Pirates vs. Corsairs!
(the seaborne phenomena off the Horn of Africa)

**Fraud, Fantasy and Fiction in Environmental Writing /
'The Invention of the Tribe' / Q**
(reviews: Ted Perry's 'Chief Seattle's Speech', various Grey
Owl, James C. Scott's 'The Art of Not Being Governed' &
Luther Blisset's 'Q')

The Dark Months Are Coming
(walking out into the witching hour)

...and more!

… the unknown, the uncertain, seduces me. I'm filled with a desire for adventure, and I don't give a damn for success. I hate your society of bureaucrats and administrators, millionaires and beggars. I don't want to adapt to your hypocritical customs nor to your false courtesies. I want to live out my enthusiasms in the pure, fresh air of freedom. Your streets, drafted according to plan, torture my gaze, and your uniform buildings make the blood in my veins boil with impatience. And that's enough for me. I'm going to follow my own path, according to my passions, changing myself ceaselessly, and I don't want to be the same tomorrow as I am today. I stroll along and I don't let my wings be clipped by the scissors of any one person. I share none of your moralism. I am going forth, eternally passionate and burning with the desire to give myself to the world, to the first real person that approaches me, to the ragged-trousered traveller; but never to the grave and conceited wise-men who would regulate the length of my stride. Nor to the doctrinaire who would like to clutter my mind with formulas and rules. I am no intellectual; I am a human being – a woman who feels a great vibration within herself before the impulses of nature and amorous words. I hate every chain, every hindrance; I love to walk along, nude, letting my flesh be caressed by the rays of the voluptuous sun. And, oh, old man! I will care so very little when your society breaks into a thousand pieces and I can finally live my life.

Who are you, little girl, fascinating like a mystery and savage like instinct?

I am Anarchy.

PIRATES VS. CORSAIRS!

[ed. – Privateers (French ones of the Breton port of St. Malo being the first known as corsairs), while using similar methods to pirates, were licensed by a State, such as the notorious Sir Francis Drake of the British Empire or the Barbary Corsairs of the Ottoman Empire; in comparison to the general historical view (rightly or wrongly) of pirates of that era as being lawless, cross-racial and anti-hierarchical.]

"I will defend France, its vital interests, its image, its message. And I make this commitment before you: I will defend Europe, the community of destinies that gave itself upon the people of this continent. Its our civilization that is at stake. Our way of being free."
– Emmanuel Macron, 2017 inauguration speech as French President

France is one of the European countries that is most interested in the trade of natural gas imported to Europe, because they will be one of the biggest distributors, and also because France is one of the strongest countries in the European Union and NATO. France's new presidential speech lets us foresee an iron freedom. "Our way of being free" never was, and still isn't, in relation to other people outside the "community of destinies" free from moral, ethical and technological superiority. We constructed our civilization in ways that depend on energy sources, which are transforming this world environmentally and socially. **The main global energy source pushed to the 21st Century is non-conventional natural gas, and Europe is betting high in it's energetic independence.** On a environmental level the debate is everywhere. What about the social level? The ocean bed will be the future depositary of natural resources to be explored on a large scale by multinationals, from energy sources to minerals like lithium or copper, and organisms for biotech [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.1 pg31**]. Europe is prepared. What about the "others"?

In 2016 NATO stated that the Operation "Ocean Shield" was completed with success. Initiated in 2008, the objective of the operation was to protect shipping from pirates in the Western Indian Ocean, off the Somalian coast[1]. But...

This May 11th super methane vessel La Mancha Knutsen, transporting LNG *[Liquid Natural Gas]* for Fenosa Natural Gas, of Spain, was attacked by pirates in the Guinean Gulf, south from Nigeria.

According to the maritime website Maritime Herald, the methane vessel was harried by another boat with at least seven armed men on board. After the alarm sounded, the vessel's captain had to take evasive maneuvers to stop pirates boarding. The pirates shot against the vessel's tower, but in the end gave up and went back to the land without hurting anybody or causing material damage. Unlike how companies are used to working nowadays, this vessel didn't carry any security guards.

La Mancha Knutsen left Aliaga's harbour, in Turkey. The ship belongs to the consortium Trygve Seglkem and to NYK, and has been constructed by Hyunday Heavy Industries in South Korea.

Turkey, that has been brought to the world's eyes for the worst reasons *[ed. – see **Return Fire vol.3 pg97**]*, may became a member of the European Union. According to a European Parliament report of 2014: "*while US has an abundant supply of cheap gas from the "Shale Revolution" [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg14**], the EU remains dependent on gas imports. Ukraine's crisis raised concerns around the security of Europe's gas supply[2]. Europe is well connected to its main suppliers through a network of pipelines, but there are plans for new pipelines to transport gas from the Caspian Region [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.2 pg83**], and later perhaps from Iraq and Iran crossing Turkey and Italy.*"

These plans are an alternative for the gas supply from Russia to Europe, that saw its construction of a new pipeline that would connect the Balkans and Austria denied for disrespecting European Union's trade rules.
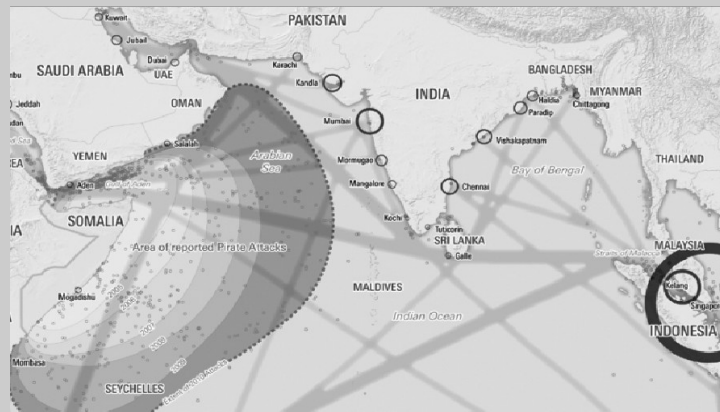
"In our times, piracy, which was never eradicated but has long remained confined in the archipelagoes of southeast Asia, is seeing a revival in several poorly controlled maritime zones of the planet, notably Africa *[ed. – also on rivers like the Brazilian Amazon; and the Serbian and Romanian stretches of the Danube, within the European Union...]*. But it is what is raging off the Somali coast that has recently caused the most losses and disruption, and has kept the media's attention. Once again, myth finds its way into the story, and the journalists have sought to forge a new malevolent figure, one who menaces the well being of western consumers in upsetting petroleum and merchandise imports produced in countries with extremely low wages: the Somali pirate, like the eastern barbarian, is driven not by political or religious fanaticism but by the even more vile lure of money. So, looking closely at what is really going on with the pirates of the Horn [of Africa], at their motivations and their practices, it's actually the myth of David and Goliath that comes to mind: their cause, which is just short of being universal, comes largely out of self-defense against the voracity of the powerful[...] there aren't very many of them and they have little to eat; their means, particularly their weapons, are ridiculous; the highly diverse coalition of their enemies controls the world empire – more particularly the seas – and has incomparable technical mastery of naval combat. As this aspect of things inevitably became more clear – despite the dissimulation or the lies of the military-industrial complex's parrots, and at the risk of tarnishing the glory of the brave gendarmes of the sea – the public powers and their media relays have progressively de-dramatized their discussion of the Somali pirates."

– Brethren of the Coast

The methane vessel will be the first of four LNG Knutsen boats that will deliver natural gas, where the vast majority is fracked gas to Spain[3], coming from the LNG Sanine Pass of Cheniere Energy, Louisiana, USA. The delivery is one of hundreds expected to happen starting in August of this year as part of a contract of 20 years. According to the website thefreeinline.wordpress, some shipments arrived before the period stipulated by La Mancha Knutsen. The contract to import natural gas from the company Fenosa Natural Gas from the USA is similar to Energias de Portugal's contract.

Civilization and Europe's heart have been attacked by pirates, terrorists and refugees. The pirates and terrorists are the ones that couldn't seek refuge; they are all hostage of a global system that feeds civil wars at their homelands, using them as human resources there or in another place in the world. The pirates, former fishermen, saw the sea become the dump of the Western garbage, toxic garbage that killed all fish that used to feed them[4]. Forced by hunger or many other times by armed paramilitary groups with Western technology, they started to work in exchange for a reward of the ship's goods. On the ships, pirates and the ship's crew fight against each other but they have the same goal: survive and go back to their homes. Deciding what will be the destiny of both (depending on the ship's cargo interest) are the Masters, emperors and their heirs (i.e. Capital); the pirates' and crew's destiny was mixed, but the destiny of the corsairs working for the empires was exactly like they teach in school: Fraternity; Equality; Liberty! *[ed. – 'enlightened' watchwords of the French Revolution that brought the bourgeoisie to power; see* **'The Matter of Knowing Who We Are'***]* (i.e. Globalization).

1. ed. – "Ever since Somali dictator Siad Barre was toppled in 1991, the country has been in a civil war. The 'Transitional Federal Government' that is in place controls merely a few blocks in the capital Mogadishu. The absence of a real government has been exploited by the rest of the world. Fishing trawlers from Europe, North America and Asia have been helping themselves to the huge fishing grounds off the 3,300 kilometre coast of Somalia. In its peak, this IUU trade (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) in Somalia generated some US$300 million annually for the first world [sic], according to calculations by the UN. This is a world-wide problem, and the UN estimates that about one in five fish consumed worldwide is fished illegally. The pirates come in large fishing trawlers from rich countries (who have long ago depleted their own fishing grounds), registered under flags of convenience of countries who never signed any agreements on fishery quota. The depletion of what was once described as 'a rainforest of fish' soon removed the livelihood of the coastal population of Somalia[...] The industrialised countries also discovered another use of the Somali waters: as a giant waste dump. Ever since the London Convention of 1993 banned the dumping of waste on sea, industrialised countries have been looking for a way out. Greenpeace reports of ships cruising the oceans for years, trying to find a 'suitable' place to dispose of their cargo. While the disposal of a tonne of toxic chemical waste in Europe costs more than €200, dumping the shit in Somali waters costs as little as €2, so the economic incentive is obvious. For radioactive waste the ratio is even steeper. Organised with the help of the Italian Mafia, pretty much every European country got rid of their unwanted waste this way for years. Other countries, like Australia joined in. The extent of this scheme was literally uncovered during the tsunami of 2004, when hundreds of rusted barrels were washed up along the coast of Somalia, poisoning many people. [...] With little fish to catch, some of the out-of-work fishermen decided to take matters into their own hands and started their own 'coast guard' operations. They stopped foreign fishing vessels and demanded money from their owners to compensate for the fish they had taken. As the new Somali coast guard became successful, others copied the business model. Regular trade vessels were hijacked and ransom was demanded. According to reports by Reuters from December 2009, a stock exchange system has been set up in Haradheere. A former pirate at the time said: '[Four months ago] we decided to set up this stock exchange. We started with 15 "maritime companies" and now we are hosting 72. Ten of them have so far been successful at hijacking. The shares are open to all and everybody can take part, whether personally at sea or on land by providing cash, weapons or useful materials... we've made piracy a community activity.' [...] No warships ever stopped the poachers or the ships with poisonous waste. Instead, Somalia was declared a 'failed state' and simply written off. Only once the Somali population started defending themselves, did the rest of the world react. As soon as 'free trade' was threatened, the rich countries decided to gang up and deploy warships [ed. – remaining fishers have been shot and killed by Italian and Russian naval guards under suspicion of being pirates, and in 2012 European Union troops were authorised to fire on 'pirate positions' on land; see **Return Fire vol.3 pg35**]. The Horn of Africa is one of the world's busiest shipping routes — more than 20,000 ships pass there annually. The industrialised world simply cannot allow the population of a country without a real government to have any form of control over the shipping routes. [...] There is more to be poached from Somalia than just fish. Large oil and gas reserves, as well as iron ore and aluminium are suspected, and exploitation of a uranium mine is under way. [These are the reasons] why every country wants to be involved in the 'battle against piracy'" ('Pirates' vs Pirates: Somalia Through the Eyes of a German Court).

2. ed. – Europe's main gas supplies from Russia run through Ukraine. An uprising in 2014 against the then-President comprised nationalist/fascist factions, those wanting to join the European Union, anarchists, supporters of the Russian colonial powers of the country, elite factions and many others (during weeks of bloody combat, in Kiev alone at least 88 people were killed within the span of 48 hours, many shot by snipers on the roofs of government buildings), ending with Russia annexing the Crimean Peninsular and battling Ukrainian troops, and neo-liberals in power in Kiev. From 'The Ukrainian Revolution & the Future of Social Movements': "The events in Ukraine must be understood as part of the same global trajectory of revolt as the Arab Spring, the plaza occupations in Spain, Occupy, and the Gezi uprising in Turkey. This is not good news. In each of the previous examples, initial police repression caused a single-issue protest to metastasize into a generalized uprising, transforming a square in the heart of the capital into a fiercely defended urban autonomous zone. This seemed to offer a new political model, in which people cohere around tactics rather than parties or ideologies. (It is telling indeed that Occupy was named for a tactic rather than a goal.) All these revolts could be broadly interpreted as reactions to the consequences of capitalism, though anti-austerity proved too narrow a frame: Turkey and Brazil saw protests over the effects of ascendant economies, not recessions. [...] A few years ago, it was possible to hope that the coming insurrections would be a naturally fertile ground for anarchist resistance. Now it is clear that, although anarchists can find new affinities within them, nationalists can capitalize upon them just as easily. This may be an inherent problem with movements that cohere around tactics, and it poses serious strategic questions to anarchists. [...] What had been a purely symbolic conflict over space with Occupy became full-on paramilitary urban warfare in Ukraine. By taking the front lines in confronting the authorities, nationalists and fascists have won themselves legitimacy as "defenders of the people" that will serve them for many years to come. Surely fascists around the world have been watching, and will be emboldened to try the same thing elsewhere when the opportunity arises. Fascists, too, are plugged into a global imaginary; we ignore this at our peril. [...] Identifying ourselves, via word or deed, merely as antagonists is not clear enough when we are not the only antagonists of the ruling powers. Our opposition to all hierarchy and domination must be communicated in everything we say and do; otherwise, we risk bolstering a reactionary opposition."

3. It's not known yet where the natural gas delivery will take place. Barcelona's refinery is the more likely to be chosen due to its large storage capacity. But this is only one of the seven refineries adapted to treat and distribute gas in Spain.

4. ed. – "The fishing industry is the clearest example [of actual luddite wars in the 'third world']. Those using older boats and nets and maintaining the ecology of their areas over centuries have sometimes been forced to literally ambush and burn the mechanized trawlers brought in by modern industries and states to 'improve productivity'. This particular war has taken place all over Asia's shorelines, till governments have been forced to demarcate areas for the operations of the two different sciences" (Western Science and Violence).

Fraud, Fantasy & Fiction in Environmental Writing

Introduction:
Environmental 'Frauds'

Over the past century, there have been several enthusiastically embraced accounts of environmental lore that have eventually been recognized as less than entirely authentic. Among the most well known and less obviously concocted of these is the case of 'Chief Seattle's speech' – a homily of ecological wisdom that turned out to have been written not by the chief of the Suquamish himself, but rather by Ted Perry, a white University professor, loosely based on what Seattle had been reported as saying.[1] A second case concerns the writings of 'Grey Owl', who claimed to have been born to an Apache chief and a Scottish woman, and whose books about his life in the Canadian wilderness enjoyed wide popularity in the 1930's. He was later revealed as Archie Belaney, who was born in Hastings on the south coast of England and later adopted his chosen identity after emigrating to Canada. While these writings have often simply been dismissed as fraudulent, their enormous popularity suggests that they tapped into a deep-seated need among Euroamerican readers, and that this might usefully be regarded as symptomatic of something that is denied in industrial society. **If a symptom can be regarded both as the expression of a repressed need and as an attempt to compensate for it, what is it that is repressed in the modern world, and how might it be authentically expressed?** In order to explore these issues, I begin with a lengthy detour into the character of truth in modern society.

Truth, Correctness, & Identity

A truthful statement is commonly understood either as one that *accurately refers to some transcendent property of the outside world* or as one that *is consistent with some consensual system of thought such as logic;* or as some combination of these. As modern humanity distances itself from the natural order and encloses itself within a technologically created realm, the emphasis is shifting from the first of these criteria to the second. Increasingly, truth is defined in terms of that subset of the real that is

scientifically plausible, politically acceptable, and economically exploitable; and as the world is physically reconstructed through the application of technology, so the first criterion of truth seems to fade. For example, the statement that nature is 'a human creation' expresses the growing skepticism in the industrialized world that there is anything genuinely 'other', anything outside and beyond human action and human reason; and as technological rationality colonizes the world ideologically and physically, so such statements – which would have been viewed as absurd even 50 years ago – become increasingly accurate descriptions of the way the world is. Thus the notion of truth as founded in the character of a natural reality that is greater than the form it might take within any particular cultural system or era is giving way to the idea of truth as reflecting the principles of one specific, technologically transformed world. This reflects a widespread but tacit acceptance of the 'end of ideology' hypothesis, implying that the sort of world we live in today is the *only possible world.* Given this 'idolatry of the actual', ecologically sound lifestyles tend to be viewed as unrealistic, childish fantasies or as harmless aberrations. And while intelligent, communicating, nonhuman creatures are common in children's stories and Hollywood science fiction, we are expected to leave them behind when we close the book or leave the cinema, returning to a 'real' world that is increasingly bereft of such qualities.

This shrinkage of the real toward a reified present leads to the view that qualities that are inexpressible in scientific terms[2] are invalid or nonexistent. **To say that a particular area of forest is populated by certain species or is rich in certain chemical elements, for example, may be correct; but it is a very impoverished expression of what the forest *is* in its entirety.** While the first version of truth aspires to express this entirety ([Martin] Heidegger's *aletheia,* or 'unconcealment'), the second version, 'correctness', merely maps it onto a particular system of understanding, and then in turn, re-imposes this understanding *onto* the world. If we insist on the reality of those qualities that tend to be ignored by merely 'correct' descriptions, then we are forced to look for means of expressing them other than the forms of science that have been conscripted into the cause of industrial growth. There are clear implications here for the sort of world that results from our behavior, given our enormous technological power; for qualities unrecognizable by such sciences tend to have a limited life expectancy. Spirits and gods once seemed real; and today not only ecosystems, but the *idea* of the ecosystem may be in danger of following them into oblivion.

There are implications, too, for our identities as human beings. If the world seems entirely rationally understandable, then feeling, spirit, and emotion become 'irrational' and therefore suspect. Of course, not all experience can be directly taken as a valid guide to what is true or moral; and it is one of the tasks of a sophisticated culture to interpret and articulate experience appropriately. A firm sense of identity needs to be *grounded* in a world that is experienced as complementing our senses, faculties, and indwelling expectations; and this experience motivates our intuition of the first version of truth, which grows out of our embodied resonance with those aspects of the natural world that we have interacted with in the course of our evolutionary history. Since we evolved as multi-sensory creatures, it is reasonable to assume that all our senses and faculties have a part to play in forming our identities. What David Levin refers to as *"the body's primordial and archaic attunement[…] its implicit structures of pre-understanding [of] what is basically good, basically true, and basically beautiful"*[3] provides our fundamental moral and epistemological orientation. This first version of truth accepts that although the senses, along with intuition, feeling, and instinct, provide us with meanings that may be difficult to articulate, they nevertheless enable us to reach out to insights and

forms of relation that are omitted by many scientific models.

For example, Robert Ryan, in a study of three urban natural areas in Ann Arbor, Michigan, found that the more active users of an area developed a 'place-specific attachment', protesting against proposed changes, favoring minimal management and a policy of letting nature take its course. Ryan notes the *"very real sense of personal loss or grief when favorite natural areas are changed or threatened by change"*, emotions which are, however, *"not always verbally expressed."* The emotional relation to place, in a sense, was not merely an element of self, but reached beyond self to become a stabilizing force within the ecosystem, suggesting a potentially more integrated self-place system. Writ large, this may be the nascent form of a natural process that is usually stifled by forms of 'education' which emphasize the detachment of self from world: a process of *growing into* the world, so that identity is no longer simply *personal* identity, but becomes that of the person-in-the-world.[4] This form of identity, and its implications for ethics and epistemology, sits uncomfortably with our roles as consumers and workers; and it may embody a deeper truth that transcends short-term industrialist realities.

Truth defined in this way as *not only* scientifically understood, but *also* as the sensed, felt expression of the forms that a healthy life in a healthy world might take, is only partly conscious and remains mostly at the level of 'gut feelings' within modern society. Frequently, the forms in which it is expressible are either marginalized or intrinsically suspect: poetry and film are viewed as 'leisure' activities, licensed to depart temporarily from the important stuff of life such as share prices or genetic structures; and environmentalists are rightly suspicious of religious fundamentalisms, specious pseudo-sciences, or fanciful 'New Age' orientations. Sometimes, we feel pressured to translate our felt sense of what is right into the language of science, as Eugene Hargrove points out in referring to Ian Douglas-Hamilton's study of the attitudes of rangers in a Tanzanian national park. In this case, elephants were demolishing most of the trees, and one obvious course of action was to cull the elephants. But none of the rangers wanted to shoot the elephants, feeling that they had great

intrinsic value. Nevertheless *"they did not believe that their feelings could be part of a professional justification for not shooting the elephants. Given that such justifications were closed off for him, Douglas-Hamilton concluded that he was supposed to find some facts that would independently justify this position so that aesthetic considerations would not have to be mentioned."* **Truths expressible in the language of science are easily accepted.[5] Truths that cannot be so expressed may be constantly reborn in the fringes of consciousness, but are also constantly extinguished when they venture into the unsympathetic gaze of the technological world.** As a result of this repressive denial of our experience, truth shrinks back towards correctness; and the resulting unease is interpreted as individual pathology.[6] Visions of a healthy world based on felt truths and relations as well as on scientific knowledge are conventionally seen as unrealistic fantasies rather than possibilities to be worked towards; and so the corporate world replaces nature as the grounding basis of our lives.

The 'Natural' in Industrial Society

Nature in its entirety is vastly more complex than the models we use to understand it *[ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg30**];* and so while science offers us powerful understanding, there are certain aspects of nature that cannot be viewed through a scientific lens – as, I think, many scientists would agree. In a discussion of cartography, for example, Tim Ingold refers to the *"discrepancy between **truth** and **accuracy[…]** the more [we aim] to furnish a precise and comprehensive representation of reality, the less true to life this representation appears."* He continues: *"[In the cartographic world] all is still and silent. There is neither sunlight nor moonlight; there are no variations of light or shade; no clouds, no shadows or reflections. The wind does not blow, neither disturbing the trees nor whipping the water into waves. No birds fly in the sky, or sing in the woods; forests and pastures are devoid of animal life; houses and streets are empty of people and traffic. [To dismiss all this] is perverse, to say the least. For it is no less than the stuff of life itself[...]"*

Curiously, however, scientific models are often regarded as incorporating *more* accurate, deeper understandings than the realities they describe. Jean-Pierre Dupuy has pointed out that

the term 'model' in scientific discourse has a meaning opposite to that of everyday speech. Normally, when we 'model' something, we produce a representation, an imitation of it; whereas a scientific model *"[enjoys] a transcendent position, not unlike that of a Platonic Idea [ed. – see **'The Matter of Knowing Who We Are']**, of which reality is only a pale imitation. [...] It is at this point that the hierarchical relation between the imitation and the imitated comes to be inverted. Although the scientific model is a human imitation of nature, the scientist is inclined to regard it as a 'model' [for] nature. Thus nature is taken to imitate the very model by which man [sic] tries to imitate it."*

In other words, our understandings of nature are claimed to be more real, more basic, than the natural world they set out to describe; and this suppresses all those qualities of nature that exist beyond science. While the domesticated world can, with some violence, be made consistent with scientific understandings, the wild world is, literally, another story. **Wilderness stretches away from us, extending beyond the horizon not only of our vision, but also of our understanding and our imagination. That is what makes it so hard to define: it is partly accessible, but also partly inaccessible.** As Edward Abbey remarks, wilderness *"means something lost and something still present, something remote and at the same time intimate, something buried in our blood and nerves, something beyond us and without limit."* In order to express some of what is beyond the horizon of current understanding, we have to embrace forms of communication such as fiction and myth. Myth need not be in opposition to reality, but can expand and deepen understanding so that it reaches toward currently unrealized possibilities. **As Robin Riddington explains in discussing Dunne-za mythologies:** *"In our thoughtworld, myth and reality are opposites. Unless we can find some way to understand the reality of mythic thinking, we remain prisoners of our own thoughtworld[...] the language of Western social science assumes an objective world independent of individual experience. The language of Indian stories assumes that objectivity can only be approached through experience. A hunter encounters his game first in a dream, then in physical reality. In the Indian thoughtworld, stories about talking animals and stories about summer gatherings are equally true because both describe personal experience. Their truths are complementary."*

Ecological meanings that are becoming endangered continue to exist in the resonances evoked by the Seattle 'speech' or in Grey Owl's words, in the properties of nature that we sense experientially but

cannot express, and in the repugnance we feel about the technological transformation of nature. Our difficulty in articulating such feelings does not make them invalid, but tells us something about the narrowing conceptual frame within which we are tacitly expected to locate not only 'external' nature, but also our own lives and identities. As Leon Kass has argued: *"[In crucial cases] repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason's power fully to articulate it. Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent), or having sex with animals, or mutilating a corpse, or eating human flesh, or even just (just!) raping or murdering another human being?[7] Would anybody's failure to give full rational justification for his or her revulsion at these practices make that revulsion ethically suspect? Not at all. On the contrary, we are suspicious of those who think that they can rationalize away our horror, say, by trying to explain the enormity of incest with arguments only about the genetic risks of inbreeding."*

While scientific language offers us the most powerful system of understanding the world has known, it is not a complete understanding. A mature scientific awareness should be ready to recognize the limitations of science, and to draw – albeit critically and cautiously – on other vehicles to convey and develop intuitions and feelings that are scientifically inexpressible.

Cognitive & Ecological Realities

Much of what we hint at when we refer to 'ecology' has to do with the emergent properties of large systems – those properties that *depend on,* but are not *reducible to,* the properties of *components* of such systems. Similarly, much of what makes us human reflects the emergent properties of cultural systems that are scientifically inexplicable and empirically untestable. Rational understanding can explain the behavior of individual cells fairly adequately, that of individual creatures rather less adequately, and that of the larger systems we are part of hardly at all – which is why we have little comprehension of the direction our society is heading in, and even less of the large-scale ecological systems it is displacing. **Consequently, the most fundamental issues of our time are precisely those we can articulate least clearly;** and this largely accounts for our persistent attraction to cultural identities and texts which express more adequately our potential place within the natural world.

As soon as we learn to count and to categorize, we are cemented into a cognitive system that organizes the world through conceptual similarities and differences. As Tim Ingold points out, we

are taught that *"every creature is specified in its essential nature through the bestowal of attributes passed down along lines of descent, independently and in advance of its placement in the world."* Consequently, *"difference is rendered as diversity. Thus living things are classified and compared [in] terms of intrinsic properties that they are deemed to possess by virtue of genealogical connection, irrespective of their positioning in relation to one another in an environment."* A butterfly, we learn, is like a moth, but different to a buddleia. In ecological systems, however, butterflies and moths have few significant relationships; while butterflies and buddleias do. Our systems of classification, then, are selectively based in those specific natural characteristics that we can recognize and cognitively order, and we tend to ignore those other less accessible natural characteristics that have to do with relation and systemic functioning. The *conceptual* structure of rational thought, in other words, diverges from and takes precedence over the *ecological* structure of the natural world.

As Steve Buchmann and Gary Nabhan point out, a *"biologically rich place is rich in relationships as well as in species. Conversely, the loss of biodiversity is always more than the simple loss of species; it is also the extinction of ecological relationships."* **This suggests that the essence of a creature (including a human being), far from being defined just by innate characteristics, may reside partly in its developing relational extensions into structures larger than itself.** Just as the pink lady slipper orchid cannot reproduce itself without being part of a larger structure that also includes the bumble bees that pollinate it, so humans are dependent on the cultural structures that according to [Clifford] Geertz *"are not mere expressions, instrumentalities, or correlates of our biological, psychological, and social existence; they are prerequisites of it."* Consequently, the silent but relentless dilapidation of cultural, social, and ecological relations, although difficult to quantify, is as devastating for us as the absence of bumble bees is for the pink lady slipper orchid. Adopting a relational identity, then, suddenly brings into focus forms of damage that have previously seemed ephemeral. Loss of community, of extended family ties, of ecological relatedness, no longer seem less real than biological damage; and terms such as a 'broken heart' or an 'emotional wrench' begin to appear less as metaphors than as descriptions of previously hidden realities.

Those emergent properties that we term 'ecological', and that cognition finds difficult to cope with, tend to be omitted from our definitions of both nature and humanity. Today, the cult of individualism *[ed. – see*

Symbiogenetic Desire], fostered by capitalism, has pushed any structures larger than the 'things' we can see and identify to the periphery of what is cognitively acceptable. Just as *"there is no such thing as society"*[8], so ecosystems, supposedly, are no more than *"transitory assemblages of biotic and abiotic elements that exist (or could exist) contingent upon accidents of environmental history, evolutionary chance, human management, and the theoretical perspective one applies to define the boundaries".*[9] According to Donald Worster, when population ecologists look at a forest, they see *"only trees. See them and count them – so many white pines, so many hemlocks, so many maples and birches. They insist that if we know all there is to know about the individual species that constitute a forest, and can measure their lives in precise, quantitative terms, we will know all there is to know about that forest. It has no 'emergent' or organismic properties. It is not some whole greater than the sum of its parts, requiring 'holistic' understanding."*

As one population ecologist puts it, if ecosystems have properties that are more than the sum of their parts, then *"the study of these systems should perhaps be carried out by theologians rather than scientists."*[10] Such views veto the scientific study of emergent properties, which are viewed as unreal or even nonexistent, just as Thatcher's statement about the nonexistence of society denies that we are defined partly by the structures we grow into and participate in. **The slippage is from *methodological* reductionism to *ontological* reductionism: in other words, it is one thing to recognize that understanding the pieces is a useful step in understanding the whole, but quite another to claim that the whole simply *is* the sum of the pieces.**[11] **Writ large and translated into technological actions, this error obliterates the systems whose existence they deny: not just ecological systems, but also social, linguistic and cultural ones, along with the emotional and spiritual possibilities that depend on their existence.**

Furthermore, denying the existence of emergent properties results in an emphasis on constancy rather than change. Life evolves through ever greater complexity of organization, including temporal organization; so while the basic components of life – say, molecules – remain the same, they become involved in increasingly complex patterns, processes, and cycles as we move towards more inclusive levels of functioning. **Defining a person or other natural entity by their fixed attributes rather than by the structures and processes they grow into during their lives puts a boundary around the individual ego and denies that growth can occur across this boundary.** If we assume that *"persons embody certain attributes of appearance, temperament, and mentality by virtue of their ancestry, [and] these are passed on in a form that is unaffected by the circumstances or achievements of their life in the world"*[12], then identity shrinks towards our genetic and social origins, and it becomes impossible to extend oneself into any cause, idea, or vision that extends beyond one's own life. However, experience teaches us that if we work to conserve wilderness, join a community, change our spiritual allegiances, or give birth, these changes affect *who we are.*

Inherited attributes, rather than being taken as a starting point for growth and transformation through participation, are all too often taken as boundary conditions for identity. Our blindness to larger systems carries with it a secondary blindness: that which prevents us from recognizing the possibilities of our own transformation within these larger systems. As individuals, we can supposedly develop attachments to a few other humans while our relations with the rest of the world remain instrumental, based in assumptions of human control and economic exchange. Experiences of participation and empathy, especially with non-human entities, are regarded as, at best, harmless indulgences. Consequently, while our restless unease drives us towards consumerism and narcissistic forms of 'personal growth', experiences of self as undergoing profound transformations as we grow into larger systems are rare and often pathologized. As Anand Paranjpe notes, *"one gets the impression that in Western philosophy and psychology there is a cultivated sense of aversion for any kind of personal transformation."*

Transformation & Authenticity

'Grey Owl's' exposure as 'really' Archie Belaney reflects this conventional view of identity as largely predetermined. However far removed Grey Owl's new lifestyle was from the English cultural landscape, his accident of birth cast him as definitively English, and therefore restricted the identity choices available to him. The enormous diversity of possible occupational choices in industrial society conceals what virtually all these choices have in common: the assumption of a lifelong radical separation between the individual and the rest of the natural world. **In this situation where almost all identity choices embody the same underlying pathology and repression, it is not surprising that more adventurous souls may attempt to abandon this social context for one that more adequately expresses their felt resonance with the natural world.**

But this is a move that is fraught with problems. Ethnicity and family background are not the only defining aspects of identity; but simply pushing them aside in the impulse to trade in one cultural frame for another is as

(Euro) Modern Ontology — Culture A, Culture B, Culture C, Nature

Relational Ontology — ant, wind, human, tool, song, human, story, plant, rock, jaguar, sound, a place
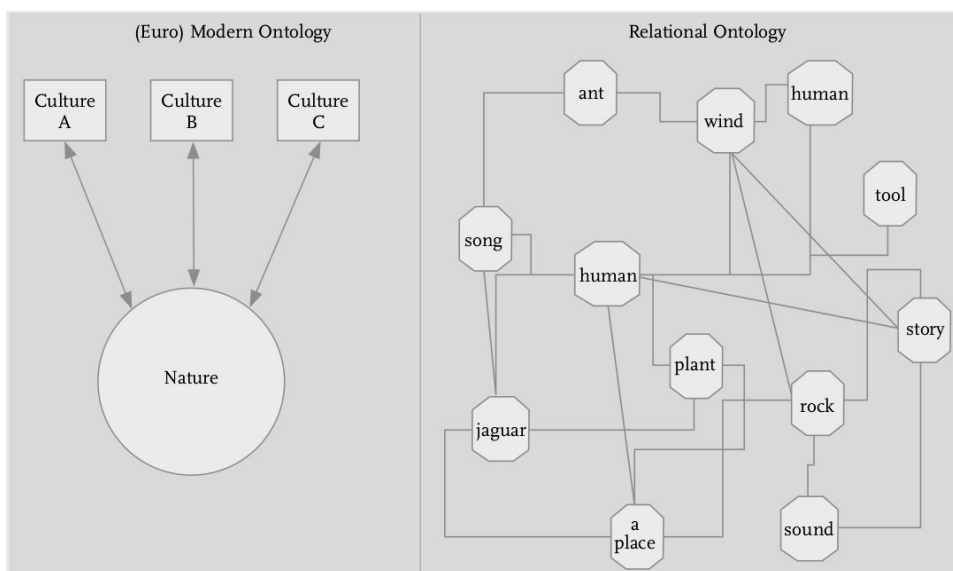
unrealistic as the opposite error of over-emphasizing them. Also, the desire to embrace another cultural framework as a 'lifestyle choice' within industrial society has spawned facile blends of New Age philosophy, pop psychology, commodified Asian religion, and supposedly 'Indian' wisdom, in which the conscious adoption of an 'alternative' stance covers up the less conscious perpetuation of conventional allegiances. In these respects, Archie Belaney was certainly not the most dishonest of the 'whiteshamans' who have emerged over the past century or so: at least he lived in the wilderness rather than staying in Beverley Hills and writing about an entirely invented experience, and he was closer to Thoreau *[ed. – see **Return Fire vol.3 pg54**]* than we might comfortably acknowledge. The difference, of course, concerns identity: although he lived on the fringes of society, Thoreau never claimed to be other than Euroamerican. Why, then, did Belaney feel the need fraudulently to claim Indian parentage?

A possible reason is suggested if we compare the impact of the two men's writings. Before his exposure, 'Grey Owl' sold hundreds of thousands of books, drew large audiences across the world, and was courted by kings and queens. In contrast, Thoreau was a little known social isolate; and after the first print run of his most famous work, 'Walden', the book remained out of print until after his death. It appears that if fraudulently pretending to be a Native American is reprehensible, not being a Native American in the first place is almost as bad. One wonders how well known the 'Seattle speech' would be if it was instead referred to as the 'Perry speech'. **Could it be that recognizing the depth of our colonization by industrialism, we believe that only those writers who are separated from us by cultural background or the passage of time are felt to be acceptable as sources of environmental wisdom? Holistic environmental awareness seems to exist in a realm that is set apart from mainstream white society, a realm also inhabited by the ethnic, the spiritual, and the emotional; and what exists in this realm can only be admitted to consciousness if its subsidiary and subordinate status is first accepted. In other words, the truths inherent in this awareness are acceptable only *on condition that they are simultaneously discredited.*** This is consistent with Wendy Rose's observation that Native American writers are shelved under 'Indians', 'Western', or some such label, whereas their white counterparts are shelved under 'literature'. Furthermore, *"if a Native American writer happens to gain international prominence [as in the case of Scott Momaday] critics and ethnographers*

exclaim that the author and his or her work is 'not really Indian'. Rather, it suddenly falls within the 'mainstream of American letters'".[13]

If feeling, spirituality, and ecological insights were seriously recognized and applied within mainstream white society, the consequences would be momentous, subverting our exclusive reliance on science and the entire anthropocentric *[ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg11]* justification for the industrialist exploitation of 'natural resources'.[14] **It is therefore necessary for feeling to be accorded a low status compared to rational argument, and relegated to a partly dissociated realm where it cannot seriously challenge industrialism. If a semi-permeable boundary is established between these two realms, the 'other' can be both acknowledged as a fringe interest while being ignored when the important decisions are made. The ascription of ecological wisdom to native cultures or past eras therefore protects mainstream white culture, allowing this wisdom a sort of dissociated survival within a subordinated sphere that is moored loosely alongside technological society without ever being fully accepted into it. 'Native literature' is one facet of 'multiculturalism' in modern society, suggesting the superficially democratic interaction of a range of ethnicities, religions, and cultures while actually cementing them into predefined places within an unshakeable politics of economy and power.**[15] **This allows spiritual and environmental awarenesses to be 'taken into account' in policy formulation where there is no risk that they would have any significant effect; or – if there is such a risk – they may be dismissed as 'unrealistic'. But nobody ever suggests that scientific and economic 'realities' should be 'taken into account': they are the unquestioned basis of decision making.**

Simply to dismiss Euroamerican fantasies about native cultures as 'fraudulent', therefore, is to miss the significance of this phenomenon. The underlying problem is

that certain types of experience cannot easily find authentic expression within industrial society, and are fundamentally incompatible with current economic structures. Since Euroamerican society is based on peculiarly irrational forms of economic 'rationality' and the rigorous exclusion of other meanings, it is difficult – without serious consequences – to embody ecological or religious principles in one's working life while remaining part of this society. Ecologically sound practices – along with growing vegetables, spiritual exercises, or camping in the wilderness – are 'leisure' activities that are separated from the serious business of earning a living. If we are sufficiently wealthy, of course, we can retreat to our islands of ecological correctness within the ocean of environmental desolation *[ed. – see **New Technologies, Extraterrestrial Exploitation & the Future of Capitalism**]*; but such 'solutions' do little to challenge the direction of mainstream society, and embody geographically already-existing psychological dissociations. For all but a few, an authentic relation to nature can exist only as fantasy; and it flourishes in this role precisely because our working lives often fail to fulfill our need to feel grounded and in contact with the natural world. A diversity of cultural and spiritual options, together with their associated environmental beliefs and practices, are allowed a superficial existence in order to camouflage and compensate for their opposite: the inescapable uniformity of a capitalist economic and political reality that is now the unquestioned basis of our lives.

In rather the same way that a mistress can perpetuate a moribund marriage by delaying transformative change, these sops to a healthy lifestyle and identity maintain industrialism – and its underlying assumptions – by providing temporary relief from it. However, as the object relations theorist Harry Guntrip suggested, while fantasy is healthy if it is a precursor to action, it is pathological if it is a substitute for it. **We need to ask ourselves: *does the action we are taking challenge industrialism, or does it exist in the interstices allowed and shaped by industrialism?* If the latter is the case, then our humanity is being kept alive through a 'life-support system' of leisure activities and 'lifestyle choices' just to the extent that we remain available to be used within the industrialist system.** There is no shortage of parallels here: forests, for example, are allowed to flourish to the extent that they provide 'timber'; so natural tendencies are permitted and used by the system to strengthen itself. Similarly, human needs and desires – most obviously, sexuality – that could be part of a healthy world become perverted and distorted when harnessed as part of the industrial system.

In contrast to most indigenous societies, industrial society defines 'culture' and 'nature' in terms of their supposed *opposition* to each other, leading to a chronic, institutionalized lack of psychological integrity. Our socially learned characteristics, rather than complementing and expressing those tendencies that derive from our embodiment as living creatures, are often seen as *replacing* them; and so our resonance with the natural world, if we are to retain our basic cultural orientation, has to occur in a dissociated realm. This is a recurring theme in theories of psychopathology from Freud onwards[16], suggesting that it is the basis of a persistent cultural malaise. In Carl Rogers' 'person centered' approach, for example, psychological distress is viewed in terms of a lack of congruence between a bodily-based experiential self and a conscious self-concept that develops through the introjection of social mores and the denial of embodied awareness. **The notions of truth, reality, and identity implied by these two versions of self differ fundamentally; and one of the main tasks of education** *[ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg27]* **is to reduce the resultant conflict by instilling the belief that embodied 'truth' is misleading and frivolous while consciously learned rationality is reliable and correct. But since conscious learning cannot completely eliminate embodied awareness, these repressed feelings will seek ways of expressing themselves symptomatically through an entirely different form of relation to the world, one which implants us empathically in the world as it abandons detachment and 'objectivity'.** This implies a form of identity, and an understanding of human being, that utterly rejects the basic assumptions of industrial life, since – as Tim Ingold says of the Ojibwa[17] – the *"achievement of empathy means taking on another way of being, [and] full understanding is attained not through translation but through metamorphosis."*

But while native ways of being can be appropriated as fantasies within an industrial lifestyle in rather the same way that tribal artifacts are used to decorate a modern living room, indigenous realities, if taken to heart, more often directly challenge rather than complement Euroamerican representations of nature. The world represented in Native American writing, for example, diverges from the neatly arranged conceptual order that our cognitive representations assume, embodying – as William Bevis puts it – an *"apparent fragmentation of the natural world into a huge cast of individual 'micro-characters', a fragmentation that has not been properly noted because it does not fit*

white formulas[...] Cows, bats, mosquitoes, blackbirds, coyotes, magpies act in their individual, peculiar ways". This is a world which is *allowed to be,* seemingly incoherent because it has not yet been made to fit within a humanly recognizable order. One thing does not 'symbolize' another, conforming to any anthropocentric taxonomy of comprehension: things and creatures just *are,* in their own peculiar ways, and relating to them involves a self-transformative effort of empathy rather than an attempt to assimilate them to a pre-existing cognitive pattern. Bevis illustrates this by referring to the writing of D'Arcy McNickle: *"Archilde is at Mission School, and one afternoon a cloud "[by curious coincidence] assumed the form of a cross – in the reflection of the setting sun, a flaming cross. The prefect was the first to observe the curiosity and it put him into a sort of ecstasy[…] 'The Sign! The Sign!' he shouted. His face was flushed and his eyes gave off flashing lights - Archilde did not forget them. 'The Sign! Kneel and pray!' The boys knelt and prayed, some of them frightened and on the point of crying. They knew what the sign signified[...] the second coming of Christ, when the world was to perish in flames." The cloud, of course, melts away, but curiously Archilde does not need this empirical proof to reject Christianity's symbolic use of nature: "It was not the disappearance of the threatening symbol which freed him from the priest's dark mood, but something else. At the very instant that the cross seemed to burn most brightly, a bird flew across it[...] It flew past and returned several times before finally disappearing - and what seized Archilde's imagination was the bird's unconcernedness. It recognized no 'sign'. His spirit lightened. He felt himself fly with the bird." "*

For Archilde, openness to his sensing of the world takes precedence over any elaborate conceptual scheme. The world comes first. This is also true, Bevis argues, of other native American writers: in James Welch's work, for example, *"[the natural world] is strangely (to whites) various, objective, unsymbolic,* **as if it had not yet been taken over by the human mind."**

Renouncing consumer society for the world that Welch and McNickle imply demands more than cosmological tourism. To paraphrase another critic of mercantile society, it is generally easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for an affluent inhabitant of the industrialised world to live in a spiritually and ecologically consistent way. The impossibility of reconciling the fundamental industrialist assumption that we are separate *from* the natural world (including our own bodies) with the indigenous belief that human society is grounded *in* the natural world leads us to dissociate nature

and feeling from economic 'realities'. Anything that challenges this dissociation leads to an unbearable degree of cognitive dissonance, in which mutually incompatible beliefs threaten to overwhelm our psychological equilibrium.

The assumption made by 'Grey Owl' that he could not, as Archie Belaney, achieve the more natural lifestyle he craved was well founded. As a teenager in Hastings, he *"loved to go off on solitary walks to look for plants and wild animals"*[18]; but in the stiflingly provincial life of southern England, these activities were necessarily part of a dissociated realm of bodily awarenesses and inarticulable intuitions. Such experiences of contact with the natural world, in one form or another, are important in the psychological development of most children; but as Cynthia Tomashow notes, for many of us, *"this aspect of identity seems to shrivel and recede [to the dark reaches of consciousness]".* Instead of developing and incorporating our bodily awarenesses as we reach out into the world, we instead learn that rational thought, the technological power that flows from it, and the economic structures within which 'business' can flourish are the fundamentals of life. **Unlike most of us, Belaney rejected this socialized mode of being: what we play at, he made the centre of his life, rejecting capitalist society and his past identity within it. In order to do so, he lied about his parentage; but whether this course of action demonstrates less integrity than our more usual acceptance of the dissociations inherent in industrialized life is debatable.** Under current conditions, the choice may not be a clear one between truth and untruth, or between authenticity and fakery; for each choice carries with it its own particular brand of inauthenticity.

The Hunger for Form
The dearth of ways expressing and justifying our embodied awarenesses makes us hungry for any suitable form; and this makes it easier to understand the enormous popularity of the Seattle 'speech' and the writings of Grey Owl. The unexpressed emotional needs of Euroamericans, unable to find more authentic modes of expression, give rise to the invention of forms of 'indigenous wisdom' that are often unrecognizable by the indigenous peoples concerned.[19] Although this flourishing tradition of 'whiteshamanism' and the disingenuous literature it has generated are exploitative of the peoples and traditions they parody, the emotional needs that underlie them are real enough. These needs should be frankly recognized, and expressed in honest forms such as fiction that is acknowledged to be fiction, so keeping alive the vision of ecological integrity until

such time as it can be realized in physical reality.

Such subjective awarenesses are allowed to play only minor roles in the material but illusory world that focuses on the production and consumption of commodities. In this manufactured world, *"what we experience is not real and what is real is not what we experience".*[20] While experience, in other words, in a flow of feelings, glimpses, intuitions, associations, and sensations, invites us to enter a world that transcends current actualities, this greater world is classified as unreal and replaced by a substitute, cognitive world defined in terms of material, biochemical, and economic categories that are learned but unfelt. Today, this partial view of reality is not just a learned understanding, however: increasingly, it is becoming the built structure of the world itself, so that the sort of world we have evolved to expect, hope for, and participate in is a latent world, hidden from us by a crude and degraded actuality. **The task facing the environmentalist of the future, then, may be less one of conserving a world that is under threat, and increasingly one of actualizing a world that exists largely as a hope, a memory, and an intuition.** As the novelist J. G. Ballard asserts, the *"balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly in the past decades. Increasingly, their roles are reversed. We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind – mass merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the pre-empting of any original response to experience by the television screen[...] It is now less and less necessary for the writer to invent the fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality."*

Subjectivity, then, is not just a froth on the surface of reality, to be skimmed off and thrown away. It can also be a guide to what is missing both from our own lives and from the contexts we inhabit. Perry's version of the Seattle 'speech' was, as he himself was at pains to point out, largely a work of fiction; but the roots of this fiction come from an awareness that extends well beyond present forms of consciousness

into the realm of a repressed, dissociated, cultural unconscious. As Rudolf Kaiser suggests, the Seattle 'speech' seems *"to touch on an idea and a feeling that have so far largely been banned from our occidental, Christian, Western culture. **It is the idea that the worldly and the spiritual, the mundane and the beyond, the profane and the sacred are not wholly separate from each other, as we are used to thinking;** but that these seeming opposites are actually very closely connected in this world and that therefore everything in this world without any exception is seen as sacred in its nature and its character. This idea that each and every thing and creature in this world is spiritual and sacred may well prove to be the salient point of this text[...] for a society which has always neatly separated the temporal and the spiritual and in this way has tried to justify man's [sic] claim that all the non-sacred world is at his disposal."*

The notion that, say, a Douglas Fir, far from being merely the 'raw material' for garden furniture, is part of a system that is both natural and sacred is so at odds with our lifestyle, our education, and our inflated material 'needs' that to express it is to risk ridicule. As I argued above, such notions can *only* be allowed to exist within consciousness on condition that they are relegated to a psychological bantustan of ethnic, spiritual, and environmental awareness that is excluded from the main current of our thought. While the text of the 'Seattle speech' was not written by Seattle, it nevertheless, as Kaiser argues, possesses a kind of validity; and it can be understood as the product of an awareness that is also a hope, one that resonates widely because it represents *the shadow of the technological understanding of the world.* This awareness can in present times not survive within mainstream politics, and is not viewed as 'real'; so it is necessary that it lead a dissociated existence as 'fiction' or 'fantasy'. But it should be recognized that in important ways, these dissociated realms are more real than what currently passes for reality.

As the destruction of the natural world proceeds, it becomes increasingly necessary to find ways of expressing not only what *is*, but also what *could be*: a healthy world, and those larger resonant structures that will be an essential part of such a world. To the extent that theory is consistent only with current, diminished forms of reality, it will be incapable of providing a basis for a

movement away from these realities toward healthier ones: as [Herbert] Marcuse observed, to *"the degree to which they correspond to the given reality, thought and behavior express a false consciousness, responding to and contributing to the preservation of a false order of facts."* An adequate theory will *also* grasp the importance of relation, empathy, and emergent properties even when these are largely absent from the world today. In Michael Lambek's terms, the *"basic question [is] whether [a] theory corresponds to the world as it is, [whether it has] 'veracity' (Descartes' [ed. – see **Veganism: Why Not**] certum; or 'correctness'); or whether it provides an ideal and has 'verity' (Vico's verum) against which the facts must be measured and perhaps found wanting."* We need to be clear about which version of truth we are working within; and whether the future world we envision is an extension of current realities, or a transformation of these realities.

If we are to keep alive the long-term aim of a healthy world, we need to recognize that the term 'fictional' need not always mean 'unreal', but can also refer to what is not currently actualized. **Great fiction can illustrate truths about life that are not always expressible through science; for science often captures the bare skeletons of once living creatures, shorn of everything that is inessential to the particular model adopted – the living flesh, the hopes and fears and beliefs, the connections and relations.** In this vein, the novelist Toni Morrison argues that since we haven't yet found a way to preserve subjectivity, it will necessarily be the first casualty of historical recording. Morrison therefore refers to her writing as *"a kind of literary archaeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image[...] on the remains[...] in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth."*

Such 'fiction', which attempts to reconstruct a meaningful world from a few residual fragments, is no less 'true' than more conservative writing which refuses to go beyond the fragments themselves. If we live – as we increasingly do – in a world of ecological fragments, then we cannot take this as the 'true' world: rather, we need to imaginatively reconstruct the possibility of a more whole, healthy world. As Morrison remarks, *"[the crucial distinction] is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth".* This is a form of truth unrecognizable by those ostensibly 'objective' sciences that deny subjectivity any validity.

A reliance on 'facts', then, cannot be seen as an adequate default position: as Bernard Williams has pointed out, such a reliance *"is itself an offence against truthfulness"*. David James Duncan makes a complementary point: *"fiction-making and lying are two different things. To write War and Peace required imaginative effort. To embezzle money from a bank does, too. [This] does not make [Leo] Tolstoy a bank robber. War and Peace is an imaginative invention but also, from beginning to end, a truth-telling and a gift-giving. We know before reading a sentence that Tolstoy "made it all up", but this making is as altruistic and disciplined as the engineering of a cathedral. It uses mastery of language, spectacular acts of empathy, and meticulous insight into a web of individuals and a world to present a man's vast, haunted love for his Russian people. And we as readers get to recreate this love in ourselves. We get to reenter the cathedral."*

A disciplined subjectivity can enable us to 'reenter the cathedral' of the wild world and to nurture it; for just as Descartes' subjectivity of doubt has been largely realized in a mechanical and unfelt world *[ed. – see **Symbiogenetic Desire**]*, so a more complete subjectivity of empathy and relation can, eventually, be realized in a healthier one. As Ingold remarks, *"we should resist the temptation to assume that since stories are stories [they are] unreal or untrue, for this is to suppose that the only reality, or true truth, is one in which [we can] have no part in at all. [Telling a story] is not like unfurling a tapestry to cover up the world, it is rather a way of guiding the attention of listeners or readers **into** it"*. It is not my intention to suggest either that science should be rejected or that fiction necessarily communicates truths; only that we need an understanding that as well as including science, also goes beyond it. An environmental movement, and a society, that limits its understanding to what is scientifically defensible impairs its ability to defend the natural world and is symptomatic of a crippled subjectivity.

Media such as film and fiction are not necessarily just the fanciful diversions of childhood, or distractions from the harsh realities of adulthood. If environmental ethics is to reach a wider audience, as David Johns has argued, we will need to use forms of communication that are *"explicitly emotive and personally grounded. […] Although philosophy seeks to answer the same questions as myth – questions of meaning – philosophy does not even remotely approach the influence of the more potent modern forms of modern myth: novels and film. It would do well to learn from them."*

Furthermore, if humanity and the non-human world are to survive in a more-than-biological sense, we will need to accept that we are continuous with our cultural and ecological contexts; and consequently, that authenticity is difficult to achieve in a world in which these contexts are degraded. We would do well explicitly to recognize our own colonization by industrialism, admitting that **the battle between ecological structures and industrialism is being fought within ourselves as well as in the world outside.** Just as the 'weeds' and 'vermin' that we have tried to annihilate may belatedly be recognized as forms of diversity necessary for the regeneration of the wild world, so censored modes of experience, together with the devalued forms of communication through which they can be expressed, may conserve aspects of reality that may one day become actual. The sort of truth conveyed by such forms, like that embodied in the Seattle 'speech' or in Grey Owl's writings, differs from that of the physical sciences; and this should be recognized as a strength as well as a weakness. There is a curious and paradoxical authenticity in accepting the present impossibility of either individual or ecological health; and in this acceptance we abandon our narcissistic individual aspirations for consistency, wholeness, and an 'ecological' lifestyle, instead aligning our imperfect lives with the dream, the vision, and the hope of a healthier future world *[ed. – see **'The Matter of Knowing Who We Are'**]*. In working to bring about such a world, we rediscover our own authenticity.

1. Perry himself never claimed that the 'speech' was anything other than a work of fiction. See Rudolf Kaiser, "Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception".

2. Scientific disciplines do, of course, vary in their ability to express sensed qualities of the natural world. Some, such as physics, express a comparatively narrow range of properties, albeit with great power and accuracy; whereas others, such as conservation biology or ethnobotany, are sensitive to a much wider range of qualities. While recognizing this degree of variation, I use the general term 'science' in this paper to avoid lengthy qualifications and caveats.

3. David M. Levin, The Body's Recollection of Being.

4. See David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World, for a more extended treatment of these ideas.

5. ed. – "'Science is founded on the idea that the results of its methods – which are very specific mathematical and experimental methods – are equivalent to what we mean by truth. The mythology holds that science describes physical reality, that science is truth. And if science is truth, then all other forms of truth – all philosophical truth, all ethical truth, all emotional, spiritual, relational, experiential truths – are devalued. They're regarded as something else besides truth. Scientists may agree, for example, that there is something called artistic truth, but they – and I'm talking not so much about specific scientists (although this is often true) as I am about what the scientific worldview does to all of us – don't think artistic truth has anything to do with the material reality that the scientist investigates. […] Science is based on exclusion. […] If you can convince people that science has a monopoly on truth, you may be able to get them to believe also that the knowledge generated through science is independent of politics, history, social influences, cultural bias, and so on' [Stanley Aronowitz]. And in the bargain, you can get them to doubt their own experience" (Welcome to the Machine).

6. This unease is reflected in striking increases in anxiety and depression in Europe and the USA over the past half-century or so. Despite greater material affluence, studies have typically found increases of several hundred percent in the prevalence of these disorders, so that

"We tell a story that the world is a machine that can be programmed to serve our purposes. We tell a story that humans are the measure of all things, that we can justify enclosing other creatures in factory farms or animal-testing labs, clearcutting the great forests and poisoning the seas, killing off other forms of life to feed our hunger and desire. We tell a story that we can mold the world to the needs of the self, rather than molding the self to the needs of the world. These stories failed us long ago, and it is increasingly common now to hear the claim that we need "new stories" to replace them. These new stories, it is said, will be stories of belonging again. They will be stories of returning to the earth, of understanding our true place in the great maelstrom of the universe, not as gods now but as family members. [...] New stories – or old stories in new form – will not be purely individual endeavors. They will not arise from research, from thinking, from analysis, from planning. They will not be utopian, globalist, all-encompassing, neat and satisfying. If we are to develop different ways of relating ourselves to the earth or to some new spiritual methodology that connects us back again to our natural heritage, this isn't going to come from our rational minds. It may not come from us at all. The mythologist Martin Shaw speaks of stories as being *"an echo location from the Earth."* The old folktales and foundation myths, he says, were not purely the creations of human minds. Rather, those minds acted like aerials, telling a story that a place, or the spirit of a place, wanted to be told. Such new stories, again, are the oldest stories of all: they are a retelling of the eternal story, from before we felled the tree. And they are not the product of thinking. They are the product of listening." – *The Axis & the Sycamore*

towards the end of the last century levels of anxiety among 'normal' children were higher than levels recorded among child psychiatric patients in the 1950's.

7. ed. – Regarding the morality claims here, aside from their pacifism which has been for us adequately discredited elsewhere (see **Return Fire vol.1 pg16**), added to acts of war and/or domination (not to mention starvation scenarios) there are a variety of other ways to look at the phenomenon of cannibalism. For example, Jared Diamond recounts a guy he was working with in Papua New Guinea preparing to return to his mountain village after the death of a relative, whose funeral rites included consumption of certain of their body parts by those close to them as a mark of respect and continuation of life.

8. As Margaret Thatcher famously observed.

9. R. Bruce Hull and David P. Robertson, "The language of nature matters: We need a more public ecology".

10. John L. Harper, "The heuristic value of ecological restoration".

11. ed. – This cynical argumentation is visible in, for instance, 'ecological compensation' schemes like that proposed in the area currently defended by the Z.A.D. occupation in Brittany (see **Return Fire vol.1 pg81**) where the construction company claims they will 're-create' an 'equivalent' wetland habitat hundreds of miles away to 'mitigate' loss for endangered species; occupiers responded by repeatedly preventing the collaborationist ecologists from coming to do their surveys and attacking their police escorts.

12. Tim Ingold, The Perception of the Environment.

13. Wendy Rose, "The great pretenders: Further reflections on whiteshamanism".

14. ed. – While we see this as an absolutely necessary path to tread, it is also one that is massively complicated by the place we are starting from within Western society (see **Return Fire vol.39**). We'd concur with comrades of Knowing the Land is Resistance: "We need to critique and fight dominator science [ed. – see **'The Pond'**] to create space for us to trust our own experiences again, while reclaiming from it the tools we might need. We also need to prevent the space created in this way from being hastily filled by a supposed spirituality that projects our assumptions about the land back onto it, recreates our own alienation from it by trapping us in our own egos and imaginings, and supports new claims of unaccountable knowledge. It might sound like we're being really hard on spirituality, but it's because we consider it to be too important a project to move hastily. There is a huge grief involved in recognizing that we truly are alienated from the land, that there is no easy way out, that we really are so ignorant. We need to truly feel that and cultivate humility in the sorts of knowledge we claim access to. Our experience is that observing the wild closely and honestly leads inevitably to action in its defense and to clashes with power – the more these clashes are collective and sustained, the more we build a community that orients its values in line with the health of the wild. Such a community is the soil from which any spiritual practice might (re)grow. In particular, we've found close observations of healing wildlands to be full of profound truths about how to live in this world. Take a walk down the traintracks, through

old brownfields, rewilding farmlands, old quarries, around abandoned houses and buildings, and you'll see the plants and creatures who are courageously facing up to the utter devastation and who are working hard to recreate health and resiliency even in the most damaged places. Learning to appreciate the work being done by plants with deep taproots like chicory, burdock, and curly dock, for instance, not only inspires us to fight for health in hard situations, but gives us practical ideas about how this can be done. These are the roots of a new practice."

15. ed. – "The form which ethnic integration takes in western societies is the community leader phenomenon, also known as multiculturalism. Basically, this phenomenon operates by creating a stratum of privileged individuals within each disenfranchised or excluded group, whose purpose is to socially manage the group, to channel its frustrations into a positive attachment to an ethnic category, and to defuse these frustrations by means of the negotiation of this group's constructed identity within the system. The history of this strategy can be traced back to the British Empire, which often used local leaders (religious figures, chiefs, kings, etc.) in this kind of way – a strategy which was absolutely crucial to the management of a wide-ranging empire given the small number of settlers and administrators. It was also used in nineteenth-century Italy, where it took the peculiar form known as trasformismo – the beheading of social movements through the parliamentary or administrative incorporation of movement leaders or figureheads. It reached something akin to its modern form in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, which were the world's first multicultural states. Each "nationality" was permitted its own local party structure, representative institutions, and so on – but its representatives, much like today's community leaders, were appointed from within the party-state apparatus, usually by the central leadership, as a means of integrating the various "national" areas. It reached its current form as a response to social crises in countries such as America, Britain, Canada, and Australia – as a strategy for defusing the increasingly militant struggles of black people, migrant populations, and indigenous peoples. Though often counterposed to the monocultural models of ethnic-majority populism, it is in fact structurally similar, relying on a similar model of social integration through ethnic categories. A similar strategy has been used to contain prison revolt. When the black consciousness movement first reached prisons, the resulting assertiveness of black prisoners was welcomed by the entire prison population, as something that altered the balance of power between prisoners and screws and that won important gains for prisoners. To undermine this solidarity, screws started playing favourites – giving benefits to black prisoners only, to create resentment from other prisoners, or rewarding other groups for being compliant. In this way, one can see the origins of the ethnic prison gangs which have since come into existence. These gangs can be seen as at least partly a result of divide-and-rule strategies which used ethnicity to undermine resistance. When network social forms have outflanked control apparatuses, ethnicity can be used by states and other dominant groups in order to re-establish control. The effects of this become very clear in contexts where the state uses pogroms to defuse anti-state unrest. The Indonesian financial crisis of 1997 offers an especially clear

example – state forces suppressed popular anti-capitalist, anti-state and anti-dictatorship protests, but encouraged and collaborated with pogroms against the Chinese population of Indonesia. These pogroms served as a way to channel social discontent in a way which was harmless for the state and capitalism. This kind of pogrom may be uncommon in Indonesia, but the channelling of frustrations onto ethnic groups deployed socially as intermediaries is very common – not only are the Chinese frequently exploited in this way throughout Southeast Asia, but colonial regimes frequently used ethnic minorities (the Tutsi, the Tamils) or migrant communities (such as South Asians in East Africa) in the same way, and one could even interpret European anti-Semitism along these lines. In addition, ethnic politics based on pogroms and constant conflict is a normal part of capitalist management in certain parts of Nigeria (eg. Kaduna), Indonesia (eg. Ambon) and India (eg. Gujarat). There are also similarities with the situation in Sydney, where a racist pogrom – tolerated, encouraged, and incited by state agents – followed two years of mass unrest against the state. The boundary between rigid ethnic identities and loose affiliations in revolt against oppressors is a slim one [ed. – see **'The Invention of the Tribe'** below], and one which the socially excluded cross over on a regular basis; the emotional and psychological reactions generated by social and economic marginality and exclusion seem to be equally open to either kind of articulation. This fluidity is something the state exploits in order to prevent the kinds of revolts which really threaten its power. A similar observation could be made regarding events in Britain and France in November 2005. In France, the absence of multiculturalist integration left open the possibility of revolts which crossed boundaries of ethnicity and religion, and which were directed primarily against the state. The result was a massive urban insurrection organised on a network basis against the poor, directed primarily at crackdown culture and the repressive apparatuses of the state and capitalism. There was also unrest in Lozells, Birmingham, at around the same time – an area which hosted a large anti-state uprising in the mid-1980s. In this case, however, the discontent – while clearly sparked by exclusion, poverty, and social alienation – was channelled in directions which were largely harmless to the state. Instead of taking the form of an uprising against the police, the revolt took the form of communal fighting between young men of Asian and African origin, on the basis of firm identifications with specific ethnic categories. This is the harvest the state has reaped for its strategy of multiculturalist integration – the use of ethnically targeted state patronage to solidify group identities, and the use of populism to channel concerns arising from social exclusion and economic precarity into ethnic categories" (Andy Robinson).

16. See, for example, his "Civilised sexual morality and modern nervous illness".

17. ed. – The Ojibwa (or Ojibwe, or Chippewa) are indigenous to 'North America', mostly living in the territory claimed by Canada but also the United States.

18. Donald B. Smith, From the Land of Shadow: The Making of Grey Owl.

19. ed. – "Western education predisposes us to think of knowledge in terms of factual

information, information that can be structured and passed on through books, lectures and programmed courses. Knowledge is something that can be acquired and accumulated, rather like stocks and bonds. By contrast, within the Indigenous world the act of coming to know something involves a personal transformation. The knower and the known are indissolubly linked and changed in a fundamental way. Coming to know Indigenous [ways of knowing] can never be reduced to a catalogue of facts or a data base in a supercomputer; for it is a dynamical and living process, an aspect of the ever-changing, ever-renewing processes of nature" (Blackfoot Physics).

20. *Robert D. Romanyshyn, Psychological Life: From Science to Metaphor.*

'ON REASONABLE GROUNDS'

On 5 June 2009, a deadly confrontation took place in the Peruvian Amazon between police forces and a group of protestors mostly composed of indigenous Awaj'un people who had taken control of a highway to protest President Alan Garcia's decrees facilitating the concession of their territories to oil, timber and hydroelectric corporations. Leni, a young Awaj'un leader, explained what motivated his participation in the protests: *"We speak of our brothers who quench our thirst, who bathe us, those who protect our needs – [this brother] is what we call the river. We do not use the river for our sewage; a brother cannot stab another brother. We do not stab our brothers."* […] One is warranted in saying that in these cases the indigenous peoples are defending not simply access to and control over resources; they are defending complex webs of relations between humans and nonhumans, relations that, for them, are better expressed in the language of kinship than in the language of property.

[…] Attending to the limitations of an approach that takes for granted that 'natural resources' are what is at stake in so-called environmental conflicts, Arturo Escobar has stressed the need to consider the power differentials between various knowledges and cultural practices. [B]y privileging a perspective that sees 'the environment' as natural resources to be exploited or protected over a model that conceives its constituents as nonhuman agents whose relations with humans are better conveyed in terms of kinship, a *cultural distribution conflict* is created. In other words, in these cases two different culturally specific ways of understanding the environment clash with each other. Of course, whichever cultural perspective gains the upper hand will determine the access to, use of and relation to 'the thing' at stake.

 [A]n ontological conflict (i.e. a conflict about what is there) is treated as an epistemological conflict (i.e. a conflict about how different cultural perspectives see, know or struggle for what ontology has already established is there). [W]e must remain attentive to the power relations *between different knowledges.* Once we follow this line of reasoning it becomes pressing to shift focus from culture to the epistemic formation of which the very concept of culture is a part. Why? **Because besides being used by analysts and commentators to explain and know the conflicts, this concept is also used as a weapon wielded in the conflicts.** For example, indigenous peoples appeal to notions of cultural rights to confront processes that will affect their capacity to sustain their 'life projects.' In response, states, corporations and environmentalists dismiss those claims on the basis that respect for the culture of indigenous peoples should not obstruct the rational 'management' (whatever this might mean) of what in the last instance is just nature. At bottom what is being argued is that not all cultures or ways of knowing 'nature' (the world out there) have the same standing in rational politics, the arena where decisions affecting a territory and its population are debated.

[S]ome environmental conflicts both unsettle what is commonly construed as reasonable politics (i.e. a politics where the parties agree about what is at stake) and make evident **the limitations of the concept of culture, the tool with which the social sciences try to apprehend and make reasonable what in principle appears as lying beyond** *reasonable politics.* […] In sum, between the roof of reasonable cultural demands and the floor of reasonable

environmental concerns, and between the left and right walls, lies the realm of *reasonable politics.* Beyond those confines lies irrationality, where politics is no longer possible. And precisely what lies beyond any rational politics is what these governments (like many others) refuse to engage with: the possibility that what is at stake in the conflicts does not it within the nature/culture and left/right categories. Certainly anthropology and other social sciences have picked up what lies beyond reasonable politics and, showing that it has its own rationality as 'culture', have contributed to bringing it back into the arena of reasonable politics – but always subject to being judged according to dominant conceptions of what counts as a reasonable demand to have cultural differences respected. Thus, crucial to an understanding of the limits of culture to intervene in the conflicts that concern us is gaining a grasp of how the 'reasonable' gets defined in reasonable politics.

[…] The Peruvian president, Alan Garcia, tried two kinds of responses to the conflict in the Amazon mentioned previously. Before the violent clashes took place, he tried to dismiss indigenous demands as irrationality trumping progress. In declarations to the press he said, *"These people are not first-class citizens. What can 400,000 natives say to twenty-eight million Peruvians, 'You don't have any right to come round here'? No way, that would be a grave error, and those who think that way want to lead us into irrationality and a backward, primitive state."* After the violent clashes, public opinion at large turned against the government. Thus, seeing that his appeals to 'reasonableness' did not work to sway the 'twenty-eight million Peruvians' in his favour and against the natives, Garcia tried another argument: foreign left-leaning governments (Venezuela and Bolivia) were behind the protest. […] Besides demonstrating the self-interested readings that governments can make of popular protests, the responses are illustrative with regard to what is considered reasonable politics in Latin America. Facing indigenous demands for the right to decide over the conditions of their own lives, the right-leaning Peruvian government first sets a limit on what indigenous peoples can reasonably aspire to as citizens of a multicultural society: their 'cultural differences' (e.g. their conception of natural resources as relatives) cannot override the progress and greater good of the nation. Seeing that the characterisation of the indigenous demands as irrational does not really work, the government then turns to another explanation: the mobilisation is not irrational but ideologically motivated. In other words, the mobilisation is about natural resources that leftist political forces want to use and control for their own purposes.

[…] Dismissing indigenous peoples' claims about what motivates their mobilisation and protests with the argument that such claims are unreasonable (either because they are based on mistaken beliefs or because they hide the real motivations) carries

Left: "NO REDD [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg8]: FORESTS AREN'T COMMODITIES!", protest after the Mexican State agreed to sell 'carbon credits' to the U.S.A from REDD schemes in the Lacandon Jungle (rich with minerals and conflict between hydro-power, palm oil plantations for biofuels, road-building and the various indigenous lifeways; the government of Chiapas plans relocation of the communities to 'Sustainable Rural Cities[!]') to 'offset' Californian emissions. Right: More doublespeak: 'Environmental Police' formed to aid this dispossession and privatise biodiversity.

the implicit assertion of an epistemologically superior standing. The dismissals are saying either *'You are confusing how things really are with what your culture tells you about them'*, or *'For ulterior motives you are trying to confuse us about how things really are'*; and in either case they are also saying *'We do know how things really are and must act in consequence.'* Where does this 'epistemological confidence' come from? Bruno Latour's characterisation of the two great divides shaping the 'modern constitution' might give us some hints: *"The Internal Great Divide [between Nature and Culture] accounts for the External Great Divide [between Us and Them]: we [moderns] are the only ones who differentiate absolutely between Nature and Culture whereas in our eyes* **all the others** *– whether they are Chinese or Amerindians, Azande or Barouya –* **cannot really separate what is knowledge from what is society,** *what is sign from what is thing, what comes from Nature as it is from what their cultures require."*

In short, 'moderns' have more than a culture, more than a perspective: they *have knowledge.* And the confidence that they have more than a perspective is premised precisely on recognising the difference between what is nature (or reality out there) and what is culture (the subjective representation of reality). Recognising such difference has allowed moderns to develop the proper procedure for knowing reality as it is: universal science[1].

Here we go back to the justifications that the various agents of modernity (governments, corporations, environmentalists) advance to override the claims of indigenous peoples: we cannot stop progress and the greater good in the name of respecting picturesque, perhaps lovable and romantic but ultimately unrealistic cultural beliefs. The forests are lumber, genetic pools, oil and water; mountains are rocks and valuable minerals; these are all things that can be turned into commodities for the growth of the economy. Certainly, environmentalists will jump in and say, *'Well, the science of ecology tells us that these are delicate ecosystems that cannot be destroyed without consequences.'* *'No problem,'* is the response, *'let the ecologists make environmental impact assessments and figure out exactly how much and in which ways we can pull resources out of the earth without completely destroying it. Perhaps we can even preserve some hotspots of biodiversity for the benefit and aesthetic enjoyment of humanity.'* Now, at this point the conversation does not involve indigenous peoples any longer; now it is a conversation among members of the tribe of the moderns who are using their only reasonable protocol to determine how to treat nature: they use universal science. Nonhuman relatives? Spirits? Ancestors? Those are not within the purview of science, they are not real, they are human fabrications and therefore fall within the domain of culture[2].

What is left for those who have culture but not knowledge? Well, they can claim in the political arena their right to keep their identities, their cultures and their beliefs, but can never expect that they will be taken seriously and at face value when they speak about what the moderns call *nature.* It is true that evolving national and international frameworks increasingly recognise a variety of indigenous rights (to be consulted, to have their territories respected, to be compensated and so on), thereby creating a whole new set of instruments and avenues that indigenous peoples can use to defend their worlds. But these rights are all crafted to the dominant parameters of reasonability. Can you imagine a politician or a corporation stopping a profitable mega-development project because the natives say a spirit or ancestor does not want it? At best, the natives might mobilise their various rights and, if the political conditions are favourable, build alliances with other concerned groups until they are able to have politicians and corporations stop the project, but on *reasonable grounds!*

The reasonableness of the demands will depend on the degree to which they are aligned with 'reality out there'. In other words, the test question that will be posed to these demands will be whether they are grounded on 'reality' or not. And who is to determine this alignment? Universal science? No surprise then about the army of expert consultants that indigenous peoples have to enroll to back up their claims and demands. **Thus, one of the problems with using the concept of culture to intervene in and analyse certain (so-called) environmental conflicts is that some participants in the conflicts seem to be** *more cultural than others,* **that is to say, they do not have** *real knowledge,* **they have** *cultural beliefs.*

[T]hose who have universal science, run with the advantage. The epistemic privilege of universal science might not be obvious and apparent in all cases where different 'claims to know' collide, precisely because of the role that multicultural tolerance plays nowadays in relation to indigenous peoples. Thus some cultural difference is tolerated inside the 'house' of reasonable politics. **However, it is precisely the term 'tolerance' that gives the game away:** in this context to tolerate means to suspend the application of the most rational understanding of reality in deference to those who do not know best. But as we can see time and again in many of the cases where 'claims to know' collide, tolerance can only go so far before universal science is brought to bear to demarcate the limits beyond which disciplining force is required to meet unreason – 'unreason' or 'irrationality' being just different words used to deny ontological differences. […] But we can take the idea that some participants are more cultural than others in another direction: it might indicate that for some participants the world cannot be encompassed by the concept of culture, or nature for that matter.

---

1. By universal science I refer to an assemblage of knowledge practices that, associating themselves with but distorting the very specific nature of the truths produced by the experimental sciences, claims to know reality 'as it is'. This assemblage has come to constitute a veritable regime of knowledge ingrained in modern governmentality.

2. Interestingly, the further environmentalists' claims move from the assumption of ecosystems as anything more than a very complex organic machine ruled by laws that are knowable and therefore manageable, the more they start to join the ranks of 'cultural' claims, that is, claims based on morals, beliefs or whatever but not on the hard facts that science is supposed to deal with.

'The Invention of the Tribe'

[ed. – The next review is translated from the French-language anti-civilisation journal La Mauvaise Herbe, Volume 12 no.1]
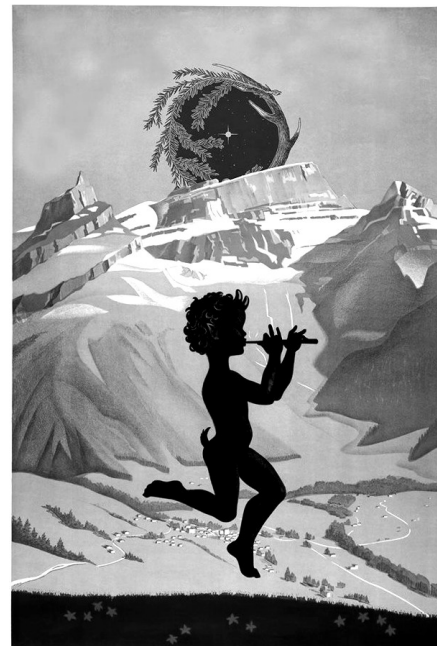
"The history of people who have a history is, we are told, the history of class struggle. The history of people without a history is, we might say with at least as much truth, the history of their struggle against the state." Pierre Clastres, La société contre l'État, 1974.

The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia, James C. Scott, Yale University Press, 2009 – 442 pages

Whole societies without a State have existed until recently in Zomia, the vast mountainous region of south-east Asia which is far from the urban centres and significant economic activity.

This zone is also situated between eight nation-states, where several cosmologies and religious traditions co-exist and where the inhabitants have a chameleon identity, in other words one of multiple identities.

This a zone which States only managed to penetrate in the mid 20th century and then only with the aid of modern technology. This type of zone has also existed elsewhere in the world; in the Alps, the Appalachians, the Atlas mountains etc. Other kinds of geographical zones have also managed to remain outside the reach of States: seas, archipelagos, marshlands, coastal mangroves, forests, arid steppes, deserts etc *[ed. – 'smooth' space, a term in contest; see **Return Fire vol.4 pg56**].*

In this book, the author argues that hill people are best understood as communities of runaways and fugitives

who, in the course of 2,000 years, have fled the oppression of State projects in the valleys – slavery, taxes, forced labour, epidemics and war. Tales of escape run through countless legends of the hills. These people's physical dispersion across a rugged terrain, their mobility, their subsistence practice, their family structure, their chameleon ethnic identity and their devotion to millenarian leaders[1] have enabled them to avoid being incorporated into States and have prevented the State from emerging amongst them. He also argues that the culture of certain foods, the social structure made up of small autonomous groups and the patterns of physical mobility were political choices.

But since 1945 the capacity of the State to deploy distance-eliminating technology – railways, roads that stay open all year, telephones, telegraphs, aircraft and IT – has completely overturned the strategic balance of power between the autonomous peoples and the nation-states. Everywhere, States have invaded the "tribal zones" to extract natural resources and ensure the security and productivity of their periphery. Everywhere, they have ended up colonising the mountains and importing the slave-subject-citizen model.

Hills, Valleys & States

Zomia illustrates the extreme divide between inhabitants of valleys and those of the mountains, between those on the lower and higher reaches of the rivers. The populating of the hills goes hand in hand with the State-forming process in the valleys, with the colonisation of the land, the creation of borders and the grabbing of resources (slaves and raw materials).

Living without state structures was the norm in human history. When the State appears, living conditions change for semi-sedentary horticulturists, pushing many of them into fleeing taxes and war.

The arrival of agriculture as the principal means of subsistence, and of State society, came with new strategies for "bringing together the population", such as the establishment of permanent villages, thus replacing open common property with closed private property.

Across the world, the phenomenon of enclosure[2] aimed to make the peasantry and the periphery profitable, forcing peasants to contribute to the wealth of the empire and into commercial exchanges, in the name of "development" and of "economic progress". In practice, this amounts to making their activities ratable, taxable and liable to seizure.

This enormous ungoverned periphery (Zomia) long constituted a threat for all the States present in the various valleys. It sheltered fugitive and mobile populations organised on a subsistence basis – gathering, hunting, peripatetic [nomadic] growing, fishing, small-scale livestock farming – which were fundamentally resistant to appropriation by the State. But the biggest threat for the States was the constant temptation and alternative that it represented for their own populations of slaves; that of a life beyond the reach of the State.

A massive majority of the population of the first States was not free. Many dreamed of escaping from taxes, feudal labour and a condition of servitude. In pre-modern conditions, the concentration of the population, the presence of domestic animals and their heavy nutritional dependence on a single variety of grain brought damaging consequences for the wellbeing of humans and harvests alike, making famine and epidemic commonplace. People also fled conscription, invasion and pillage, all very frequent in State-run spaces.

The non-civilised chose their place, their subsistence practice and their social structure in order to maintain their autonomy. **They were not "left" to one side by civilisation, but should rather be seen as adaptations designed to escape both from capture by the State and from the formation of a State.** In other words, these are political adaptations of State-less people to a world which consists of numerous States.

The history of the civilised is the history of the State and of sedentary agriculture. Cereal-growing on fixed fields is the foundation of its power. Peripatetic agriculture, slash-and-burn, was much more widespread in the hills and permitted crop diversity and

Zomia

physical mobility. Sedentary agriculture brought with it property rights, the patriarchal family enterprise, and encouraged big families. Cereal culture is inherently expansionist *[ed. – see the companion piece to* **Return Fire vol.3; Colonisation***]* and generates a surplus of population and the colonisation of neighbouring land, while being liable to famine and epidemic. However, as they had a constant need to keep the population together for work and war, States had to use generalised slavery to survive as ideological entities.

As a general rule, the social structure in the hills was much more flexible and egalitarian than in the hierarchical and formalised societies of the valleys. The higher the altitude, the less hierarchical and more egalitarian the structure. The inhabitants of the hills paid neither taxes nor tithes. It isn't surprising that they still host separatist movements, struggles for indigenous rights, millenarian rebellions and armed opposition to the States. This resistance can be seen both as a cultural rejection of the patterns of the inhabitants of the plains and as a zone of sanctuary. Many inhabitants fled to the hills to escape State projects in the valleys. The nomadism of the hills is also a strategy of survival and the multiple rebellions of these regions pushed many to seek refuge in even more remote regions. This historical pattern of flight is therefore a stance of opposition if not resistance.

State Space

As elsewhere, cereals (such as rice) constitute the foundation of State projects. From the perspective of a tax collector, cereals have a considerable advantage over root crops. Cereals grow above the ground and ripen at around the same time. Harvests can therefore be calculated in advance. They have the effect of anchoring populations in a territory and raising their visibility.

The State depends on its capacity to gather crops within a reasonable distance. The further that the place to be controlled lay from its centre, the further the power of the State dwindled. Watercourses were the pre-modern exception to its limits. Before modern technology, it was difficult for States with navigable watercourses to concentrate and project their power and cultural influence. Flat lands thus enabled State control and appropriation (State space), while undulating land is intrinsically resistant to State control (non-State space).

Hills and marshes were sparsely populated and their populations practised forms of mixed agriculture (peripatetic growing of mountain rice and root vegetables, gathering, fishing and hunting) which were hard to assess and even harder to appropriate. Before modern technology, the state was a seasonal phenomenon in
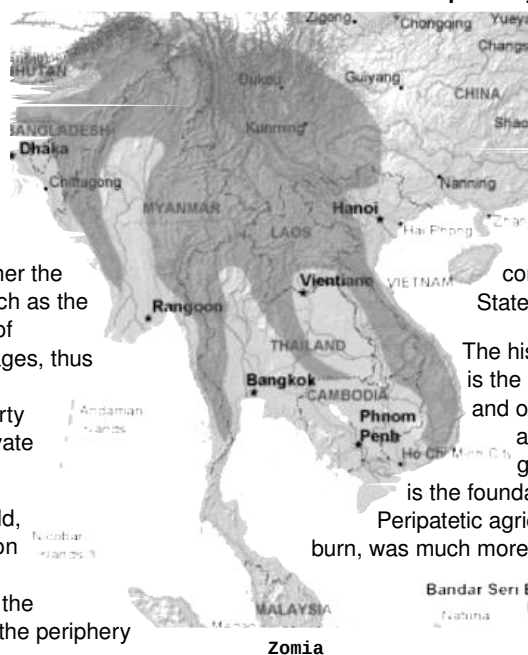
the hills; in the rainy season, from May to October, the rain rendered the roads impassable, making year-round military occupation impossible. **The inhabitants of the hills also knew when to expect the arrival of the armies and the tax collectors. These people had only to wait for the rainy season, when the supply routes were broken (or more readily sabotaged) and for the garrison to be facing famine or in retreat.** The coercive presence of the State in these zones was episodic, or practically non-existent.

Concentration of Workforce & Cereals

Political and military supremacy calls for a concentration of the workforce within reaching distance. The concentration of the workforce is only possible with sedentary agriculture. And such agro-ecological concentration is only possible with the irrigated growing of rice (or other cereals). This constitutes the most efficient means of concentrating workforce and foodstuff. The two other means of achieving this are the taking of slaves and pillage.

Peripatetic agriculture offers a greater return for less effort and produces a considerable surplus for the families which practise it. This type of growing disperses people across a territory, forming a constraint to the State's need to concentrate the population and making it difficult and costly to collect the food. Unlike monoculture, mixed and dispersed agriculture ensures nutritional balance and offers greater resilience to diseases and pests than does monoculture. Moreover, farm animals transmit numerous illnesses to humans. Overall, monoculture provides a diet that is nutritionally inferior to a mixed diet. However, rice alone could not support a denser population, but did mean the population was more readily mobilised when required for feudal labour or war.

The growth of population by means of war and slave-raids is considered to be at the origin of social hierarchy and the centralisation of the first States. Kingdoms expanded their workforce base by forcing prisoners of war to settle in their territory and by kidnapping slaves. Soldiers burned the fields and homes of the captives to stop them from returning there. They razed forests, turning them into fields and drained the marshes. **The majority of royal decrees were against runaway serfs, forbidding them from leaving, from moving home or from ceasing to grow cereals.** Many subjects were even tattooed to indicate their status and their master. In pre-modern systems, only physical coercion can guarantee property and the accumulation of wealth.

Monoculture encourages social and cultural uniformity on many levels: in the family structure, in the value of child labour, in diet, in architectural styles, in agricultural rituals and in market exchanges. A society shaped by monoculture is easier to watch over, evaluate and tax than a society shaped by agricultural diversity. Empires have tried to eradicate peripatetic agriculture, because its produce was not accessible for State appropriation. In modern times, two other reasons have pushed States to eradicate peripatetic growing: political security and the control of resources. Peripatetic fields and forests are therefore burned, razed and eventually replaced by mines. States thus minimise the chances of survival for the inhabitants of the hills outside State spaces.

Civilisation & the Ungovernable

The narrative of civilisation is one of development, progress and modernisation. To be civilised is synonymous with being governed: living in a permanent village, cultivating fixed fields, recognising the social hierarchy and practising one of the principal salvation-based religions *[ed. – see Return Fire vol.4 pg40]*. In the eyes of the civilised, the level of civilisation can be read by means of altitude: those living on the peaks are the most backward; those living halfway down are slightly more cultured and those who live on the plains and grow rice are the most advanced, albeit still inferior to those living in the heart of the State.

The more you adopt the dominant culture, the higher you raise yourself culturally. Even if you live on a mountain, you are always "higher" in town and "lower" outside. This has nothing to do with altitude, but with cultural elevation. When entire peoples lead, out of choice, a semi-nomadic lifestyle, they are seen as a threat and stigmatised. Social policies and government aid measures are put into place to bring these "uncouth and backward" people back into the fold of civilisation. All those finding refuge among the rebels are associated with a primitive condition, with anarchy.

The Great Wall of China in the north and the Miao walls in the south-west were built not to prevent

barbarian invasions but to keep overtaxed peasants from escaping to live with the barbarians. **It's in the light of administrative control, and not of culture in itself, that we should understand the invention of ethnic categories at the borders.** An ethnic group is no more than a social status, a way of telling whether and how those in question are administered by the State. A barbarian region is thus a political place facing up against the State; it is a social position. The civilised are completely incorporated into the State and have adopted the customs, the habits and the language of the dominant group. Going off to live with the barbarians was less the exception than the norm; if you left the State space you were in a political space that was free and autonomous.

Keeping the State Out of Reach: Populating the Hills

Mountain people can be seen as refugees displaced by war and choosing to stay out of the direct control of State authorities. These authorities tried to control the periphery by grabbing the fruits of their labour, taxing their resources and by recruiting soldiers, servants, concubines and slaves. The history of their flight is recalled annually by the mountain folk with various rituals and their traditions are culturally encoded within a strong tradition of familial and economic autonomy. The valleys can revert to the characteristics of the social life of the hills following a collapse of empire. Empires fear these latent forces on their borders and have constantly launched campaigns of assimilation or extermination, particularly after popular insurrections.

The principal reason for flight was war; when entire armies go on the pillage, destroying everything in their path, capturing slaves and raping, the inhabitants of the valleys are pushed out towards zones beyond the reach of the State. Banditry and revolt were widespread practices, but the typical response was to escape into a remote zone where the coercive force of the State was the least felt, while the elites moved towards the centre. Those withdrawing towards the mountains saw there a significant natural advantage. They could, at any moment, block the various accesses and, when necessary, withdraw even deeper into the mountains. **Mountains favour defensive warfare in general and provide countless sites where small groups can hold**

off a much bigger force. They can also destroy bridges, prepare ambushes or booby-traps, bring trees down across roads, cut phone and telegraph lines, etc.

Escape the State. Prevent the State.

Those who try to escape the State can use several strategies: fleeing into inaccessible zones, scattering and dividing into smaller groups and adopting subsistence techniques which are invisible and low-profile. In other words, when a society or part of a society chooses to flee from incorporation and appropriation, it moves towards simpler, smaller and more dispersed social entities. These remote regions are thus a choice and part of a strategy enabling people to stay out of reach of the State.

Peripatetic agriculture is a way of escaping the grip of the State. All the representatives of the States of south-east Asia have discouraged or condemned peripatetic agriculture, because it is a fiscally barren form: diversified, dispersed, difficult to watch over, to tax and to confiscate. Peripatetic agriculture offers relative freedom and autonomy. By growing root vegetables, hunting and fishing, nobody needs to work for a wage.

Tribes and States are mutually constituted entities. There is no sequence of evolution; tribes do not precede States. They are social form defined by their relation to the State. And when there is a hierarchy in a tribe, it is often a theatrical performance by a group to adapt to its relationship with the State. The position of the hill-dwellers is that of equality, autonomy and mobility. Amongst the Kachin gumlao, there is a tradition of assassinating, deposing or abandoning more autocratic chiefs. They have a long history of applying egalitarian social relationships by deposing or killing chiefs with over-large ambitions for governing. The Lisu, Lahu, Karen, Kayah and Kachin are known for their tradition of anti-chief rebellion.

But it is flight, rather than rebellion, which was the foundation of freedom in the hills: many more egalitarian communities were founded by fugitives than by revolutionaries.

The Invention of Ethnic & Tribal Identities

Ethnic identity is defined by the mode of subsistence and the belonging or non-belonging to a State; it is a social position regards the State. It is a sort of cultural phenomenon. States are made up of prisoners and slaves and slavery is primarily an urban phenomenon. The slave-raids at the periphery were aimed against the hunter-gatherer and horticulturist animists *[ed. – see **Return**

Fire vol.4 pg40] so as to deport them towards the needs of the centre. Seeing as most of the town-dwellers originally came from the hills, do they really share an ethnic identity?

The Karen people and many other minorities seem to be *ethnically chameleon,* capable of passing from one identity to another without problems. Living close to a diversity of cultures, ethnic chameleons learn the performances required by each of the cultural paradigms. For example, the Lua/Lawa, who are animists, who practise peripatetic agriculture and speak a Mon-Khmer language at home, are skilled in the Thai language when they move into the valleys. Ethnicity is thus a self-made project; those who adopt a specific identity become members of the identity in question. Ethnicities in the hills are not rigid, but are deployed in the aim of incorporating neighbouring populations. The area has been populated for 2,000 years by wave after wave of people fleeing State centres, invasions, slavers' raids, epidemics and feudal demands. There they joined localised populations in hilly and relatively isolated areas. They accentuated the phenomenon of complex dialects, customs and identities.

The identities found in the hills represent a position against the States of the valleys. They have been put into the service of autonomy and the absence of State. The anti-State identity is perhaps the most common foundation of mountain identities up until the 20th century, when a life outside the State was still possible.

States assimilated all the persons that they captured, but the culture under a State barely altered as a result because the dependence on just one

LaDonna Tamakawastewin Allard

We have been betrayed by Standing Rock Tribal Council

132 151 275

U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs cops clear protestors (see Return Fire vol.4 pg16) in 2017 as during '70s indigenous insurgency

kind of cereal crop ended up dominating the work routines of a majority of the people. The homogenising effects of an agricultural system and a class structure were often punctuated by revolts, reproducing the previous social order under a new administration. The only structural alternative was flight towards the communal properties in the hills.

Porous, Plural & Fluid Identities

Most of the hill peoples of south-east Asia didn't have what we regard as proper ethnic identities. They identified themselves often by the name of a place – the people of this or that valley or catchment basin – or by a lineage or family group. Their identity varied according to

the person they were addressing. **Many names were implicitly relational – the people from up high, the people of the western ridge – making sense only as an element in the relational whole.** Others names used were those given by foreigners, as was the case with the Miao. Most of the hill-dwellers had a repertoire of identities which they could use according to context. A person's ethnic identity would be in a sense the repertoire of their possible performances and the contexts in which they were displayed. Ethnicity is not a given, but a choice.

Across the world, colonial forces have identified and codified customs and traditions with the aim of using them as the basis for indirect power via the nomination of chiefs. This technique involves not only new fixed identities, but assumes a mainly hierarchical and universal order. Egalitarian and chameleon peoples without chiefs or permanent political order beyond the hamlet or the family line have no place in this order of things.

There was a lack of institutional levers by which they could be governed. These institutions were introduced by force. For example, in their dealings with the Kachin, Lahu, PaO, Padaung and Kayah, the British handed institutional power and privileges to a few local chiefs so as to control them better.

In any case, once it has been invented the tribe takes on a life of its own. An entity created as a political structure in order to govern has turned into an expression of political protest and self-affirmation. It has become the recognised means of stating a claim regarding one's autonomy, natural resources *[sic]* or the earth. Confronted by peoples without a State, the State only recognises claims based on ethnic identities and tribal rights.

It's the standard mode of making claims to States and answers the same needs as a trade union or association in contemporary society. The more you look at the reality behind the concept of the tribe, the more it seems to be the creation of the white man *[sic]* to describe indigenous people, to be able to negotiate with them, administer them, encourage them to think in the same way. The invention of the tribe must be understood as a *political project.*[3]

The vagueness of social forms in the hills, the historical and genealogical flexibility and the baroque complexity of languages and populations, all form part of the constitutive characteristics of hill societies.

3. The creation of the Cossacks as a self-conscious ethnicity is particularly instructive in grasping this phenomenon. Those who became Cossacks were fugitives and serfs who fled western Russia in the 16th century for the steppes of the River Don so as to escape social control. They had nothing in common with each other, apart from their servitude and their flight. They were geographically fragmented into 22 groups. They became a people because of the new environmental conditions and subsistence routines. They established themselves alongside Tatars, Circassians and Kalmyks. They lived by a communal land system, were egalitarian and had total freedom of movement. Cossack society was thus a mirror image of the servitude and hierarchy of tsarist Russia. The three big revolts which threatened the empire started in Cossack lands. After the failure of the Bulavin Rebellion (1707-8), the Cossacks were forced to provide the tsarist army with cavalry units in exchange for the preservation of their autonomy. And after the defeat of Pugachev's Rebellion (1773-74), their local democratic assemblies were replaced by a Cossack aristocracy.

'THE COLONIAL CENSUS'

In relation to indigenous societies, Rohrlich-Leavitt noted that *"gatherer-hunters are generally non-territorial and bilocal; reject group aggression and competition; share their resources freely; value egalitarianism and personal autonomy in the context of group cooperation; and are indulgent and loving with children."* Where distinct groups exist, they often relate in a networked way – the gift networks *[ed. – see 'Rejoin the Circle']* of the Trobriand Islands and the extended kinship networks of the Lakota being two examples. **One characteristic of such societies is the non-exclusive nature of attachments and affinities, and hence the absence of an overarching identity.** Even in the strongest kinds of segmentary lineage systems that come closest to fixed group identity, the existence of extra-familial affinities operates as a restriction on ingroup-outgroup patterns, ensuring some degree of social openness.

[…] In most of the world, modern ethnicity is a colonial invention. It apparently derives from some combination of nationalism – a phenomenon dating back three centuries at most, arising among Europeans and settler-colonists, and basically constructing spooks of sameness linked to the rise of industrial technology – with theories of biological superiority derived from discourses of aristocratic class privilege. Colonial administrators and their pet anthropologists and social scientists went to great lengths to categorise people into groups based on ethnicity – the basic function of the colonial census as a device of subject-construction, as well as to construct and promote discourses differentiating the various groups and associating them with some eternal essence. In some cases (such as Vietnam), colonisers actually went to the lengths of inventing an entire written script in order to construct the colonised population as an ethnicity.

[…] Capitalists are only able to profitably exploit societies in which a capitalist infrastructure has not yet been constructed, by working with and through existing social relations; often, this means finding ways to incorporate networks. And it is here that ethnic and patronage networks become useful.

The distinction between ethnic/patronage and horizontal/affinity networks is subtle, because the external organisational forms are often quite similar. The difference is that, whereas the latter involves horizontal links and structural openness, the former introduces a hierarchical element which is potentially system-integrative or leaves the network open to integration.

In the case of ethnic networks, this hierarchical aspect is an identity category, a strong discourse of Us and Them defining the network and its resources as the exclusive property of an authoritative social group. In patronage networks, this identity-basis is used in combination with a hierarchical situation – an asymmetrical control over resources – to integrate the network around relative privilege, under the control of an elite within the group who hold positions of power and use them to the advantage of the group (and to the disadvantage of outsiders). **It is my contention that patronage networks based on ethnic, religious, and sectarian affiliations are the primary form of system-integration in the global periphery,** and that these networks occupy such a role because of their proximity to the affinity-network form which arises among the

dispossessed. **Ethnicity is thus crucial as the primary recuperative device used by the powerful in the world system to contain the insurrection of the global poor.**

[…] The distinction between affinity networks and ethnic-based movements is clearer in the case of Manipur. In 2004, a mass social movement against emergency powers shook the Indian occupation. This movement was not based on ethnic categories, but rather, operated across the lines of the various social groups. One of its most notable features was the adoption of a fragmented, centreless, localised form of organisation in which social groups, classes, villages, and so on, were able to organise their own autonomous activities. This proliferation of direct action overwhelmed the state machine. One report states that *'[t]he entire stretch of the road, from Karong to Hiyangthang was dotted with such barricades, and attempts by the police to clear the road were frustrated due to the sheer number of agitators'.* With villagers in each area organising autonomously, the state was overwhelmed by action. Parallels with effective anti-capitalist and ecological direct action in the west are very obvious here.

In contrast, ethnic politics in Manipur takes the form of the operation of a number of hierarchical armed opposition groups. Each of these groups is attached to one or another ethnicity, and their methods take the form of persecution and exclusion of others. Each is fighting for some kind of state in the world system – greater privileges in the distribution of patronage, an independent state under the control of a specific group, or the institutionalisation of one or another set of privileges (such as language criteria) establishing the supremacy of a particular ethnicity. While Meitei groups seek an independent state of Manipur, Naga and Kuki groups fight for separate homelands, and in contrast to the popular autonomy expressed by the social movements, the armed opposition groups operate in an extremely hierarchical way, imposing "moral codes" (such as traditional dress and alcohol prohibition) by means of violence and punishment.

[…] A similar distinction can be made between the kind of messianic Judaism embraced by authors such as Walter Benjamin and Martin Buber, and the type espoused by statist Zionists as the basis for constructing an ethnically exclusionary state. European racists found Jews threatening precisely because of their non-inscription in the state system and their resultant outsider status. It was from this position – as bearers of hybridity and as people "out of place" – that the most important radical developments of Jewish thought have arisen. In contrast, with the exception of a small neo-Nazi fringe, the normalisation of Jewish identity through the creation of a state-based ethnicity has effectively defused anti-Semitism among European nationalists and statists. Rather, there is now a kind of fellow-feeling with Israel as a western-allied power contributing to world-system integration in an unstable region. **This rapid turnaround from hostility to commonality can be explained in terms of the system-integrative functions of ethnicity.** Contrary to appearances, what European statists hated about Jews was not anything specific to this particular group, but rather, the fact that a particular group *(any* particular group – one could also refer to the Roma here) could not be inscribed in the dominant system. The moment this exceptional status was eliminated by means of integration into the dominant system of representations, a discourse of antagonism was replaced by a discourse of similarity and equivalence.

Q

by Luther Blissett [1]

It is 1519, the opening of a century of religious upheaval, peasant revolt, heresy, and Inquisition.[2] A student in Wittenburg meets radical theologian Thomas Müntzer, just two years after Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the cathedral there and began the Protestant Reformation.[3] In the same year a mysterious papal agent sets in motion a project of espionage and disruption against Luther and those who took Luther's challenge to the Catholic Church even further. So begins the story told in Q.

"It is my destiny to survive, always, to go on living in defeat, taking it a little at a time […] This is a game that demands to be played to the end; if that is the case, then so be it."

The student, who adopts many names as he traverses Europe, goes on to participate in the upheavals and narrowly escape the inquisitions and massacres of the 16th Century. Like Emmett Grogan in his exaggerated autobiography Ringolevio, one can almost read this character as the trans-historical ghost of revolt, surviving impossibly from one conflagration to another.[4] Alongside his story appear the letters and diary entries of his lifelong foe, the papal spy Qoelet, who participates in all this as well, albeit fighting for the other side. Together they provide a fictional firsthand account of over three decades of European history.

In addition to retelling the radical events surrounding the Reformation, Q functions as a critical allegory of the social movements of the 20th century. The book should be read with this in mind, though the metaphor can be thin at times,[5] and a critique of machismo and sexism is also lacking.[6] One could interpret passages such as Chapter 54, which consists almost entirely of male characters conversing while being fellated by women described only by the size of their breasts, as biting caricatures of the worst sexism reproduced by supposed radicals; but these make for unpleasant reading all the same, and the absence of the women's liberation movement from the allegory speaks to a sexism that runs deeper than a merely narrative weakness in the story.

Strong female characters like Ottilie Müntzer and Ursula Jost do not offset this.

Like Balestrini's The Unseen, reviewed in the previous issue of Rolling Thunder, **Q details the horrors and defeats that frequently are engendered as much by our own actions as by those of our enemies;** in view of these, it offers proposals as to how we can advance our projects of revolt today. There are two main strategic proposals put forward. The first is an individual and subjective proposal: we should throw ourselves into the struggles of our time *consciously* and *strategically,* **so that even in defeat we still have a trajectory or life project to see through to the end.** The second proposal regards how we might use the novel itself.

"The mirror reflects the years all at once, but there's still a quickness in the eyes. Something that must have flashed on the barricades of Münster, or among the peasant armies of Thuringia. Something that wasn't lost along the journey, because the journey couldn't kill it. Madness? No, but as Perna put it: the desire to see how things will end."

Agency is a difficult thing. It can fall into your lap when you least expect it and evade the most fanatical who desire it. The protagonist of Q is thrown into a historical situation beyond his choosing and control, but within that space he finds opportunities to act. His choices, however, lead to horrors just as often as to liberating experiences; every night he is haunted by the ghosts of his slain comrades. **It is not until the end of the novel that he is able to reflect on his past and choose his battles and actions consciously,** carrying on his life project even into old age to *"see how things will end"* in a way of his choosing. The stories of the Münster commune and Jan Van Batenburg offer a sobering warning to radicals who fixate on violence and destruction as ends in themselves *[ed. – see* ***'The Matter of Knowing Who We Are'***]. We can reject the degeneration of revolt to a matter of mere military force without dismissing our desire for a new world or rejecting the need for force to make that desire reality.

"In the fog of diffuse dissent you can really cover some ground."

In the final section of Q, the protagonist and his comrades begin distributing a book called "The Benefits of Christ Crucified": *"a cunning little book, designed to stir up endless hornets' nests, because it's ambiguous in its content and expressed in a language anyone can understand. A masterpiece of dissimulation, and it's*

already causing all manner of dissent." Though the content of the book is not particularly radical, they breathe radical life into it by presenting it in heretical sermons and putting it into the hands of the right people. They use the book to spread revolt, draw out their enemies, and give themselves space to avoid and escape the Inquisition. **This book, of course, is a metaphor for Q itself.** Mirroring its ambiguity and cunning, Q is written in the simple style of an action novel and published by corporate publishing giant Harcourt, yet it contains an undeniable glimmer of radicalism that makes it perfect for us to use for our own ends.

"I smile. No plan can take everything into account. Other people will raise their heads, others will desert. Time will go on spreading victory and defeat among those who pursue the struggle... We deserve the warmth of baths. May the days be aimless. Do not advance the action according to a plan."

---

1. Luther Blissett is a "collective identity" used here as a nom de plume by four Italian authors, who've since continued writing under the name Wu Ming. For details about the exploits of those who took on the name Luther Blissett and now Wu Ming, try lutherblissett.net and wumingfoundation.com.

2. Of the numerous historical accounts of this period of revolt and radicalism, Norman Cohn's The Pursuit of the Millennium, Friedrich Engels' The Peasant Wars, and George Huntston Williams' The Radical Reformation offer good starting places – though Cohn and Engels especially view these events through authoritarian lenses of their own.

3. Having read a little on the metaphysical controversies of that era, your grumpy editor fears that Q does not adequately explore the religious beliefs of the rebels it depicts. From a philosophical perspective, this is a missed opportunity, though it would take a very different book to take this on; from a historical perspective, one could charge that this amounts to a refusal to engage with the radicals of that day on their own terms. [ed. – Indeed, one of our main take-aways from this profound novel was a critical look at how much Western radical tradition clings to the Christian heritage and worldview depicted in that era... but that's a topic for another day.] Of course, Q was intentionally written as an action novel, which limits its philosophical and historical potential but perhaps opens up other possibilities.

4. Editing this review late at night in the convergence center for the protests at this year's Democratic National Convention, I can imagine the protagonist stumbling in unnoticed, white-haired and wizened, to witness the foolishness of the latest generation.

5. Discussion of the protagonist's relationship to various wealthy merchants, and what this means in the context of both the metaphor and story itself, is beyond the scope of this review.

6. The authors are reported to have taken steps to remedy this in their more recent work.

THE DARK MONTHS ARE COMING

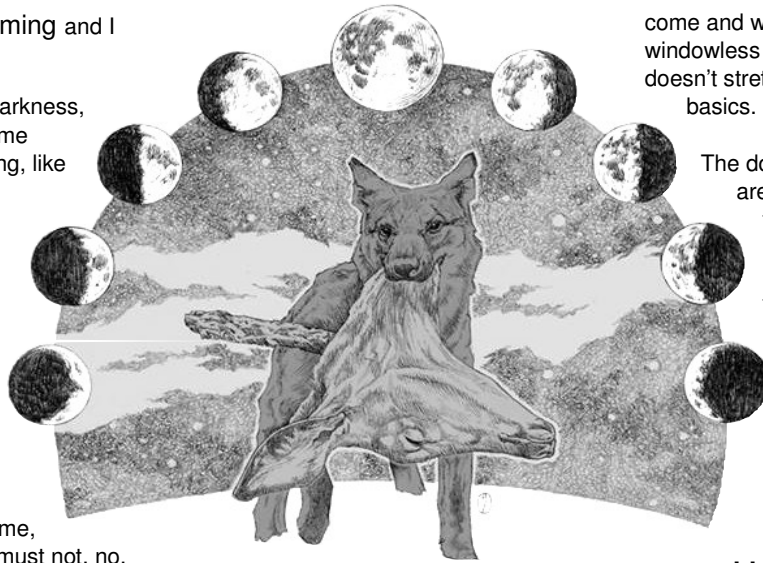The dark months are coming and I await them eagerly.

I cannot wait to hide in the darkness, to become invisible, to become myself. The dark is comforting, like a mother, holding me in its embrace. It nourishes my soul, heals it, and makes it whole again.

It is at this time that I feel the pull of nature, of the great outdoors the most. **I love all seasons, but these darker months are mine.**

I can hear my woods call to me, can feel it. It is an urge that must not, no, cannot be ignored, and so I pull on my boots and whistle for the dogs, and together, witch and hounds, we set off.

The sky is a tumult of grey, boisterous clouds, heavy with the promise of rain. I can smell the ozone. I love this place, where I live the most on days like these, always have. I don't know why, except that maybe because it seems to match this council estate.

"The concrete jungle," people call the street on which I live… when they are being nice. It, and its residents are the butt of all jokes. When you tell people where you live they struggle to hide their distaste and hold onto their bags a little tighter, as though my living there makes me a criminal.

I suppose it does, to some.

I love these people. They are mine. Weed dealers, single mothers, struggling families, terrible teens already disillusioned with life: the estate is a veritable melting pot of life's downtrodden. I trust these people. These people will argue with you, fight with you, but I trust them.

"During this time of year, every day is shorter than the last; darkness claims an ever increasing portion of our existence. The trajectory can be discouraging; we may come to feel estranged from the sun. The winter solstice is the point when that changes; when darkness yields to light and the days gradually grow longer. [O]ur projections and forecasts are always uncertain. To suggest otherwise is to reduce reality to a simple machine – perhaps civilization's favorite metaphor – where each event follows the next as a matter of course, where the ending is predetermined and wholly predictable, where we have access to the whole of its operations. But if reality must be likened to a machine it is of the black box variety where we have nothing but observed inputs and outputs and very little beyond speculation as to its internal churning. We may at times be able to predict the output but, in ways both better and worse, are regularly mistaken and surprised. Given the number of doomsday scenarios and apocalyptic visions currently in circulation, the fact that we are often mistaken should be understood as a source of hope and encouragement. There are more variables at play than we can possibly be aware of and so our nightmare visions may not come to pass. To give up hope and abandon resistance is to treat humanity as an all-knowing deity rather than as an animal operating with limited knowledge and finite senses. [...] I have faith that the sun will return..."

– The Faith of a Green Anarchist

come and work in these giant grey windowless behemoths for a wage that doesn't stretch, doesn't even cover the basics.

The dogs pull for they know the way, are eager to swap the concrete for grass and soil. These woods are theirs too, and they know they can be free, if only for a while. We turn a corner and, snuggled between more grey buildings, is a narrow gravel track. We follow it, past yards of piled tyres and rusting machinery.

On each side, the trees, sparse at first, grow thicker and denser, the path steeper, until you finally reach the top, a big wide meadow. The tall grass is yellowing and soon it will die back, but for now the dogs disappear in it. They reemerge, running and nipping one another, playful things, enjoying the simple pleasures of being free, with the wind in their faces and the grass beneath their feet.

I sometimes think we could learn a thing or two from dogs. How to be free. How to be content with our own naturalness.

I follow them slowly, lost in the beauty of this place. It's not a secret, but it feels like it is today. There is no one, other than myself and the dogs here, on this grey and gloomy day. Finally, I can breathe.

The churning of the industrial state, 'productivity', can still be heard if you listen for it, but it's easy to block it out, ignore it. The sounds of nature take over.

Kestrels circle overhead, hovering every so often, uncannily still in the air.

Rabbits hurry to find cover, but the dogs are oblivious to them; they are still too far away, and there are too many scents that delight their noses between them and the rabbits. I sometimes think that dogs have got it right. Look how happy they are to be outside, to be free; to just enjoy the fresh air in your face.

The track leads into the woods, a narrow opening between crowded trees. **It's not a big woods, but it's mine,** and not the straight rows of man-planted pine common in so many areas.

We look out for one another. **These are my people, but I am not theirs. They know it and so do I.** I am a part of their world, and not of it.

I am witch.

I turn my back on the estate, if only for a while, and head across the playing field and onto the industrial estate. It's never quiet here, not even in the dead of night. The factories never shut, not even for one full day a year. God forbid anyone should have any time off. We kill ourselves for this *[ed. – see Memory as a Weapon; 'An Enemy of the Desire to Create']*, to

We slip off the track, disappear into the trees and it's like a different world. Hushed, but alive. The moss covered trunks of hawthorn and birch and oak rise from the ground, and I let my hands linger across them as I move past them, deeper into the woods.

Devils Woods this place is known as. I don't know if that's the official name, but as kids we would come here, and Devils Woods it was then, and is now. They've tried to reclaim this wildness, it is now run by a trust. The work they do is good to be fair, without them these trees would no doubt have been torn down, replaced by more of the housing or industrial estates that ever seem to creep closer.

But they also want you to stay on the track, and tracks are not for me.

The dogs dart here and there. They love it beneath the trees and I let them run. They will not stray, ever the faithful friends.

I'm nearly there now, my clearing. Others have been here, they leave the remains of campfires, rubbish too. I pick up the rubbish, and can feel the thanks of this land. Then I sit down and just be. No meditation or ritual today, though it almost kind of is.

Here I can just be. I feel the power of the earth beneath me, can feel the spirits of land and tree and animal. **I wonder if more people knew this, could feel this, would they do more to protect it?**

We are connected to this land, to this earth.

Find your spot and protect it.

The threat of fracking *[ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg14**]* creeps ever closer to my town. We can't look to the local authorities to protect us, because even when they try, Big Government slaps them down[1]. So much for *democracy.*

I won't let it happen here, or anywhere in my town, and to stop it will take action on all fronts, magical and mundane. **I will fight. Fighting is second nature to me. I relish it. But I must do more, as must we all.** It is all of our responsibility, don't we all rely on Mother Nature *[sic]*?

I close my eyes and breathe deeply, take in the smell of the soil, the scent of the woods. I can feel my strength returning, the healing of my soul, and know that it is time to go, even as I wish I could stay for hours. Time to go and put on my many masks, go back into the world of man *[sic]*.

I call the dogs, and they know, but relish every moment of their freedom, and come running past me and back out onto the tracks, back through the meadow and onto the gravel track. Back into the world of man and commerce and impositions. Back to the forty hours of mindless work a week for wages that do not stretch.

I am of this land, I am of these woods, I am of the rivers and the oceans and the sky and the stars. We all are. Never forget it. It is our strength, this knowledge, this truth.

Rediscover your own wildness and you will rediscover yourself.

---

*1. ed. – See **Return Fire vol.4 pg18**. As well as the Lancaster drilling sites this is in reference to, last month Third Energy were scheduled to being high-volume fracking North Yorkshire "on or after 26th October"; the first time in the U.K. since exploration at Preese Hall led to small earthquakes in April and May 2011. As we prepare to print, in a landmark case the petrochemical giant Ineos has secured long-term sweeping U.K. court injunctions against those opposing fracking, leaving them liable to be jailed, fined, or have their assets seized for acting in defence of (amongst other things) drinkable water, clean air and the very stability of the land beneath our feet.*

NATURE DEVOURS PROGRESS & EXCEEDS IT

The midday sun skins alive the specters that couldn't hide in time. Their bones turn into violins and grate on the ears of adventurous men lost in the forest, imitating a Roman emperor's decadent court.

Tongues of fire, flashes of breasts, reflections of blue pass through the half-light full of vampires. One can walk. The ground has the air of a brain that would like to appear as a sponge. Silence weighs on the ears like a gold nugget on the hand, but the gold is softer than an orange. And yet, the man is from that side. He has opened a corridor in the green, and all along this corridor he has stretched a telegraph wire. **But the forest quickly grows tired of embracing this cord that gives nothing back but a human voice,** and the plants, thousands of plants, more enthusiastic and insatiable than the others, have rushed to smother this voice under their kiss; then silence falls back over the forest like a rescuing parachute.

There, more than anyplace else, death is merely a temporary way of being of life, which disguises one side of its prism so that the light is concentrated more brilliantly on its other faces.

The skulls of the ruminants offer cover, among the great trees threatened by thousands of creeper vines, to the nests of birds that reflect the sun on their wings, the leaves on their throats. And fleck of blue sky throb on corpses that metamorphose into a mound of butterflies.

Life fights with all its might, in all its time, marked by swarms of mosquitoes on the water's face. **Life loves and kills, caresses what it adores with a murderous hand.** Seeds sprout like trip-hammers, implacably nailing the ants that devoured them, and to which they may owe their terrible power of germination, to the ground. Blood calls the sobbing flowers back, and the flowers kill better than a pistol. They kill the pistol.

Where genesis has not yet said its final word, where earth only separates from water to generate fire in the air, earth and water, but especially where earth and water, terrorized by celestial fire, make love night and day, in equatorial America, the rifle drives away the bird that it doesn't kill, and the snake crushes the rifle like a rabbit.

The forest has fallen back before the axe and dynamite, but between two railway crossings, it has thrown itself on the tracks, addressing the train's engineer with flirtatious gestures and tantalizing glances. Once, twice, he will resist the temptation that will follow him all along the route, from a verdant railroad tie to a signal hidden by a swarm of bees, but one day he will hear the call of the enchantress who has the look of a beloved woman. He will stop the engine for an embrace that he desires in passing, but the embrace will be endlessly prolonged in accordance with the perpetually renewed desire of the seductress. Though mute, the siren still knows how to draw her victims irretrievably into the abyss of no return.

Thus, the slow absorption begins: piston rod after piston rod, lever after lever, the locomotive goes back into the forest's bed, and from voluptuousness to voluptuousness, it moistens, quivers, moans like a lioness in heat. It blackens orchids, its boilers give shelter to crocodiles' playthings that blossomed the day before while legions of tiny birds live in the whistle, giving it a chimerical and temporary life, since quite quickly the forest's flame will swallow it up like an oyster, after having licked its prey for so long.

In the distance, slow skyscrapers of trees will erect themselves to express a challenge impossible to gather.

Articles referenced by title throughout this chapter in ***[square brackets]*** which do not appear in the previous pages appear in the other chapters of this volume.

"Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet."

– Inversnaid