

Abstract:

The Echoing Greens: the Neo-Romanticism of Earth First! and Reclaim the Streets

From the early 1990s into the 21st century a prominent cultural manifestation of environmental activism was the emergence of loose networks coordinating under the banners of Earth First! and Reclaim the Streets. Twenty years since the appearance of EF! and RTS in the UK, this article is a contribution towards an historical overview. Throughout the groups' media output, we find an environmental discourse in keeping with the cultural phenomena that Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre identify as Romantic anti-capitalism. Their eco-warriors therefore echo green and amplify sentiments dating back to the Romantic period and take forward a historical tradition at a time of triumphant globalization when pundits were proclaiming "The End of History." They aspired to what Graham St John terms an "alternative cultural heterotopia" in the here and now, creating the kind of "Tactical Autonomous Zones" Hakim Bey encouraged as microcosms of a post-Capitalist society. Among the 19th century themes and tactics deployed in activist discourse are enclosure, Luddism, alienation, civil disobedience and festivity.

In their resistance to the social dominance of the car, road and oil industries, EF! and RTS sought to disrupt business as usual both physically, through direct action, and by "culture jamming" the global structures of political and economic power they regard as complicit in climate change, environmental destruction, injustice and militarism. Subsequently a new generation of activists in Climate Camp, Rising Tide and Plane Stupid continued to oppose open-cast mining and airport expansion to prevent climate change.