

THE TRAP

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The Trap

by Mo Lohaus

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THE TRAP

[1] INTRODUCTION	1
[2] FIVE STRATEGIES	4
[3] NEWS SUITS	8
[4] EDUTAINMENT	13
[5] THE WEDGE	19
[6] SOCIAL ROBOTS	24
[7] BUFFERS OF ABSTRACTION	30
[8] DOUBLE-BLIND DRAMAS	34
[9] THEY ATTACKED US	40
[10] THE ROPE	45
[11] THE FORMALITY	50
[12] QUIET WEAPONS	54
[13] THE GREEN WAR	60
[14] HOT SKY	67
[15] GERMAGEDDON	71
[16] THE SIEGE	75
[17] INTELLIGENCE	80
[18] GROUND ZERO	85
[19] SILENT PARTNERS	90
[20] THE THREE R'S	95
ENDNOTES	101

[1] INTRODUCTION

The trap is attractive and difficult to escape. Few of us realize we are caught in it. It manages our environment, observes and directs us, exploits our behavior and biology, and steadily refines its tactics. It has unlimited financial resources, the pick of the world's best talent, full access to advanced technology, and endless options for erasing opposition. Concealing its methods and goals, it operates in plain sight without alarming its prey. Tomorrow's targets help it capture and kill today's.

The trap is civilization: the system of domesticating humans that steals our lives. Corporations distribute it and governments administer it. Armies and police protect its operations. Media monopolies enforce its perspectives. The global banking system does its accounting. All dominant institutions are its contractors. All designated experts are on its payroll. Its officers have the last word and final decision on everything.

All who are trained by its culture obey its orders. All who trade its currency are its salesmen. All who believe its dogma are its missionaries. War is its business plan. Slavery is its product. Lying and violence are its daily operations. Wearing masks of civility, glasses of cognitive conformity, and uniforms of normalcy, we march as its mercenaries; terrifying, subduing, and violating one another to generate its profits. We, its prisoners, enforce it on each other, until we free ourselves and replace it with something else.

FIXING OUR WORLD

Civilization is carrying us in dangerous directions. Recognizing that and wanting to fix it are important first steps. Then comes discovering how it works. Then comes understanding that fixing it requires fixing ourselves. This guide helps you take those steps, then step out of pondering into purpose: developing practical perspectives, acknowledging shared needs, building alliances of support, and cooperating with others of diverse priorities. When inhuman tactics are used to divide and conquer us, nurturing and protecting one another help us overcome them. Working together to discern what is happening and decide what to do updates our menu of options: Passivism, accepting being a victim, is deleted. Activism, creating a world we want, is the only choice left. Choosing it is enjoyable and freeing.

Many of us find our current situation too overwhelming to observe, study, or consider. We avoid assessing it, owning responsibility for understanding it, or gaining traction on it until we absolutely must. We abandon ourselves to emotional reactions that steadily steal our sanity, sovereignty, and health. When self-harm and the futility of avoidance become truly intolerable, sobriety reaches in and pulls us out: It observes and evaluates our effectiveness. It detaches us from assumptions, expectations, and reactions. It insists on constructive perspectives and intentional decisions. And it develops approaches that improve positioning, accumulate energy, and usher in better opportunities.

Sobriety will fight for us relentlessly. It is willing to be disciplined, to find better options, and to try them until something works. To wake it up and watch it take action, consider the cat and the chicken: Curiosity killed the cat.

Conformity killed the chicken. Both died, but their lives had noticeably different quantity and quality.

The cat spent six years exploring its personal possibilities. It was often hungry and alone, facing unexpected and dangerous challenges. Its battles left it scarred and missing fur, but vibrantly alive. It developed keen instincts about what enlivened and nourished it, and frequently purred with pleasure. What it shared with others was satisfying. Even its death was exhilarating.

The chicken spent six weeks obediently aligning with the perceptions, behaviors, and limitations of its peers. It compulsively pecked for bugs that were not there and cackled and crowed when those around it did; never knowing why. It was well-fed, surrounded by company, numb, busy, and confident, from hatching to hatchet.

Many of us modulate stress by behaving like chickens. We repeat familiar activities, oversimplify perspectives and conclusions, double-check our responses with those around us to make sure they are acceptable, and choose symbolic meanings over results; following familiar workflows for polite lives and deaths. It seems that fitting in produces staying safe, but it only produces feeling safe. The chicken felt safe until the last few seconds of its life. The cat rarely felt safe, lived fifty times as long, and enjoyed living far more.

This is the most unsafe period in centuries. Surviving it demands we update our tactics. Civilization is being reorganized around high tech surveillance, violence, and remote control. Those who direct these systems arrange our lives and deaths. Rights, freedoms, and opportunities are now reserved for them and their collaborators. The rest of us live as refugees in impoverished possibilities.

This is progress. Thousands of years ago, warfare and farming were developed as two strands in a rope; a rope around the neck of our species; a system of domesticating us. People realized that techniques used in hunting, herding, and ranching animals could be used on other people, and they did it. Civilization is the man ranch they built and their descendants still control. Learning how it works creates a frame of interlocking pieces from which the puzzle of recent events can be completed. Completing that puzzle and seeing the big picture sparks a magical transformation that turns chickens into cats, and cats into dogs: loyal, ferocious, social creatures excited and evoked by the adventures we share.

[2] FIVE STRATEGIES

Let's wash off the coincidence theory that civilization just happened, review the evidence that it, like a factory, was built using technologies and methods refined over thousands of years, and register how the hunting, herding, and ranching strategies perfected on animals are now used on us. Five are applied to us relentlessly to funnel us into situations where we are divided and conquered. Living them from animals' perspectives brings our own situation into focus.

DEFINE AND DIRECT

Imagine we are ducks in a large flock. We are the last ones to arrive at a lake, and we are at a terrible disadvantage: Most of the others have already landed, after being deceived by decoys. They saw shapes of what seemed to be ducks bobbing on the water and assumed the place was safe. The shapes floated and drifted by the shore, but did not swim or

quack. From a distance, they looked real. Now, as we arrive, the decoys are hidden in a scene that is mostly real, among hundreds of birds that do swim and quack. We do not notice any decoys at all. We see only what we want to see: happy ducks and a safe place to land and spend the night. The only space left is by the shore, by the reeds, by the hunters with their bows and nets.

SCARE AND STEER

Imagine we are buffalo, leading a huge stampede, and we are at a terrible disadvantage: The moving mass behind and beside us makes plunging forward our only choice. At the place where memory and instinct urge us to angle to the side, around the rocks, two-leggeds block our way. With spears, fire, and drums, they panic us into running through the rocks and over the cliff, then butcher us and make dinner.

FEED FOR FIDELITY

Imagine we are wolves in a time of hunger, and we are at a terrible disadvantage: We are led by our noses and bellies to the place where the two-leggeds live. They put out food for us and we eat it. By observing their actions and feelings, we begin to intuit what they want from us, and do it. When we do, they feed us. We take the bait and eat it. We stop seeing them as competitors and start seeing them as friends. We forget how to hunt and become dependent on them; dependent on being rewarded for doing what they want. We stop roaming, settle down, and move into the dog houses they provide for us; adopting perspectives, feelings, and behaviors centered on pleasing our new masters.

CONFUSE AND CONTROL

Imagine we are reindeer in a great herd, the fifth generation since the two-leggeds began pacing and steering us, and we are at a terrible disadvantage: They and their wolf-dogs, running beside and among us, have been with us since the beginning of memory. We no longer notice that they are commanding our direction by moving among us. The old ones of the herd give them no notice, so neither do we. When night deepens, and the sick and old disappear, we sleep peacefully. Trotting into the narrow canyon as winter sets in seems normal.

NO CONTEXT/NEW CONTEXT

Imagine we are cows born in a barnyard, and we are at a terrible disadvantage: This is home to us, and the impulses that show us how to use our freedom have never been activated. The environmental stimulants that evoke our abilities are missing; there are no predators to run from, tasty plants to seek out, or thrilling dramas of courtship and mating; everything is businesslike and succinct. Our menu of choices has been stripped to a minimum. The drive to gallop dims more and more each year as our bodies adjust to barely moving at all. The fence of the corral seems more and more final, like a wall. Clucks and calls of ranchers and yips and nips of dogs direct us as reliably as the voices and motion of our own kind. Those who relieve the pressure in our teats each day and take away our young seem like part of life's normal order.

A PRISON WITHOUT MEMORY

Imagine we were born in villages, cities, and suburbs generations after our ancestors were conquered and captured, and we are at a terrible disadvantage: The history and methods of our own species are kept secret, and what was once done to animals is now done to us:

The tactic of define and direct that works with ducks was never taught to us: Define a safe-seeming place and direct your prey there. The tactic of scare and steer that works with buffalo was never taught to us: Scare them out of familiar workflows and steer them into yours. The tactic of feed for fidelity that works with wolves was never taught to us: Fight off their famine, provide food and security, and they will attend to and obey you. The tactic of confuse and control that works with reindeer was never taught to us: Confuse them by mingling with them and acting as if we are all on the same team; then control them by leading them into narrower and narrower spaces, where they can be corralled and separated, divided and conquered. And the tactic of no context/new context that works with cows in the barnyard was never taught to us: Create islands of familiar experience they cannot look beyond. Manage their environments to assure their abilities are never activated. Realign their impulses with habits that discharge their emotions, and docile they will stay; even if publicly milked and stealthily slaughtered.

The built environment is our barnyard. The wars that conquered and captured our ancestors are still happening; waged for profit by hunting clans that pretend to serve and protect us. Tactics effective on battlefields, centered on deceiving and violating, are applied to us relentlessly at school, work, and home. They coerce us to believe what we

are shown, ignore what should upset us, and go where we are steered. Being deceived and violated dissociates us; it coerces our obedience to appropriate perception and normalized predation. Responding to workflows that overwhelm us, confuse us, and control us, we focus on fitting in to feel a little more safe. We religiously avoid considering what is too threatening to acknowledge: Civilization is the domestication of humans. We are its livestock.

[3] NEWS SUITS

In civilization, we are promised something and given something else, over and over, yet continue to hope and believe. The programming that helps us feel normal and safe assures us that the prizes we have won seem valuable. Questioning that would set off avalanches of instability and insecurity. When people are angry about the system we live in, we do not understand why, or even what they are talking about. Our masks of civility, glasses of cognitive conformity, and uniforms of normalcy help us feel appropriate, competent, and successful in a complex and confusing world; they filter out a range of perception that would be extremely uncomfortable if we acknowledged it; a spectrum of inadmissible events that have been in our blind spots our entire lives.

The news illustrates this situation well. It showcases the layered lying operation that saturates and subverts our world. In it, those who lie do not know we are lying. We are hired to lie by and for people our prey never see. We have no idea we are employed by a hunting clan, that our behavior is damaging, or that we are involved in disabling others for those who profit from their dysfunction. We have been trained to turn off our sensitivity and alertness to appear polite and appropriate.

With those turned off, we miss many details that might clue us in to what we are participating in. Because we do not know we are deceiving and lying to ourselves about what is happening, what we say and show to others seems sincere.

The prey in the audience never see anyone showing the signs of lying, so we believe we are seeing the truth. The news suits presented to us as authorities are unaware of their dishonesty with themselves and of the manipulativeness with which they are filtering their own perception. They do not give signals that what they are presenting to us is different from what they themselves believe, so we imagine they are being honest. We imagine we are being presented with a sincere attempt to determine and communicate the truth about what's happening in the world, produced by people who sincerely want to know, who are competent enough to determine it, and who are committed to finding out.

The news is a ritual. Its priests, the news suits, present sermons of no context. As audience participants in this ritual, we connect with the priests, some of the least informed, least curious, least cognitively competent people in society, to hear their grossly simplistic version of reality and adopt their perspectives. As part of compulsively accepting the formality presented to us, the directive definition that the news is the place people go to get informed, we hallucinate that we are becoming more informed by perceiving more simplistically and less critically. That is right. The news suits are some of the least informed people in society; least informed about science, history, economics and everything else relevant to understanding what is happening in the world. Because they are thoroughly ignorant, they can read overly-simplistic, self-contradictory narratives day after day, without noticing how they are misleading us or showing signs of discomfort.

Because they have no discerning evaluative process or supply of independently gathered information, they can trust, believe, and swallow the purely emotional perspectives presented to them as facts, and regurgitate them for us while smiling.

Like most positions in corporate hierarchies, the news suits have been hired for specific psychological profiles. They are not curious people. They are not thoughtful people. They are insecure people who compulsively attune to their bosses' preferences and perspectives and produce behavior harmonious with those. That is the profile for which they are hired. That is why we have the same flavor of unctuous grinning moron on more or less every news channel in the country: Industry standards have been applied to their hiring.

Corporate structure mirrors military structure. It leverages the same set of observational data about human perception and behavior, scientifically applied. In military terms, news suits are press officers; actors who play the role of being informed. Press officers are hired for their ability to create rapport; to convince the audience that they are not lying. Those who have the least conflicting information do the best at giving the appearance of believing what they are saying. Those who are least curious are the least likely to gather information that might conflict with what they are paid to read. Those who are least analytically competent are the least likely to notice contradictions in what they are reading or give signs of discomfort. Those who are least concerned with honesty and truth are the least likely to develop workflows that make sure what they are reporting is true and accurate. Those most desperate to regard themselves favorably devote the least energy to upholding standards of consistency. So a certain psychological profile is hired for, and those presenting news are exactly those least likely to know what is true...