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FROM CASTLES TO MALLS

First, let's get a sense of the vast sweep of history:

<i>Historical Era Labels (rough dates)</i>	<i>Medieval (900-1300)</i>	<i>Renaissance (1300-1650)</i>	<i>Enlightenment (1680-1780)</i>	<i>Romantic (European 1780-1830/American 1830-1860)</i>	<i>Victorian (1830-1900)</i>	<i>Modern</i>
Buildings & Work	castles: feudal relations	→→→→→	→→→→→	factories: wage slavery & /industrial capitalism	→→→→→	malls: consumerism
Human Waste & Sanitation	into the moat or woods	→→→→→	gutters	→→→→→	sewers	flush toilets
Tools of War	swords	→→→→→	guns/cannon	→→→→→	Gatling gun	rockets
Coffee		why the Renaissance was so creative	urban coffee/newspaper culture	→→→→→	→→→→→	Beat Generation
Famous, Artists & Thinkers	Chaucer	Shakespeare	Ben Franklin	Keats/Whitman	Dickens	Andy Warhol

Some of my items above are intended to be whimsical, but that said: you'd know a lot about cultural history if you really understood the castle/factory/mall sequence! I.e. in very condensed short-hand:

--castle = feudal, hierarchical relations identified with the Medieval period/preindustrial world; security of identity but little autonomy or entrepreneurial drive.

--factory = Modern period--Industrial Revolution producing many goods that "improve" our lives; you choose to work in a factory freely ... its entrepreneurial from both worker/owner ends (capitalism); but you also quite likely become a "wage slave"... and are alienated from Nature. The face-to-face relations of the preindustrial world are replaced by general alienation and a bureaucratic culture.

--mall = consumer culture in the contemporary world; the "self" is comprised of what it buys and etc.

Now, ponder the Medieval to Renaissance theological worldview that preceded the scientific worldview that informs the 18th-century Enlightenment era. The main component of the former worldview is known as the Great Chain of Being, which organized all of nature/the cosmos by hierarchy rather than scientific objectivity:

[E-text: Great Chain of Being "Wiki" article & illustration](#)

- The hierarchy covers the entirety of creation and being(s), from rocks and turnips (yes, that's right;

even vegetables are ranked) to angels. It is divinely determined, which means power relations and positions within the hierarchy cannot be questioned.

- Supernatural God, although “above” fallen nature, nonetheless intervenes or extends Godhood everywhere. The vast spread of creation that falls below the total perfection of God becomes by degrees less perfect and comparatively inferior—man has a weakened degree of God’s reason; animals lack reason (and women, being daughters of Eve, have less reason than men!). Some minerals—diamonds—have more "virtue" (a Renaissance term that combines our sense of "power" and "excellence" and "status") than others; trees are better than shrubs; horses are better than swine, etc. Satan is defined as “evil” but also as the final nadir, the complete antithesis of God’s plenitude.
- The self is viewed in terms of caste-like, status-quo hierarchies (king...knight...peasant); not capitalistic possessive selfhood—in which one, as a free entrepreneur, acquires property/wealth and is a free-agent in one's destiny.

HOW ABOVE FITS INTO ROMANTICISM (both British/European and American)

1) Age of Reason: emphasizes a rational/orderly universe.

=good: we can catalogue/engineer, from an objective distance, nature (Peale painting of himself in front of his natural history museum); we can engineer human nature (Benjamin Franklin’s guide, in his autobiography, of how to methodically correct bad habits).

=bad: the “bureaucratization” of nature/self can lead to anomie (it is “out” there, and the overly corporate/bureaucratic/clock-oriented self seeks to fill in interior voids with consumeristic items or with the delusory reshaping of the psyche thru facile self-help guides).

=ugly: combine the above with nascent/developing capitalism (the end of feudal interconnectedness), and work place and other social relations become commodified and entrepreneurially privatized. Reciprocal relations or extended kinship relations are replaced by relations via \$\$\$.

=example: famous British Romantic Poet William Wordsworth expresses in his sonnet the loss of power from being preoccupied, “late and soon” with “getting and spending.” It would be better to be a “pagan” of old, in which one was interconnected with nature’s power.

=example: deTocqueville passage, in which old aristocratic/feudal stability is replaced by a mobile citizenry, disconnected from others, and self-absorbed. The private self under capitalism is liberated from feudal restriction and deems itself entrepreneurial, bringing possessions towards itself or into the nuclear family (my tale of childhood walk into the woods was about fleeing not the family in the sense of affection, but the family in the sense of a privatized nuclear unit, too cozy as a nodal point in the capitalist scheme).

=example: my grid drawing of homes/apartments, in which you are lucky if you even know the name of your neighbor! (joke about Halloween: only during Halloween do you get to peep into other privatized nuclear units of strangers).

=the really ugly: fear and discipline. There were relatively few laws in the feudal/Medieval period; justice was quick, painful (torture), and not equitable. From the Enlightenment on, the bureaucratization of law leads to an expansion of laws you can break, which are less painful but more pervasive, albeit seemingly more equitable. You are disciplined, mostly, on the micro-level: all the

identity cards in your wallet, all the stop signs, and, in a different sense, your continual worry about falling behind, of not catching up, time-wise. *Your watch is your warden*. You live by a whole set of regulations, some visible, some interiorized so much that you don't recognize them as such (many of them work related or social in nature: ½ hour for lunch, don't not wear a tie to work, spend exactly 4 years for your BA education, dress this way not that way, and so on). We, living in a democracy, have a wide range of freedoms to choose what we want (sensibly, we pause and applaud our freedom), but is there not some psychological damage? Is it better to be a "native" fearing the consequence of transgressing some capricious taboo, or a modern self, fearing a traffic cop in every intersection, fearing a tax penalty if you return your taxes too late, fearing the FIU Registrar's office if you pass the drop/add period?

=detour example: so, back in the day, feudal days, a haggard-looking woman knocks on your door and asks for a bowl of soup; if you have it, you give her some. And she goes on (to starve somewhere else). In the 17th century, a haggard-looking woman knocks on your door, asks the same request, and you turn her away, saying, "go to the poor house" (poor houses emerge in the 16th-18th centuries in urban areas). Your house burns down, you reflect and conclude, "she's a witch, burn her." In the 18th century, a haggard-looking woman knocks on your door, asks the same request, and you turn her away, saying, "not my problem." Your house burns down, and you are ok, because you have an insurance policy, which although it cannot predict bolts of lightning, can predict the odds of how many houses will burn down from lightning within a town in certain period of time (i.e., statistics and actuarial science emerge during the "Age of Reason"). Alas, the woman may still starve, but your previous sense of communal responsibility has been siphoned off to the bureaucratized state; so you don't care.

2) American Romanticism 1830-1860 (before Civil War, which begins in 1861—most of the American Romantic writers, for one reason or another, either die, or do their best writing before the end of the Civil War) has these background "causes":

--1789 French Revolution: radical, egalitarian energy leads to a sense that selves and societies can change.

--late 18th evangelical religious movements emphasize introspection (you and your Bible, in private).

--backlash from urbanization/industrialization (anti-city, Thoreau finds solace in the woods).

--German Idealist philosophies (Immanuel Kant) replace earlier passive, Lockean theories of mind and perception.

3) Actually, only a few artists, philosophers, and writers are "romantic" during the American Romanticism period. Indeed, in 1832 Queen Victoria ascends the British throne, and thus the American Romantic period (1830-1860) overlaps with the Victorian period (1832-1900, roughly). And so, paradoxically, the liberating instinct of American Romanticism (metaphysically or socially) coincides with decorum, conventionality, and social hierarchy (workers vs managerial elite etc.). In Nathaniel Hawthorne's renowned The Scarlet Letter (1850), the most famous scene is when the adulterous Hester, in the middle of woodsy glade, rips off her "A" (her social stigmata) and doffs her bonnet (revealing luxurious hair and etc.); Hawthorne gets pretty rhapsodic about this for several pages, but thinks better, and Hester puts her bonnet back on. A small, but very telling scene.

4) On a scale of 1-10, our writers took a walk on the wild side (however you wish to interpret that, and if you don't know the reference do a Google search/YouTube search for Lou Reed!):

Emerson: he led to others getting enthused, but he stayed at home writing (having an inheritance): a 4.
Thoreau: he journeyed to Walden Pond, about 2 miles from his mother's kitchen: a 5.

Fuller: bold, brave, and tragic: a 10.

Poe: he's a somewhat split personality, all gothic on the inside and professional on the outside: a 10/4.

Douglass: translating the metaphysical desire for freedom into actual social action, via his escape from slavery: a 10.

Dickinson: ditto, with Poe, but her social recluse can be interpreted in different ways: a 10/2(or 9).

Stowe: her novel stirred hearts against slavery, although she was otherwise very Victorian: a 6.

Melville: he lived with cannibals, went whaling with a very diverse work-force, wrote brilliant novels, settled down into a life of frustration and anomie (he's my hero, I give him a 10).

Whitman: read his poetry... 9.

WHAT ALL OF THE ABOVE MEANS

For better or worse we are enmeshed in bureaucratic being (which brings profit and safety and equity), but open your psyches to the wild. Be as Henry David Thoreau said, in a quite striking line, "the Lewis and Clark of your own mind"! The trick, to go full circle back to my opening lecture anecdote, is not to flee the domestic/bureaucratic space for some woodsy space of deep reverie, but to bring the capacity of deep reverie back to your day-to-day lives. In short, be curious and imaginative.