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12 Western Turtle Island anarchy

Jason M. Wirth

For PAUL -
 Love of the Cascadian
 Lotus,
 Elyse
 Tetsugen 2020

all up & down the Coast
 there are poets listening
 to the woods

(Mary Norbert Körte)

Preface

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, but with roots in the first half, a distinctive philosophical-ecological-spiritual voice has emerged on the West Coast of North America, as evidenced here in the poem of Mary Norbert Körte. On its own terms, we cannot approach this site-specific event of philosophical thinking without taking into account the settler colonial politics and industrial ruin that continue to endow the name North America. My task in this chapter is therefore to begin dismantling the colonial practices of place that not only determine how we regard what it is to be here, but also what it means to speak of it philosophically. As the notion that we are on a continent called North America, or members of its three nations (Canada, the United States, and Mexico), is part of the settler colonial legacy, I will not attempt to think from a continent-wide perspective, but rather from some of the bioregions and countercultural legacies that comprise the Pacific Coast of what I call forth as *Turtle Island*, a new-old sense of what it is to be here and to philosophize here.

In other words, I seek here to articulate both the "new" and the "old" anarchic sense of place that is announced with the "new-old" name Turtle Island in its West Coast evocation. If settler colonialism was the initial and rapaciously dominating mode of inhabitation, what Gary Snyder, Peter Berg,¹ and others have called reinhabitation is to be "born again on Turtle Island" and it is therefore to hear it as the "new-old name for the continent." It is to hearken to the "voice of nature herself, whom the ancient poets called the great goddess, the Magna Mater" (Snyder 1974, 107). In addition to being the title of Snyder's 1974 Pulitzer Prize winning collection of poetry, *Turtle Island*, as is also developed by the editors in the introduction to this volume, is the "the new-old name" (ibid., 105) for the North American continent used by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) Peoples and other Northeastern Indigenous Peoples. It has now

spread widely as naming an alternative manner of inhabiting what we call North America.

Here is a generation of white People finally ready to learn from the Elders. How to live on the continent as though our children, and on down, will still be here (not on the moon). Loving and protecting this soil, these trees, these wolves. Natives of Turtle Island.

(Ibid., 105)

Although my comments can extend to all of Turtle Island and beyond, I concentrate on some parts of its Pacific Rim, especially Cascadia,² the Central Coast of California, and the Sierra to avail myself both of the irreducible singularities of these interrelated bioregions and their Indigenous cultures as well as their late arriving countercultures. In engaging some of the luminaries of these bioregions of Turtle Island like John Muir, William Everson, Robinson Jeffers, Gary Snyder, Kenneth Rexroth, and Mary Norbert Körte, I seek primarily to articulate some of the basic political conditions under which settler colonialism gives way to a more originary and compelling sense of place. These conditions are, in a manner that hearkens back to the great Russian geographer Kropotkin, generally anarchic, and demonstrate that the roots of this movement were already practiced *avant la lettre* by the original inhabitants of Turtle Island. I articulate this vision in its ecological-political grounding as Western Turtle Island Anarchy.

Anarchy is to some a scary word, and to many a greatly misunderstood word. To the frightened and confused it evokes randomness, chaos, and a political free for all. I attempt to dispel these misunderstandings and to develop an ecological sense of anarchy—bioregions are inherently anarchic and challenge us to develop a politics commensurate with these enabling conditions of place. I elaborate this in four sections. The first evokes the celebrated East-Asian figure of the Seven Worthies as a prefiguration of a place-based turn to philosophical anarchy. The second takes up this issue in relationship to what the Central Coast poet William Everson called “Archetype West,” which he discerned emerging in John Muir’s battle to save Hetch Hetchy from being dammed, and which climaxed in the work of the California poet Robinson Jeffers. The third section details Kenneth Rexroth’s prophetic call for a reawakening to our anarchic roots. The final section returns to select Indigenous practices in what the poet Robert Sund called Ish River Country (the parts of Cascadia in which life emerges in and is supported by the waters that flow from the Cascade Mountains to the Salish Sea). In retrospect and using contemporary parlance, we can appreciate their early insight into aspects of what in a new sense can also now be called an anarchic political economy.

The Worthies of Turtle Island

I begin by calling forth an image to collect both the East Asian inspirations on the rebirth of Turtle Island and its countercultural and counter-hegemonic disposition.

The Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove came to the West Coast of Turtle Island.

The Seven Worthies are a legendary collective of Third Century Neo-Daoist poets, musicians, and philosophers who fled the corruption of the Wei State and lived among the bamboo and drank wine, composed poetry and music, and debated philosophy with a lively wit—what the Daoists of the time called *qingtan* (清談) or “pure conversation,” dialogue uncompromised by the domination of the Imperial State. They debated and poeticized the mystery (*xuan* 玄)³ of the movements of Dao and endeavored to recover practices that are not at war with nature (*ziran* 自然), that which is itself of itself. They endeavored to live out in a practical as well as thoughtful way what is now catalogued as *Xuanxue* 玄學, Mysterious Learning, the study of the mysterious and profound. Although the historical facts of this association have been obscured by the passing of time, this legend remains in East Asia a potent symbol not only of reclusion but also of resistance to the denigration of human affairs and values.

And they came to the West Coast of Turtle Island and they were poets, philosophers, and anarchist-pacifists.

Why such an eccentric claim?

The Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove are frequent subjects of East Asian painting and poetry and were cherished over the centuries as an image of an awakening to an otherwise repressed way of living. The phrase Turtle Island is the well-known alternate name for North America. As we have seen and as the editors of the present volume also explain, Turtle Island names a place no longer obscured and repressed by its colonial name and culture. It defies the practices of the regime where, as Gary Snyder tells us, “People live on it without knowing what it is or where they are. They live on it literally like invaders” (Snyder 1980, 69). My invocation of the Seven Worthies in the Mountains and Forests of the West Coast of Turtle Island is, again with Gary Snyder, to “hark again to hear those roots, to see our ancient solidarity, and then to the work of being together on Turtle Island” (Snyder 1974, introductory note). It invokes what William Everson called “archetype West,” namely, “a recovery of taproot, a quest for the mysterious force that makes a region recognizable as a distinct cultural entity: the mystery of place” (Everson 1976, xiii). I am calling forth our own homemade Worthies, figures who renounced the imperium and attempted to recover, articulate and live out what the imperium obscures.

The group practices of sagacious resistance in *Archetype West* are therefore not fundamentally thinking about the *American West* (including Canada and Mexico) because thinking in and about the West exposed an “ancient solidarity” and “taproot” that *America* otherwise dominates and represses. Thinking in the West therefore concerns itself with little of the thinking that merely happened to take place in the “West.” To be in the West is to be in a place where place itself is what is at the heart of what it is to be here. It is a place distinguished by what it means to be formed, nourished, and sustained by this place. It is a place that takes its sense of place seriously and ontologically. Such thinking can, does, and

should occur in any bioregion, but the manners in which it occurred in select western bioregions are striking and pioneering.

In his remarkable book on the linguist, anthropologist, and creative writer Jaime de Angulo, Andrew Schelling thoughtfully specifies what he considers to be the “primary characteristics of Pacific Coast culture, art, and scholarship”:

The encounter with wilderness. The search for primitive mind. A sharp investigation into what language is and how it works. A deep spiritual hunger, lonely, eccentric, keenly unorthodox, alert to Asian and Native California traditions. Anarchist pacifist politics.

(Schelling 2017, xxi)

This is not a laundry list of accidentally bundled together features. They collectively comprise an image of thought regarding the West Coast of Turtle Island. For example, the spiritual sublimity of the land—Everson’s Archetype West—gives rise to a spirituality that resists the imperial subjugation and utilization of the earth. It is a form of spirituality with roots in an ancient awakening of *primitive* mind, which in this case never means infantile or immature, but rather an originary, complex and wealthy mind, despite its low standard of living as measured by today’s putatively evolved standards.⁴ Gary Snyder sensed that the “coming revolution will close the circle and link us in many ways with the most creative aspects of our archaic past” (Snyder 1969, 93). It furthermore expresses itself creatively by attuning itself to language and its ways. The awakening of primitive mind is also “alert” to Asian spiritual and poetic insights as I hoped to suggest by evoking the legend of the Seven Worthies. It can also be seen, for example, in Gary Snyder, Lew Welch and Philip Whalen’s devotion to Zen practice.

It is also and non-accidentally alert to Indigenous traditions, the languages, lifeways and teaching stories that evolved in accordance with what it was to be here. The activation of these qualities of Mind collectively manifest a spiritual sense of place, although the forms and rituals of this spiritual sensibility are wide, plural, and still evolving. One need only reflect on Snyder and Whalen’s training in Zen and the latter’s ordination as a Sōtō Zen priest. Others took a different path. Everson’s experience of the sublimity of the California landscape as pantheistic incarnation, for example, led to his 18 years (1951–1969) as the “Beat Friar,” the Dominican Brother Antoninus. “Later, recognizing the apotheosis of pantheism in the incarnational instance, I espoused Catholicism, and, from the bastion of the Dominican Order, pursued an erotic mysticism as the most viable emphasis in a West-oriented religious quest” (Everson 1976, 108). Mary Norbert Körte, whose words form this chapter’s epigram, became a Dominican nun around the time that Everson became a friar. She abandoned her vocation in 1965 after undergoing a kind of conversion experience at the Berkeley Poetry Conference where she heard the likes of Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Spicer, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan. In addition to subsequently becoming a fine poet and teacher herself, she left San Francisco

and moved to Willits (in Mendocino County, the southern reach of Cascadia) and dedicated decades to protecting its Redwood forests, including acts of civil disobedience, which resulted in her arrest.

We can already sense how most of these broad features roughly comprise a unified sensibility of thinking and acting, but it is Schelling’s final quality, “anarchist pacifist politics,” that can seem the most puzzling. How does thinking in the West Coast of Turtle Island also manifest as a commitment to anarchist pacifist politics? How is the image of thought inherently pacifist and anarchist? And what do these politics look like? If the Worthies are anarchists, and if this means something more than what it rejects (the imperium), *toward what* are they working and living?

In the following three sections, I offer some introductory reflections on anarchist-pacifist politics and their interrelation with these other formative values. In other words, I use anarchist-pacifist politics as a lens to suggest some of the qualities of the sensibility that manifests in these six dimensions of Western-spiritual-primitive-wild-Dharma-Mind. Even Daisetz Suzuki, whose post War teaching and writing was such an awakening to Snyder, Welch, Whalen, and many others on the West Coast of Turtle Island, claimed in one of his US seminars that “I think anarchism is best” (Kiritia 1994, 65–66).

Given the degeneration of “anarchy” in common parlance to “chaos,” from the outset we should avoid confusing pacifist-philosophical anarchy with individual anarchy. The latter holds that individuals should be free from governmental restraints so that they can extract whatever resources they want and use the land as they see fit. This is closer to the libertarian strain found in many rural places in the West, but it has nothing to do with collective anarchy. The latter holds that the commons belong to all—human and non-human—and that we are all beneficiaries of the commons and therefore we all have a mutual responsibility to maintain it for everyone, human and non-human, sentient and non-sentient. Governance is decentralized, labor is no longer in the service of the enrichment of a few, the hyper-concentration of capital is dismantled, and responsibility is distributed widely and cooperatively within a locality. Rather than central structures (and individual concentrations of hyper wealth) where a few dominate the many, responsibility is complex, broadly shared, and evolving.

Archetype West

It is worth remembering that William Everson spent the Second World War at Camp #56 just outside the small town of Waldport on the Oregon Coast, a work camp for artists who were conscientious objectors.⁵ Everson’s pacifism was not merely an intellectual commitment, but also a way of living that took responsibility for the lands that had formed him.

The landscape of the West of Turtle Island in its pantheistic sublimity is what Everson dubbed “Archetype West.” His reliance on the term archetype testifies to the fact that he had steeped himself at the time of the book’s appearance (1976) in Jungian literature. Everson’s archetype is not a fixed a priori form that

is hardwired into the psyche. Rather, it comprises psychic patterns of experience, the knowledge of which is drawn from formative effects within experience itself.

Intangible psychic forces in unconscious collective life, they work as motifs that shape the substance of our responses, and become, through the accumulation of experience, repository images, established symbolic forms, figures in our consciousness to be recognized principally through their effects.

(Everson 1976, xiv)

Archetype West first began to take shape in Yosemite National Park in John Muir's battle against the O'Shaughnessy Dam. Its construction dammed the Tuolumne River and flooded the Hetch Hetchy Valley, the glacier-carved sublimity of which rivaled Yosemite Valley and which had supported summer populations of Miwok and Paiute for at least 6000 years. Muir's traumatic childhood Scottish Protestantism had been healed by his encounter with the Sierra, which, Everson explains, was "so decisive that it is not too much to say that a man was invaded by a mountain range, and, transformed thereby, became its voice" (ibid., 50). The emergent Archetype West, articulated forcefully for the first time by Muir's rapturously spiritual prose, did not automatically vanquish the prevailingly genteel life of utility that had characterized American culture. The "dichotomy between American utility and American sublimity" was to come to a head with the plans to flood the Hetch Hetchy to provide water for the swelling population of San Francisco. Muir fought the dam with all that he had, but he did not prevail. Still, the utilitarian "threat to the pantheistic base," however unconscious that base may have been, began "to vibrate" as "Americans" all over Turtle Island became more conscious of a "sense of awe and divinity in wilderness" (ibid., 51). We can see this alternative spirituality, however inchoate, still infusing this culture's embrace of national parks and monuments, despite the many failings of the Department of the Interior. Muir's battle for Hetch Hetchy and his struggle against the idolatry of utility, was bringing the pantheistic or animistic sublimity of the West to expression.

For because the national religion of formal Christianity, which had been utility-oriented following Protestantism's revival of the Old Testament injunction to "subdue the earth," the actual pantheistic base had been largely unconscious, delineated by Emerson, and Thoreau and Whitman, but not thoroughly articulated by the public at large. It was Muir fighting for the preservation of the Hetch Hetchy that elevated the implicit recognition of the divinity of nature to the most explicit testimonial.

(Ibid., 52)

Muir had unleashed an avenue into the "*participation mystique* which this archetype favors" (ibid., 108), and it fractured the self-contained propriety of the self-contained life of utility and practicality.

Muir was the necessary condition for a voice to be given to Archetype West, but Robinson Jeffers was its apotheosis. It seems that Everson borrowed this term too from Jung, who considered the ἀποθέωσις not in its literal Greek meaning of "becoming divine" but in the psychoanalytical register that the late Jung described as "maximum consciousness, which amounts to maximal freedom of the will" (Jung 1963, 231). Jeffers' apotheosis was the first modern voice to articulate the inhumanist power and violence of the land, employing it for the "rupturing of forms, and the consequent liberation of the numen inhering in the natural object, the point-focus of the underlying pantheistic intuition" (Everson 1976, 68).

Jeffers' searing breakthrough—the land singing in its sublimity, deaf to the utilitarian calculi that produce our wars against each other and the land—led him to squander his early recognition and public acclaim when he refused to support the Second World War. "Finally I say let demagogues and world redeemers babble their emptiness to empty ears; twice duped is too much" ("Advice to Pilgrims"). Random House affixed a warning to *The Double Axe and Other Poems* (1948) about its lack of patriotism.⁶ Muir's fight to save Hetch Hetchy and his ongoing debate with forest conservationist Gifford Pinchot⁷ (as laudable as the emphasis on sustainability and "the wise use of the earth" is, it cannot break with a utilitarian relationship to the land) pointed to what achieved apotheosis in Jeffers: inhumanist values as they shatter the monopoly of utilitarian, extractive, and transactional relationships to each other and the land.

After Muir's death and before Jeffers' apotheosis, the Western World was consumed by the War to End All Wars. For Everson, the "massive slaughter" of the First World War demonstrated to the prevailing culture "its utter unworthiness of the sublime dignity which the majesty of landscape enjoins" (Everson 1976, 60). By way of transition, it is already worth noting that Peter Kropotkin, the influential philosophical anarchist, was a geographer by profession. He first and foremost took account of the land. This contributed to his stance against the Social Darwinist insistence on competition and domination. He regarded it as a tacit and retroactively constitutive ideology that justifies the ongoing brutality of the winners of capitalism. To justify the brutality of our economic and social order as inevitable, we concoct a convenient myth: We evolved to be competitive in the struggle to survive, therefore capitalism and Spencer's survival of the fittest accords with our nature. In contrast, Kropotkin pointed to the long and evolutionarily adaptive history of cooperation and mutual aid that can be seen among most living beings and throughout most of human history. It is not that we cannot live in brutally competitive ways, but rather that we do not *have* to and in the main have generally not done so.

Moreover, one can appreciate Kropotkin's point in two new ways. First, we can simply reflect that no centrally organized society that relies on the domination and subjugation of both its population and its natural resources has ever been long-lived. Empires and states rise and soon fail and history is a graveyard of authoritarian cultures. If one wants to find long-lived cultures, one need only look to the resilient Indigenous communities of Turtle Island who have survived,

as they say, "since time immemorial." These societies are at least 12,000 years old and likely far older and they learned to survive by learning the hard lessons of what it is to be here and what it is to live as if your descendants in 500 years will prosper even more (as Indigenous activists sometimes frame it). Second, the climate emergency and the ecological crisis more broadly demonstrate that while the utilitarian-consumerist-self-serving Mind might be at its root, it cannot be at the solution. The earth is telling us in bioregionally specific ways that we must change who we are and how we live. Jeffers and Everson, and many others, following what in this land is also an ancient Indigenous voice, allow the land to confirm what Noam Chomsky said about anarchy: it is "an expression of the idea that the burden of proof is always on those who argue that authority and domination are necessary" (quoted in Angelbeck and Grier 2012, 552). Not only are they not necessary, they are ecologically catastrophic.

I and thou beyond domination

Gary Snyder reflected that the otherwise loose affiliation of poets of the so-called San Francisco Renaissance belonged to "one of those few times in American history that a section of the population has freely chosen to disaffiliate itself 'from the American standard of living' and all that goes with it" (Snyder 1995, 10). It is important to remember that this rejection of the ideology, even the archetype, of utility and consumption also included a thoroughgoing suspicion of the academically approved poets and official poetry as well as the gatekeepers of academic philosophy, who not only decide who and what gets to matter as philosophical, but also in practice, if not in intention, transform philosophy from the subversive and countercultural wisdom and practice of a way of life into the scholarly arcana celebrated in the leading high-impact journals, none of which are consequently read all that much.

And Snyder's practice? James Brown strikingly dubs it the "Zen of anarchy": "immediate, inner revolution aided by Buddhist practice directed toward anarchist models of social behavior" (Brown 2009, 226). Brown rightly stresses that this was not another case of Orientalism. It was Suzuki's critique of Western ideology that Snyder and his friends found attractive. We can also dismiss the charge that this therefore amounts to a case of Reverse Orientalism, or self-imposed Occidentalism. Snyder and company creatively transformed Zen to address an unfolding global crisis. In Japan the institutions of Zen sometimes coopted or otherwise counteracted the revolutionary spontaneity of Zen practice. Dōgen's thirteenth-century admonition that "whoever speaks of a Zen *shū*," a school or institution of Zen, is a "devil,"⁸ generally fell on the deaf ears of institutional forms of Zen. To add insult to injury, Zen was heavily politicized during the Meiji Restoration and during the War of the Pacific, significant portions of Zen aligned themselves with State militarism.⁹ Moreover, Snyder was cognizant early on of Buddhism's genius for inner revolution and its ineptitude and quiescence regarding outer revolution. "Institutional Buddhism has been conspicuously ready to accept or ignore the inequalities and tyrannies of whatever

political system it found itself under. This can be death to Buddhism, because it is death to any meaningful function of compassion" (Snyder 1969, 90).

Global politics, Snyder argued, is an inherent expression of Buddhism's three poisons. The ironically self-identified "free world" has "become economically dependent on a fantastic system of stimulation of greed which cannot be fulfilled" (ibid., 91). As thinkers like David Loy have also dramatically demonstrated, it is not enough for Buddhism to work on the three poisons (delusion, attachment, and aversion) on a personal level because they are also at work at institutional, cultural, economic, and political levels. "The mercy of the West," Snyder summarized, "has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both" (ibid., 92). This is the creative emergence of the hybrid practice of Kropotkin the Buddha, or the Zen of anarchy.

This creative and spiritual form of anarchic pacifism had already begun to take form on the West Coast of Turtle Island before Snyder and his friends moved to San Francisco, especially in the person of Kenneth Rexroth. He was at the heart of the now mythic San Francisco Renaissance and its principal convener, the one who, Everson writes, "found his voice in San Francisco" (Everson 1976, 103). An astounding polymath and seminal poet, he nonetheless electively kept his distance from University culture (although he lectured at UC Santa Barbara from 1968 to 1973). He was wary of the tacit politics of the University gatekeepers of what matters philosophically and poetically. Everson describes the San Francisco apotheosis that Rexroth helped engineer: "Anarchism and pacifism were adopted as political programs against the military-industrial complex, and a relaxed bohemianism was favored over against the 'correct' posture of the Academy" (ibid., 107).

Rexroth, founder of the San Francisco Anarchist Circle in the 1940s (Brown 2009, 208), was an avowed "philosophical anarchist," that is, he refused to cede authority to the state and to the structures of hierarchical domination but would not resort to violence to overthrow them. He was therefore also a pacifist and conscientious objector and even worked to smuggle Japanese Americans out of the incarceration camps during the Second World War. In his unfortunately little known but quite spirited 1974 work, *Communalism: From Its Origins to the Twentieth Century*, Rexroth recognizes the prophetic importance of anarchists like Kropotkin:

It is right that ecology should have become so enormously popular at this juncture. It is not just that man is destroying the planet on which he lives, and driving himself toward extinction by mining his environment and reducing all business enterprise to the form of an extractive industry. The human race is a certain kind of species, developed in a specific environment, with specific relations internally, man to man, and externally to other species. Had this situation not existed, the human race had not evolved, and had not continued within a narrow range of modification, man would have become extinct. The present relation of man to his environment and man to man has

become so unlike the optimum necessary for the evolution of the species that humanity as we know it cannot endure ... This is what all the schools and tendencies of the libertarian and communal tradition have in common, a primary emphasis on man as a member of an organic community, a biota, in creative, non-exploitative relationship with his fellows and his environment. The communist-anarchists Élisée Reclus¹⁰ and Peter Kropotkin were both geographers and, if anyone was, they were also the founders of the science of ecology.

(Rexroth 1974, xiii)

Rexroth, whose dedication to ecological issues goes all the way back to some of his earliest published poetry, wrote these words in 1974 when few people could appreciate the gravity of climate change (despite the inauguration of Earth Day in 1970). As true as this was, it is also important here to note that some people knew exactly what was unfolding. In the same decade in which Rexroth wrote these words, Exxon and its scientists, for example, had already discovered that the externalities of their business model would be catastrophic. Leaked documents from 1988 demonstrate that Shell also knew at least by the following decade that its business model would also have devastating consequences.¹¹ As these petrochemical giants knew with broad confidence how bad the burning of fossil fuels would turn out, did they sound the alarm? Not at all. Rather they spent an estimated two billion dollars in an orchestrated campaign of misdirection and lies.¹² In this light, Rexroth's words now sound all the more prophetic: "It is either utopia or catastrophe" (Rexroth 1974, xv). Rexroth consequently extolled the slowly emerging counterculture as a matter of life and death. "The fact that thousands of people can desert the industrial capitalist society," like Rexroth, Everson, Snyder, Körte, and many others did, "and live by making pots or batiks or leather work or strumming guitars may seem superficial and trivial. It is not. The problem is to reorganize the economy so that the automobiles are made in the same way" (ibid., xvii).

For Rexroth, the Neolithic village still had much to teach us, as do the Paraguayan Jesuit communal missions. Some contemporary historians may reject his characterization, but whether or not it is apt, it points to an anarchic ideal:

The Indians were certainly happier than anyone would be in Plato's Republic, or St. Thomas More's Utopia. Life was an almost uninterrupted ritual, a kind of group contemplation suffused with joy. The extraordinary thing is nothing like it has ever happened at any other time in history, certainly not since the neolithic village.

(ibid., 291)

Rexroth credited Martin Buber's *I and Thou* with helping awaken him to a non-centralized, highly complex, but non-dominating mode of being with each other (each other is an encounter with a dialogical "you" not the self-serving

reification of an "it"), and with the creatures and things with whom we share the Earth. To turn full circle, it was his initiation into the "pure conversation" or *qingtan* with and between all things. This was Buber's dialogical principle reimaged in these emerging countercultures in and as the West of Turtle Island.

Originary anarchy

In conclusion, I think it is worth pausing and considering again the fact that no centrally organized society that relies on the domination and subjugation of its population and of the place's resources has ever been long-lived. Empires and States are short-lived and if one wants to find long-lived cultures, one need only look to the Indigenous communities of Turtle Island who have figured out how to survive "since time immemorial." Listening attentively to and learning from some of their orature, one can also detect warnings learned the hard way about the consequences of not accepting responsibility for the commons that comprise us and all of the other life with whom we share its dependent co-origination.

In his provocative study, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Glen Sean Coulthard of the Yellowknives Dene embraces Frantz Fanon's rejection of the Hegelian struggle for recognition. The settler colonial state is not at all worried about being recognized by its subjects. It is not a struggle to death for recognition in which the master needs the slave to confirm that the master is indeed a master. The master does not care what its subjects think. It is there to appropriate the land and labor of its subjects. "What it needs is land, labor, and resources" (Coulthard 2014, 40). Empire is not based on recognition, but it is useful when empire subsequently wants to appear legitimate, inclusive, and democratic. Suspicious of the Canadian colonial state's contemporary efforts to recognize First Nation's Peoples, Coulthard argues that such recognition tacitly demands that one accept the master's founding values.

So today it appears, much as it did in Fanon's day, that colonial powers will only recognize the collective rights and identities of Indigenous Peoples insofar as this recognition does not throw into question the background legal, political, and economic framework of the colonial relationship instead.

(Ibid., 41)

As they assumed control and "legitimacy," the settler colonial state engaged in what Marx called "primitive accumulation," which in terms of Indigenous Peoples meant the violent appropriation of their lands. If the appropriation of labor is the theft of time (one works to live and lives to work), then the appropriation of the commons (the place of the many becoming the property of the few) is a program of *spatial* alienation. Coulthard embraces the Lakota philosopher Vine Deloria, Jr (*God is Red*) in his insistence that for Indigenous

Peoples it is place, not time, that occupies the highest meaning (ibid., 60). As such, place was experienced as “grounded normativity” that was “deeply informed by what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms” (ibid., 13). The loss of the *place of one's being* is more important than the theft of time in which one is an exploited proletariat. The:

place is a way of knowing, of experiencing and relating to the world and with others ... In the Weledeh dialect of Dogrib, ‘land’ (or *dè*) is translated in relational terms as that which encompasses not only the land (understood here as material), but also people and animals, rocks and trees, lakes and rivers, and so on. Seen in this light, we are as much a part of the land as any other element, and hence these relations entail ethical responsibilities obligations.

(ibid., 61)

Not only are we called to be allies to, and to lift up, Indigenous Peoples in their ongoing cultural struggle for the rights to the land in order to honor the rights of the land, the ecological emergency highlights the hard-won wisdom of this relationship. The hyper-concentration of capital and the centralization of the State as its guarantor not only rob workers of a meaningful share of the wealth that they produced, but also reinforces a profound *spatial* alienation from our obligations to the Earth itself whose ecologies (commons) grant us the being that we share with all of its other members.¹³

This is, in part, why Winona LaDuke, of the White Earth Reservation in Northern Minnesota and two-time vice-presidential candidate for the Green Party, argued that Indigenous resilience cannot be separated from healing the lands that help constitute Indigenous cultures. When Congress finally passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978, for example, the assumption was that Indigenous Peoples could now freely practice their long suppressed religious rites and traditions. However, this Act was blind to the rootedness of Indigenous spiritual worlds in the spatial or earthly constitution of those worlds. It “did not protect the places where many of these rituals take place or the relatives and elements central to these ceremonies, such as salt from the Sacred Salt Mother for the Zuni or salmon for the Nez Pierce” (LaDuke 2005, 13). In fact, the cruel and intentional effect of the reservation system was to divide what could only be inherited and paid forward holistically. They could not take generational turns with their sacred lands because they were divided from the lands that constituted them spiritually, culturally, and physically. “By the 1930’s, Native territories had been reduced to about 4% of our original land base. More than 75% of our sacred sites have been removed from our care and jurisdiction” (ibid., 14).

The land base of many Indigenous people was not land that they owned, but it was land that was given to them and, as such, constituted them. Colonization and genocide stole the futurity of Indigenous worlds not only through murder,

but also through dividing and appropriating the lands that constituted Indigenous worlds. This is to steal the time of the future by stealing the place of a human future (an inhabitable earth), as was the case in the dispossession of Indigenous lands, but which is also the case in the stance of humanity as the “master and proprietor of nature.”

The Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg (constituted by lands now colonized as parts of Ontario) teacher, leader, and scholar Leanne Simpson also argues that the healing of the lands that ancestrally and contemporarily constitute the Nishnaabeg People—“to restore balance, justice and good health to our lands”—also:

requires a disruption of the capitalist industrial complex and the colonial gender system (and a multitude of other institutions and systems) within settler nations by challenging the very foundation of the nation-state and its relationships to the land and Indigenous nations.

(Simpson 2011, 87)

Re-emergence must carry forth and pay forward through the dense obfuscation of centuries of imperial violence and the dispossession of the lands, languages, and traditions that is the *ancestral gift of who they are*. “At their core, Indigenous political movements contest the very foundation of the Canadian state in its current expression” (ibid., 16). Yet, strikingly, the Nishnaabeg have the audacity to commit not only to meeting the needs of today, but to those of a future 10 generations away (ibid., 67).

In my neck of the ecological woods, Ish River Country (in the poet Robert Sund’s coinage), ancestral home of many Coast Salish Peoples, one still detects both the ancestral traces and contemporary resurgence of these earthen ecological anarchies. A term like anarchy, of course, is anachronistic and responds to a level of centralization eschewed by Coast Salish Peoples, yet one can nonetheless detect its Indigenous rudiments *avant la lettre*. The local anthropologists Bill Angelbeck and Colin Grier have argued that Coast Salish peoples traditionally enjoyed highly complex, but decentralized communities. As the noted anthropologist Wayne Suttles observed, “Families of ‘high class’ were the majority. These high-class People were those who ‘knew their history,’ received training, and possessed private knowledge. Commoners, who were in the minority, did not know their history.” Suttles compared Salish society to an inverted pear because there “was no apex of nobles, medium sized middle class, and broad base of commoners ... The greater number of People belonged to an upper or respectable class” (quoted in Angelbeck and Grier 2012, 554). Charles C. Mann likewise notes in *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus* that, centuries before the arrival of Europeans on the eastern side of Turtle Island, the Haudenosaunee federation had welded tremendous “personal liberty” with the cooperative cultivation of equality. “Northeastern Indians were appalled by the European propensity to divide themselves into social classes, with those on the lower rungs of the hierarchy compelled to defer to those on the upper” (Mann 2006, 375).

In the settler colonial cultures that displaced Indigenous culture, the concentration of capital and the centralization of the State create a pyramid, with most folks at the base (approximately 150 million people in the US, for example, struggle to make ends meet), with a smaller, but still somewhat broad middle (the currently shrinking middle class), and the apex, where a powerful plutocratic minority holds sway. In the “inverted” Coast Salish “pear,” the “commoners” were a tiny minority and aristocracy of various kinds was broadly distributed. It is a small but critical step to extend this insight to our beleaguered bioregions, the commons that sustain—at least for the time being—the life we share with all of its inhabitants. Ecologies are anarchic with diffuse complexity and hence assiduously and bioregionally specific responsibility. A politics rooted in place is ecological, and ecologies anarchically distribute power and benefits diffusely to all of their members, human and non-human. This is the call of a de-colonized site-specific philosophy: A Turtle Island ecological philosophy that connects us all, human and non-human, sentient and non-sentient, singular bioregion by singular bioregion, in a time of great earth exigency.

Notes

- 1 Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann: “Reinhabitation means learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation. It involves becoming native to a place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around it. It means undertaking activities and evolving social behavior that will enrich the life of that place, restore its life-supporting systems, and establish an ecologically and socially sustainable pattern of existence within it. Simply stated it involves becoming fully alive in and with a place. It involves applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its exploiter” (Berg and Dasmann 2015, 36).
- 2 For this, see the invaluable and pioneering work of David McCloskey: <https://cascadia-institute.org>.
- 3 Xuan 玄 appears in the *Laozi* as the mysterious, arcane, deep, and dark.
- 4 The classic study of this “original affluent society” remains Sahlins 1972.
- 5 See McQuiddy 2013.
- 6 For more on this, see Shebl 1976.
- 7 For more on the relationship and opposition between preservation and conversation, see Clayton 2019.
- 8 Dōgen made this admonition in the *Shōbōgenzō* fascicle “*Butsudō*” where he claimed that those who speak of Zen as a school or sect (*shū*) are devils—“those who groundlessly refer to themselves in this way are demons who violate the buddha way, enemies who are not welcomed by buddhas and ancestors” (Dōgen 2010, 502).
- 9 See Victoria 2006.
- 10 Jacques Élisée Reclus (1830–1905), like Kropotkin, was primarily a geographer and like the latter was also banished for anarchist activism. Reclus is the author of the 19-volume work, *Nouvelle géographie universelle: La terre et les hommes* (Paris: Hachette, 1894), as well as the posthumously published, *L’homme et la terre* (Paris: Librairie universelle, 1905–1908).
- 11 See Franta 2018.
- 12 See Brule 2018.
- 13 For more on this, see Wirth 2017.

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