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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE TERROR OF DAILY LIFE

It's headline stuff, shocking and confounding, happening more and more. But no one, left or right, seems to have much to say on the subject.

In the summer of 1966, Charles Whitman left a suicide note, climbed a tower at the University of Texas and shot 14 people to death. In the ensuing years, the term "going postal" emerged, referring to a slowly rising incidence of workplace killings. But in the past ten years -- since Kip Kinkle at Thurston in 1998 -- suicidal multiple-homicide rampages have become commonplace. Columbine '99 and a quickening recent string: e.g. Cho at Virginia Tech last spring, the 19-year-old Omaha mall shooter in December, the honor student at Northern Illinois University last month. Four school shootings in one week in February, in fact.

The "explanations" are so weak as to be barely even voiced. "It's about too many guns." I was brought up in the 1950s in a household containing many firearms. No one went to school to shoot other children. Guns have been everywhere in this culture, but the shootings are a current, deepening reality. "It's due to the closure of mental health facilities." As if in the past such individuals would have been institutionalized? Most of these individuals showed no psychotic symptoms at all. If everyone on anti-depressants were suspect, millions would have to be on locked wards.

No, there's a pathology abroad that is too much to contemplate within the dominant discourse. Too much is implicated.

So many, many words about terrorism. All the terrorism, the threat of terror attacks. Those Islamic suicide bombers; hey, let's not forget those "eco-terrorists." Of course, one is far more likely to be a victim of gunfire at a school, in a mall, at the workplace, than to be blown up in War on Terror hostilities. The real terror, increasingly, is that of daily life in mass society.

Meanwhile, many are consumed by the latest cycle of electoral nonsense and manipulation. Can you imagine any politician touching the shootings epidemic with a thousand-foot pole? Denial still reigns, but it is being stalked in a grisly way. The rot at the core of industrial life is now rotting all the way through. The decomposition is far advanced and exposed for all to see.

What's happening in society is the flip side of the rapid destruction of the biosphere. There has been a very disturbing jump in the number of parents killing their own children. On Feb. 18 the CDC reported that the suicide rate among middle-aged Americans has jumped 20 percent in the past five years. In recent months a county in Wales has endured an explosion of teen suicides. And so it goes. Stress, depression, insomnia, anxiety are on the rise. People with no hope are signing out and taking others with them.

The "crisis of meaning" is not just a postmodern catchphrase. We find ourselves adapting and justifying, as meaning, texture, community, freedom slip away from our lives. Isaac Asimov's *Robots of Dawn* describes a technoculture in which the face-to-face has all but vanished. Sound familiar? Welcome to the Dead Zone and its no-future, where only one of the delusions is that life in this industrialized technoculture could ever be green, sustainable or healthy. Time to wake up and smell the gunsmoke.

John Zerzan
Eugene

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