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CONJECTURAL HISTORY AND EMPIRICAL DATA. A DEEP HISTORY OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

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ABSTRACT

Like Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don*, Marshall Sahlins's *Stone Age Economics* is perhaps "his own gift to the ages". In the intellectual climate of the 1960s, between Polanyi's lectures at Columbia University and Lévi-Strauss's Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale in Paris, Sahlins built a radical socio-economic theory, an anthropological economics, and an original idea of the human condition. This idea is based on empirical ethnographic materials, but also implicitly on the recovery of the ancient mythology and the poetical idea of the Golden Age, or the "state of nature" so prominent in the eighteenth century. At the center there is a concept of the human condition that Sahlins finds among pre-Neolithic hunters and gatherers, and which contrasts with the idea of the human condition constructed by Western Civilization, "on a perverse and mistaken idea of human nature". It was a challenge to the notion of "scarce resources". But Sahlins's depiction of the Stone Age as the Golden Age of limited work and material plenty, idealizing the early condition of man, seems to echo the biblical story. At the bottom there is "the fundamental problem of human evil", and original sin or the Genesis narrative. Fifty years after the publication of *Stone Age Economics* we can re-read that collection of essays on primitive societies, and especially *The Original Affluent Society*, and *The Spirit of the Gift* (the political aspects of the Gift) in a contrasting perspective of deep history of contemporary society, as a challenge to our social organization of production and consumption. But the lesson from archaeology (and history) is that it is very difficult for mankind to turn back time.

Keywords: Original Affluent Society, Hunter-Gatherers, Golden Age, Human Condition, Deep History.

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1. The Golden Age

From Hesiod to Edmund Spenser, John Davies of Hereford and other poets of the Elizabethan Age, and until nineteenth century Romantic literature, the myth of the Golden Age, and the ideas of the Fall of Man and original sin, accompanied the path of Western Civilization in poetry and in philosophy. And also in iconography, from the fifteenth to the twentieth century: from Cranach to Nolde (the magnificent *Verlorenes Paradies*, 1921, an image of rough loneliness after the Fall) or the wild variations of Gauguin's *Rupe Rupe* (1889) and *Nave Nave Mahano* (1896); from Agostino Carracci's *Reciproco amore* (1558) to Henri Matisse's *Le bonheur de vivre* (1905-1906) https://collection.barnesfoundation.org/objects/7199/Le-Bonheur-de-vivre-also-called-The-Joy-of-Life/, and the many variations of pastoral painting and the idealized forms of life in bucolic and pastoral poetry.

Iconography is just as important as literature, philosophy and theology, and a history with images is as important as a history with the written word.

Since classical antiquity, there has been constant tension between two recurring perspectives: the Golden Age where humankind lived without effort or pain, nourished by the fruits of earth, "for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint" (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 109-120); later as a lost Paradise/Paradise lost, and then necessity and tiring work; the political utopia of Virgil and the restoration of the Golden Age (Virgil, *Eclogues*, eclogue IV). The end of the Golden Age is in all cases determined by processes and materials of civilization or culture: metals and weapons, the plough, cities surrounded by moats and walls, writing. Then came Christian interpretation, until the Renaissance, through Virgil and Ovid,[1] and later the laicization of Genesis and theological thought in the eighteenth century.[2]

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[1] On the promise of a restored golden age during the sixteenth century, Yates 1975. On primitivism, Lovejoy and Boas 1997 (1935), perhaps a fundamental text for the genesis of *Stone Age*, but which is never mentioned there. The only reference is to Lucretius, through Marvin Harris, in relation to the pessimistic view of the hunter-gatherers, and the "Neolithic prejudice" (p. 3, note 1): the vision conceptualized by Adam Smith, but it is an idea that "probably [goes back] to a time before anyone was writing". The collection of ancient texts by Lovejoy and Boas showed that many aspects of eighteenth-century primitivism "had their counterparts in classical antiquity" (p. ix). On the modernists' literary construction of the primitive, Bell 2010.

[2] Sahlins writes in a 2006 cosmological essay, which I will return to later, that "the *philosophes'* project of enlightenment consisted largely in secularizing Christian theology" Sahlins (2006, 2008).

The central hypothesis of cultural primitivism from antiquity to the nineteenth century is that "the highest degree of excellence or happiness in man's life existed at the beginning of history" [3] and then came the decline and questions about possibilities of "recovery" or *reviviscentia* (the term used by Humanists),[4] the myth of Astraea and the resumption of a hypothetical "primeval mode of life", "renewal" of the Golden Age, and/or "a voluntary return to a primeval mode of life" or "primeval excellence".[5] Alternatively, there was Millenarianism, or more recently also Anarcho-primitivism, which might, however, date back to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854).

The general theme is the "human condition" after culture (development of civilization), or after original sin, that is, in Western Civilization ("Western Civ"), the idea of Judeo-Christian cosmology's human condition.[6] Nevertheless, *humankind* or *human beings*, and *human condition*, are concepts that are too broad, especially in a chronological perspective and with regard to discontinuities. Between the so-called Neolithic Revolution and the Bronze Age, third-second millennium, a social stratification was created whereby a small part of *humankind* obtained benefits and profit, resources and wellbeing from the civilizing process. In Assyrian low-reliefs social stratification and relations of domination are clear and evident. In late medieval iconography they are expressed by the distance between those who are inside the castle and those outside the walls, between knights and peasants.[7]

The civilizing process includes social and moral differentiations, different behavioral codes, as well as different forms of "distress of civilization", of which cultural primitivism is an essential sign: "[c]ultural primitivism is the discontent of the civilized with civilization, or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it".[8]

From the viewpoint of "cultural primitivism", Marshall Sahlins tried to provide an ethnographic ground to an ideal and a myth (a romantic idealization of the past?). Sahlins's interpretation is entirely built on Paleolithic remains, on the few surviving societies of hunters and gatherers; implicitly,

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[3] Lovejoy and Boas 1997 (1935): 2.

[4] Gombrich 1974: 9-30. In Sahlins's opinion, this was the invention of a tradition: Sahlins 1993: 1-25, 7-8.

[5] Concepts and terms of Lovejoy, the founder of the "historiography of ideas". Portions of these themes, as we will see, appear in the essays published by Sahlins between 1996 and 2005.

[6] The concept often taken up by Sahlins in his essays, e.g. Sahlins 1993: 1-25, 18.

[7] Elias 1994. In particular, "Scenes from the Life of a Knight" and the drawings of *Mittelalterliches Hausbuch*. See P. Murphy's critical investigation (Murphy 2015).

[8] Lovejoy and Boas [1997 (1935): 7], who refer to Freud 2002 (1929).

it is built on the hypothesis or conjecture that the behaviors, lifestyles and social ethics of aboriginal Australians, of Bushmen, of Hadza are similar to those of our late Pleistocene ancestors. However, ethnographic materials are not fossil and archaeological evidence, and hunter-gatherers are not even "survivors". Rather, they are our contemporaries, and Sahlins was aware of this.[9] The following considerations are only a modest historiographic reconstruction of Sahlins's interpretation.

2. A historiographic background

From a historiographic and genealogical viewpoint, Sahlins's references are classic authors and themes from anthropology: Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don*, and empirical materials of the theory, Franz Boas's *potlach* and Bronisław Malinowski's *kula trade*, which are at the center of Mauss's ethnographic collection. Sahlins also partially inherited Mauss's generalization between ancient law and contemporary society, in the mixture between law, economics, religion and social morphology. And he shared Mauss's humanistic utopia in contrasting feeling and reason,[10] in the name of *civilité*: "C'est en opposant la raison et le sentiment, c'est en posant la volonté de paix contre de brusques folies de ce genre [the massacre in a Melanesian village described by Thurnwald] que les peuples réussissent à substituer l'alliance, le don et le commerce à la guerre et à la stagnation".[11] Mauss was thinking about early twentieth century society.[12]

The emerging theme is gift-exchange / contract: in the absence of a sovereign power "[t]he gift is the primitive way of achieving the peace that in civil society is secured by the State", whereas the classical contract is "a structure of submission, and sometimes of terror".[13] Sahlins too looks in the Paleolithic for an alternative to contemporary society. The reference to contemporary society is evident in *Stone Age*, in its first pages: "The market-industrial system institutes scarcity, in a manner completely unparalleled and to a degree nowhere else approximated".[14]

In addition to Mauss, Sahlins refers to Karl Polanyi as well, and his own references are partially the same as Polanyi's. In Polanyi, especially

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9 Sahlins 2017 (1972): 8. See also Lovejoy and Boas 1997 (1935): 9-10.

10 Sahlins 2017 (1972): 159-160.

11 Mauss 1950: 78.

12 Ginzburg 2010: 1303-1323.

13 Sahlins 2017 (1972): 153-154.

14 *Ibid.*: 4-5.

in *The Great Transformation*, the history of European society is the history of society's violent subordination to the market with the State and the factory – an interpretation shared by James C. Scott.[15] Polanyi's thesis is based on historical and anthropological empirical materials (ancient and African societies) by contrast with the theses of economic science (classical and neoclassical economics). Polanyi drew a rigid antinomy between market and "non-market" economies (*market* and *marketless* or *peripheral market*): variably "archaic", "primitive", "early", all the extinct economies and societies (unlike Sahlins, and it is a significant difference). To be sure, the economic forms are historical, but the essential problem is *embeddedness*: from Polanyi, Mark Granovetter elaborates the idea that personal relationships are always embedded in social networks, generating trust and creating relations of exchange that cannot be reduced to pure economic rationality.[16] This is also true for the market economy, before and after the great transformation, or before and after the Neolithic Revolution, and similar considerations can be extended to Sahlins and *Stone Age*. Indeed, in the preface to the new edition of 2003, Sahlins writes about the mystification of "sclerotic opposition of economic rationality and culture […] because our rationality is grounded in equally relative and nonutilitarian schemes of cultural value […] In a different way but to the same effect as the material practices of the Fijian or Trobriand Islanders, the capitalist system of pecuniary rationality is the implementation of a larger system of cultural value".[17] The economy is a category of culture, a cultural system like politics.

Anthropological economics is in synergy with political anthropology. In the preface to the French edition of *Stone Age Economics* of 1976 (*Âge de pierre, âge d'abondance*), Pierre Clastres focused on power and politics; prestige without power, and the fundamental discontinuity between primitive societies without State and societies with a State. In primitive societies, power is the "relation de dette entre le chef et la société"; or in other words: "la société primitive est la société contre l'État". And then the question Clastres asked Sahlins was: "Où prende naissance l'acceptation de la servitude?", clearly referring to Étienne de La Boétie. The "dette" is therefore an economic-political category. Sahlins met Clastres in Paris, in 1967-1968, in the laboratory of French structuralism, where he was invited by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In 1968 he published the first version of the essay on the original affluent society in "Les Temps Modernes" (*La première société d'abondance*)

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[15] For Scott, Polanyi was fundamental reading: *The Great Transformation*, "the most important book I've ever read" (Scott 2010).

[16] Granovetter 1985: 481-510.

[17] Sahlins 2003: xxiii-xxiv.

and he later published a review of Marvin Harris's book (*Cultural Materialism*) in "Libre",[18] but after Clastres's death. "Libre", the radical left-wing journal, to a certain extent the heir of "Socialisme ou barbarie" or an offshoot of "Textures", was set up by Clastres with Cornelius Castoriadis.

In the intellectual climate of the 1960s, between Polanyi's lectures at Columbia University and Lévi-Strauss's Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale in Paris, Sahlins built a radical socio-economic theory, an anthropological economics, and an original idea of the human condition. Polanyi's theoretical experience was built starting from anthropology, but taking a very broad historical view, from ancient Assyria to eighteenth century England, with a critical outlook on contemporary society and Western Civ, that is to say, the great transformation. The historical dimension was present in the interdisciplinary project at Columbia University[19] since the end of the 1940s. In *Stone Age Economics*, the partially implicit historical perspective is on deep history, on capitalistic society and on the human condition, through the experience of the laboratory of French structuralism from 1967 to 1968.

Implicitly, *Stone Age* is also a philosophy of history and a chronological history of mankind, whose roots in classical antiquity Lovejoy and Boas had traced in 1935, and a form of "cultural primitivism", which in Western Civ "is the discontent of the civilized with civilization".[20] It is also Freud's view of human nature, and his contribution to the understanding of the human mind. In the Freudian perspective, humankind does not tolerate the privation/deprivation imposed by society (civilization/culture) and does not like hard labor. Aversion to work can take up the myth of the Golden Age, before the Fall, but can it also cross the abyss between man's primitive condition and his condition after the Fall? In Sahlins there is an idea of primitive men's positive social proclivity. The idea of state of nature? Here the key is Sahlins's interpretation of the *Essai sur le don*: neither Rousseau nor Hobbes ever considered the state of nature as an empirical fact or a historical stage.[21] *The Spirit of the Gift* is perhaps the most beautiful essay of the collection. Sahlins's brilliant reading of the essay on gift retrieves a central but generally forgotten theme of Mauss's essay, that is, *Political aspects of* The Gift *and* Leviathan: "[t]he material flow underwrites or initiates social relations. Thus do primitive peoples transcend the Hobbesian chaos". In the comparison with Hobbes, the political philosophy of the *Essai sur le*

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[18] Sahlins 1979.

[19] Polanyi *et al.* 1957.

[20] Lovejoy and Boas 1997 (1935): 7. In the Preface there is a reference to Freud 2002 (1929). See also Gellner 1988.

[21] Sahlins 2017 (1972): 156.

don is that "[t]he primitive analogue of social contract is not the State, but the gift".[22] This essay, which won Pierre Clastres over, has a continuation in the other central essay after *The Spirit of the Gift*, *On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange*, through the hypothesis of a "provisional generalization".[23] "[A]nthropological economics" merges with political anthropology: before the birth of the State, the domestic mode of production tolerated only a limited level of accumulation and predation on the part of "big men". In the preface to the French edition, Clastres translated Sahlins's idea on primitive society into his fundamental thesis of political anthropology as follows: "[s]ociété donc sans organe séparé du pouvoir politique, société qui empêche, de manière délibéré, la division du corps sociale en groupes inégaux et opposés".[24] And in this empathy of Clastres lies part of the cultural and political success of Sahlins's hypotheses.

3. Human nature and western civ

In the 1990s Sahlins continued his research in a historical-cosmological perspective on Western Civ and its original features. One of Western Civ's grounds is the theological idea of "man's fall": the Judeo-Christian cosmology of the human condition, "of a human nature inherently corrupted by sin, of life as a punishment", and the dogma of human imperfection. Sahlins's path also includes an earlier reflection (1993) on Western social sciences and, in particular, anthropology, which has at its center the idea of human nature derived from Western theological tradition, which would make Western society an anomaly among cultures.[25] In Sahlins, the radical critique of Western Civ is at its core as well as the Western idea of human nature, that is, the consequences of the idea of human imperfection. The opposition between culture and nature and "the ancient Western specter of a presocial and antisocial human nature" would be an idea shared by all of intellectual history and in part by archaeology;[26] on three themes: the human condition, economics, politics.

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[22] *Ibid.*: 153.

[23] The division between generalized reciprocity, balanced reciprocity, negative reciprocity, and the idea of concentric moral circles of sociability (the connections between material flow and social relations).

[24] The Préface by Clastres was also a polemic with Marxist anthropology and with the French Communist Party; see also Graeber 2017: xv.

[25] Sahlins 1993, on the importance of deep history for anthropology. The other essays are Sahlins (1996) and Sahlins (2006).

[26] Sahlins (1996): 395-428.

The Western idea of human nature is at the center of two essays published between 1996 and 2005, perhaps as an answer to the most significant question that concluded the most classic essay in *Stone Age*: "Above all, what about the world today?".[27] The question was translated by David Graeber in the foreword to the Routledge Classics Edition: "Why do we see the world as inadequate to what we want out of it?".[28] However, this world might not be "inadequate" for everyone.

The two essays, published within a period of ten years, draw on each other and converse with one another, and in part with the central theme of *Stone Age*, which they investigate. *Stone Age*'s themes are recalled in connection with the theme of the human condition, accompanying all of Sahlins's scientific production, in a fundamental yet not very well-known essay, which I have already quoted, his Tanner Lecture of 2005, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature*. It was the search for a social and political order differing from that created by Western Civ. In order to overcome the antagonism between nature and culture dating back to Hesiod, Sahlins took up a "universal principle of human sociality", viz., kinship, "the original human condition", "an alternative conception of order" in anthropological research. Sahlins investigates its faint traces in Plato, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. This investigation focuses on the ways in which the very idea of human nature and condition was translated into political forms between absolutism and republicanism, "two contrasting modes of cultural order […] a diachronic and dynamic structure of interdependent opposites".[29]

In accordance with Clifford Geertz, Sahlins subscribes to the idea of a "reciprocally creative relationship" between biology and culture.[30]

In *Deep History*, a recent historiographical perspective, the concept of *kinship* was reformed and expanded according to the idea of *kinshipping*, "moving through time and space by means of relationship and exchange", but also "through sharing and cooperation, sociality, exchange, solidarity and collaboration, brutality, competition and conflict".[31]

At the center of Sahlins's theory lies, however, an idea of the human condition that Sahlins finds among the surviving pre-Neolithic hunters and gatherers, and that he contrasts with the idea of the human condition created by Western Civ, at bottom scrutinizing "the fundamental problem of human evil" and original sin. However, do non-fossil survivors provide reli-

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27 Sahlins 2017 (1972): 35.

28 Graeber 2017: xviii.

29 Sahlins 1996: 5-6.

30 Geertz 1973: 68.

31 Shryock and Smail 2011: 32.

able testimony? Sahlins was aware of this crucial question asked by Ernest Gellner. Gellner reconstructed the three fundamental ecological stages in human history (hunting/gathering, agriculture and industry) in relation to fundamental human activities (production, coercion, cognition). The hunter-gatherer stage was not central to Gellner's argument, simply serving as "a kind of starting point", a "kind of contrast or baseline", used to determine "what could *not* have happened then".[32] However, Gellner addressed the central problem of the relationship between archaeological evidence, interpretations and reconstructions. He started from the idea that "primitive man lived twice: once in and for himself, and a second time for us, in our reconstruction", and compared the ideas of Friedrich August von Hayek and those of Sahlins. The political spectrum between the right of Hayek and the radical left of Sahlins, with Veblen in the center, was made possible by the lack of conclusive evidence, the incomplete and ambiguous nature of evidence such as that provided by archaeology and ethnography.[33]

As noted earlier, Sahlins's interpretation was built entirely on Paleolithic remains, on the few hunter-gatherer societies that survived, perhaps those that were quite atypical for the very fact that they had survived, and in marginal areas, in ecological conditions that were presumably worse than those of the Paleolithic. Sahlins was aware that the anthropology of hunter-gatherers was prone to such an anachronism: the survivors were "refugees, deported". For Gellner, they could also have been generated by agricultural, complex society. According to Lovejoy and Boas, the anomaly consists precisely of "the peoples who have remained strictly in a state of nature […] a small portion of mankind". Consequently, the civilizing process becomes inevitable, on the idea of the "juristic state of nature", and the permanent need for forms of government "with stern punitive laws" in light of man's inclinations, with few exceptions.[34]

For Gellner, however, there was another more central question, one that concerned the social morality of savages, immune to the ethics of work and free from abstract and impersonal norms, a social morality condemned by Hayek and praised by Sahlins. As Gellner observed, these two positions were not, at a factual level, "so very much in disagreement".

Gellner also discussed the idea of "alleged social proclivities", present in Marx, and investigated the theme of the division of history in periods and stages (hunting/gathering, agrarian production, and industrial production) "in terms of their reproductive base", with the idea, however, that the eco-

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[32] Gellner 1988: 275.

[33] *Ibid.*: 25-35. Here I have taken a paragraph from my essay (Raggio 2016: 247-266).

[34] Lovejoy and Boas 1997 (1935): 18.

nomic base determines problems but not their solutions. Hunting and gathering, agrarian production and industrial production define societies that appear in "a very wide, indeed bewilderingly wide, diversity of forms".[35] And perhaps today we can add a fourth stage, of the digital era and genetic engineering. In 1988 Gellner wrote that it was not easy to refute Sahlins's theses since the survivors were "suspect witnesses", and especially because "archaeological and ethnographic evidence remains incomplete and ambiguous, and may remain so forever".[36] Yet, Sahlins never directly addressed archaeologists. As we have seen, Sahlins's archaeological perspective is, in a culturalist dimension, the anthropological discussion of the themes concerning the long period of Judeo-Christian cosmology with the idea of human nature.[37]

4. Turn back time

It is very difficult for mankind to turn back time: what does archaeology teach us? Today archaeologists' reconstructions and interpretations are perhaps less ambiguous or incomplete in character. Colin Renfrew emphasized the social benefits of Neolithization and tried to explain social development in the relationship between persons and material culture: a fact, independently of an evolutionary perspective.[38] Timothy Earle and Allen W. Johnson argue that the development of societies can be understood by examining three connected processes: intensification, integration, and stratification.[39] Did such evolution destroy the peaceful sociability of primitive man?[40] Archaeology teaches us as well that "[t]here is no directional trend among hunter-gatherer societies",[41] and there is no evidence of a "human proclivity to prefer leisure to greater wealth" (Sahlins's idea).[42] Sahlins reversed the dominant anthropological interpretation, but essentially ignored archaeology.

According to Sahlins's interpretation, kinship and domestic mode of production are the grounds for abundance and original prodigality, with the ethnographic and theoretical-methodological reference to Alexander V. Chayanov. In the world of hunter-gatherers the variations of reciprocity and

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[35] Gellner 1988: 19-20.

[36] *Ibid.*: 35-38.

[37] Explicitly in Sahlins (1996).

[38] Renfrew (1972, 1998).

[39] Johnson and Earle 2000.

[40] The repeated reference to "Man the hunter" and primitive man provoked a response from feminists: Sterling 2014.

[41] Rowley-Conwy 2001: 39-72.

[42] Graeber 2017: xv.

generalized reciprocity, and their specific obligations, are related to kinship distance. Was it also the utopia of an age of "material plenty" without exploitation? In Sahlins's ethnography, Bushmen and aboriginal Australians, who for Melville Herskovits were on the margin of survival, and almost below the level of pure subsistence,[43] become examples of a primordial abundance. Scarcity and poverty are institutionalized by the market economy (Polanyi's idea), that is, the bourgeois ideology of scarcity. Mobility and nomadism of hunters and gatherers remove the notion of scarcity, and are not marked by anxiety. Rather, they resemble a picnic on the Thames.[44]

In these pages, anticipated by ethnographic and statistical data, idealization of primitive men before the tragedy of neolithization is more evident.[45] But is the example of the picnic on the Thames, or a *déjeuner sur l'herbe*, the bourgeois at leisure in the Bois de Boulogne, an expression of affluent society or scarcity society?

Can we compare Manet's painting with an image of young Hadzas picnicking (https://www.nature.com/articles/481449a#rightslink)?[46]

In the mid-1970s, the theme was in the air. An American background is the symposium entitled "The Social Organization of Prehistoric Communities" held at the 64th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association at Denver in November 1965. In Denver, Lewis Binford, in his concluding paper, asked "one of the basic questions that informs the humanities: the transformation of the human condition brought about by the onset of agriculture and animal domestication".[47] This symposium and the conference entitled "Man the Hunter" in Chicago in 1966[48] are the background for Shalins's most famous essay.

Sahlins ignored archaeology, which was the scientific horizon of Lee and DeVore. Conjectures and, similarly, ethnographic analogies are also a way to deal with archaeological sources, along with evidence and possibilities, and this is perhaps the most interesting theoretical and methodological point of this historiographical history. DeVore, in particular, addressed the problem of ethnographic misunderstanding, denounced by Sahlins, too, in his Com-

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43 Herskovits 1952.

44 Sahlins 2017 (1972): 28: "consequently their wanderings, rather than anxious, take on all the qualities of a picnic outing on the Thames". The title of Sahlins's most famous essay was borrowed from John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*. In 1998 Galbraith concluded the 40th Anniversary Edition with the urgent idea of a "companion volume, *The Non-Affluent Society*".

45 An idea that was also held by the archaeologist Lewis Binford in the 1970s.

46 Henrich 2012: 449-450 (Figure 1: Helping hands).

47 Lee and DeVore 1968a: 343-349.

48 Lee and DeVore 1968b. At the conference, Sahlins presented the idea of the "original affluent society": *Notes on the original affluent society*.

Fig. 1. Édouard Manet, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863.

ments on the Denver Symposium: "we view the Bushmen study not as a study of living Paleolithic fossils but as an opportunity to test some assumptions about correlations between observed behavior patterns and the artifactual materials that are left behind to reveal those patterns". And Lee proposed ethnographic studies, but "with archaeological questions in mind".

Bushmen are not Paleolithic fossils, they are our contemporaries. And therefore "the anthropology of hunters is largely an anachronistic study of ex-savages […] the surviving food collectors, as a class, are displaced persons. They represent the paleolithic disenfranchised, occupying marginal haunts untypical of the mode of production: sanctuaries of an era, places so beyond the range of main centers of cultural advance as to be allowed some respite from the planetary march of cultural evolution, because they were characteristically poor beyond the interest and competence of more advanced economies".[49] Hypotheses are built on such materials: "[p]re-

[49] Sahlins 2017 (1972): 8.

sumably our ancestors…".[50] But the idea of the "original affluent society" is then entirely built on "survivors", and it is here that the problem – in my opinion (methodologically) crucial – of the relation between "conjectural history and empirical data" comes into focus.

Fifty years later, the – interpreted – empirical data are the archaeological ones: in many cases, the same data from the 1960s that archaeology scrutinizes today through new technologies and new questions.

Archaeology and history are not in *Stone Age*, but later Sahlins retraced, as we have seen, a perspective of deep history within a reflection on Western Civ, with the idea that "Western notions of nature and culture ignore the one truly universal character of human sociality: namely, symbolically constructed kinship relations".[51]

Sahlins was recently quoted with regard to so-called sustainability. Hunters and gatherers satisfy their needs completely with limited consumption of energy.[52] The Book of *Genesis* describes this Paradise lost and the move from hunter-gathering, the lifestyle of Eden, to the agrarian life: a modern quest to locate the Garden of Eden on Earth. The archaeological hypothesis that the *narrative* of a Garden of Eden may refer to a region that was once located in the Persian Gulf in an area now under the ocean (Juris Zarins and his Eden theory), or to the point of view of the hunter-gatherers, might be unfounded. The Garden of Eden or the Golden Age can be transformed into an idea or archaeological evidence, but the burial under the ocean could also be a metaphor of the impossibility of going back.

Ian Hodder had a brilliant archaeological and psychological approach to the theme in a perspective of deep history, from the Paleolithic to the Contemporary Age and vice versa, in the relationships between persons and things. Hodder identified four possible relationships or dependencies between persons and things: "humans depend on things […], things depend on other things […], things depend on humans […], humans depend on humans". Hodder moved the focus to things and to the multiple reciprocal connections. In his works, in a perspective of deep history, the key concept is that of *entanglement/entrapment*. Hodder reconstructs an evolution from the Paleolithic to the Contemporary Age where *entanglement*

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[50] Comments by Irven DeVore.

[51] Sahlins (2006, 2008).

[52] In the most radical interpretations, the myth of the Golden Age comes back, e.g., among theorists of Anarcho-primitivism such as John Zerzan, on the basis of "the work of academics like Richard Lee and Marshall Sahlins": "life before domestication/agriculture was in fact largely one of leisure, intimacy with nature, sensual wisdom, sexual equality, and health. This was our human nature, for a couple of million years, prior to enslavement by priests, kings, and bosses". An example of "discontent with civilization"; but how is the post-Fall to be explained?

with an increasing number of things turns into *entrapment* ("a darker side to the entanglements of humans and things"), reducing or excluding the possibility of going back.[53] However, in general the open theme is also and above all humankinds' capacity or need to look back.

Conclusion

In 1972, the same year as the first edition of *Stone Age*, David Bowie sang of the world's end as it runs out of resources in *Five Years*, the wonderful song opening the album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*: "We've got five years […] Five years, that's all we've got". The theme was in the air in the 1970s, just as it is in the air today. Maybe this story started after the Fall of Man.

The lesson from archaeology (and history) is that it is very difficult for humans to turn back time, and recover a "pristine affluence" or the original affluent society.[54] The benefits of the Neolithic "would always have looked different depending on vantage point; those living in the palace on the hill and those serving in its shadow".[55]

Sahlins's gift, "his own gift to the ages", like Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don*, is in the idea of a possibility, which for Sahlins and now for David Graeber is an urgent need.[56] Perhaps it is never entirely true that Astraea completely leaves the world.

In conclusion, I shall quote the deeply humanistic conclusion of Frances A. Yates: "[t]he return of Astraea must always be a *renovatio*, a renewal or rebirth or rediscovery of the past through which a new future is created".[57]

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[53] Hodder 2012; Hodder 2014: 19-36.

[54] Rowley-Conwy 2001.

[55] Gamble 2016: 285.

[56] "It's clear that, if our species is to survive, we're going to have to come up with a new economic discipline …" (Graeber 2017: xviii).

[57] Yates 1975, Conclusion: Astraea and the Gallic Hercules.

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