There is a fifth dimension, beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone.

Thus intoned Rod Serling at the beginning of the first episode of the first season of The Twilight Zone in 1959. It would be years before I read Kafka, Huxley, and Orwell, but I knew the territory well. Rod Serling, Charles Beaumont, and Richard Matheson, had already taken me there once every week for five years.

The Twilight Zone left me with powerful memories of stories of ordinary people who had somehow slipped almost casually across an unseen line, and into another world … another reality. And here we all are … 49 years after the last program was broadcast … living in The Twilight Zone. I wish we had better writers. The same plot devices from a handful of episodes are used over and over, overlap one another, and play simultaneously non-stop. And the kicker is … most people don't even notice … and that in itself is an old Twilight Zone episode.

One of the present-day Twilight Zone episodes we're living through is a nightmare story entitled "Resource." It's about a planet whose people have based their entire existence and survival upon a non-renewable resource that poisons the air, water, and land. Though the supply of this non-renewable resource is becoming increasingly scarce, the people on the planet insist on using it for almost everything they do. They burn it in their personal transportation vehicles. Their roads are made from it. They brush their teeth with toothbrushes made from it. They use it to entertain themselves and watch films and listen to music on disks made from it. They make their clothing from it. And strangest of all, they use it to produce their food. The planetary scientific community has told everyone that the use of this resource has caused the climate of the planet to change and unless its use is stopped, and alternatives found immediately, the planet may become uninhabitable within a century. The response to the ultimatum is the dominant industrial and political leaders tell the people the scientists are wrong so the majority of the people continue to use up the resource as fast as they can. The "twist" ending is the leaders of the planet are insane and are destroying the planet for money they will never spend.

Running simultaneously with that episode is a story whose theme Serling explored many times: Fascism. The phrase, "…when everyone is transformed, no one is transformed." from Milton Meyer's They Thought They Were Free keeps banging around in my head. Meyer didn't write for television. He wrote about how Fascism happened in Germany, a modern, industrialized, educated nation. He wrote about how "decent men" became Nazis. What he wrote about in 1955 has become the reality for post 9/11 America. In case it slipped our notice … Everything has been transformed.

From Wikipedia:

“The Pentagon Papers, officially titled **United States Vietnam Relations, 19451967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense,** is a United States Department of Defense history of the United States' political-military involvement in Vietnam from 1945 to 1967. The papers were discovered and released by Daniel Ellsberg, and first brought to the attention of the public on the front page of The New York Times in 1971. A 1996 article in The New York Times said that the Pentagon Papers "demonstrated, among other things, that the Lyndon Baines Johnson Administration had systematically lied, not only to the public but also to Congress, about a subject of transcendent national interest and significance."

… Later, Ellsberg said the [classified] documents "demonstrated unconstitutional behavior by a succession of presidents, the violation of their oath and the violation of the oath of every one of their subordinates".. He added that he leaked the Papers to end what he perceived to be "a wrongful war.”

38 years after the leaking of the Pentagon Papers Chelsea Manning contacted WikiLeaks and released classified information about the United States actions in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. The material provided by Manning, according to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, "suggest thousands of war crimes."

The architects of these war crimes, the instigators of the supreme international crime, a war of aggression, are highly paid keynote speakers, write books, and regularly appear on network news programs for their expertise and commentary. Chelsea Manning has been sentenced to serve 35 years in a military prison.

In just under 40 years everything has been transformed.

As Meyer wrote, “ … you see that everything, everything, has changed and changed completely under your nose. The world you live in - your nation, your people - is not the world you were in at all. The forms are all there, all untouched, all reassuring, the houses, the shops, the jobs, the mealtimes, the visits, the concerts, the cinema, the holidays. But the spirit, which you never noticed because you made the lifelong mistake of identifying it with the forms, is changed. Now you live in a world of hate and fear, and the people who hate and fear do not even know it themselves; when everyone is transformed, no one is transformed.”

Occasionally I have a benign Zone-esque moment perhaps brought on by encroaching geezerhood … who knows? The dime in the bowl of change on my nightstand has embossed upon it the face of a living queen instead of a dead president. An insignificant moment of slight disorientation quickly passes. I remind myself that’s a Canadian dime dummy. But wouldn’t you be absolutely dumbfounded if you found a dime in your pocket change with Woodrow Wilson’s profile on it? What world would have you suddenly found yourself in?

My first exposure to existential angst wasn’t Kafka or Jean-Paul Sartre, but the twenty-second episode from The Twilight Zone’s first season, The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street which ends with Serling’s narration:

The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs and explosions and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, prejudices - to be found only in the minds of men. For the record, prejudices can kill. And suspicion can destroy. And a thoughtless, frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all its own - for the children … and the children yet unborn. And the pity of it is … that these things cannot be confined … to the Twilight Zone.

Pretty heavy for a 54 year-old TV show huh? As Stephen King wrote in Danse Macabre, “The Twilight Zone did occasionally strike notes of horror -- the best of these vibrate in the back teeth years later.”

What do you mean ... Years Later??!! Faulker wrote, “The past is never dead. It's not even past.” The Twilight Zone wasn’t cancelled … we’re living it.

http://www.superbeans.com