews over what Portnoy sees as their debilitating hatred of gentiles. Here, for example, his protagonist Portnoy launches a tirade against his mother because of her — and her husband’s — racism toward their black cleaning lady. When fourteen-year-old Portnoy exercises his belief in “the rights of man” by insisting on eating with this black woman, his mother whispers, “Wait, the girl will be finished in a few minutes . . .” This assumption on his mother’s part that eating with a black cleaning woman is somehow beneath him sends into a frenzy:

. . . *I will not treat any human being (outside my family) as inferior!* . . . Can’t you grasp something of the principle of equality, God damn it! And I tell you, if [my father] ever uses the word nigger in my presence again, I will drive a real dagger into his fucking bigoted heart! *Is that clear to everyone?* I don’t care that his clothes stink so bad after he comes home from collecting the colored debit that they have to be hung in the cellar to air out. I don’t care that they drive him nearly crazy letting their insurance lapse. That is only another reason to be compassionate, God damn it, to be sympathetic and understanding and to stop treating the cleaning lady as though she were some kind of mule, without the same passion for dignity that

other people have! And that goes for the *goyim*, too! We all haven't been lucky enough to have been born Jews, you know. So a little *rachmones* on the less fortunate, okay? Because I am sick and tired of *goyische* this and *goyische* that! If it's bad it's the *goyim*, if it's good it's the Jews! Can't you see, my dear parents, from whose loins I somehow leaped, that such thinking is a trifle barbaric? That all you are expressing is your *fear*? The very first distinction I learned from you, I'm sure, was not night and day, or hot and cold, but *goyische* and Jewish!³⁸

This hostility reaches its zenith, perhaps, when it is focused on America Christians living in smaller cities, in towns, or in rural areas. American writer and later emigrant to Israel Ze'ev Chafets catalogued these feelings in *Members of the Tribe: On the Road in Jewish America*. In New York City, Chafets writes, "Anti-Semitism has pretty much been licked on the Lower East Side, but the district leaders keep a wary eye on the rest of the country." Many Jews, drawing on articles "gleaned mostly from the Orthodox *Jewish Press* of Brooklyn," are intensely worried about "Ku Klux Klan atrocities in Alabama, Connecticut, and other such godless precincts. They pronounced the names with distaste, shaking their heads at the mere mention of these exotic regions — places where you couldn't fix alternate side parking even for Yom Kippur . . ."³⁹ In another example, Ben Waldman, a Jew in charge of Ronald Reagan's and Pat Robertson's "Jewish campaigns," told Chafets that "Jews are incredibly bigoted in their attitudes toward born-again Christians. For one thing, they think they're all the same — they don't know that they vary greatly among themselves."⁴⁰

Other perceptions are shared by Yossi Klein Halevi, author of the 1995 *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist*, an inside account by a JDL member who left the group and had a chance to reflect upon what membership meant to him at the time and what in the long run was problematic about that membership. Son of a Holocaust survivor (who, incidentally, was saved by a gentile), Halevi learned from his father "the wisdom of Jewish Exile: *Halakhah*, it is law, *Esau sone l'Ya'akov*, Esau the Goy hates Jacob the Jew." Halevi's father's view of the world was rooted in the traditional Jewish view of theodicy: anti-Semitism was God's punishment. His father felt that "you didn't question natural disasters, blame volcanoes for periodically erupting; you learned to protect yourself." Echoing a theme we saw earlier, "non-Jews were almost irrelevant — a nameless, indifferent storm" — in Halevi's father's stories. Halevi was raised in a Brooklyn neighborhood that shared this worldview: "Beyond our Brooklyn enclave, populated mostly by Orthodox Holocaust survivors like my family, were Italians, Puerto Ricans, Scandinavians. They evoked no curiosity in us, only fear. We saw them all as members of the same ethnic group: Jew-haters. Goyim, we called them, a

Hebrew word that literally means ‘the nations’ but that we understood to mean the enemy.” By the end of adolescence, Halevi had accepted most of the lessons his father had taught him, particularly his father’s most crucial lesson: “to see myself as a stranger in a hostile world, a member of a people related only formally to humanity — in effect, a separate species.”⁴¹

Again, such perceptions of the American Majority parallel those of other Jewish members of the new American elite, including novelist Philip Roth, as we have seen. In another passage from *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Roth mocks the purported barbarity of White Americans:

Let the *goyim* sink *their* teeth into whatever lowly creature crawls and grunts across the face of the dirty earth . . . let them eat vulture, let them eat ape-meat and skunk if they like — a diet of abominable creatures well befits a breed of mankind so hopelessly shallow and empty-headed as to drink, to divorce, and to fight with their fists. All they know, these imbecilic eaters of the execrable, is to swagger, to insult, to sneer, and sooner or later to hit. Oh, also they know how to go out into the woods with a gun, these geniuses, and kill innocent wild deer . . . You stupid *goyim*! Reeking of beer and empty of ammunition, home you head, a dead animal (formerly *alive*) strapped to each fender . . . and then, in your houses, you take these deer . . . cut them up into pieces, and cook them in a pot. There isn’t enough to eat in this world, they have to eat up the *deer* as well! They will eat *anything*, anything they can get their big *goy* hands on! And the terrifying corollary, *they will do anything as well*.⁴²

Fast-forward a generation and Roth has become the paranoid and bitter Jew he had railed against forty years earlier. This was clear by the time he released *The Plot Against America* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004). Judging by the book’s content and plot, Roth himself appears consumed with a vision of a Jew-hating goyische nation led by Charles Lindbergh.⁴³ The fact that white Christian boys and men in the millions went to die for the Jews’ enemy in World War II seems lost on the elder Roth, whereas Hollywood director Steven Spielberg had the decency to acknowledge such sacrifices.⁴⁴ Roth’s hatred was so palpable that the review of *The Plot Against America* that appeared in *The American Conservative* concluded, “This is a repellent novel, bigoted and libelous of the dead, dripping with hatred of rural America, of Catholics, of any Middle American who has ever dared stand against the war machine.”⁴⁵

Four years later, Roth released *Indignation*, his twenty-ninth book. In this novel about a young man from Newark (Roth’s hometown) attending a college in small-town America, Roth’s Jewish protagonist, a weekend waiter, can barely stand the WASP locals:

More than a few times during the first weeks, I thought I heard myself being summoned to one of the rowdier tables with the words “Hey, Jew! Over here!” But, preferring to believe the words spoken had been simply “Hey, you! Over here!” I persisted with my duties, determined to abide by the butcher-shop lesson learned from my father: slit the ass open and stick your hand up and grab the viscera and pull them out; nauseating and disgusting, but it had to be done.⁴⁶

Others have examined this strain of hostility lurking in other cultural constructions. Nearly a decade after Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* appeared, for example, Hollywood insider Ben Stein added a new dimension to understanding the hostility so many creative American Jews felt toward Majority Americans. In his 1976 essay “Whatever happened to small-town America?” he explored television's pronounced hostility toward rural (read Christian) America. Overwhelmingly Jewish, the television elite, like its Hollywood counterpart, imagined that small-town gentiles naturally meant Jews harm. “As a result, when he [a Jewish TV writer] gets the chance, he attacks the small town on television or the movies.” Stein then offered his own views on what the contemporary Hollywood creative community was thinking:

The television shows and movies are not telling it “like it is”; instead they are giving us the point of view of a small and extremely powerful section of the American intellectual community — those who write for the mass visual media What is happening, as a consequence, is something unusual and remarkable. A national culture is making war upon a way of life that is still powerfully attractive and widely practiced in the same country Feelings of affection for small towns run deep in America, and small-town life is treasured by millions of people. But in the mass culture of the country, a hatred for the small town is spewed out on television screens and movie screens every day Television and the movies are America's folk culture, and they have nothing but contempt for the way of life of a very large part of the folk People are told that their culture is, at its root, sick, violent, and depraved, and this message gives them little confidence in the future of that culture. It also leads them to feel ashamed of their country and to believe that if their society is in decline, it deserves to be.⁴⁷

Three years later, Stein revealed other aspects of this “ethnic/cultural polarity.” In his book *The View from Sunset Boulevard*, Stein provided a potent example of contempt for rural Americans, showing how Norman Lear's production company, TAT, created two shows in the late 1970s set in small towns: *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* and *Fernwood 2 Night*. “In both shows, what Marx called ‘the idiocy of rural life’ comes across powerfully. The

small Ohio town of Fernwood, not quite rural and not quite industrial, is full of bigots, Klansmen, quacks, hillbillies, and religious frauds.”⁴⁸ The similarities to Kunstler’s blog views are obvious, as we will see.

As a Jewish writer from New York, Kunstler in his blogs has often exhibited hostility toward non-Jews, particularly those not from the Northeast or the West Coast. For instance, in his blog “We’re Weimar” he writes about the Tea Party convention in Nashville: “It was held not accidentally at the ridiculous Opryland Hotel and resort in the city’s outer suburban asteroid belt, right next to the circumferential freeway, and next door to the defunct (1997) Opryland USA theme park, an attraction based on the cute idea that Tennessee rubes were too dumb to spell the word opera — so the symbolism was perfect.” He continues:

Behind the incoherent cargo of conflicting complaints that makes up Tea Party doctrine — like “keeping the government’s hands off our medicare!” — stands the more basic dissolution of the Sunbelt’s miracle economy, along with the pain and bewilderment of the southern peckerwood political nexus that rose out of the dust after World War Two to build the suburban nirvana of universal air-conditioning, happy motoring, Jesus tub-thumping, over-eating, and Friday night football that defined Sunbelt culture. They sense now that history is about to thrust them back into the okra patch, with the hookworms and the chiggers, as the economy whirls down the drain, and the car dealerships close up, and the idle production homebuilders succumb to methedrine addiction, and the price of Reba McEntire tickets exceeds their dwindling resources, and they are none too happy about any of that.⁴⁹

In one of his signature phrases, Kunstler writes that “The Tea Party people are the corn-pone Nazis I have been warning you about.” Further, “The Jesus thumpers among them” are treated contemptuously, as he does at the conclusion of this blog: “And when Jeezus comes to take you home, that place will be just like Opryland USA was in its heyday, with Dolly Parton in every suite and all the pulled pork sandwiches under heaven’s dome”⁵⁰

Kunstler continues with this undifferentiated assault against tens of millions of Christian Americans in another blog, “One Lump Or Two?” where he trumpets the warning “Here come the Corn Pone Nazis!” The primary focus of his contempt is the Republican Party’s vice presidential nominee in the 2008 election:

. . . Sarah Palin, is exactly the kind of corn pone Hitler that America deserves: a badly-educated, child-like, war-mongering opportunist easily manipulated by back-stage extremist billionaires who think they don't have enough money yet. Sarah Palin is going to run for president in 2012. In the process she'll turn the sad remnants of the Republican party into a suicide cult, but she might just get elected and you can kiss the 230-year-long experiment in representative government good-bye for good.⁵¹

Once again, in the following blog, Kunstler evidences his considerable disdain for White Christians from many parts of America:

The Republican case is too painfully obvious — Congressman Todd Akin being only the latest buffoon from the vast red state flyover cultural wilderness of franchise food and franchise thought to expose himself as lacking the basic male decency to defend womanhood against the consequences of plain-and-simple rape. In Dixieland Republicanism — now a misty region-of-mind that extends way beyond the old Confederate borders — you have the perfect confluence of sheer stupidity with the put-on, fake religiosity of men too weak to take responsibility for their own actions. They can just pawn everything off on Jesus: the good, the bad, the mystifying, the shameful. All the Republican men have to do is show up at the Nascar oval in time for barbecue.⁵²

In a slightly more recent blog, Kunstler repeats his unflattering imagery:

It's especially disturbing to see the infiltration of the latest version of Jesus mumbo-jumbo — Southern Republican Nascar Evangelical orthodoxy — take over the collective mind of the USA. The poverty of ideas this represents can't be overstated and the timidity of any opposition to it is a disgrace to our heritage. Maybe that's an argument for electing a Mormon president, since that peculiar branch of the church is so self-evidently childish and ridiculous that it will probably do more to defeat religious fanaticism than all the humanist dissertations ever written — or a thousand clones of Madonna Ciccone dancing in stadiums under laser beams in titanium brassieres.⁵³

Thus the mystery: Why does Kunstler create a favorable array of images of White Christians in *World Made By Hand*? Despite sharing with many other American Jews the same animosity toward the generalized masses of White Christians not from New York City or the West Coast, and despite consistently attacking and mocking those Americans in his weekly blog, he unswervingly treats the vast majority of his characters in *World Made By*

Hand — White Christians not from New York City or the West Coast — as fully developed human beings with abundant good qualities. Further, these Christians have suffered yet still manage to put back together civilized — even comfortable in some way — lives. Most perplexing is the fact that the most unabashed Christians in the novel are a group of White Southerners led by Brother Jobe. In *World Made By Hand*, he and his congregation are through and through portrayed as just and God-fearing people.

Consider that the novel opens with Robert Earle returning from a fishing trip with Reverend Loren Holder, pastor of Union Grove's First Congregational Church. His wife is Jane Ann. Both are flawed people, but that makes them human. Holder, though his belief in God flags, continues to fulfill his role as pastor. A soft man, weakened like so many other Americans by the easy life of modern conveniences and great abundance, he nonetheless endures the end of normal times. As the novel progresses, Holder attempts to become more of a man, one step being the assumption of the office of town constable. Soon enough, this forces him to confront a local bully, a task he realizes he will suffer for — and does, beaten almost to death. The fact is, however, he faces up to his duties. Most likely, readers will finish the novel with the impression that Holder is a good man.

Other townspeople are also good, decent human beings. Quite simply, nowhere does Kunstler disparage these citizens. Even the “trailer trash” who live up the hill from Union Grove and operate the salvaging operation at the town dump are differentiated human beings, not a generic mass of NASCAR-loving imbeciles. To be sure, one of their less mentally gifted members shoots and kills a companion of Earle's, but most of the blame is laid on post-normal times circumstances. Even the compound's leader, Wayne Karp, is given his humanity, though as leader of his band he must operate with a firm hand. As seen above, he is genuinely sorry when one of his men kills a young man from town, and later, when Earle, as mayor, and Holder, as constable, aim to bring Karp to justice, he has no choice but to resist, which makes perfect sense under the circumstances. Karp is in no way inherently evil.

One of the happiest settings in the book is based at the large farming operation run by local laird Stephen Bullock, who is “about sixty, hale and brawny, six foot three in boots, with silver hair that hung to his shoulders and was only starting to thin in the front His blade of a nose and penetrating blue eyes added to his look of Roman authority” (77). Educated at Yale, Bullock subsequently earned a law degree at Duke, and when his father died young, he assumed control of their fruit farm, adding to it considerably after that. Approvingly, Kunstler writes that “Stephen Bullock had a comprehensive vision of what was

going on in our society and what would be necessary to survive in comfort, and I don't think he ever deviated from that vision for a moment" (85). Further, "Self-sufficiency was not new to him, but the necessity of changed times made him take it to higher levels" (78).

Kunstler, through his characters and the plot, shows in many ways that despite the severe deprivations and loss of loved ones, the post-collapse world is a better one. Consistent with his non-fiction critiques of the industrial world, Kunstler shows that he abhors the tacky suburban strip-mall appearance and its car-centered mode of operation. Asphalt and parking lots are the symbol of such decadence and a failure of vision. "The landscape," he writes,

had changed so much over the years. A lot of what had been forsaken, leftover terrain in the old days, was coming back into cultivation, mostly corn, some barley, oats, hay, and lots of fruit trees. Everywhere that had been a parking lot, the pavement was breaking up and growing over with scrub, sumac, and poplar mostly. The roadside commercial buildings going out of town to the west were in various stages of slow disassembly: the discount beverage warehouse, the strip mall where the movie rental, dollar store, and a Chinese take-out joint used to be. All the metal was striped off.⁵⁴ (74-5)

Indeed, "Farming was back. That was the only way we got food" (5). And nowhere is this return to an age of homespun more vividly and positively portrayed than at Stephen Bullock's "plantation." Consisting of 2,000 acres, it provides lumber which is milled on the premises, and "impressive workshops in the vicinity of the house, several of them new fieldstone buildings: the creamery, the smokehouse, the brewery, the harness shop, the glass shop, the smithy, the laundry." It also includes a horse-breeding operation, not to mention fields of hard-to-find crops such as sorghum. When Earle and Brother Jobe visit the farm, Earle narrates:

We made our way around the extensive property, down grassy lanes between fields of one crop and another. The corn was knee-high and lush. The buckwheat was in flower . . . [Bullock] was particularly proud of his experiments with spelt, an antique precursor of our common wheats and apparently immune to the rust disease that lurked in our soils . . . The hillsides above his grain fields were dotted with brown and white cattle, some dairy and some steers for beef . . . There were ten acres alone in potatoes and as much in kitchen vegetables. He had mostly women and a few children chopping weeds among the crop rows out there, and men on construction and heavy labor jobs around the plantation. We saw a crew coming in from the woodlots with a load of red pine logs behind a team of massive oxen. (78-81)

Kunstler is reverent toward America's (gentile) past. For instance, he privileges past architecture over that of the post-World War Two designs. Bullock's 1802 house, for example, is a fine one, as this scene attests:

The sun was down, but plenty of purple afterglow remained and to the east a coppery quarter moon was rising in the warm haze. The antique foursquare manse never looked lovelier, with trumpet vine blossoming over the pergola outside the kitchen, roses in the arbors, two potted fig trees beside the door, swallows dipping around the eaves, and purposeful human activity evident everywhere your eye came to rest. Lights glowed warmly inside the big house and a Debussy recording played. It was the epitome of what you would want to return home to after a harrowing journey to a dark place. (188)

A high point in the novel comes when Earle and some New Faith "Holy Land vets" return from Albany after having rescued four of Bullock's ransomed men. As a way of showing thanks, Bullocks plans to put on a "grand levee," which provides a perfect pretext for Kunstler to celebrate the death of gas-guzzling car life and the rebirth of life lived locally:

The levee at Stephen Bullock's farm was the greatest social event around Washington County in decades, even going back into the old days, when television and all the other bygone diversions held people hostage in their homes after the sun went down, and you could hardly pry people out of their living rooms — as we used to call the place where the TVs lived Bullock's levee brought us out of ourselves, out of a dark wilderness of the spirit where we had sojourned for so long in anxiety and isolation. (208)

As Bullock's farm is out of town, people ride in wagons to get there, and what ensues is "a train of horse-drawn vehicles that stretched a quarter-mile long heading west into the sun" (208). Earle and others are musicians and play their instruments as they ride, belting out tunes such as "Sail Away Ladies" and "Grey Eagle." Upon arrival, guests are greeted by the only evidence of working electricity in the area: Bullock had strung up Christmas lights which ran off his own hydroelectric setup. Spirits are abundant as well, as alcoholic cider, beer, whiskey and a potent punch sit on outside tables. Long tables "groaning with puddings, new potato salad, sugar snaps, radishes, pickles, sauerkraut, creamed new onions, corn bread, cakes (real cakes made with wheat flour), pies (ditto the flour), berry crumbles, cookies and confections, butternut fondants, even a tray of fudge made from chocolate" stand nearby (209).

Kunstler sketches out the joy of the event in chapters forty-four through forty-six, giving himself the opportunity to describe the superb assortment of chemical-free meats and how they are cooked, the beauty of the nubile New Faith women (one of whom tries to seduce Earle), and the medley of old (then not so old) tunes Earle's music circle plays. To symbolize the superiority of these new times over old, Kunstler focuses on the humble hot dog, served on real flour buns. "The truth was Bullock's hot dogs were far superior to any commercial hot dog I'd ever had back in the old days. Everything was handmade, including the sauerkraut and the mustard. The dogs themselves tasted more like bratwursts, and the buns were just out of the oven" (211). These treats began the festival and another American staple, hamburgers, closed it. Post-collapse life could be good. Clearly Kunstler is not at all writing about hateful people or a lifestyle he despises; he seems to genuinely respect and cherish his characters.⁵⁵

This sympathy and even identification with his characters and their small-town lives find expression in Earle's relationships with gentile women. Nowhere is there evidence of disgust at who these women are or toward their Christian backgrounds, nor is there any untoward hints of exaggerated lust, certainly nothing approaching what we saw above with Roth. To begin, Earle's wife Sandy, née Trammel, is already dead by the time the novel begins, and from what little is written about her, she sounds like a Majority American, i.e., from a White Christian background. The same can be said for Earle's first lover, Jane Ann Holder, who generally visited every Thursday evening "in a connubial way." "It was an arrangement. She was my best friend's wife. My wife was dead. No suitable single women were around. Loren was apparently no longer able to have sexual relations with Jane Ann . . ." (16). Consequences of not living in normal times.

To be sure, Kunstler is not unconcerned with a woman's beauty. On the contrary, he is attentive to description: "At forty-seven, Jane Ann was still a beautiful woman, with deep breasts, a slim waist, and a small behind. Her qualities of physical beauty were undiminished by the constant sorrow she carried like a burdensome cargo." Kunstler, though, uses this only to deepen her character, which has other dimensions as well, namely sadness. Some years earlier her son Evan had joined Earle's son Daniel in a quest to explore the collapsed nation that America had become. Neither has been seen since. While Earle maintains some semblance of hope, Jane Ann "had been in a state of despair since her girl had been taken by the flu . . . We used to call people like her 'depressed,' but we dropped those clinical locutions because despair was a spiritual condition that was as real to us as the practical difficulties we struggled with in everyday life. Jane Ann could not stop mourning. She was

not the person she used to be, but she resembled her” (17).

Earle’s trysts with Jane Ann are not the only ones that are a bit awkward in these post-normal times. After a series of incidents, including a murder and house fire, a young widow of about thirty comes to Earle’s house to ask him to care for her and her seven-year-old daughter Sarah. The widow, Britney Watling, feels she can no longer fend for herself and her daughter, but Earle protests, “I’m old enough to be your father, and I was present where your husband was murdered. People might get some strange ideas” (122). Britney appreciates these reservations but is realistic enough to know that under current circumstances in these unusual times such a domestic arrangement could be tolerated — if only barely.

The relationship remains platonic for a while. Then, the inevitable occurs. Britney one evening enters Earle’s room, “barefoot and wearing an old green chenille bathrobe.” Earle’s pulse quickens “just having her in my room.”⁵⁶ Moments pass and Earle becomes increasingly tense. “Then Britney stood up, letting the bathrobe fall off her shoulders onto the floor as she did. Her nakedness was shocking. Though small, she was a perfectly formed woman” (249). Kunstler’s description of what follows is the most graphic sexual portrayal in the novel, but the fact is it remains a conceivable development given the plotline and the times in which they now live. This carnal encounter is but one aspect of Earle’s relationship with Britney, and as with his other romances, this one is wholly respectful.

Conclusion

The summer continued with no more disturbances or big tragedies, though the temperature in July hit a record 107 degrees. Trade of sorts resumed up and down the Hudson, allowing some news about cities downstream to filter up. Manhattan, it was reported, was left with unusable skyscrapers because without electricity they were worthless. Long Island was hit by both an enormous hurricane and a dengue fever epidemic “and now had a population equivalent to what it had been in the year 1800” (317). Life was overwhelmingly more local in Union Grove. Earle made a go of his new life with Britney and Sarah, thankful that Britney, “tough and tender both,” had “brought me home to myself after a long sojourn in a dark region of my heart.” Kunstler closes *World Made By Hand* by having Earle conclude: “And that is the end of the story of that particular summer when we had so much trouble and so much good fortune in the world we were making by hand” (317).

Notes

1. *World Made By Hand*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008). Chapter one of the book can be read here: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97470094>, (accessed Sept. 17, 2012).
2. Yggdrasil, "Modeling the Collapse," *The Occidental Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 2012), 6.
3. "Join Up!," <http://kunstler.com/blog/2012/09/join-up.html>, (accessed Sept. 4, 2012).
4. See "That Old Martial Spirit," <http://kunstler.com/blog/2012/08/that-old-martial-spirit.html>, (accessed Oct. 17, 2012).
5. Patrick O'Brien, "Not Normal Times: Post-Collapse Apocalyptic Novels (Part One)," *Journal of Hokkai Gakuen University*, No. 152, June 2012.
6. Joseph A. Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37-38.
7. See <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/channel/doomsday-preppers/>, (accessed Oct. 17, 2012).
8. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jericho_\(TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jericho_(TV_series)), (accessed Oct. 17, 2012).
9. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution_\(TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution_(TV_series)), (accessed Oct. 16, 2012).
10. See <http://www.infowars.com/> and <http://www.prisonplanet.com/>; <http://prisonplanet.tv/news/index.php>; and <http://www.youtube.com/user/thealexjoneschannel>, respectively.
11. Terry Weiss, "Economist Richard Duncan: Civilization May Not Survive 'Death Spiral'," http://moneymorning.com/ob/economist-richard-duncan-civilization-may-not-survive-death-spiral-2/?utm_expId=5485297-9&utm_referrer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.infowars.com%2Fare-the-government-and-the-big-banks-quietly-preparing-for-an-imminent-financial-collapse%2F, (accessed Oct. 23, 2012).
12. <http://www.infowars.com/are-the-government-and-the-big-banks-quietly-preparing-for-an-imminent-financial-collapse/>, (accessed Oct. 17, 2012).
13. See "The Hardest Decision of My Life," <http://chuckbaldwinlive.com/home/archives/2209>, (accessed Oct. 17, 2012).
14. See "A Suggested Survival List," <http://chuckbaldwinlive.com/home/archives/5084>, (accessed Sept. 3, 2012).
15. Mathew Barrett Gross and Mel Gilles, *The Last Myth: What the Rise of Apocalyptic Thinking Tells Us About America* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2012), 13-14.
16. Brother Jobe also serves as the bearer of bad news about race relations in post-collapse America. In addition to informing the reader about race problems to the west, he also informs us that things were also bad in Pennsylvania, where "The white against black and so forth was spilling over from Philly too, and we had trouble with it" (76). He repeats this tale when queried by Stephen Bullock about why they left Pennsylvania. "Well, sir, race trouble to be honest. A lot of people cut loose when Washington got hit, you know Pennsylvania became a desperate place. After a while, it was like cowboys and Indians Over the years we lost twelve of our number." In fact, Jobe reports more widespread mayhem: "There's grievances and vendettas all around at every level. Poor against whatever rich are left. Black against white. English-speaking against the Spanish. More than one bunch on the Jews. You name it, there's a fight on" (148-9).
17. Kunstler, of course, is referring to journalist Thomas Friedman's 2005 book *The World Is Flat*:

- A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, which gives a vigorous defense of the spread of globalization. These, however, were not the only global problems. In keeping with his critique of oil-fueled suburban life, Kunstler inserts a passage where he is talking to a little girl who is reading a book featuring a motorcar. The girl understands neither what an engine is, nor gasoline, so Earle explains to her the use of oil and the peak oil phenomenon (in terms a girl can understand). “We had to get more and more of the stuff from faraway places across the ocean. And that led to a lot of trouble. People in other countries like China and Japan and Germany,” he continued, “needed oil too, and there wasn’t enough to go around, so they fought over what was left. And soon, the fighting caused more problems with money and getting all the other things we needed to live, like steel and rubber. And there were such big problems with money that a lot of people couldn’t buy cars, and even if they could, the gasoline was very expensive . . .” (245).
18. It is interesting to compare this prison situation with that portrayed in *Patriots: A Novel of Survival in the Coming Collapse*, a book I discussed in Part One of this series: “At many prisons the guard forces could not gain control of the prison population, and there were mass escapes. At several others, guards realized that the overall situation was not going to improve, and they took the initiative to do something about it. They walked from cell to cell, shooting convicts. Scores of other prisoners died at the hands of fellow convicts. Many more died in their cells due to other causes; mainly dehydration, starvation, and smoke inhalation” (9-11).
 19. This one reference to Earle’s actual identity as a Jew stands alone, as almost nothing else in the novel suggests other characters are definitively Jewish. Still, one might speculate about the ethnicity of the Union Grove doctor and dentist, Jerry Copeland and Larry Prager, respectively. While composer Aaron Copland used a variation on the name, it is not a typically Jewish surname, and well-known TV talk-show host and author Dennis Prager is Jewish, but many non-Jews with roots in Prague share the name. Finally, there is one other reference that could be to a Jewish character. One of Bullock’s four men who are kidnapped is Jacob Silberman, but there is so little information on this character that nothing conclusive can be said. In short, these three examples are ambiguous and do not warrant Jewish identities. Certainly Kunstler could have made them more explicitly Jewish had he wished to.
 20. In the final chapter, Earle narrates the outcome of the book. The bodies of Minor and Wayne Karp are taken from the springhouse, and only two people, Earle and the doctor, had a chance to compare the identical wounds on the bodies. Then Earle adds, “except for one other person, and I was not altogether sure anymore that he was exactly what you might call a person” (313). Kunstler leaves it at that and moves on to an unrelated topic, and the novel ends in four more pages. I have no idea who this “one other person” might be.
 21. See “Male Energies,” <http://kunstler.com/blog/2012/08/male-energies.html>, (accessed Oct. 22, 2012).
 22. Frederic Cople Jaher, “The quest for the ultimate shiksa,” *American Quarterly* 35 (5) (Winter 1983), 518-542.
 23. See Patrick O’Brien, “The Jew in Modern American Cinema: The Masks of Dustin Hoffman,” *Journal of Hokkai-Gakuen University*, No. 103, March 2000.
 24. Philip Roth, *Portnoy’s Complaint* (New York: Random House, 1969), 142-152.
 25. Roth, *Portnoy’s Complaint*, 192.
 26. Roth, *Portnoy’s Complaint*, 205-206.
 27. Philip Roth, *Portnoy’s Complaint*, 75.
 28. MacDonald, *Separation and Its Discontents: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism*

- (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 3-4. The two other books in the trilogy are *A People That Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994) and *The Culture of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).
29. MacDonald, *Separation*, 7.
30. MacDonald, *Separation*, 5. MacDonald also quotes an Orthodox rabbi who confirms some of the attitudes shared by Jews quoted in this paper: "Sadly it is . . . the granting of humanity to the Gentile either as an individual or as a people . . . that is so often lacking in Orthodox circles. Suffering from a kind of moral blindness, we find it difficult to see the non-Jew as anything more than a bit player in our own drama."
31. See <http://www.theoccidentalobserver.net/2010/06/kevin-macdonald-jews-as-a-hostile-elite-again/>, (accessed Oct. 5, 2012). MacDonald is editor of the online site "The Occidental Observer" (<http://www.theoccidentalobserver.net/>), which is associated with the academic print journal *The Occidental Quarterly*. For a list of MacDonald's articles dealing with his perceptions of Jewish hostility toward outgroups, see <http://www.theoccidentalobserver.net/category/jews-as-a-hostile-elite/> (accessed Oct. 19, 2012), where most of the articles are by MacDonald.
32. David Gelernter, "How the Intellectuals Took Over (And What to Do About It)," *Commentary*, March 1997, 33-37.
33. Meir Y. Soloveichik, *First Things*, February 2003.
34. Philip Weiss, "Letting Go," *New York Magazine*, January 29, 1996, 25. In another source, scholar Bonnie Zimmerman adds her own views about Gentiles:
Sept. 1978. After years of attending a graduate school with a large Jewish student body and teaching at colleges in the Chicago area, I moved to San Diego to take my first full-time teaching job. My first day in the classroom brings a shock: not since my undergraduate years in Indiana have I seen such a sea of pale faces and straight blonde hair. I have not felt this alien as a Jew in over a decade. As time goes on, I notice the little things: the constant assumptions that I am from New York, a student's complaint that I assign too many Jewish writers. What is happening to me? Am I finally uncovering the anti-Semitism my parents warned me about? ("The Challenge of Conflicting Communities," in *Thirty Jewish Scholars*, 204).
35. Philip Weiss, "Letting Go," 27.
36. Philip Weiss, "Letting Go," 27-28.
37. Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Levi-Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, 1974), 185.
38. Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, 74-75.
39. Ze'ev Chafets, *Members of the Tribe: On the Road in Jewish America* (New York, Bantam Books, 1988), 143.
40. Quoted in Chafets, *Tribe*, 54-56.
41. Yossi Klein Halevi, *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist: An American Story*, (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1995), 6-15.
42. Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, 81.
43. In his Des Moines speech on September 11, 1941, Lindbergh had advocated an isolationist position toward the ongoing war in Europe. The push for American entry into the war, he argued, emanated from three sources: the Roosevelt administration, Britain and International Jewry. Kevin MacDonald shows that despite being right on the facts, Lindbergh was nonetheless vilified nationally (See *Cultural Insurrections: Essays on Western Civilization, Jewish Influence,*

and *Anti-Semitism* [Atlanta: The Occidental Press, 2007], 267.) Joseph W. Bendersky, in *The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), treats this episode at length.

44. In his 1998 blockbuster *Saving Private Ryan*, Spielberg created an homage to these Christian Americans by showing how one family — the Ryans — sacrificed much to defeat Hitler. As Wikipedia notes, “In the United States Department of War in Washington, D.C., General George Marshall is informed that three of four brothers in the Ryan family have all died within days of each other and that their mother will receive all three telegrams on the same day. He learns that the fourth son, Private First Class James Francis Ryan of Baker Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, is missing in action somewhere in Normandy. After reading to his staff Abraham Lincoln’s letter to Mrs. Bixby, Marshall orders that Ryan be found and sent home immediately” (accessed Oct. 16, 2012).
45. Bill Kauffman, “Heil to the Chief,” *The American Conservative*, September 27, 2004.
46. Philip Roth, *Indignation*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 27–28.
47. Benjamin Stein “Whatever happened to small-town America?” *The Public Interest*, Summer 1976, 22–23.
48. Ben Stein, *The View From Sunset Boulevard: America as Brought to You by the People Who Make Television*, (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 72.
49. See “We’re Weimar,” <http://kunstler.com/blog/2010/02/were-weimar.html>, (accessed Oct. 12, 2012).
50. “We’re Weimar.”
51. See “One Lump or Two?” <http://kunstler.com/blog/2010/08/one-lump-or-two.html>, (accessed Oct. 4, 2012).
52. See “Male Energies,” <http://kunstler.com/blog/2012/08/male-energies.html>, (accessed Oct. 5, 2012).
53. See “Heretics Unite!” <http://kunstler.com/blog/2012/10/heretics-unite.html>, (accessed Oct. 16, 2012).
54. Kunstler’s attitude toward cars is disdainful, consistent with his writing in both non-fiction books and his blog. For instance, when Earle’s father-in-law Bill Trammel is on his deathbed and in a delirium, his last coherent words capture the extent to which cars were an integral part of their lives in that generation: “*Don’t worry, I’ll bring the car around . . .*” (24). Wayne Karp, whom we have already seen, is, in his leisure time “addicted to sporting entertainments that required gasoline engines: motocycling, motoboating, snowmobiling, off-roading, jet-skiing, and watching NASCAR racing on television. He couldn’t relax unless an engine was roaring somewhere near his head” (28). Perhaps his most poignant criticism of the car comes at the end of the book when he is conversing with Brother Jobe up in the horse pasture. “I love to watch the horses,” Jobe says, continuing:
“You know, all those years back down home, my people were just crazy for the NASCAR. They’d go out to some honking huge oval track at Darlington or Daytona and watch those dadblamed machines go round and round and round, making all that noise. A horrible din. For hours and hours. If I knew how somebody could endure that, I’d die happy. Not to mention calling it *recreation!* Heck, it’d be more interesting to go out to the freeway overpass and watch traffic. At least the goldurn cars’d go in different directions. Anyway, I’m glad that foolishness is over. The car wrecked the southland. It wrecked Atlanta worse than Sherman ever did. It paved over my Virginia. They made themselves slaves to the car and

everything connected with it, and it destroyed them in the end. Well, here's to the New South. May it rest in peace." (304-5)

55. It is serendipitous, perhaps, that Kunstler recently encountered a group of actual Christians who display the blended appearance of the novel's New Faith Congregation and Bullock's big "levee." In his blog "Ponzi's End" (May 28, 2012), Kunstler discusses a "religious cult commune in the next town" where the group resides in a former "gentleman's estate" built in the 1920s. "The buildings are quite beautiful; the main house is a Greco-Roman beaux arts mansion; a massive horse barn has large and graceful arched windows; and there are other houses and barns on the large property, which occupies a sweetly enfolding dell of land in this county of hills and valleys." Reading this description, one almost gets the feeling that he is describing passages from his own book, *World Made By Hand*. Kunstler continues describing the commune:

The weather couldn't have been more beautiful and the property was maximally groomed for the festival. There were several tents up, nice ones, decorated with colorful medieval-looking swags. One was a big circular tent set up for the folk-dances that are part of their subculture. You got a very clear picture of the demographic shape of the outfit: at the core of it were vital and healthy-looking young adults, median age around 30, I figured, who were running things, doing most of the work, organizing the daily routines. Then there were the old Boomers turned white-haired grandparents (many times), seekers from the 1970s who had signed on with the outfit long ago, reproduced mightily, and now played a background role in the scheme of things.

There was a costuming motif that was not too intense but allowed for visual self-identification among the members: long skirts for women; beards and pony-tails on the men, who all otherwise dressed in ordinary catalog casuals of the day. It set them apart without making them look too kooky. It also reinforced gender differences (the horror!) in a micro-society not dedicated to erasing and transgressing them. I didn't know much about the group's internal workings, but it seemed to me that the men were in charge, and I got the impression that far from representing some clichéd notion of "patriarchal oppression," it produced a reassuring tone of confidence in clear lines of responsibility - a quality now completely absent in outer America's culture of incessant lying, systematic fraud, and consensual evasion of reality.

Now compare that description to one from the book at the beginning of Bullock's festival:

None of the New Faith women — thirty-five of them altogether — were older than middle age and most of them in their twenties, with a few apparently older teens . . . The New Faith women dressed differently than our people. They wore a kind of uniform: a long, herb-dyed linen skirt and a sun-bleached white muslin blouse buttoned primly at the throat. The only real difference between them was in the sleeves. Some long, some short, and some no sleeves. (211).

One difference between the book and the group Kunstler observed is the presence or lack of children. At the commune children — "of which there were very many" — were well behaved. In *World Made By Hand* there are far too few children, even among the young and healthy New Faithers. This is a point of consternation to everyone. The starkest similarity between people in the novel and those at the commune comes with purpose, purpose grounded in localism:

What I saw on Saturday on this farm was a wholly different group demeanor: purposeful, earnest, confident, energetic, and cheerful. It mattered too, I think, that this small community's economy was centered on agriculture and value-added production of common household products (they make soaps and cosmetics for the natural foods market). This was a snapshot of the much smaller-scale and local economy of America's future, techno-narcissistic fantasies aside.

(<http://kunstler.com/blog/2012/05/ponzis-end.html>, [accessed Oct. 22, 2012])

56. Kunstler might be having a little ethnic fun, however, when he conjures up the reading material for Earle the night bathrobe-clad Britney appears in his room. She asks, "What are you reading?" To which Earle replies "Albert Speer's memoirs." Speer, Earle allows, was "Hitler's pet architect" (247). Readers may recall that Speer (1905-1981) was a minister in the Third Reich but after the war he accepted responsibility for his role in the war and called Hitler a criminal.