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RESISTANCE!

The Echoing Greens: The Neo-Romanticism of Earth First! and Reclaim The Streets in the U.K.

*Stephen E. Hunt**

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Fair Seed-Time

When Reclaim the Streets revelers smuggled a maypole into Parliament Square on Mayday 2000 with an accompanying banner bearing the legend "Let London Sprout," participants were reviving and continuing a long legacy of green Romanticism in the symbolic epicenter of the British state at the new millennium's outset. The guerrilla gardeners were not only cultivating, dancing upon, and occupying a contested physical space, but undertaking a semiotic squatting of the Houses of Parliament's iconic skyline.

From the early 1990s into the 21st century, one of the most prominent manifestations of environmental resistance in the activist sphere was the emergence of loose networks coordinated under the banners of Earth First! (EF!) and Reclaim the Streets (RTS). Now that EF! (U.K.) and RTS have been around for 20 years, it is possible to draft first surveys from an historical perspective. Throughout their media output is an environmental discourse inflected with, and which evolves out of, a worldview dating back to the Romantic period.

In setting out to trace continuities with Romanticism, a significant philosophical source for radical environmentalism, questions arise as to the way in which such networks echo—and, in the era of globalization, amplify—earlier anti-capitalist traditions. This inquiry also provokes questions about the strategic and rhetorical benefits allusions to social history may have for campaigners. For example, by grounding current campaigns within the context of broader historical struggles, precedents can be claimed for direct action and civil disobedience, and appeals for environmental protection can accrue gravitas by evoking respected writers from the past who are regarded as sympathetic kindred spirits. Against a caricature of radical environmentalists as isolated voices in the wilderness, this linkage projects an extensive solidarity across generations and cultures. In Britain activists often evoke local distinctiveness in campaigns against the destruction of particular places.

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Typically they would defend an area with attractive "natural" features, rendered meaningful through cultural memory. In this respect a green Romantic approach favoring qualitative rather than quantitative evaluations of the countryside has been a helpful heritage for campaigners in their efforts to prioritize the claims of place over space. Finally, I suggest that invoking social history constituted a political intervention in the decade after the Cold War, when "society" and "history" were ideologically contested terms.

This article draws upon analysis of *Earth First! Action Update* (1991-ongoing), *Do or Die* 1992–2003), and other published output of EF! (U.K.) and RTS. Critical reflection upon personal observation of several campaigns and gatherings, as well as communication with Jason Torrance and John Jordan, prominent participants in these networks, also informs the work. Such primary material is understood through a reading of critical literature relating to environmental Romanticism and radical environmentalism. Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre's overarching theoretical perspective on Romanticism as ongoing cultural resistance to industrial capitalism is central to my argument. Jonathan Bate's ecocritical *Romantic Ecology* corroborates this approach through his revelation of continuity between late 18th and early 19th century Romanticism and green opposition to globalization two centuries later. Derek Wall's *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement* (1999, 20) also locates the prehistory of road protest in William Wordsworth and John Ruskin's opposition to railways.

Romantic Roots and Rhizomes

This is not to suggest that Lake Poets were proto-monkeywrenchers or that radical environmentalists were reading *The Prelude* or *The Masque of Anarchy* while squatting treetops. We should be wary of imposing present-day environmental consciousness upon the different concerns of the Romantic and Victorian periods. Several factors have altered the context of environmental debates, including urbanization, the development of nuclear technology and genetic modification, the influence of new social movements, and the impact of globalized media on perceptions of the environment. Nevertheless, Romanticism provides a coherent theoretical paradigm for understanding radical environmentalism as a manifestation of an enduring tradition that grassroots networks such as EF! and RTS strongly exemplify. There is also awareness among radical environmentalists of Romanticism's foundational importance for many countercultural traditions. John Jordan, an RTS activist who significantly influenced the collective's theoretical approach, cites Max Blechman's *Revolutionary Romanticism* (1999) as "one of my favorite books (e-mail to the author, November 15, 2011)."

Cultural critics Löwy and Sayre make a compelling case that "Romanticism is essentially a reaction against the way of life in capitalist societies" thrown up with regret and rage against the onslaught of industrialism (2001, 17). By this definition, because capitalism and industrialism are ongoing, Romanticism, too, has no end-date

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but continues to be expressed through multiple critiques, whether they are nostalgic, reactionary, revolutionary, or futuristic. Romanticism was, and is, a cultural phenomenon born of antipathy to the negative impacts of industrialism—i.e., it is the ideological counterpart of capitalism that seeks to rationalize industry and commodify the world for profit and economic growth, with its attendant encroachments upon, and pollution of, the natural world. Raymond Williams (1961, 85) records that Thomas Carlyle first named "Industrialism" during the 1830s, undertaking an early analysis of its impact as a mechanistic worldview. Critics made passionate appeals against what Friedrich Schiller termed the "Disenchantment of the world," infusing economic anti-capitalism with a cultural politics of liberation and imagination. The strains of Romanticism that are my focus particularly contest both the alienation believed to be intrinsic to capitalism and the degradation of the physical environment, of which anthropogenic climate change is currently the most topical example.

Löwy and Sayre's theoretical underpinning of Romanticism sustains the current argument for the designation of EF! and RTS as neo-Romantic in two ways. First, it establishes Romanticism within an overarching conceptual framework, as a world-view unifying diverse—and often incompatible and mutually antagonistic—voices, sharing antipathy towards industrial capitalism. Second, in maintaining that Romanticism is "coextensive with capitalism" they situate it as an ongoing cultural phenomenon (Löwy and Sayre 2001, 17). My use of the term "neo-Romanticism" in the current essay is therefore made with reference to this continuing presence of Romantic anti-capitalism in EF!, RTS, and their precursors, including Situationism, deep ecology, and social ecology.

Deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions (1985, 82) note the Romantic Movement's early role as "a counterforce to the narrow scientism and industrialism of the modern world." Environmental Romanticism prioritizes a qualitative attitude to the physical world, rejecting market quantification as an approach that leads to the destruction of the natural environment and the alienation of humanity from that environment. This insistence upon the limitations and dangers inherent in seeking to comprehend and order the material world through measurement and calculation is a hallmark of both historic Romantic traditions and varieties of neo-Romanticism. William Blake's famous caricature of a solipsistic "Newton" [1795] (Butlin 1981, II. 394), absorbed in measuring with calipers with his back turned from the natural world, exemplifies this rejection of reductionism. While it is acknowledged that the natural environment is not pristine wilderness free of human impact, Romantic nature sympathy upholds respect for its autonomous development and integrity. It entails a belief in the natural world's beneficial, indeed essential, contribution to human well-being, and a sense of its intrinsic worth.

Bate compares Wordsworth's ecological radicalism with the approach of present-day environmentalists, arguing that for both reverence for the natural world represents a kind of political engagement with revolutionary implications. Bate advocates "green reading," suggesting:

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> If one historicizes the idea of an ecological viewpoint—a respect for the earth and a skepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society—one finds oneself squarely in the Romantic tradition; and it has strong contemporary force in that it brings Romanticism to bear on [. . .] the greenhouse effect and the depletion of the ozone layer, the destruction of the tropical rainforest, acid rain, the pollution of the sea, and, more locally, the concreting of England's green and pleasant land (1991, 9).

Romantic-era opposition to industrial capitalism includes not only elite voices of literary dissent, but also the physical resistance of displaced workers such as the Luddites. The 19th century trajectory of English Romantic environmentalism includes John Clare's opposition to enclosure and marsh drainage, and, in common with Wordsworth, to intrusive railways, and objections to industrialism's social and environmental impact in the works of John Ruskin, William Morris, and Edward Carpenter. This Romantic tradition took many forms, embracing a desire to reclaim a sense of place, live authentically, share equitably the commonwealth of the planet, and conserve wild places. The appearance of Victorian campaign groups such as the Open Spaces Society, with their demands to protect and access the countryside, anticipated direct action such as the celebrated ramblers' mass trespass at Kinder Scout during the 1930s. For Löwy and Sayre, this strain of Romantic anti-capitalism continues into the post-War era, especially in the May 1968 events and the anti-nuclear movement. Above all, they suggest: "at the turn of the 20th century the ecology movement constitutes the most important form of renewal of the Romantic critique of modern industrial civilization" (Löwy and Sayre 2001, 230).

The Germination of Radical Environmentalism

Influenced by American naturalist William Bartram, Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge provided much of the literary heritage for American Transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and succeeding nature appreciators Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. However, Transcendentalist writings indicate critical engagement and adaptation, rather than reiteration of the English tradition. Emerson visited the Wordsworths, Coleridge, and Carlyle in 1833 (Emerson 2001, 791). He returned and developed the ideas expressed in one of his most famous essays, "Nature" (1836), which is regarded as the foundational text for American Transcendentalism.

Thoreau, Emerson's fellow Transcendentalist and nature worshipper, was even more influential upon seminal environmental thought. Thoreau adapted the Wordsworthian sublime to the American context in works such as *Walden* and *The Maine Woods*. He also brought to the green Romantic tradition a rebellious strain of homegrown individualist anarchism, not only celebrating the natural world but also developing a critique of modern life and governmental interference.

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Deeply inspired by Thoreau, John Muir reached back to the Transcendentalists and forward to 20th century environmental activism. When Emerson visited California in 1871, Muir encouraged the older writer to "worship" in the "temples" of "holy Yosemite" (McCormick 1995, 14).

160 The American nature writers experienced and described a wilder nature populated by bears, wolves, and deadly snakes, marking a significant departure from the pastoral legacy of English Romanticism. Edward Abbey's adaptation of Wild-West discourse for the purposes of radical environmentalism was an immediate 20th century influence upon EF! When EF! was founded, Abbey became an 165 enthusiastic supporter.

The immediate context for the radical environmental movement's rise is the occurrence of conspicuous and enduring catastrophes during the era of industrial modernity—including habitat destruction, war and genocide, famine, nuclear accidents, climate change, and species extinctions. Many activists therefore assert 170 that their resistance is a "common sense," intuitive response to such problems. Rik Scarce (1990, 31) found that radical environmental activists frequently attributed their passion to defend the Earth to "an ecological consciousness that comes from the heart and not the head."

However, many broader philosophical worldviews have inspired radical 175 environmental activism. Alison Anderson (2000, 95) identifies influences that include "romanticism, socialism, religious fundamentalism, the peace movement and anarchism." Radical environmentalists' philosophy and tactics also owe much to the civil rights, women's liberation, and other new social movements. Historian Bron Taylor (2008) surveys several other "tributaries" in the Romantic tradition that 180 influenced EF!, particularly critics of capitalism on environmental grounds, including Lewis Mumford, Murray Bookchin, Vandana Shiva, and Theodore Roszak. Scientific insights, especially from evolutionary biology (the Romantic worldview directly shaped Charles Darwin's thought), ecology, and quantum physics, were also foundational. The immediate sources for EF!, RTS, and other grassroots environ-185 mental networks are biocentric deep ecology and social ecology (both eco-philosophies emerging in the 1970s; the former through Arne Næss's ideas, the latter through those of Murray Bookchin). Among prominent EF! activists for example, Judi Bari was strongly sympathetic to deep ecology (Bari 1995).

Green Shoots of Earth First!

190 According to Dave Foreman's account (1991, 7), EF! had its origins in a meeting in the United States between five people, including himself and Howie Wolke, to "establish an uncompromising wing of the wilderness preservation movement." As a start, a newsletter was circulated to 500 conservationists believed to be sympathetic. Its title was "Nature more," from Byron's line in *Childe Harold's*

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195 *Pilgrimage*: "I love not man the less, but nature more" (Gordon [Lord Byron] 1970, 251; Canto the Fourth, CLXXVIII, 1598). The adoption of the more exuberant title "Earth First!" signaled a biocentric approach in which economic and political considerations were subsumed within ecological and planetary priorities. The network was born of disillusionment with the perceived limitations of Greenpeace 200 and the Sierra Club, coupled with inspiration from the bandit spirit of Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang*. In this 1975 novel, Hayduke and his comrades take radical direct action in defense of the wilderness. Certainly for EF! Founder member, Mike Roselle (2009, 41 and 53), Abbey's novel was "required reading," along with Thoreau, Muir, and Aldo Leopold.

205 In 1991 the network appeared in England when EF! (U.K.) coordinated a blockade of Dungeness nuclear power station (Wall 1999, 46). From the outset there was a close affinity with social justice groups. For example, it was a source of symbolic pride for protestors against the Newbury Bypass that a gigantic kettle used to brew tea on the camps was a veteran that had once warmed the cockles of the 210 Greenham Common women's hearts. When EF! was launched, there was a ready-made constituency of resistance that included seasoned activists from peace, animal liberation, labor, anti-fascist, and free festival campaigns. Over 20 protest camps obstructed the construction of the Newbury Bypass, a 14-kilometer trunk road that was completed at the cost of the destruction of three Sites of Special Scientific 215 Interest (SSSI) and involved up to a thousand arrests.[1] The relatively small number of people taking direct action against road building was augmented by a wider constituency of sympathizers with affection for the English countryside, a sentiment partly explained by its visible cultural presence as Blake's "green and pleasant land" and celebrated as picturesque in Wordsworth's poetry and John Constable's 220 paintings.

EF! (U.K.) co-founder Jason Torrance explains that all cultures have used stories to connect to a sense of place, so the literary and historic legacy was enormously important in defending threatened locations:

> 225 We were reading American writers such as Muir, Leopold, and Abbey. There were strategic imperatives around the creation of stories and connection to the land. In terms of narratives about the English countryside, we were inspired mostly by Coleridge and Keats. During the Twyford Down campaign, we were aware that

[1]The Newbury protest was the culmination of five years of intensive struggles, using a two-pronged strategy of direct action coupled with a compelling publicity offensive to confront a major road-building program. High-profile protests, such as those at Twyford Down and the M11 in East London, failed to stop the construction of the roads in question. Many more projects, however, were cancelled as the road-building budget was slashed from £23bn to £4.5bn (Arbib 2009, 12) in the face of tenacious public opposition. Abandoned road proposals included the Salisbury Bypass which would have been adjacent to water meadows painted by John Constable. The road protests of the 1990s also considerably raised the profile of environmental issues in general. In 2013 a renewal of road building is provoking a new wave of opposition, with the Combe Haven Defenders' protest against the construction of the Hastings Bypass in Sussex perhaps auguring a new summer of resistance.

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> Thomas Hardy had written about St. Catherine's Hill, too. I remember there was also a strong Romantic tribalist aspect to what went on (Torrance, interview with the author, Bristol, December 15, 2011).

While they shared a "no compromise" approach, there is a consensus that the British grassroots networks have more often expressed their commitment to environmental defense within a broader framework of social, often revolutionary, transformation than their American forerunners. Torrance noted that in the United States, EF! was "coming from a biocentric equality for all life, deep ecology point of view... rather than the deep social-change issues" (Wall 1999, 145).

Such variance may also reflect older cultural distinctions due to contrasts in scale and landscape. For example, Bate (1991, 39) notes that the English Romantic tradition has been orientated towards celebrating the locally distinctive in contrast to the "vastness" Muir admired in the High Sierra. The struggle has been to protect countryside close to, and scattered with, human habitation. The area next to Dungeness nuclear power station is an example. This is one of the largest expanses of shingle in Europe, through which sea kale and viper's bugloss push up, next to extraordinary Edwardian chalets. While the surrounding area, designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), boasts significant ecological diversity, EF!'s English debut was about opposing nuclear power, not the kind of wilderness defense called for in Oregon or Clayoquot Sound.

By the time EF! (U.K.) was launched, the "official" U.S. EF! network had shifted to a more anarchist and social justice orientation. Founder members close to Foreman had stepped down to launch *Wild Earth* in a bid to return to the basics of wilderness protection. However social ecologist, ecosocialist, and anarchist approaches demanded cogent analyses of *why* the natural environment is being destroyed at an unprecedented rate, without which heroic direct action would inevitably fail. Furthermore, there was a strong rejection of early U.S. EF! sympathizers' misanthropic opinions, such as welcoming AIDS as a population check, and racist anti-immigration sentiments. After 1990 the prominence of spokespeople such as co-founder and ex-Yippie Mike Roselle and Judi Bari, who provided links to eco-feminism and the Industrial Workers of the World, signaled EF!'s increasing orientation towards the libertarian Left.

Together with the single-issue Road Alert, EF! (U.K.) was the main coordinating network for the high-profile direct action against road construction, notably at Twyford Down, Solsbury Hill, and Newbury. EF!'s greatest success was the eventual abandonment of the Conservative's "Roads for Prosperity" road building program. This was widely acknowledged to have resulted from broad-based direct action, which raised the issue's profile, generating more conventional, constitutional opposition. The activist *raison d'être* of EF! was to promote the transformative power of the positivity of the deed over despondency in literature about the planet's

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plight. However, the regular *EF! Action Update* was accompanied by the more reflective and theoretical *Do or Die*, which by 2003 weighed in at nearly 400 pages.

The impact of industrial processes and infrastructure upon living environments was the central impetus for EF! While Britain has little terrain that can be properly designated "wilderness," campaigns have been directed at supporting opposition to logging and rainforest protection overseas as well as action against nuclear power and genetic modification at home. Many campaigns aimed at protecting local distinctiveness, opposing incursions upon cherished places as varied as Oxleas Woods, an ancient woodland near London (for road building); Selar Farm Nature Reserve in the Neath Valley, South Wales (for open cast mining); Nine Ladies, a Bronze Age archaeological site in the Peak District (for quarrying); and Pollock, a working-class housing estate in Glasgow (for a motorway).

EF!'s most high profile and successful battles made use of non-violent civil disobedience, a significant part of the radical environmentalists' strategy. Thoreau was first to outline the principles of civil disobedience, following his imprisonment for refusing to pay tax to support war against Mexico in 1846. EF!'s civil disobedience tactics, such as occupying and blockading, are in a long line of resistance to authority, from 19th century resistance to the enclosure of Epping Forest to the Peace movement's opposition to militarism at Greenham Common, Aldermaston, and Faslane. Such actions ensured that EF! was well placed to anticipate and intervene in the increasingly urgent opposition to climate change, which is arising as the 21st century's most prominent environmental controversy. Consequently, a new generation of direct-action groups related to EF!, including Rising Tide and Plane Stupid, continue to oppose coal mining and airport expansion.

Reclaim the Streets: The City Sprouts

An early offshoot of EF!, RTS was a more urban phenomenon, which took its most direct inspirations from Situationism and social ecology. Developing from street parties that literally, if temporarily, reclaimed streets as public spaces, RTS launched a frontal assault on the citadel of capitalism in 1999 that became the model for subsequent mobilizations against world summits. Through media such as spoof newspapers *Maybe*, *Evading Standards*, and *Financial Crimes*, RTS updated the Situationist critique of attacks on "The Society of the Spectacle" and passive consumerism. In the 1990s the appearance of RTS represented a reinvigoration of a jaded green movement outside the Parliamentary political framework. Initially, RTS aimed to extend awareness of the private car's immediate detrimental environmental impact—pollution and road accidents—to a wider consideration of their social impact. André Gorz was a particular inspiration. One of the greenest of the 1968 generation of political philosophers, Gorz's 1973 essay, "Social Ideology of the Motor Car," was a seminal link between the *soixante-huitards* and the rise of political

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ecology. The car, Gorz (1980) argued, is an inherently anti-social luxury, incapable
310 of democratization and that renders hellish the cities it fractures. Similarly, for RTS the car was a synecdoche of capitalist society, as it alienated individuals in privatized microspaces, had literally riven communities asunder through road construction, and was destructive of convivial public space. Moreover, RTS held that the automobile and oil industries were complicit with resource wars and planetary damage through
315 climate change. The car and its supporting infrastructure of roads was therefore a concrete urban problem that could be used to raise awareness and understanding of alienated capitalist relations. It was hoped that a challenge to the hegemony of the car, therefore, could also be a starting point for radical social transformation.

The earliest RTS events date from London in 1992. Branching out from EF!,
320 RTS was heavily involved in the campaign to defend the community around Clarendon Road, Wanstead against the extension of the M11, a major motorway running from northeast London to west of Cambridge. Following the consolidation and growing confidence of a federated network of RTS collectives, larger mobilizations took place that fused community environmental politics with parties
325 and carnivals. The first major street party rocked Camden in 1995. In following years there were many more street parties in England and worldwide. Among the largest was the party in Shepherd's Bush, 1996, which attracted in excess of 5,000 revelers, culminating in a dance blockade of the former M41, a 1.21-km road in central London. In an ironic reversal of the Situationist truth, sand was delivered to
330 convert part of the motorway into a Hawaiian beach, placing the beach above the road. Next up, stilt-walking giants disguised drilling operations beneath their wire-framed dresses so that tarmac could be removed and trees planted; sound systems pumped out techno music to smother the noise (Reclaim the Streets 1996). RTS modeled such strategic happenings and "reclaimed" spaces on Hakim Bey's notion
335 of the "Temporary Autonomous Zone." Before the 1997 general election, up to 20,000 people attended a major RTS counter-demonstration in London. The multi-purpose event combined a solidarity march for striking dockers, an anti-election rally under the slogan of "Never Mind the Ballots," and a huge metropolitan rave.

A Global Party lay siege to the G8 Summit in Birmingham in 1998, drawing
340 attention to what critics increasingly regarded as unjust, unrepresentative, and environmentally irresponsible political and economic leadership. This was an early instance of a challenge that became almost customary on such occasions. RTS's most audacious happening was the Global Carnival Against Capital on June 18, 1999. The century's final year saw England's largest explicitly anti-capitalist event, with up
345 to 10,000 campaigners storming the "Square Mile" of London's financial district. Now part of a broader international federation called People's Global Action, RTS coordinated this event with protests in 30 countries to coincide with the G8 summit in Köln. It directly anticipated the so-called Battle of Seattle, which took place five months later. Further attempts to unite the red, green, and black took the form of
350 large May Day events in London during the new millennium (7,000 came to play "Mayday Monopoly" at the 2001 event).

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By 2002, however, RTS had experienced demise as the police increasingly anticipated events and "kettled" (detained in a confined space) participants, especially following September 11, 2001. In the noughties, both EF! and RTS banners were likely to invite a rapid state response. Nevertheless, despite this apparent closing down of political space, the praxis RTS initiated up-scaled and morphed into many new radical environmental groups by mid-decade. In keeping with the fluid nature of such networks, new groupings proliferated and diversified, including Critical Mass, World Naked Bike Ride, Rising Tide, Dissent, No Borders, Climate Camp, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, and Plane Stupid, all of which reflected shifting priorities and fresh tactical fronts. While media coverage has mostly foregrounded socio-economic demands, it is evident that the high-profile Occupy Movement has a strong awareness of the ecological dimension to current crises. Visiting occupations in Bristol and London in November 2011, I found the permacultural demand to "compost capitalism" was combined with such ecological concerns as climate change, nuclear power, protection of endangered species, and airport expansion.

Echoing Greens

EF! and RTS operate as diverse networks rather than centralized entities. In line with their anarchist and anti-capitalist principles, campaigners form free voluntary local groups, cooperating through mutual aid. Both have inclusive statements of aims and structure, providing loose parameters within which most anarchists, ecosocialists, social ecologists, radical greens, ecofeminists, and deep ecologists can comfortably operate. London RTS describes itself on its website as "a direct action network for global and local social-ecological revolution(s) to transcend hierarchical and authoritarian society (capitalism included)." According to the *Earth First! Action Update* 82 (May 2002), the philosophy behind EF! (U.K.) "... is the use of non-hierarchical organization and direct action to confront, stop and eventually reverse the forces responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants."

In "The Resonance of Romanticism," A.K. Thompson notes that the tactical and theoretical preference for direct democracy and affinity groups by anti-globalization campaigners was a means to maintain immediate face-to-face communication. Thompson (2011, 59) suggests that this impulse was a Romantic tactic in so far as the use of "decision-making structures thought to belong to another time and place" connoted a desire to reclaim an intimacy of personalized exchange of a kind that predated the communications of mass industrialized society.

When EF! and RTS resisted the degradation of the natural environment from open cast mining, road building or the nuclear industry, their physical actions amplified sentiments expressed two centuries earlier. Mary Wollstonecraft, disappointed in her attempt to stroll by the Elbe, was an early observer of the conflict between the natural environment and the demands of industrialism:

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> There was no path; and the smell of glue, hanging to dry, an extensive manufactory which is carried on close to the beach, I found extremely disagreeable. But to commerce every thing must give way; profit and profit are the only speculations... (1987, 194).

If the Romantic flame began to kindle during the Industrial Revolution, it burns still in the hearts of present-day green Romantics, fond of their kinship with their Romantic forebears. Löwy (1999, 198) suggests revolutionary Romantics wish not to return *to* the past but rather to "detour" *via* the past in order to draw inspiring models for transformed, utopian futures: In "[t]he memory of the past as a weapon in the fight for the future, one could hardly imagine a more striking and precise formulation of the revolutionary-romantic perspective" (1999, 206).

Networks such as EF! and RTS at once look back to historical precedents and are futuristic in their aspirations to a post-capitalist society. Their critique is manifest in several themes and rhetorical tropes characteristic of Romantic discourse, such as opposition to enclosure, admiration for Luddite objections to technology, and the detrimental aspects of industrialism, including pollution and destruction of the natural environment and the perceived alienation of urban life.

Enclosure

Neo-Romantics often framed present-day encroachments upon the natural world for profit by redeploying the notion of enclosure. The Parliamentary enclosure acts of the 18th and 19th centuries accelerated a process ongoing since the medieval period. Historian Ian Waites (2004) traces a direct continuity between historic disaffection with the loss of the commons and RTS and ramblers' groups more recent politics of space. Several literary works of the period contested and regretted the loss of the commons and the associated possibilities for freedom of access and means of sustenance in the form of wood gathering, grazing rights, and gleaning. Wordsworth's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," for example, looks to the plight of the laboring poor who experienced diminished resilience and autonomy with the abolition of customary gleaning rights. Likewise Clare's "The Mores" laments:

> Inclosure came & trampled on the grave
> Of labours rights & left the poor a slave (1996, II.348)

Clare was keenly aware, moreover, of the detrimental impact of the loss of moorland habitat upon the species that formerly flourished there.

Nearly two centuries later, EF! historicized the loss of accessible countryside as a metaphorical and literal process that is ongoing and accelerating in a global appropriation of land and life forms. One example was the construction of a

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motorway through Twyford Down, a Site of Special Scientific Interest near Winchester. According to a *Do or Die* contributor, encroachment upon Twyford Down, was an instance of land "illegitimately wrested away from us through the process known as 'enclosure'"—a reference to the eviction of EF!'s road resisting allies, the Dongas Tribe (Anon. 1996, 65). The irony was not lost that Owlesbury, adjacent to Twyford Down, was notorious for agricultural machine breaking during the 1830s (Anon. 1998, 46–47). Another anonymous EF! activist asserted:

> Two hundred years ago the English elite's main enemy was the peasantry [. . .] The elite used the enclosure of land and the mechanization of crafts and agriculture to crush the rebellious autonomy of the English poor (Anon. 1999, 91).

For RTS, too, enclosure served as a metaphor for the *modus operandi* of industrial capitalism: "We believe in . . . taking back those things which have been enclosed within capitalist circulation and returning them to collective use as a commons" (Anon. 2000, 80). In this sense enclosure, beyond a development that culminated in the historic Parliamentary enclosure acts, is understood as a continuing phenomenon in which appropriation of new commons are not only analogous to land enclosure but a continuation of the same process. Activists Kay Summer and Harry Halpin (2005, 354) argue, for example, that the market in carbon emissions "seeks to make money out of climate change through enclosing or privatizing the atmospheric commons."

Luddism and Sabotage

As industrial capitalism was consolidated during the early 19th century, disaffected opponents such as Luddites and Swing rioters fiercely contested prevailing trends. Through widespread disturbances they resisted technology that they regarded as instrumental in loosening their hold upon the means of production, instigating a shift towards those with power and capital enough to invest in developments that would inevitably undermine their working conditions and economic independence. In 1812 Byron defended the Luddites, a lone voice in the House of Lords condemning a bill that would make machine breaking a capital offence. Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang* (1982, frontispiece) opens with Byron's words "Down with all kings but King Ludd." Luddism became a celebrated episode for Romantic anti-capitalists, and a term ripe for reclamation in the radical environmentalists' lexicon. Anarchist Uri Gordon (2008, 130), for example, identifies "a neo-Luddite resistance to new technologies" which constitutes "*political* resistance to capital's strategies of consolidation." For radical environmentalists, Luddites courageously resisted the negative human consequences of new machinery, using direct action to defend the economic autonomy and resilience of weaving communities during the Romantic heyday.

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470 Praising direct-action campaigns in King Ludd's former "kingdom" in the Midlands, this time against peat extraction and Manchester Airport expansion, a "voice from Earth First!" wrote:

> We are told by the media—the advance guard of the spectacle—to constantly change so that we can continue to be news. But nothing is truly new—with the 475 exception of the scale and complexity of the problem. Our struggles are recent battles in an old war.

He or she continues:

> As rebels, revolutionaries and romantics we are citizens of a future society we have 480 yet to give birth to. Feeling out of place in this society, alienation is very painful (Anon. 1997, 71).

In this discussion of Luddism, our "voice" thus explicitly identifies EF! with the Romantic tradition. To cite Luddism as a particular inspiration is therefore to 485 reclaim social history as well as reversing the term's negative connotations. In 2011 EF! (U.K.) combined their commemoration of 20 years of "ecological protest and resistance" with the 200th anniversary of the Luddites (Earth First! [2010]). By identifying a tradition of direct action in this way, EF! links clandestine grassroots resistance from the past and present, thus attempting to establish a thread of dissent 490 across time—a common, collective response to the harm caused by capitalism.

Similarly, Abbey encouraged "sabotage" or "ecotage" of machinery in the name of liberation or environmental defense:

> When workers in the nineteenth century textile mills of England and France felt they were being abused by having to work 12 and 16 hours a day, they'd 495 sometimes slow down production by throwing their wooden shoes [*sabots*] into the machinery. I think this form of illegal resistance is justified (Abbey 2001, 20).

Alienation

Another major idea in the Romantic critique of modernity is that capitalism is inherently alienating in the workplace and social relations. Present-day critics such as 500 Joel Kovel (2007) have extended the process of division and commodification in capitalist society to the human relationship with the natural world.

In addition to objections to economic and social alienation, some EF! sympathizers express the notion, from deep ecology, that humanity is an alienated species, separated from the natural world. An Earth First!er writing as "A Roving

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505 American" argues that ecological alienation needs to be confronted alongside social issues:

> It's painfully obvious that fighting the land-rapers in desperate rearguard battles over every single development is bound to fail in the end. Instead, we need to attack the roots of the problem (i.e., capitalism, patriarchy, racism, sky god
> 510 religion, alienation from nature, etc.) ("A Roving American" 2000, 46).

There are strong correlations between the Romantic worldview and the biocentric approach, which urges that nurturing biophilia and nature sympathy will help humanity to become more integrated. Early 20th century writers, such as Henry Salt
515 (much in the Romantic tradition), anticipated the meaning of the recently coined term "biocentrism," through their perception of "universal kinship." Salt (1921, 244) declared: "all sentient life is akin and he who injures a fellow being is in fact doing injury to himself." When John Seed, a writer with close ties to EF!, argues for the spiritual benefits to be gained from connecting to the natural world, he is
520 following the green Romantic path. He suggests that by seeing through "anthropocentric self-cherishing,… [a]lienation subsides. The human is no longer an outsider, apart" (Devall and Sessions 1985, appendix, 243).

Such vision demands ethical responsibility towards other species and the natural world, and is finally an act of imaginary sympathy. It extends Shelley's powerful
525 dictum that "to be greatly good, [one] must imagine intensely and comprehensively," putting oneself "in the place of another and of many others" so that ultimately "the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own" in an effort to integrate human life within the biosphere (Shelley 2002, 642). In "Tintern Abbey" (especially lines 94–106), Wordsworth reaches out to a world beyond the
530 anthropocentric self in his passionate and eloquent evocation of connection with the natural world (Wordsworth 2000).

Activists have insisted that different modes of alienation are intrinsic to the same historical and economic processes and are intimately linked. Sociologist Justus Uitermark writes that in the discourse of the WOMBLES (White Overalls
535 Movement Building Libertarian Effective Struggles—close comrades of RTS):

> [. . .] the mechanisms that connect materially, yet separate mentally, laborers and consumers in different parts of the world are part of the same processes that alienate people from their living environments (Uitermark 2004, 717).

May Day Blossoms

540 RTS inspired happenings that encouraged participants and Londoners alike to imagine the transformation of the metropolis into a greener place. On May Day

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2000, the attempt of guerrilla gardeners to cultivate Parliament Square on the so-called "Mayday 2K" event echoed the Victorian back-to-the-land movement (Gould 1988). Five thousand RTS campaigners temporarily seized the moment in a shock of creativity and color, only to reap a harvest of negative headlines the following day. This literal sowing of the seed of the new world is a form of tactical prefiguration to inspire change. It is a distinctive and enduring mode of direct action, looking back to urban environmentalist groups such as Amsterdam's Kabouters in the 1970s, or even Pantisocracy, Coleridge and Robert Southey's proposed utopian community of the 1790s.

In 1820 Leigh Hunt, that green Romantic of the "Cockney School," celebrated the environmental and social traditions of May Day as: "the union of the two best things in the world, the love of nature, and the love of each other" (Joshua 2007, 71). With its connotations of pagan ritual and labor struggle, May Day has been an occasion to realize heady—and hearty—aspirations to re-enchant the world. EF! anti-road campaigners erected a maypole and symbolically burned a giant wicker earthmover on top of Solsbury Hill for Beltane in 1994. A backdrop banner at the RTS Mayday 2000 event entwined the two traditions of vernal rites and labor struggle in the proclamation "Resistance is fertile." *Maybe*, RTS's spoof newspaper, linked the maypole as a fertility symbol, rejoicing in the couplings of the "Queen of the May" and the "Lord of Misrule," with the memory of the Haymarket Martyrs, anarchists executed following labor demonstrations in Chicago in May 1886 (Reclaim the Streets 2000a, 6–7). In this way it was intended that a (partially invented) tradition of Merrie England would come together with international solidarity and emancipation.

There was also a mischievous sense of delight in the preposterousness of the idea that Parliament Square, a heavily enclosed space in the shadow of the House of Commons, could be returned to the common people, and the intensively maintained monoculture of its lawns muddied into allotments. The intention was to offer a tantalizing glimpse of a garden city, a vision of an edible metropolis of shared abundance. Following the principles of psychogeography in figuratively turning a space back into a place, the transformation was predictably as fragile and short-lived as a mayfly.

There was an element of self-conscious irony in the ribbon-weaving frolics of the revelers' dance of celebration and resistance. While the act was anachronistic, the maypole dancers were aware that they were not agricultural workers blessing crops, probably did not want to encourage pregnancy, nor for the most part did they number among the industrial proletariat. However, there were authentic concerns in the make-believe. As the green echoed with pagan rituals, the throwback to yesteryear was motivated not by nostalgia, but an attempt to use social history to intervene in, and shift, the territory of present-day debates, literally flagging up, with green, red, and black flags, critical issues for the 21st century. The cabinet of curiosities that is Romanticism provides an inexhaustible wealth of images of nature, liberty, and

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imagination that conform to Walter Benjamin's idea of "wish images." Thompson (2011, 44) suggests that using Benjamin's approach, cultural activists can take "wish images" from the past as prefigurations of a potentially classless and utopian future.

In seeking to confront the British state in its symbolic heartland with their own utopian alternative, RTS's "earthy sexual carnival" (Reclaim the Streets 2000a, 6) had more recent progenitors. Pleasure, authenticity, imagination were watchwords of the theoretical inspiration in Situationism and social ecology. In Bookchin's (1980, 26) ecological society there would be room for "play, fantasy, and imagination." Tapping into the ludic potential of the subversive and creative energy of festivity was to continue the May 1968 spirit. Both EF! and RTS activists identified with critiques of industrial modernity by the Situationist International, for Blechman (1999, 246) "the pinnacle of the revolutionary avant-gardes of romanticism." There seemed to be an enduring relevance in the analysis of a "situation" in which disempowered populations, tenuously represented by politicians, existed as spectators of the power and celebrity of others rather than living authentically. The Situationists' rhetorical weapons against consumer society could be readily adapted for present purposes. A slogan from Roaul Vaneigem's 1965 Situationist tract *Revolution of Everyday Life* was emblazoned across leaflets for the 1999 Carnival Against Capital: "To work for delight and authentic festivity is undistinguishable from preparing for a general insurrection."

Conclusion

While refusing a dogmatic blueprint for a new society, the "avant gardeners" of the new Millennium, placed ecological concerns at the heart of their vision. The broadsheet *Financial Crimes* proclaimed "we are against all forms of oppression, and for a free and ecological society based on mutual aid and cooperation" (Reclaim the Streets 2000b, 11).

Taking Löwy and Sayre's definition of Romanticism as an umbrella term for multiple and ongoing expressions of disaffection with industrial capitalism, I have endeavored to demonstrate that EF! and RTS exemplify *neo*-Romanticism rooted in this historical tradition. Echoing 19th century concerns and tactics such as enclosure, Luddism, sabotage, and May Day festivity, they have inherited an array of aesthetic, imaginative, and ethical strategies, seeking to subvert the productivist priorities of capitalism in the cause of a post-capitalist future. They demonstrate an awareness of being a part of an older struggle for radical change, transcending the ephemeral circumstances of the immediate time and place.

It was also necessary for green anti-capitalist networks to evolve. The radical environmental networks not only echoed aspects of historic Romanticism but also adapted this tradition to meet new global risks within mostly urban contexts. The exploitation of information communication technologies, the mobilization of

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national and international opposition movements, and the use of data drawn from such fields as scientific ecology and economics all enable neo-Romantics to develop and amplify their critiques of capitalism.

Activism partly seeks to make history by seizing the day, rather than reliving the past. But the enduring presence of allusions to social history, for example the framing of May Day mobilizations within the traditions of pagan nature celebration, socialism, and anarchism was itself a political intervention. Around 1990 the term "social history" was made of two controversial elements that were contested in the charged discourse at the end of the Cold War. Margaret Thatcher's notorious phrase "There is no such thing as society" came to define a worldview that celebrated individualism, family, and the nation state, but refuted collectivist and cooperative aspirations. Also in the early 1990s, neoliberal pundits were enthusiastically endorsing Francis Fukuyama's famous claim that ideological conflict would cease following the Eastern Bloc's collapse, effectively resulting in the end of history. Triumphant Liberal democracy, based on free-market capitalism, it was proposed, would achieve universal hegemony as a consequence. The emerging anti-globalization movement vigorously challenged such a proposition. By asserting the continuing relevance of social history, activists were keeping open a space for change, indeed sustaining the possibilities for revolutionary transformation. To this end, several activist-orientated radical history groups emerged during the noughties in London, Bristol, and Nottingham, emphasizing history's importance for understanding and inspiring change in the present. Romantic dissent inevitably forms a significant part of their focus of interest.

It is appropriate that groups such as EF! should continually reinvent themselves, to adapt and evolve as networks rather than fixed institutions, and be fluid in their strategies and priorities. Green neo-Romanticism continues as a loose EF! network with allies such as Rising Tide and Critical Mass. The Occupy Movement, the latest challenge to the social and environmental costs of untrammeled capitalism, also demonstrated its awareness of its roots in the Romantic counterculture, taking up Shelley's celebrated lines from *The Masque of Anarchy*, "we are many, they are few," as a rallying cry. I have woven together strands that demonstrate that EF! and RTS can be fruitfully examined within this framework. While capitalism reaches most expansively in an era of advanced globalization, radical greens have been not only echoing but attempting to amplify Romantic dissent two centuries after its literary heyday.

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