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5 Where the Green Ants Dream Aspects of Community in Six Parts



Prelude

The terrorist events of September 11, 2001, highlighted that differences in location, culture, and states of consciousness have made others “Other” to us and us to them. As we struggle to analyze the differences among humans—those within our self-defined communities and those outside, those who are sympathetic to a shared version of modernity and those who are not—we also need to attempt to remember the samenesses. Existing as it does in both all space and no space, our species’s nature is utopian—of no place—yet omnipresent, an idea, a state of being so basic to our self-understanding that it is often ignored. Among the billions of categories of organisms that exist on this planet, from the cicadas in the garden to the cat sitting comfortably at my feet when I began working on this chapter, it is still with other humans that we share the greatest similarities.

Indeed, in addition to challenging our sense of difference, September 11 also changed the way we think about *community*. The word seemed to take on new and deeper associations, as New York City and the nation, miraculously, functioned as a community in the face of unimaginable catastrophe and loss. I try to remind myself often that my first and primary community, my first point of identification, is as a human being, and I agonize—*agonisesthai* (bring into contention)—our collective failure to acknowledge the most

basic needs and sufferings of all humans. At the same time, I am always searching for signs of success—manifestations of compassion for our shared humanity beyond national and cultural boundaries, beyond locality, beyond an awareness of difference.

To approach the subject of community is to be thrust into complexity: the degree to which we are disconnected from so much of what defines individual societies—landscape, relations between men and women, indigenous cultures, language—and yet we are also irrevocably interconnected. Although we are unable to avoid the complexity of the world we have constructed, we are equally unable to avoid the complexity of ourselves—the mix of our contemporary desires with the longings that hearken back to other moments of societal development. When we speak about community, are we not really considering the following questions: What types of relationships with others in our species are we capable of sustaining? What do humans need? What is it that we want, and what keeps us from actualizing these ideals?

Traditional Communities: Dreaming the Past

While first conceptualizing this chapter I was living in Eressos, a small Greek village on the western coast of the island of Mytiline across from Turkey. It is also known as Lesbos. Entranced by village life and attempting to understand the meaning of my own atavistic desire to connect with the premodern, I have spent quite a bit of time in such remote, unlikely, but, nonetheless, often reassuring locations.

This village exists in two parts. One is the town of Eressos, a remote location made famous by the Greek poet Sappho, who lived here when in exile. The other is Skala Eressos, the beach town where natives and others go to swim. Some tourists come up from the beach to the *plateia* (central plaza) of Eressos for lunch or dinner—mostly lesbians from Germany, Italy, or Greece who are making pilgrimages to the site where Sappho once lived. The villagers don't seem to mind the presence of these women, who are often obviously in couples. Such otherness does not offend them. They are not it; it is not them; the differences remain intact but seem only to create respectful curiosity.

On a physical level, there is comfort in the size of Eressos, its placement on the top of a hill providing a vantage point for observation, the human scale of the buildings, the simplicity and uniformity of the structures—all white stucco or gray brick, modest trim in blue, green, red—an unself-conscious homogeneity of color and design positioned around a central plaza, or *plateia*, with four small *kafenions* (cafés) and *tavernas* (taverns). It is not simply the arrangement of buildings that is satisfying; it is the way of life such order reflects and facilitates: the bakery, the small fruit market,

the grocery store all exist in proportion to serve the needs of the village community. This modest scale results in little waste. Each day only so much bread is baked, fish brought to sell, tomatoes or watermelons picked for consumption. When the shopkeepers run out of a product, it is over, finished, they say, until the next day. Only what is in season, only what can be carried from the fields, only what is desired is offered for sale. Everything is dependent on locality and physicality, ritual, and routine.

In the village, life is much as it always has been. The elderly are still integrated into daily life. They remain in their ancestral homes even during old age, with the entirety of village life surrounding them. There is public space where they can sit and talk—women outside their homes, men in the cafés. The villagers have the companionship of others from their generation and friends who bear witness to the trajectory of their lives. In many cases their children have left for the cities and return at intervals, for holidays, vacations, when their parents need more care. The villagers grow food in their gardens. Within this village population, among the constant inhabitants (not the tourist or weekenders from Athens who visit sporadically) no one has dramatically more material wealth than anyone else. If anyone did, he or she might choose to live elsewhere. The villagers share the name days of the saints and celebrate their namings together—Evangelia, Marina, Maria, all holy days. Even the village has a patron saint whose name day is celebrated with a festival, or *panagyri*. Here no one uses the word *community*. They don't need to. "Spoken of community (more exactly: a community speaking of itself) is a contradiction in terms," writes Zygmunt Bauman. "Organic communities just *are*."¹

The village lives in a premodern condition, modernity and postmodernity move through it, but with one of the few Communist Party headquarters left in Greece, it is almost as it was fifty, or even one hundred, years ago. Only the hardware store has a computer to keep track of the movement of stock. What is comforting for the contemporary human organism in all of this? Probably the three things Bauman tells us humans have needed and continue to need from society: "certainty, security, and safety."² It is interesting to observe how these desires coexist in us, how the memory of such a life lives on in the individual and collective imaginations. The village represents a peasant life that many residents of major urban centers of the United States would find ultimately boring and isolating; yet most people would also respond to elements of its simplicity with a certain amount of relief. Many North Americans are descended from peasant stock. Although those who reach the middle class or above often try hard to dissociate themselves from these origins, there is nonetheless familiarity and comfort, for example, in not driving a car, hearing only the sounds of birds and goats, seeing a sky colonized by stars, swimming in clear water, and feeling safe to walk the labyrinthine streets any hour of the day or night.

As old men play backgammon and drink thick coffee—the latter a legacy of Turkish occupation—I listen to women speak of old age and their inability to walk as they once did, and I recognize yet again that the simplicity and difficulties of human day-to-day needs is here occurring simultaneously with the hectic pace of life in Tokyo, Bangkok, New York, and Paris, although the psychic space between these localities is immense. It is easy to romanticize the samenesses and the postmodern interventions that exist in all these spaces, but it is much harder to articulate the actual differences. So when intellectuals speak about the peripheries and the center, few imagine the distance that must be traveled between these spatial and nonspatial points of origin and destination. If one wants to theorize accurately about the totality of the contemporary experience, one needs to spend some time observing it, or it can be too easy to imagine that technological inventions like the Internet actually have transformed everyone's daily lives.

When we finally do bring our urban, modern, postmodern selves into direct connection with our own premodern desires for physical and psychic comfort, then we cannot fail to observe, as did Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that civilization, as it progresses and becomes increasingly complex, does not necessarily make us happier.³ Since we have created this world in which most of us live in the West, why do we not make it more habitable, for everyone? Is it because we are caught by the contradiction of our bodies seeking safety in modest scale, silence, and simplicity, while our minds race uncontrollably toward the new, the complexity of culture, and constant diversion? Or is it that although our minds are comforted by such calmness, our bodies seek stimulation? Why, Frankfurt School critical theorists might ask, are we evolving a world that does not satisfy our most basic desires? Or are we just trying to leave the body—an unrepentant vestigial organ—and are stuck midstream, still daunted by its urgencies? Where is our basic species nature located? Can it be transformed? What will happen if and when we are able to supersede our own animality? What shape might our desires then take?

Artificial Intelligence: Dreaming the Future

It has become fashionable to theorize the “posthuman,” but are we not in truth simultaneously fascinated with and also terrified by this notion? Who can objectively study the demise of our species, as we have known it, as we have lived it? The Spielberg-Kubrick film *A.I.* (2001) explored this concept in a surprisingly philosophical way, proving once again how film, literature, and art can articulate humans' deepest fears and desires, making them conscious and reintegrating them into our collective psyche.

Within the narrative, the corporeal yet ethereal creatures that evolve when humans have already become extinct, two million years after the beginning

of the film (a time already in the future), emerge after the polar ice cap has melted and much of the world is underwater, including all of New York. This new hyperintelligent species has never known humans, so its members are very grateful when they retrieve a cyborg boy from the bottom of the sea where, miraculously, he has been preserved in a sunken car for centuries. Although he is not human himself, he *knew* humans and, most significantly, was created by them to simulate their image and desires. This new species, quite gentle and kind, is anxious for the cyborg child to tell them all he knows about human life. They recognize that even this child, although not of real flesh, still has residual desires programmed into him by his human creators. If they learn something about these desires, perhaps they will come closer to understanding the human species. With their extremely developed telepathic faculties, they can understand his needs by merely touching his head with one of their elongated, diaphanous fingers. Living as they do in the world of simultaneous time and space, they are able to offer him the actualization of unfulfilled dreams from the past. This cyborg child most desires his human mother, who has been dead for centuries. He is told that through their technology they can return her to him for a day. But they can conjure her only once. After that she will be gone forever. He accepts the terms, however brief, desperately hoping he will finally experience the joy of unconditional love, something he never knew while she was alive when she always favored her human son. He wants to be the truly beloved son, if only for a day, if only in a dream of the past returned.

Once the cyborg boy and his human mother are reunited, they have a perfectly intimate, almost Oedipal, day together, and she lavishes her affection on him and she does tell him how much she loves him. But when she goes to sleep that night she is lost forever and can never again be awakened. It is the most romantic version of human love—ephemeral, touched with the inevitability of loss. Merging two disparate genres—science fiction and fairy tale, one looking forward, the other back—the story is a fairy tale of the future, a projection of what might be imagined on the unfulfilled idealization of what never was. Here, in this Spielberg-optimistic and Kubrick-dark amalgam of a sci-fi film, even the cyborg body—it alone beyond death and destruction—is programmed with the strengths and weaknesses of human emotions and, as such, can neither be fulfilled nor ignored for very long.

Spielberg is hearkening back to the love of the organic when the human world he is projecting has long moved beyond it, or has used its ability to create cyborgs to establish new hierarchies—classes of beings divided between those of the flesh and those not of flesh. It is the organic that separates the classes in this future time when dominance, prejudice, and brutality still reign. But, ironically, it is the fabricated boy who survives and, more than all the humans in the film, is capable of deep love and affection. He has suffered the humiliations of human capriciousness and cruelty, but his programmed

desire for happiness through love, designed by humans in their projected, perfected image of themselves, has survived as an ideal for centuries.

What can we make of this allegory? Perhaps it is telling us that humans live at a crossroads, desiring the evolution of their own ability to transform the organic and rid themselves of the inadequacies of the body forever, while longing for an intimacy of experience still associated *with* the body and its vulnerability. When we imagine the evolution of the species, it is often expected that the inevitabilities of the flesh—its degeneration, decay, and ultimate death, its ability to torment us with pain and desire—will be transcended because humans, in the projected future, will be able to control whatever it will mean when we say *the body*. And we imagine that, freed from the biological body, we will also be free of the schisms caused by differences of race, class, ethnicity, and so we romanticize this technologically derived, seemingly liberated future. But Spielberg sees something else: What characterizes the species at all stages of its evolution is an inescapable longing for connection, intimacy, and community, all of which are often thwarted, while at the same time we are haunted by a profound insensitivity to the suffering of others who, whether human or cyborg, share the same desires and pains, whether they are organically or technologically programmed (as some type of “human”) to feel them.

Spielberg is speculating on the future, and it is through a fiction about the future that we come to see the present—the degree to which we obstruct the possibility of community by replicating difference and maintaining the hierarchies of value that are used to justify brutality. As a filmmaker he is giving us a glimmer of how cyborgs might unbalance the social structures that exist. And in so doing he is warning us about how oblivious we are to the consequences of our inventions and what this obliviousness might mean for future societies.

Science fiction has always presented the future to talk about the present. And fairy tales have always looked to a mythical past to talk about how the unconscious clings to a lost world that tries to control the present one. What does it mean when such ideas are put into the public sphere—the place where individuals become citizens and as such ask difficult questions about society’s direction? How do these ideas reflect the complex relationship of the individual to the society? And can we use public space (in this case created by a film) to help chart the evolution of the species and the progression of ideas about our own existence on this planet as they progress through art, popular culture, and other forms of social organization?

The Public Sphere: A Permeable Membrane

At this difficult moment in history, when the notion of space has taken on a new virtual dimension and time seems to have accelerated beyond what

is healthy for the human organism, can we imagine a public sphere within which we in the United States could live and openly discuss the complex evolution of our species-life together? Could we construct a space in which individual desire could intersect with societal concerns and we could debate those issues around which there is disagreement? Complicating this imagining is that it is unclear what constitutes the public sphere in America or exactly where the line between the private and public domains is drawn. Bauman writes:

It is no longer true that the “public” is set on colonizing the “private.” The opposite is the case: it is the private that colonizes the public space, squeezing out and chasing away everything which cannot be fully, without residue, translated into the vocabulary of private interests and pursuits. . . . For the individual, the public space is not much more than a giant screen on which private worries are projected without, in the course of magnification, ceasing to be private: the public space is where public confession of private secrets and intimacies is made.⁴

If Bauman’s thesis is correct, then democracy itself, which is dependent on the debate of public issues in the public sphere, is seriously challenged.

I’m not sure when I first noticed that the United States had become a society of confession, and that public space had been “colonized” with the “intimacies of private life,”⁵ that politics was no longer about issues, that newspapers seemed filled with gossip posing as news, with celebrities appearing on the *Tonight Show* to tell the public why they were getting a divorce, and Bill Clinton, when still president, being asked on television what type of underwear he wore. At a certain point it seemed there was no longer a public sphere, just a private sphere relocated to the public arena. Maybe it started in 1984 when Gary Hart, then running in the presidential primary, confessed adultery, his wife at his side, on national television. At the time, many were shocked by what are now familiar, ritualized public acts of absolution. I thought, “To *whom* is he confessing? What community does he think cares?” If everything is now public, what *are* the truly private issues? And how does one understand the degree to which one’s private problems are often rooted in social inadequacies whose solutions frequently rest in the public sphere? How does one make the link back from the personal to the societal? And if one does not, and if we do not, then what does the concept of society mean?

Most citizens are now compelled to seek “biographic solutions to systemic contradictions” and inevitably to “reduce the complexity of their predicament.”⁶ And such behavior can only support the delusions of a capitalist system that blames the individual for his or her lack of success and engenders citizens who do the same. Has the emphasis on the private collapsed the public, or has the death of the public—the residue of spectacle society—overemphasized the private and therefore overshadowed any sense of

public? Whatever the origins of this situation, it certainly has successfully reinforced individualism at the expense of citizenship and destroyed the belief in, and facility and desire for, dreaming new organizations of society into existence.

The act of dreaming a future for society has slipped out of fashion. Postmodernism as a philosophical and theoretical movement in thought and art making liberated us from certain hierarchies of value that needed to be displaced, but it has also made the notion of imagining any type of cohesive future appear sentimental and nostalgic. To believe in hope, to want to conceptualize the public good, to value one's role as a citizen, and to believe in public discourse have all been labeled provincial or naive in this contemporary global debate. Yet without such imaginings, where are we—the human community—headed? We continue to want to talk about community within our new deterritorialized condition, and yet we know that the distinctions of inside and outside, private and public, so fundamental to our notion of community, are in flux. Bauman writes, "Once information could travel independently of its carriers, and with a speed far beyond the capacity of even the most advanced means of transportation (as in the kind of society we all nowadays inhabit), the boundary between 'inside' and 'outside' could no longer be drawn, let alone sustained."⁷

Eric Hobsbaum observed, "Never was the word 'community' used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life."⁸ Or, as Jock Young writes, "Just as community collapses, identity is invented."⁹ Bauman continues, "Identity owes the attention it attracts and the passions it begets to being a *surrogate of community*: of that allegedly 'natural home' which is no longer available in the rapidly privatized and individualized, fast globalizing world."¹⁰ Surely it is this "natural" home that we all still seek, like the lonely cyborg child. Or perhaps it is a longing only those of us raised in modernism continue to experience, those who believe that there should be some place where we might transcend alienation and feel, if only for a time, safe and loved.

This new version of community that is called identity could be understood as that which emerges out of political conflict or repression. It could be understood as what comes after alienation when we separate from others of our species and make our difference our defining quality. Or it could be understood as what stands in the way of real political interaction or meaningful change in the social order. It could represent the privatization of the political and social realms, or it could be a transitional stage to reach the political in a new, fuller way, one in which all difference is included in the debate. Such disparate interpretations of identity are fought out among those who claim strong identities as a place of community, but the origins of these feelings, and what they tell us about the evolution of the nature of our

understanding of community, often remain unarticulated in public space. It feels at times as if community as a concept has come to mean smaller and smaller units of distinguishing characteristics and histories, more exclusive than inclusive, and rarely moving the species out from these groupings to embrace a greater whole.

In truth most of us live simultaneously in multiple states of consciousness and identify with multiple communities. We are happy to acknowledge these complex identities and to find others whose identities also resist simplification. But in our need to cope with the ubiquitous nature of the global and our sense of impotence to affect it, many of us gravitate to more local, imaginable, and manageable communities. And so inevitably we land *some place* where we can negotiate inside and outside, private and public, self and other, individual and collective, a place where we can function as individuals working with other individuals to bring something larger than our circumscribed identities into existence. Having found our own point of location, we inevitably bring to it our expectations of what humans can accomplish together—and are usually alternately satisfied and frustrated by what we learn from the exercise.

Locating Locality

As the complexity of globalization, and one's opportunity for action within it, frustrate even the most sophisticated nomadic voyagers, finding a base that can serve as a platform for actualizing one's values becomes even more essential. It allows us to work for the present but also to dream for the future and perhaps to create an intentional community founded on certain agreed-upon principles. Of course, such self-conscious community building reflects the dynamics found in the larger society and therefore allows us to be more cognizant of what it takes to create coherent societies. Also, theorizing without a base can be dangerous. It makes us intolerant of all those who have constituencies to answer to and must, moment by moment, negotiate conflicting versions of reality. Praxis keeps us rooted—safe from hypothesizing in the ether.

The School of the Art Institute had been my location of practice for almost three decades. I did not set out to have the school be such a focus. Originally I came to teach literature and philosophy, but over time the combination of my own innate skills and the needs of the institution pulled me closer to its core. With others I entered into the project we call the School. During this period I had been able to observe daily what it means to negotiate a historically based community of creative people and to help dream them and it into the future.

In art schools, places where past and future interweave, idealism about the work that is being produced, the values embedded in it, as well as

the way in which such institutions are governed are omnipresent. On one hand, such art-making environments are the repositories of tradition where skills and knowledge about art are passed from one generation to the next. On the other hand, they are places of great experimentation and innovation where leaps are made conceptually and practically, new forms developed, ideas generated, and cultural transformations absorbed—constantly. They are locations that help create the new but also are *unsettled* by it. They gain their identity in the local but are organically global—reflecting the international nature of the art world. And they create a community for many people whose unique skills are often undervalued by society at large.

Such institutions educate the next generation of artists and designers from places like Chicago and the rest of the world, and they also help educate those who will be the ongoing audience for art and design. Art schools also extend the notion of a creative community to those outside the institution who are interested in the artists, designers, and thinkers who are brought as visitors; the shows mounted in the galleries; the films and videos presented in the film centers; and the public intellectuals sought out for their ideas. Colleges and universities organically extend the radius of their own communities, creating larger units of those motivated by similar passions. In this sense, such environments reach out to many and serve their larger communities in ways often not acknowledged. What an advantage for a small U.S. town, or a large one for that matter, to have a major cultural or educational center as part of its core. How great are the advantages daily offered by these institutions to everyone who might want to make use of the provided opportunities?

But when there is controversy and work shown in art schools and arts institutions comes under attack, such institutions are thrust into another relationship with the public. Too often the response of the arts institution itself is to pull up the drawbridges and to polarize into the notion of “us” while the society outside becomes “them.” The world is then divided between those who speak the language of art making and those who do not. The particularity of the artist’s vision needs to be understood, but that conversation is often not possible once there is anger and certain groups feel offended. Yet the negotiations that then ensue are often not unlike those of citizens seeking equilibrium between themselves and the collective.

Such environments are fragile because they constantly try to create a certain set of conditions that will allow for the development of creative work, such as a certainty of physical and psychic space. In this the efforts of these communities mirror the stability that humans require from society in general. The academics and staff who govern and run the institution day to day must provide a place for the students and faculty that nurtures their creativity and allows for experimentation but also is capable of reining them

in when they extend so far as to endanger themselves, those around them, or the institution itself.

Students are in school to develop their own creativity, but not in isolation. Their interrogations may begin with issues of form, content, or successful execution, but should extend to create a contextualization for the work that is inclusive of the history of art making, their immediate environment, as well as of the conditions of the world.

At the same time that faculty members are leading students through this process of self-reflexivity and helping them to develop a facility for making such evaluations, they are themselves also engaged in the same process—making work, evaluating it, contemplating difficult decisions, and putting ideas out into the public arena. They are also balancing the weight of the past with the discourse of the present and the risks necessary to influence the future. Art schools therefore resemble universities as well as factories, design offices, production houses, showrooms, laboratories, and galleries. Yet there is uniqueness in art school training marked by this emphasis on process and visibility of work at various stages of development.

It would seem that even the most creative people, able to envision myriad new forms and approaches to their own art making, should be able to create equally innovative, institutional structures to support their ongoing creative and pedagogical activities. But this is not always the case. Too often there is comfort in perpetuating traditionally perceived hierarchies between faculty and administration, as well as between faculty and staff. Unnecessary restrictions that attempt to privilege one form of art making over another, to restrict the movement of students within the curriculum, and to contain the physical environment in ways that are often counterproductive to students’ creative growth also are often programmed into the structure of the institution. Such developments reflect a fear of the creative potential at the heart of the mission of these institutions. The contradictions of such unnecessary polarizations and categorizations often go unexamined, justified by a certain anxiety about the place of such institutions in the world, the place also of artists in the world.

And, unfortunately, perpetuated at times in art schools whose curricula are experimental is an infantilized sense of helplessness, a perceived inability to change structures to make them suit the constantly evolving potential of a creative community. Although intellectually supportive of the idea of removing boundaries, faculty members and arts administrators sometimes become frightened when the walls finally do come down. The anxiety often accompanying change and transformation exists in even the most creative people. In general, only a rare few are willing to leap into untested universes of production, and fewer still are willing to assume roles of leadership and then to understand such work as not only necessary, but also creative.

As a result, these institutions, which bring such play and innovation into the world through educating the next generation of artists, can miss the opportunities to bring the same energy to their own organizational structures which, if liberated from the weight of tradition, could add so much to the public discourse about leadership and pedagogy. From these environments, where governance, process, and creativity are central, we can learn just how difficult it is to build and sustain truly creative communities and to communicate their achievements to a larger society.

How can we develop creative leadership that encourages new concepts of community? What about those less tangible communities based on ideas and brought together outside institutions? Unrestrained by the specificity of place and tradition, what type of new terrain can they offer the imagination?

Ethical Communities

To the search for useful ways to talk about deterritorialized communities based on ideas, communities that take into account the contraries of the personal and the public, the local and the global, the human and the cyborg, the imaginary and the real, I add the notion of ethical communities. Such entities are brought into existence by people of shared values and are established around collective concerns such as the effects of globalization, world poverty, the living wage, racism, AIDS research and care for patients, restorative justice, global warming, freedom of expression, and the continued manifestation of the creative spirit through socially focused art and sustainable design production. Perhaps one is never so much at home as when in connection with others whose point of origin might be completely different from one's own, but whose deductions about the nature of society and its preferred values are at least very close to one's own. Such communities, founded around ethical evaluations of the necessary directions for society, might exist in what Buddhists call the "tenth world," the world of right now, the most present present, neither of the past nor the future, not bound by place, institution, or identity, and dreamed into existence to address immediate issues and committed to activism as a way of effectively mobilizing the world into action.

Together such groups could create visions of new futures—realistic utopias—able to incorporate the concept of the "human," which is being reconfigured daily, to move beyond those polarizing issues of identity that become new borders or roadblocks inhibiting the development of "species being." In this concept of species being Marx tried to encompass the full range of potential within which the species could best use its own capacities of reason and imagination. It is an important concept to bring back into discussion, because it allows us to imagine again the notion of the

potentiality of the species to evolve. What are we capable of imagining and bringing into existence, not simply because we *can* but because we truly believe such innovations of thought will improve the lives of everyone? Peace movements, for example, have brought together widely dispersed groups of people who may not agree on much else but who share the goal of world peace. Environmental movements have done the same. And now, in spite of geographic distance, new types of unimagined communities have already been brought into existence. Such groups mobilize their actions over the Internet and are too varied, too complex, too otherworldly to enumerate here. But their presence has become ubiquitous and, for younger generations, essential.

We saw movements launched online. The "anti-globalization" movement really caught the public eye when it first began its interventions in multiple locations organizing its membership through the Internet. It was the absence of geographic boundaries that first characterized this community. But I am not sure what form anti-globalization activities can take now that such new horrific meaning has become attached to this discourse by acts of terrorism launched against the symbols of global capital. It is clear that, on one hand, the rapid move to globalization from business, industry, and governments will be difficult to turn back. The force propelling it forward, like the profit margin, for many is great. Yet there is an increasing concern about who is being excluded from the new "global village." Writing, thinking, and new discourses have been developed in an attempt to understand the impact on all aspects of society, from traditional indigenous communities to major urban centers.

A movement of young people, trying to bring conscience to this runaway train, became an international mobilization of resistance that used the vehicles of technology to convene, so to speak, its group meetings. And these protesters certainly kept the heads of state on alert in Seattle, Prague, Rome, and Genoa. However theatrical the actions of these groups are, and at times even futile their tactics may seem, they *are* deeply concerned with issues that, for the most part, do not affect them directly and are outside their local, personal spheres of interest. They are willing to travel great distances and put themselves at physical risk in order to communicate the injustices of global capitalism, and they are willing to assume that role until national leaders recognize such concerns and address them. The anti-globalization activists want to make apparent something many average citizens have already come to understand: "Our dependencies are now truly global, our actions, however, are, as before, local."¹¹ And for some it is precisely the local that is being affected by globalization, economically and culturally, leaving people impoverished on both fronts.

These activists are articulating universal fears about a world both exploding in complexity and speed of ideological change and shrinking in

its intricate interconnectedness. These fears were manifested through the catastrophes in New York and Washington. Not only were those metropolitan centers deeply wounded by the events of September 11, the economies of places as far-flung as Hawaii, Switzerland, and Japan were affected as well. The acts of destruction were targeted at high finance and government, but they affected thousands of small businesses, factory workers, city workers, and artists, tumbling everyone into an already looming economic recession. No events could have been more local and yet, in cause and effect, more global.

When the buildup for the Iraq war began, demonstrations took place across the country, and thousands turned out for these marches. Many of those mobilizing the protestors were high school students who had not participated in such dramatic gestures before. Yet it was their energy—certainly this was true in Chicago—that motivated veterans of earlier protests to get back out on to the streets. Groups came together for that purpose as they always have, but this time word of mouth was a conversation in cyberspace. Many chat rooms and Web sites are in themselves manifestations of ethical communities, where those who share the same values, to keep difficult conversations alive, and those who protest injustice and reckless behavior, wherever they can, come together to share information, debate, and organize petitions, demonstrations, actions.

Where the Green Ants Dream

How can we reconcile contradictory claims of community—the premodern and the contemporary, the public and private spheres, the creative and reactionary, the local and the global? How can we truly measure the transformations of consciousness that occur every day, as people recognize, and begin to take responsibility for, their effect on this planet? I turn here to the work of an artist whose manifested vision of the intersection of incongruous meetings of cultural difference at times has allowed such contraries to coexist.

Werner Herzog's 1985 film *Where the Green Ants Dream* is in part about such extreme polarizations of lifestyles and values. Central to the plot is a confrontation between a group of aboriginal Australians and mining representatives who plan a series of explosions that they hope will yield valuable minerals. A young engineer chooses the site of demolition based on the richness of the ore to be found there. He is about to detonate the explosives when a group of aboriginal elders arrives to protect this site from violation.

We can easily imagine what happens next: The Australian aborigines, centered on a connection to the land, indigenous communities, ancient wisdom, and dreaming, stand in direct opposition to the mining company, which is run according to capitalist principles that affirm profit and the

illusion of “progress” as the motivators of action and the annihilators of all ethical criteria. For the aborigines the situation is dire. They believe this is sacred land, where, at this precise location, the green ants are dreaming the universe into existence. If the ants are awakened, or the coherence of their dream disturbed, chaos might be unleashed and the planet obliterated.

What is apparent throughout the film is that speed is the most destructive force. The strength of the aborigines rests in their patience. They stop the project by slowing it down—sitting, chanting, and praying while refusing to move. They inform the young geologist that they represent 40,000 years on earth, and during that time they have not destroyed the land as the white man—a relative newcomer—has already done. Understanding the earth as they do, they have time on their side. They move slowly, refusing to be rushed. And the explosions are finally halted. The young geologist, deeply affected by the clarity and complexity of their vision and their power to actualize it, drops out of the center of modern life to join them on its peripheries. The aborigines not only win the battle but win over his consciousness as well.

Placing a high value on dreams and dreaming has been central to many aboriginal societies. We know this from studying indigenous American cultures like the Oglala Sioux, for whom dreams dreamt by holy men were taken so seriously that at times they were enacted by the entire tribe. We know that in indigenous cultures what is seen in dreams often becomes conscious subject matter for art and music. But in U.S. society, one of the most utilitarian of all societies, little value is placed on dreams and dreaming. We seem unwilling to affirm the integration of myth and the unconscious with consciousness and of our need for this to occur.

Dreaming for the future, Pierre Bourdieu tells us, is not likely to occur in “people who lack a hold on their present.”¹² And certainly this characterizes contemporary U.S. society in general. But there are people, even now, who are constantly reimagining not just their future but also their present, and the present and future of the collective. They are the creative minds to which one must turn at times like these, when the world is sent into turmoil and the failure of a coherent vision for our own society's future is all too apparent. They are the green ants dreaming. They make the “art,” as Bauman writes, “that transforms the improbable into the inevitable.”¹³ And they create innovative structures that help humanity.

If such values were central to the prevailing contemporary U.S. society, those who make their life's work the dreaming of the future of the society, not for their own economic aggrandizement but for humanity, would become its most valued citizens. Such creative people dream their dreams for the future on many fronts and can be found working in health care, education, numerous nongovernment offices, environmental agencies, urban planning, and in their studios as artists, designers, and intellectuals. The work of *dreaming the future* is at the core of the lives of such people and of

such communities. Creative activist organizations are not only *against* but also *for*, no longer solely convened by place but also by ideas. Such communities, Slavoj Žižek suggests, can help us move from a society that says, as many citizens did in response to September 11, “A thing like this should not happen HERE!” to “A thing like this should not happen ANYWHERE!”¹⁴ Such a simple shift could change America’s approach to its own citizens, its foreign policy, and to the world.

It may be that globalization *is* truly the “revenge of the nomads,”¹⁵ and movement has won out over staying put to redefine for many the notion of community as no longer only local and particular but global and inclusive. And it may be that the positive radicalness of this is that the hierarchies previously created to maintain oppressive forms of order will be transformed. But without a vision for how to use this potentially positive “disorder,” new boundaries *will* be created along new lines. We have been watching such polarizing discourses enter the language every day since September 11. Without a sense of history, without a re-cognition of what has come before, new divisive patterns and hierarchies will simply replace the old. If we have learned anything from watching the destruction of the World Trade Center it is that the notion of progress is contested territory. One community’s definition of progress is another’s nightmare and target for destruction. Progress, as we have understood it in the West, *can be obliterated. Its dominance is not inevitable.*

Although it is fashionable to assume that in this century communities will become predominantly exterritorial, nongeographic, nonphysical, and that *place* itself will be irrevocably “devalued,”¹⁶ there is still no doubt that what many crave is something as traditional, local, and essential to democracy as the Athenian agora, the public-market space, where ideas as well as goods are exchanged. The impetus for such space, whether actual or cyber, is to create a location where humans can meet as citizens to do the business of society, enjoy the company of others, and imagine engaging the process of the future together. Such places are also where humans can come together to mourn collective tragedy—another form of community—that turned a city as urban and urbane as New York into a village, where a local newspaper, the *New York Times*, told the stories and showed the faces of all who died on September 11. One hopes that by now all Americans recognize that, just as innocent people were killed in New York, innocent people have also died in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, and that we are now deeply connected to these tragedies and will continue to be for decades.

Without recognizing how potentially powerful these desires for an ethical and humane response to the needs of others are—through activist projects, and acts of compassion, in physical space as well as in ideas—all visions of future communities will not satisfy, because they will deny the original community, the one we all share and, like all organic communities, rarely

discuss—our humanity. The collective project of our species is to engage in its own conscious evolution beyond individual identity, difference, and nationhood. Its success can best be measured by how well we care for, protect, and value one another’s lives. Such basic aspects of community take place in the tenth world of the most present present and should exist at the core of our species nature.

Notes

An earlier version of this chapter was presented in the paper series of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts (2002).

1. Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 12.
2. *Ibid.*, 72.
3. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1958).
4. Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2001), 107.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, 106.
7. Bauman, *Community*, 13–14.
8. As cited in Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, 151.
9. As cited in *ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. As cited in *ibid.*, 29.
13. *Ibid.*, 32.
14. Slavoj Žižek, “Welcome to the Desert of the Real,” circulated on the Internet, November 2001: www.theglobalsite.ac.uk/times.
15. Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, 35.
16. *Ibid.*, 38.

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For my mother, Helen Becker, 1908–2005,

in love and gratitude