

ClearCut – The Wages of Dominion (condensed)

A Guided Meditation

And God blessed them and said unto them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that crawls upon the earth."

The Invitation

The first thing to happen in **ClearCut** after the burly, big-hearted men with chainsaws leave; after the trimmings and underbrush is bulldozed into slash piles and the topsoil compacted under the tracks of very big machines; after the last logging truck is heading down the mountain to fill great ships headed for China and Korea and Japan; after Bird has flown and Animal has fled...

After that, *but just before* departing Spirit takes refuge in our unconscious and the great silence of buried shame settles like morning hoarfrost over the violated land... The first thing to happen, if you are lucky enough to be present in such a moment, is a glimmer of recognition. A recognition of something deep inside.

In this moment, if you are sitting on an old stump amid such a spectacle with nothing better to do, nowhere to go, no message to convey, or evidence to collect - merely absorbing the immensity of the silence surrounding you – it may come as a shock that the first thing to happen is a furtive implication of complicity, and with it an intimation of great beauty.

As the early morning mists rise out of **ClearCut** to rejoin the sky, the scene resembles a battlefield littered with body parts, blood, and the bilious spilling innards of steaming corpses; hollow-eyed soldiers scavenging among the smoking ruins. Dark visions of apocalypse arise in the mind. The book of Revelation.

It may be hard to not look away, but I invite you to climb up and join me here, to look a little deeper. We're sitting eight feet or so above the ground on a giant stump, which, until yesterday was a towering Western Red Cedar growing in place for sixteen hundred years, surrounded as far as anyone could map by a diversity of flora and fauna exceeded only in tropical rainforests. A full sixteen feet across, we could square dance up here. Sap still oozes from its cambium like a congealing scream. Breathe in its intense heady aroma as the smell mingles with the fumes of compacted mud giving up its fetid oxygen. Bereft of life, we are now alone.

Let the tension in your shoulders be swept away by the breeze. Relax your jaw, suspend your disbelief, but stay alert to the wind luffing in your ears, for sometimes it carries messages. If comfortable, close your eyes, and breathe in, deeply. Except for the sound of an occasional lonesome leftover frog croaking from the pools that fill the tracks left by the big machines, all is silence. Sit with me on this stump. Be still for a while. Open, as wide as you are able, and remember who you are.

In this vast and sudden transition moment there is a message coming our way. It is not my message; it is our loving mother, the living planet Gaia speaking. Speaking directly to us, speaking through many stern voices today, in many languages, shaking us to wake up. They are all saying the same thing: "despair is the enemy, not others."

This ancient Cedar has a voice too, but it is as soft as a ghost, as gentle as a mother, and achieves its authority only in our stillness, in our ability to be attentive to its meaning. If we love life, and if we wish to discover a source of hope, it is important to know who we as a species have become. To know that, we must look clear-eyed at what we have done. Stay with the feelings that arise, especially the grief, and the rage that may ensue. Weep your heart out, and let the tears cleanse your rage.

ClearCut is an apt metaphor for our current human condition, and this exhibition is a guided meditation, a journey through despair to recognition and acceptance of our personal complicity in the fatal human character flaw of dominion. We pay a brief visit to the waystation of guilt and blame, then on to the discovery of an urgent message our mother Gaia has been trying to deliver to us for generations: that the evolution of human consciousness must continue beyond dominion into *communion* if She – if we – are to continue receiving the gift of life and passing that gift along to our children and grandchildren. Contrition and forgiveness are required milestones to visit before we can affectively set out on the path of atonement and reparations - *the path of making things right*.

Do not underestimate the enormity, or the difficulty, of this shift. Please do not underestimate its importance.

* * * * *

Complicity

Maybe you've been to war. Maybe you've been a logger. Maybe you've built a back porch or a deck or a closet of this very cedar. Or maybe, like me, you only read newspapers or think toilet paper and a hot shower are two of the greatest creations of human civilization. Maybe, like me, you fill your tank, stock your fridge, watch your mutual funds, and stare at the news – transfixed in horror – and cast your ballot.

Maybe, like me, you rail at Big Oil, Big Food, the capitalists of Wall Street and their puppet politicians, while taking pains to separate yourself from them by recycling your plastic baggies, riding your bike to work, signing petitions, and donating to a Democrat.

It's not enough, of course. Forgive me, but I am speaking here about the recognition of complicity in the evil of species supremacy. Unseen, shielded from consciousness by busyness, distraction, and righteous

indignation, the evil of dominion that justifies this **ClearCut** has been with us all along, slinking around in the subsoil of consciousness even before Eve ate the apple. We've been struggling with this original sin of species hegemony in our art and philosophy and politics for hundreds of generations. Ironically, our origin story tells us in Genesis that this dominion is God-given. We mistook it for license, and daily deepen its resultant wounding.

Our deeply internalized habits of dominion conspire with the brain's attempt to seduce us away from the horrific effects of our collective behavior - guilt, and its denial, rage. But if we choose to take up residence in guilt and blame, we are simply perpetuating and reinforcing an ancient lie, a lie that has separated us from Spirit for millennia: the lie that we are entitled, that *it all belongs to us, not vice versa*. The lie that it is all here to serve us, not vice versa. Or the lie that it is someone else, not us.

We then not only miss the beauty of this great truth of complicity, but in perpetuating this lie we further separate ourselves from our own species, declaring war in our hearts against those *others* we identify as responsible, and elevating ourselves via blame above the rest of our kind. As if it weren't us! How complicit of us to so cleverly by-pass entirely the opportunity for responsibility embedded in the recognition of our complicity.

Just because I didn't wield the chainsaw; just because I didn't oversee the Forest Service that administered the logging contracts; just because I didn't own the land or the extraction companies pocketing the immense profits doesn't mean I haven't benefitted in every way from **ClearCut**.

Just because I didn't pass the laws or finance the slave expeditions; or just because it was my ancestors, not me who fought the wars, stole the land, dispossessed and murdered the natives, and plundered the resources of the planet, does not mean I haven't benefitted in so many ways from those who

did! And continue to benefit every minute of every day that I am alive. Does not absolve me from responsibility.

I exist as a creature of our shared history. I live a lifestyle in a culture created by and defined by our species domination and by personal privilege. Dominion has made me what I am. I am stunned into a condition of aesthetic arrest by the simple truth of this understanding. The spiritual numbness slowly begins to tingle with feeling. Chills run up my spine. The once familiar sensation of being alive begins to flow through me again.

Spirit, having long ago been banished from our knowing, resides now only in our unconscious where she can no longer interfere with our science or our technology. But she intrudes in our dreams, secretly trysting with our higher, more primitive selves, stirring furtive yearnings and vague memories of abandon as she lures us into her dance in the moonlight.

A jealous lover, exiled Spirit has surreptitiously repaid us with unassuageable guilt around which our hearts harden. Compassion congeals into detachment. The simple thrill of being alive dissolves into panic as we navigate over a deepening sea of uncertainty and anxiety. Through the ages we have sought relief, absolution, and escape from the clutches of guilt's frigid grasp. Our continued complicity in the great crime of human supremacy has infused our culture with content and our religions with hypocrisy for millennia. Meanwhile, our headlong pursuit of the conquest of nature continues, unabated. A fool's errand, a mockery of the divine, as we pivot helplessly in the wind on a spire of arrogance.

But now – here - sitting on this stump amid a vast cultural wasteland, we can no longer conceal from ourselves the truth of who we have become and what we have done. Clear-eyed in the undeniable face of the evidence as we open to this brutal verdict, to the message carried on the wind, and

to Spirit herself yearning to reconnect in our hearts, we begin to experience something new.

Something we haven't felt perhaps in a while, something beyond data. Things begin to make sense on a longer wave, on a wave way below the surface gyrations of the mind, and – surprise! - we experience a tiny surge of irrepressible life force rising in our central nervous system, barely detectable at first, but gaining strength as we nourish it and come to cherish its presence. It is the very force that converts a seed into a sprout. That can raise sap 300 feet from the roots to the topmost needle of this very cedar. The same force that joins a bee to its swarm in search of nectar. Spirit arouses.

In the face of the reality before us, **ClearCut** is not only metaphor, it is the reality of our approach to *all* our extraction practices. Dominion rules. And now, in the presence of Spirit, it becomes starkly and undeniably clear just where that has taken us.

Our claim of dominion has separated us from our Source, has separated us from our tree brethren, from our animal allies, from the bird angels whose heart-wrenching calls fade from hearing. And from the root microbes that digest our food for us in our guts. And finally, from Spirit.

Thus separated and alone, we awaken to face endgame. King of the hill, as the hill crumbles beneath us and our legs turn viscous. If there is any hope at all, it is no longer *them* who must be held responsible. Nor even *we*. It is *I*.

Yikes.

* * * * *

The Exhibition

I first experienced **ClearCut** out of the corner of my eye, rushing through the endless miles of wasted lands in my eagerness to get to the vestigial

patch of **Old Growth** that surrounds the west side of Mount Olympus in the National Park. As I sped past, I would briefly glance sideways with grief, then anger – rage even - as my mind rushed in to make meaning of the absent forest which is our planet.

I was not yet ready then for this meditation. I needed first to connect with Spirit in the primaeval rain forest, to witness and experience her firsthand, to have my heart opened by her radiant presence, to prepare myself by connecting to what once was before I was ready to accept what now is.

Mind unaided by Spirit, seeing only guilt ahead, preempts complicity by telling me to turn down my thermostat, plant my garden, and join a march in the streets. Take up residence in the great complaint, and I can stand apart from (that is, above) those I deem responsible for our plight. *But separation via moral superiority is only a continuation of the crime, another version of dominion.* A liberal palliative against the pain of apparent complicity. Forgive them for they know not what they do. Forgive *me*, for I do.

After mounting the exhibition entitled *Entering Old Growth – Meditations on the Ancient Rain Forest of the Pacific Northwest*, the ClearCuts that surround the Olympic National Park like a besieging army kept calling me back. The relative puniness of the remaining few acres of Old Growth compared to the vast immensity of planetary denudation made me question the validity of my spiritual experience in the big trees. Was it all delusion? Was I kidding myself? I stayed away from the Peninsula for a time, watched way too much cable news, wondering how long we had left. Is all indeed lost? What was I missing? Filled with doubt, I needed to know the truth of the matter.

So I returned to **ClearCut**.

Looking for clarity, I climbed a labyrinth of old logging roads to the top of a shorn-naked mountain I had previously only visited in my dreams. And

there, in a protected cove alee of the peak, I scrambled up on this very Cedar stump. It was a windless and unusually sunny fall day in late October, balmy even, and I could take my shirt off and bask in the warmth. Twenty-some miles to the west rolled the great Pacific onto the sands of Kalaloch Beach. Twenty-some miles to the east rose the Mount Olympus Ridge, almost totally bereft now of its 12,000-year-old glacial caps. To the north and south I looked down over great valleys once covered by ancient forest, now converted into a patchwork quilt of tree-farm and **ClearCut**.

Periodically a raven's call echoed mournfully up the canyon walls - intimate - speaking directly to me somehow in an ancient language only my heart could understand.

This little corner of the once great Pacific Northwest Temperate Rain Forest is but the final chapter in the story of the destruction of the Old Growth Climax Virgin Forest of the continental US. It is one story, repeating everywhere on our westward conquest.

We started with the Chestnuts and other hardwoods of the Northeast, then the Longneedle pines of the Carolinas and across the entire South, and when they were all gone we headed west through Ohio and along the northern tier of states mowing down everything that grew in our path. Up went our homes and farms and cities behind the delusional curtain of endless bounty. Until we hit the Pacific. As late as the 1970's and '80's 500 truckloads *per day* of Old Growth logs still made their way down these treacherous logging roads that had been bulldozed into the mountainsides surrounding Mt. Olympus.

Then, just as the logging gangs began closing in on the very last of the virgin forest in the continental United States which is now the Olympic National Park, in the summer of 1968 Gaia spoke - through the call of a Spotted Owl - to a young wildlife biologist grad student named Eric

Forsman. Forsman was tending a lonely fire tower on a summer job for the Forest Service deep in Oregon's Willamette National Forest.

In the evening, he loved to sit out on the porch of his remote cabin, witness to the vast transformation of day into night, listening to the wilderness come alive with night noise as the dusk softened into darkness. The owl hooted several times from the edge of the little clearing, until Forsman - in response to some inner inspiration - hooted back. Little was known about the Spotted Owl at the time, for it lived only in the interior depths of the Old Growth and was rarely sighted, never studied.

The owl returned the call. For a while they carried on a chat, hooting back and forth to each other. Then an extraordinary thing happened. The owl flew down from its perch and landed on the porch railing directly in front of him, its head cocked in an owl-eyed stare. Forsman fell instantly into a lifelong enchantment, resolving on the spot to make this reclusive Raptor his life's work.

As the relationship of this bird's habitat requirements to Old Growth became known over the succeeding thirty years, the logging penetration into the Olympic Peninsula began to encounter obstacles. Inspired by Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the Earth Firsters drove some nails into the big trees, laid down in front of a few bulldozers, and blew up a couple of sawmills. The rest is history.

I grew up in Wisconsin, spent most of my summers in the north country and never once realized it wasn't wilderness. Never realized I was in a tree farm - not much more than a cornfield really - not in a real forest. It wasn't until I walked among the big trees of the Park - a symbolic remnant of Old Growth saved from the chain saws at the very last minute by the spotted owl, Forsman, and an army of ecologists, botanists, and activists - that I began to realize the immensity of our transgression.

I stayed on that mountain top all day that lazy lovely autumn day, shooting an occasional panorama (image #5255), not needing, not wanting to move. Changes in the sky were noted, two Growler jets from the Base on Whidbey Island entertained me with their pursuit/avoidance maneuvers for a bit before disappearing to the north. I had no epiphanies that day, no deep thoughts or emotional breakthroughs. But somehow, slowly over the course of the afternoon I became convinced that I had something to learn from *ClearCut*. In hindsight, I think it was the raven.

Before the evening chill took hold, I headed back down to my camp. Since that day I have explored hundreds of **ClearCuts**, puzzling out my feelings and thoughts around this example of our practice of dominion. Immersed in its devastation, **ClearCut** reveals to me that beneath the heavy sadness - way before and under and after and over the grief and rage of loss - if I can only sit still enough, long enough, lies the truth of human dominion, the recognition of my own deep complicity therein, and a way forward.

* * * * *

A Way Forward

In this vast moment of emptiness, we come to recognize how everything - *everything!* - in our current culture and lifestyle - no matter how green we have gone, no matter our level of activism, no matter how small our personal carbon footprint - depends upon our cultural history of limitless resource extraction, genocide, and drive for dominion over others, over everything that is not ourselves.

The forces of dominion that now animate our economics, our politics, our educational systems, our religions, our healthcare, and even infiltrate our families and our love lives, have been deeply internalized and can continue to survive only so long as they continue to manifest from within. So, within we have gone, to the very heart of guilt and its inverse – blame.

But marooned there, in the familiar and comfortable intoxication of habitual guilt and /or blame, we just can't get at the root of the problem.

We are not bad people. Unless you are determined to follow the old storyline and burn in a mythical eternal hell, guilt is not a terminal condition; rather, it is a cairn on the trail informing us of a needed course correction, beckoning us to try a new route. It is Gaia herself calling to us to *wake up!* Our house is on fire.

The story of my generation has been the story of our response to that wake-up call, of coming into awareness of the lie of entitlement working in our lives and the ever-so-painful attempt at extrication therefrom. Fortunately, since guilt is but a waystation on this meditation, not the destination, there is a little more work that needs to be done. If we persevere, there is a secret side door to the unease of complicity that reveals itself to the steadfast.

The Pathway of Making Things Right

That door is remorse. Stay with me here. When I take full ownership of what I have done and who I have become, a small door opens within, and contrition floods into my emotional body like an injection of pure Spirit. I feel so acutely the suffering of Gaia and become so filled with sorrow for all that has been lost and for the wrong in which I have been complicit, that an ancient sense of separation that I hardly knew was there anymore begins to loosen within me.

Fear relaxes its grip a little. My lofty perch of judgement becomes uncomfortable, and over time I awaken into being *part of*, not *above*, or *better than*, everything and everyone that is not me. I becomes we. Me becomes us. When I look out, I see me; when I look in, I see you. I hear the drumbeat of Her heart and I can feel the music begin, softly. I catch a glimpse of the swarm and I feel the impulse to move with it.

This may be subtle, but it is no small thing. This is not a mere difference in degree, but - I would assert - a fundamental next step in the evolution of consciousness. For I can now come out of my hermitage and rejoin my species. After such a long exile, I can now step back into the circle dance of life celebrating itself and become the glowing, living, breathing manifestation of life itself that I am. Finally, after all these eons, I can step back into myself.

Imagine that! Isolation, alienation, and separation, like the morning mists in ClearCut, simply evaporate. The same breath of life that animates every worm and every whale and every leaf on every tree floods in to animate me. And you! Breathe it in, deeply. Spirit revives, she arises to sing again, to dance again. What a tragedy it would be to allow such miracles of creation as you and me to numb out on a soulless desert of despair, to ultimately devolve into radioactive dirt.

This journey of the complicit into community is not for the faint-hearted. The outcome cannot be assured. If we continue to seek blame for the human condition and the state of our planet in everyone but ourselves, we are led reflexively only to guilt and fear, and will continue to walk the path of cold depression and despair. We can then only conclude that mankind is irredeemably corrupt and on an ineluctable path towards extinction. Good riddance, the planet will be much better off without us.

I have walked that path and have shared that journey with many of my contemporaries. We've been a glum lot for some time now. It hasn't helped a bit.

The visceral acceptance of the truth of my complicity, in uniting me in the confederacy of my fellows, in uniting me in the league of life itself on earth, is the necessary preparation – a hazing ritual, if you will - for what follows. It is only the depth of my contrition that finally and for all time blows away the denial, confusion, and doubt clouding my mind. In so

doing, it clears a passageway forward to 1) clarity in my identity, 2) the capacity for connection and compassion, and ultimately 3), forgiveness. My tears bathe my soul-body with love and cleanse my mind of fear, preparing me for action.

This passage out of denial and blame and into the lucid realm of remorse and forgiveness is a most powerful generator. Lucidity is a clairvoyant state of communion with Spirit, producing the resolve, strength, wisdom, and energy required to set foot on the path of making things right. With high hopes no less, and in the highest of spirits.

The path of making things right. Imagine what that might look like. For yourself, for us as a country, for us as a species...

* * * * *

Forgiveness

So it is with relief to experience that with the recognition and deep acceptance of complicity - with full-member status in humanity and as an atom in the organism of Gaia - comes the need and capacity for forgiveness.

If becoming human has meant life becoming aware of itself, and with that awareness we have been lured by our own projection of God down a path of dominion, and as a result of that dominion we have become separated from what we have become conscious of, for God's sakes can we not recognize the error of our ways and forgive ourselves our complicity?

Lucidity reveals that without forgiveness we can only remain imprisoned in our cell of arrogance with no further movement. So let us then get on with the business of forgiving ourselves and each other and set out on the *path of making things right.*

What would it take, for instance, to lure away from Silicon Valley enough of that high-level engineering intelligence that has been so busy creating the alternate digital reality of social media to create a fusion jet engine? Hah? Is that too fanciful to imagine? Whatever happened to fusion research anyway?

In another moment of great peril not so long ago, we gathered enough brainpower together in the Manhattan Project to create the atom bomb. Can we not muster the resources to create a comparable tool in the service of community? We walked on the moon with only the most primitive computer power. Even more fundamental, our slaves attained their freedom, women enfranchised themselves, and gay couples now marry.

We have frequently accomplished what was once unimaginable. But then we imagined it, and it was made manifest. Outside of the sun, the human imagination is the most powerful force on earth. Imagine now the possibility of a thousand other such things we have the potential to manifest in our pursuit of reparations on the *path of making things right*.

The Choice

As members of a learning planet, we now set about the process of relinquishing our entitlement (no mean feat) and taking up our rightful place in a biosphere in which all species have their essential roles in an evolving, symbiotic system imperfectly designed but still hard at work to better sustain the needs of all species. We join with those who came before us and with our heroic fellows – pioneers already on the path of making things right - and dedicate our lives to the reparation of everything that lies broken at our feet.

From something, to nothing. In the blink of a geological eye there is a zone of transition as vast as our imagination in between. It can pass unnoticed, hidden from view, or it can transform our planet. We can wake up, or we can die out.

It is precisely the vastness, the suddenness, and yes, the horror of that transition that has the power to shock us out of our old stories and our old habits of thought and being. It is within that zone of transition – in **ClearCut** - where we can first experience, then bear witness to the possibilities inherent in emptiness.

If a little fear is required to get our attention, maybe a little horror is required to act. Stay with it. Watch where dominion is in play, and when we discover it at work in ourselves, we simply do something a little differently. Watch what happens. Repeat. Witness the miracle of evolution at work.

When we discover it coming at us from others, we simply turn sideways to it and watch it pass. We immerse ourselves in the transition moment, wherever and whenever we find it – life is full of them – and for the sake of our children and grandchildren, we hold it close to our hearts and ride that moment like the dragon of survival that it is.

Let us swarm.