

THIS LUMINOUS EDITION OF KJ is largely a prayer to and for COPIO, the UN's 10th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that convenes in Nagoya this fall. Since the 2020 biodiversity targets it adopts will touch every ecosystem on Earth, it may be our last chance to save our planet's wildness and our own evolutionary ass. The meditations assembled here, on biodiversity's preciousness and peril, are thus meant to inspire all COPIO participants to do the right ethical/ecological/ancestral thing, and create a treaty that really works.

I for one am hopeful about COPIO's impact on the world, not so much from what happens inside the conference hall, but the effect that new campaigns appearing there could have on millions of activist minds. I say hopeful, but let's be perfectly frank about the direness of our plight...

# EVOKING EARTH'S IMMUNE RESPONSE TO MEGA-CORPORATE MALADIES

## THE BAD NEWS

Biodiversity as well as our arctic ice caps, virgin forests and maternal oceans all appear to be inescapably doomed under every politically plausible scenario today. Extinction rates, deforestation, glacier melt, ocean acidity and cloistered methane release are all accelerating faster than even pessimists foresaw. Whatever promising tech and policy fixes we may have at hand, there is clearly no visible "political will" to make the turnaround. Black humor betting on the tipping point — i.e., which worsening factor will finally push the biosphere into catastrophic chain reactions — is taking off as a macabre payoff date seems more and more imminent.

What is driving the devastation? Whether referring to the latest data or just common sense, many witnesses now agree that vast corporate bodies and their global political might are causing most of our ecological malaise these days and fiercely resisting every treaty that offers real cures.

Big corporate lobbies were the only winners at the COP15 Copenhagen climate talks, the Doha Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species negotiations, and every global economic summit for the last 15 years. They even preemptively encircled COP10 and diluted host nation Japan's 2020 CBD target proposals into hazy bafflelegab.

Early target recommendations from CBD subcommittees had real content and teeth, calling for an "end" to biodiversity-harmful subsidies (to big fossil fuel, mining and agrobiz corps), a "halt" to destructive fishing practices (like corporate bottom trawling, long-lining, etc.), "strict controls" on the transfer of bioengineered organisms (Monsanto's nightmare), and "sequestering" at least 15 percent of the earth's surface in protective sanctuaries (as opposed to 1.2 percent now). When the corporate crew finished boiling down Japan's own target list, however, all those solid goals were vaporized.

Who will stop them? The COP10 delegates? Few if any coming to Nagoya this year have urgent orders from their governments to make the CBD comprehensive or muscular or even meaningful. Nations fighting eco-pillage and biopiracy may make some useful noise, but the overall governmental mood is economically depressed and corporate conciliatory. In other words, no insiders expect any CBD clauses to survive that would seriously disrupt the resource-plundering status quo or threaten corporate bottom lines.

The battered NGO community? Green civil society's reformist zeal and confidence have been badly shaken of late by crashing foundation grants, fierce corporate pushback, and withering defeats in Copenhagen, Doha, and assorted G8/G20 venues across the world. Add in escalating Obama disenchantment and demoralizing win/loss records in the human rights, health and anti-war arenas and you begin to understand the confusion and despair in movement trenches these days. Biodiversity activists likewise find themselves divided and conquered by their dedication to very specific issues, ranging from koala bears and polar bears to cloud forests and coral reefs. While each cause is worthy and this diversity



PHOTOGRAPH BY WAYNE LEVIN

births great costume parades, centrifugal concerns don't generate coherent strategies or enforceable demands.

In sum, the biosphere is being collectively ravaged by huge corporate bodies protected by purchased politics and united in their hostility to growth limits and environmental costs. Equally grim, biodiversity's last line of defense is manned by scattered environmental forces too divided by their issues to devise joint battle plans and discover their true strength. The pious our-struggle-is-our-glory crowd may be OK with this futility, but those striving to actually save something are getting incredibly depressed.

## THE GOOD NEWS

The bleak diagnosis above has been circulating for a while, and promising new radical prescriptions are starting to appear. Radical in the sense they address the root problems involved — the destructive scale and single-mindedness of global corporate power and the competitive disarray among the grassroots resistance. Promising in the sense that they redefine the rules of engagement in ways that give activists, native peoples and Nature a plausible chance to prevail.

*The task is, not so much to see what no one has yet seen, but to think what nobody has yet thought, about that which everybody sees.*  
— Arthur Schopenhauer

The two prescriptions most active in the run-up to COP10 turn medical metaphors into sophisticated remedial tools, but begin with simple thoughts.

1) **ACTIVISTS TRULY ARE THE PLANET'S IMMUNE SYSTEM.** They are the biosphere's restless, fearless and always outnumbered white blood cells, and can thus learn vital lessons from the ways our own immune cells defend our bodies every day.

2) **MOTHER NATURE DESERVES A VOICE.** The UN represents our nation-states and the WTO their corporate masters, but who speaks for humans as a sensuous species or the other fragile children of the natural world? The ongoing desecration of our seas, forests, climate, and biodiversity starkly dramatize the need for a Gaian regency, an influential global body to represent the living earth.

## AWAKENING IMMUNO-ACTIVISTS

As suggested in the bad news above and headlines everywhere else, our planet is facing terrible challenges from some monstrous corporate powers. But we also have millions of activists on the ground who could conceivably turn the tide if they acted in concert with bolder, shrewder strategies.

The immune analogy offers activists telling perspectives on some of their greatest challenges — their perpetual fewness, intense individuality and aversion to hierarchies and organizational constraint. Many grassroots organizers think of these as weaknesses, but from an immunological point of view this is how resistance always works. Our immune cells are always a tiny minority in our body politic, exhibit great diversity, and work in small ad hoc groups when they organize at all. Nonetheless, considering their lifetime achievements, they have a rather brilliant record in the field that activists can learn from now.

*(Grassroots) politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies.*  
— Groucho Marx

Activists' most obvious self-inflicted problem is their competitive diversity. Most focus on a single symptom of the corporate plague — its wars,

injustices or extinction rates — and ignore the upstream commonalities that would allow them to conspire. If a critical few would just focus on disabling the entities behind the most lethal practices, countless single issue symptoms could be alleviated all at once.

Our immune cells seem to sense this and don't obsess on symptoms. They seek out the critical disease agent behind an entire symptom array. An immunological diagnosis of our planet's ills might thus identify the emergence of vast malignant corporate mutations as the common driver of our endless wars, consumptive fevers, polluted health, and democratic paralysis. It would next dispatch scouts to probe their vulnerabilities and other agents to perforate, drain and deflate them, as they do with all tumors they can identify.

Detecting cancerous tumors and corporate malignancies is tricky, however, as they deftly mask their pathology. Both have learned to camouflage their aggressive parasitic nature — tumors with molecular deception and corporations with PR. In fact, both have grown so skilled in this deceit that they often convince their host bodies that their destructive growth is not only harmless, it must be protected and subsidized. Their con games are similar: "Hey, we're doing really vital work down here, send us more nutrients, glucose and capillaries immediately!" and "Ahem, we're too big to fail now and if we don't keep growing both we and you will die. Send us more tax breaks, subsidies and bailout money right away!"

## DIAGNOSING CORPORISM

A good blueprint for immuno-activist thinking has been around for a while. Ken Reiner's Alliance for Democracy pamphlet called *Corporism* introduces the corporate takeover of our societies not as a coup or usurpation, but as a "metamedical emergency." The concept of corporism essentially applies germ theory to global eco-social ills and finds, lurking behind scores of symptoms, a single class of pathogens — the mega-corporate bodies of the world. Today germ theory is a cornerstone of medicine, but it faced great skepticism at first because its target pathogens, microorganisms, were too small to see. Likewise, the corporism hypothesis is hindered because the *macroorganisms* it targets seem too vast and complex to visualize. But they are as real as toxic microbes, and now nearly as ubiquitous.

Corporism is not about capitalism, communism or socialism. It is about toxic organizational scale within any socio-economic system, and how big bodies inevitably turn malignant when they exceed a certain size. Once such bodies incorporate more than a thousand members or start to promiscuously diversify, their own growth in any direction seems to become more important than

their avowed utility to the body politic — and malignancy is near.

Smaller corporate bodies may become noxious, too, but they generally lack the clout to obscure or legalize their harms. Small firms that contaminate a lake or stream are often driven out of existence by local laws and irate neighbors. Mega-corporations, however, can remotely devastate entire mountains, ocean gulfs or even the global atmosphere and still prosper and enlarge.

A biological perspective on such big bodies suggests a panoply of new tactics to shrink them back to human scale, benign function and democratic control. It also offers hopeful insights to activists whose trust in conventional legal or political tools has faded because our justice, regulatory and legislative systems have been so commercially compromised.

Biology can be our mentor. For instance, we call immune cells a defense, but they are a pretty offensive crew. They vehemently engage huge parasites to assess their weaknesses and then brief their diverse fellows on where to focus their attacks. Immuno-activists can learn effective strategies from this *modus operandi*, especially how to target the vulnerabilities of big bodies as a class. One common susceptibility, for example, is their dependence on government issued corporate charters. These charters are the big bodies' DNA and determine their allowable lifespan, structure and behaviors, just as our genes govern ours.

In the US, for example, corporate charters formerly limited companies' lives to a set number of years, confined their operations to certain socially useful tasks, prohibited them from owning other firms or even non-essential real estate, and required total transparency to legislative oversight. They also banned their involvement in politics and generally kept private bodies on a tight public leash. That was over a century ago, however, before the larger bodies bribed legislatures and hounded courts into granting them legal personhood and countless human rights, which they then exploited to dissolve all prior restrictions on their indiscriminate growth.

Such knowledge is tactically suggestive. It also reminds us that the immune system is above all an egalitarian information matrix where constant feedback and shared reconnaissance direct activities rather than hierarchical control. Earth's immuno-activists will likewise need a reliable global clearing house to keep them all aware of what is happening in and to their besieged host.

## GAIAN REGENTS FOR PLANETARY RIGHTS

Indigenous leaders have taken a critical step in that direction. At the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, in Cochabamba, Bolivia on April 22, 2010, they announced a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth. This proposed treaty recognizes the intrinsic value of all living things and, if ratified by the UN, it will give legally binding rights to the natural world. Currently all of nature's non-human children are simply deemed "property" and their rights are legally usurped by whoever owns their habitat.

But such a step requires some agency to represent the web of life, identify



its direst maladies, and make sure that as many people as possible know what they are. To fulfill this declaration, eco-activists and indigenous Pachamama partisans are therefore now creating what they call a Gaian Regency to represent the ailing planet, direct attention to her ills, and incubate broad spectrum remedies.

Regencies are temporary bodies that arise to govern a realm when its sovereign is too young, incapacitated or far away to serve. They manage public affairs during a breach in rightful authority. As the source of all life, Mother Nature arguably merits sovereign respect, our highest allegiance and a very loud say in environmental policy. However, as long as she remains stricken and voiceless, she seems to require a regency of her own.

Their envisioned Gaian Regency will consist of a council periodically and democratically elected from diverse bioregions and have three mandates to discharge:

✿ To effectively represent and publicize the living Earth's interests — by directing concern, legal aid and other forms of support to endangered species and cultures

✿ To focus more attention on the root causes of harm and comprehensive remedies — by inviting, evaluating and disseminating the most astute prescriptions for the planet's consumptive ills

✿ To inspire deeper reverence for the web of life and the magic of consciousness — by promoting ancient or innovative ways to experience Earth's sacred unity and re-enchant our lives

For millennia the indigenous peoples of the world, particularly their traditional healers, have been serving these ends on the ground. Their nations lived so reverently upon the Earth that even after scores of generations, foreign explorers would mistake their lands for pristine wilderness. Those are the local values and memories they work from as they step forward on the global stage to take this stewardship planet-wide.

At COP10 they will rally support for the regency concept and enjoin the immuno-activist world to collectively confront the big common causes of climate chaos, pollution, extinction and war. Such collaboration could greatly enhance civil society's ability to radically downsize monstrous corporations, heal the earth, and reconnect our governance to the deepest needs of life.

The rise of a Gaian Regency fortified by immuno-activism doesn't guarantee victories, of course, but it promises marvelous synergies and incontestably improves our odds. 🐦

IMAGE BY JOHN EINARSEN