

Sense and Sensibility: Modern Anthropology in a Posthuman World
or
Listening Well to the Globalization of Discontent
by
Dave Crawford
for
C.U.A.C 4/24/2005

First, I'd like to thank you all for coming this afternoon, or thank you for staying if you are amongst the hardcore anthro-geeks who have been here for much of the past two days. It warms my sour old heart to know there are young people out there who get off on the idea of doing anthropology. I think you're crazy, but crazy in a way that is inspiring.

Thanks in particular to the organizers—the geeks amongst the geeks, the most wacko of the crazies-- who have put this conference together. Organizing anthropologists is like teaching worms to sing; while ultimately futile, it can be entertaining if your sense of a good time is warped enough. You are all beautifully warped and we have all benefited from your efforts. And finally, thanks for having me back again this year to talk. I was out here for the first of these California Undergraduate Anthropologist events and I am both stupefied and thrilled that you have not only declined to seek a restraining order against me, but instead have asked me to talk again.

You know not what you have done; I am a dangerous man with a microphone. And in this forum I am especially dangerous as my assignment is to send you off with a bang. Your organizers are quite concerned that this be a positive bang, however, and if you know me at all then you also know that this is a terrible misalignment of assignments. I am not a positive person. On an existential level, and a political and economic and environmental one, I am quite sure we are all doomed. At one point I even started a religious order called the “Church of Despair” with a political wing which was the “The People for Doom”). Can you imagine? We were only trying to match the tax exempt status of the Christian Coalition, but it should tell you something that my contribution to religious politics was an organization that did not agitate for the death penalty, but instead advocated for death itself. Our rituals involved cheese puffs and used motor oil, but I can't go into that. The only other person to ever join my religion is now dead, which, again, colors my sense of where we're all heading.

Anyway, I've mellowed since those days and will try to make today's talk slightly more rosy, but it won't be easy. As near as I can tell our democracy is convulsing from a crack-like addiction to corporate money, our environment is degraded to the point we'll soon be counting laboratory rats as wildlife and golf courses as protected open space, our universities—which at one point were at least *said* to be concerned with the training of sensible citizens—are now openly declared giant job training factories where CEOs and government apparatchiks tell us what to teach. Our main goal is now to sharpen your spikes so you don't slide into the social class below. Yes, clearly the whole planet is doomed, not just you and me. So it is probably apparent why you were more than a little nuts to elect me as the one to send you off with hearts full of fire and minds lusting for an incandescent anthropological future that smells like vanilla candles and looks like ripe fruit, free beer, and naked Gap models. But I will try.

