



# **Theory & Practice of the Neo Indigenous**

A shiver is running through the spine of humanity, as we all start to realise something has gone terribly wrong. Whereas modernity and industrial capitalism promised us 'progress', everywhere we turn we see a world in ruins. We have turned our once majestic and bountiful earth into a wasteland - untold amount of lifeforms have already become extinct, and ecosystems across the world, ecosystems we depend on to survive, are in a critical condition. And things the situation of human beings isn't much better. While a tiny minority of people control the majority of the world's resources, billions of people across the planet barely have enough to eat. And even if you happen to be one of the people that materially benefits from our global system of exploitation, you are likely suffering from one of the psychological ills which have grown to pandemic proportions in modern society - depression, loneliness, anxiety. For these reasons, people are now wondering - 'what kind of progress is this exactly?' Right now the only thing we seem to be progressing toward is our own extinction. Demands are made of national governments to change things, but how can we expect a solution from that which has caused the problem?

Communism was the 20<sup>th</sup> century's answer to the problems of modernity. It sought to address the exploitation inherent to the logic of industrial capitalism. But the pitfalls of the communist movement are now clear. Its focus on seizing State power generally led to authoritarian regimes; the revolution became entangled in the apparatus of power it sought to dismantle. However, it is not only the practical implement of communism that is the problem. Communism is of another era, an era that consider the development of heavy industry as a form of 'progress'. Which means it offers little insight into the ecological contractions of industrial society, contradictions that now define our time. However, the achievements of the communist movement are not to be underestimated. It proved that people united around a single vision have the ability to transform all of society, to change the course of history. Lessons have been learned, horizons widened, and today progressive forces are plotting a new course.

Across the world, a new type of social movement is growing. This movement brings together social, ecological and spiritual struggles. One way we can think of this movement is as a neo-indigenous movement. *Indigenous* because it takes as its role models indigenous peoples from around the world - people who have lived dignified lives, in community, and in harmony with nature for untold generations. *Neo* because it recognises the positive developments of modern society times. The movement doesn't aim to return to some imaginary past - but rather to take the best of the indigenous, the best of the modern, and combine them to create something new.

The movement is global but it expresses itself differently based on local conditions. In other parts of the world, where indigenous culture and tradition is more intact, the movement is a lot about protecting and expanding upon what already exists. In Europe the movement is about creating something new, while at the same time getting back to the roots. The beginnings of the movement can be found in the cultural revolutions, youth revolts, and hippie gathering at the end of the 1960's. It was a time when progressive forces started to coalesce around new ideas, new forms of expression, and using new methods to transform society. However, it is really in the last thirty years that this movement has become conscious of itself and began to grow rapidly. It's aim is not to take power, but rather that people empower themselves. It's method is not to make demands of government, but to directly enact the social transformations they advocate for. By transforming society on a small scale, they are proving that the kinds of transformations that society needs are not only possible, they are already happening.

But with millions of people across the world coming together around a new vision, the key questions are - 'what are the values of this movement?', 'what is the underlying philosophy binding all these people together?', 'what kind of world is this movement hoping to create?' This text can be understood as a tentative attempt to answer these questions. It does this by looking at the objectives, theory and practice the movement. But in order to understand the movement, we first have to look

at the societal problems that the movement seeks to address, their historical circumstances and present days effects, but the main thrust of this text is not critical. The many faults of industrial society is are already understood. Instead we will focus on the solutions to the these problems, and the aims of the movement. This text is the first part in a longer work, which will the full scope of the neo-indigenous movement, but in this text we will focus on the first of aim of the movement.

*To establish a harmonious relationship with nature.*

# Nature

## ***Background***

The necessity of building a new relationship with the natural world hardly need to be elaborated upon. Our exploitation of nature has reached such extremes that we have made vast tracts of this once bountiful earth inhospitable to life. Everyday the desert is expanding on all sides. The sea is being reaped of life. The air is being filled with toxic gases. If you want to see the consequences of industrial societies relationship with nature, head into the countryside. Where there was once abundant life, unending forest and million little creatures, there is now wasteland. The only life allowed to grow is the monocultural crops that feed our bloated cities (as well as the bloated animals to be sent to the slaughterhouse). The human relationship with nature in industrial society is one of master and slave, or even worse. Former slave owners at least usually tried to maintain the health of their slaves in order that they could be longer exploited. But industrial society doesn't even bother with this. It is so short sighted that it allows ecosystems to deplete further and further until there is nothing left. Such are the extremities of our foolishness that we are causing the death of the web of life that we depend on to survive. Such is the wanton disregard for everything aside from 'profit' that we are seriously contemplating our own extinction. But who is it that thinks they profit from this? How did we even get to this point? How do we find ourselves in such a situation?

## ***Natural Roots***

It would be wrong to say that human beings as species, all peoples throughout the ages, have suffered under such ignorance and delusion. In fact it seems like the majority of us recognised our relationship of connectedness and interdependence with Nature. Indigenous communities around the world, people more connected with the source of life, are under no illusion about the human dependence and subordination to the Gods and Goddesses of Nature. The indigenous people of the Andes revere Pachamama, Mother Nature, as the giver and sustainer of life. In reverence to the mysterious and benevolent life giving force, they bury food or burn incense during harvest time in her name. In India the Goddess Durga is worshipped as the highest form of the fertile life giving energy (shakti), and generally in India, there is no clear division between people, animals, deities, and the natural world. A being that is one time a God, may later be a fish, or a tree, or a person. Ultimately, all is one. Although the human mind divides the world up into separate entities, this is merely the world as it appears to the everyday human mind. The highest truth is the unity that underlies all existence, and so humanity doesn't occupy any privileged position, but is simply one expression of this greater unifying force.

Indigenous Europeans too had a similar relationship to Nature. At the centre of the nine worlds of the Norse universe was Yggdrasil, a giant sacred ash tree, considered the source of all life and knowledge. Many Norse Goddesses and Gods were associated with phenomenon from the natural world, such as Thor (thunder), Jörð (earth Mother) and Freyr (weather & harvest), and creatures from the natural world were often given the quality of Gods, such as Auðumbla, the primordial Cow Goddess who nurtured the Gods with her four rivers of milk. The Greeks and Romans also had a reverential attitude toward the natural world. Their deities too were based on different aspects of nature; Zeus was the God of the Sky, Poseidon the Sea, Apollo was God of the Sun. The Greeks were well aware of the power of these Gods and Goddess of the Natural world, and the role they played in deciding their fate, and were sure to offer them regular libations as a sign of deference. The Celts had many nature Gods and Goddesses, one of the most important of which was an Earth Mother figure, often in the form of a triple Goddess. However, there is also evidence that many Celtic people were animistic, worshipping the natural world directly, rather than anthropomorphic personifications of it.

And at the heart of this spiritual reverence for Nature is a very practical logic. If you don't respect nature, you will suffer. If you overfish the waters, the next year there is less fish. If you continue in your heedless exploitation of the rivers, one day there'll be no fish. Because of this most cultures learned to only take what they need, and avoid stumbling into the bottomless pit that is human desire. But this simple lesson is one that industrial society doesn't seem able to learn. When our river runs out of fish, we simply dispossess our neighbour of their lands and fish their river, and then their neighbour, and their neighbour, and their neighbour, in a logic that ends concludes with all rivers being reaped of all their fish. The greed of industrial society is only matched by its short-sightedness.

### **Genesis**

The roots of this ethic of exploitation lie deep within the human psyche; the drive to own, to use, to dominate is not the particular heritage of one culture. However, these are not the only deep rooted psychic impulses of human beings. Just as central to the human experience is the drive to love, to help, to co-operate. All these drives come from the same basic human desire - to feel connected to the world we are a part of, to overcome the separation of the subject from the object. By claiming ownership of the world, one is trying to overcome this separation through the ego. One identifies so thoroughly with the 'I' that the only way to feel connected to the rest of the world is by attaching it to this 'I' making it 'mine'. But this strategy only leads to greater alienation. By working for one's own self-aggrandisement, one only heightens the feeling of difference between the self and everything else.

By adopting the opposite strategy, renouncing ownership of the world, cultivating a feeling of selfless love, acting for the benefit of others, one begins to overcome narrow identification with a single mind and body and small set of things that are mine, and recognises themselves in every shape and shade of existence. All people have both potentialities within them and it is often their culture contexts that influence which of these potentialities can express itself. While some cultures encourage and bring to the fore the better qualities of human beings, others, such as industrial capitalism, brings out the selfish side of humanity, celebrating, rewarding, and even necessitating selfish activity.

To help us better understand the present we can look to our history, in order to see how the stories we have told ourselves have lead to the place we're at now. For although it in the industrial era that it began bearing its most bitter fruits, the seeds of this culture of exploitation were planted many ages ago; 'And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creepth upon the earth... And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth and every tree, in which is the fruit yielding seed: to you it shall be for meat.'

Unlike the spiritual understanding of many other human cultures, the Abrahamic God is not the Earth Mother, personified in the natural world, or the underlying unity that lay behind the appearance of division. Instead God is separate from the world he created. He is the Ruler, the Law Maker, modelled after the figure of the King. And in this cosmology, we too were set apart from the natural world. Even before we were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, we were separated from the natural world, placed above it (or at least men were). In this anthropocentric and patriarchal world view there is a clear hierarchy in the order of beings. On top is God (who looked like a man, or rather men looked like Him), next came men, who were subordinate to God but were superior to everything on earth, then came women and all other living creatures, whose whole existence was based around serving men, and with whom men could do essentially whatever they liked.

This was not the first time in human history that God was equated with the figure of a ruler. Ancient kings and emperors often claimed for themselves the status of Gods. When seen in this context, we understand that the Jewish cosmology, that the only ruler was God the Creator rather than Caesar the God, was a radical challenge to their Roman oppressors.<sup>1</sup> What's more, when looking at Roman society, built on slavery and pillage, in which dehumanisation and degradation was an accepted part of every day life – the ethics of Christian would go a long way to changing that. Your neighbours were no longer to be thought of as your enemy, as someone to be fought and subdued, but rather your neighbour to be loved and respected. But the adoption institutionalisation of Christianity by the Roman State would emphasize the authoritarian character of the Abrahamic God. God is the King, ruler of Heaven and Earth, and men were his feudal Lords, tributaries, to whom God extended dominion over the world and everything in it. Nature had no other purpose than to serve 'man'. If it wasn't something to be exploited, it was something to be feared – a swarm of locust, a great flood that ends most life on earth. And as this doctrine began to colonise Europe, wearing away at the old nature based pagan traditions, this was the understanding of Nature that prevailed. Nature was something to be subdued, conquered, and exploited.

However, the problem is not the Abrahamic tradition as a whole. While this text is looking at how Christian cosmology was used to justify the modern exploitation of Nature, this is not to say that the Christian cosmology is inherently exploitative, or couldn't form the basis of a symbiotic and loving relationship with the natural world. The messages of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have inspired as much love of nature as they have been used to justify atrocities against it. The *Canticle of the Sun* from Saint Francis of Assisi expresses the same feeling of love and devotion to the natural world that can be found in indigenous cultures throughout the world;

'Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,  
especially through my lord Brother Sun,  
who brings the day; and you give light through him.  
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene,  
and every kind of weather through which  
You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful  
and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains us and governs us and who produces  
varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.'

Like every tradition, the Abrahamic religions are a huge mix of all the potentialities that exist within the human being. In every culture people look to justify their actions based on the ethical norms and

---

<sup>1</sup> And the political implications were understood by Rome, who destroyed Judea and tried to eradicate Jewish culture.

standards of their era, and the Abrahamic tradition has been used by oppressor and oppressed alike. The oppressor legitimises their position using the word of God, twisting the message of enlightened people and holy prophets to suit their own agenda. But that same word in the hands of a liberator, sharpened on the whetstones of truth and compassion, are used to cut through the bonds of mental and political servitude.

### ***The Nature of Industrial Society***

The modern relationship with Nature took Genesis as its starting point, and we see early modern thinkers referring to the Bible when constructing their own understanding of the natural world. John Locke, one of the most influential of the early modern philosophers, developed the idea of 'private property' based on the word of God. Locke begins with the biblical assertion that 'the earth and everything in it is given to men for the support and comfort of their existence', and originally 'all fruits it naturally produces and animals that it feeds... belong to mankind in common', and develops this idea to explain how individuals could expropriate pieces of Creation for themselves. 'Though men as a whole own the earth and all inferior creatures, every individual man has a property in his own person... The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are strictly his. So when he takes something from the state that nature has provided and left it in, he mixes his labour with it, thus joining it to something that is his own, and in that way he makes it his property.'

So God gave dominion over the world to men, and then men, through the act of labour, have the right to make nature their own private property. This seems fair on one level. People need to be able to take from the natural world what they need to live, and if someone has worked to build a house or made a tool, it's right that they should be able to use it. But is this the only factor that should be taken into consideration when thinking about how we can use the gifts that Nature has provided? Let's say you live in a valley with a single food source, chestnuts. You decide to go harvest all the chestnuts before anyone else gets a chance. So while you start to secure grow fat on your huge surplus of chestnuts, the rest of the people in the valley have no food to get them through the winter. Does me going and harvesting all the chestnuts really give me the 'right' to keep them all to myself because I've mixed my labour with them? Who was it that granted me the right to appropriate what I want, when others don't have what they need? Do the hungry not have the greatest claim to food? The labour based justification for private property is even more perverse in the context of labour exploitation and capital accumulation, where the people who work don't even see the benefit of their labour.

But more to the point, what gives human beings the right to appropriate everything they want, when trees, herbs, animals, fungi, lichen, and a million other living being also need them to live? Locke's 'theory of value' was based on the idea that Nature itself had no value, for the only value something could possibly have is in serving 'man'. According to this circular logic, 'man' gives Nature value by appropriating it, which in turn justifies the act of appropriation. But if I go into the rainforest with a bulldozer and level everything, does this make the trees and the land mine? Have I really added 'value' to it? As well as justifying the essentially unlimited exploitation of nature, it also conveniently justified the dispossession of those 'lazy' Indians in the New World. Instead of making Nature valuable to mankind, they were content to let the natural world 'lie waste' (as in not be exploited for its resources). According to Locke's calculations, an acre of land in England created five pounds worth of value for the benefit of mankind, while in America the same acre was 'possibly not worth a penny'. This makes it not merely the right, but the duty of the civilised English to drive the Indians from their land and make it valuable for all mankind.

And it is this colonial understanding of Nature that prevails in modern society today. Nature is something to be owned, appropriated, used. Base resources to serve economic 'growth'. So ingrained is this logic that even advocates for Nature appeal to it. Landscape restoration projects talk about how much the restored ecosystem will boost the economy with tourism, etc. Or you often

see headlines such as - 'Climate crisis will cost X billion, and is the greatest threat to economic growth'. We must save nature, or it will cost us a lot of money! Industrial society is more worried about losing money than the mass extinction of life. Right now there are many legal campaigns throughout the world to grant Nature legal personhood; because apparently only people should be spared degradation and destruction. This is not to say that these aren't worthy actions and important attempts to appeal to all members of society. But the fact that this kind of logic appeals to large sections of our society (including the section with all political decision making power) is a sign that something has gone terribly wrong in our relationship with the natural world. The consequences of such a one sided relationship are now plain to see. The end point of our society is a world reaped of all life, a desert of dust and plastic.

One major cause of this attitude is the fact that, in the process of exploiting the natural world, we have become alienated from it. We have lost our connection with the infinite source of wisdom, beauty, and power. The majority of us now live in places where nature has been either eradicated or hidden away. The modern city is a concrete world in which everything is human made, aside from a lonely tree on the side of the road. Our food comes ready made and wrapped in plastic. Any animals that find their way into our labyrinth are considered pests, to be expelled or destroyed. The main experience we have of nature is watching it on a screen. For this reason, the ecocide is always happening somewhere else. In the city the process is already complete. It can be ignored. You can change the channel.

The only time the destruction of the natural world is raised to the level of collective consciousness is when half a continent is on fire. We sometimes read reports of the ongoing collapse of global ecosystems, but they are just one news story in a constant stream of information. Many of our most important communication platforms are more concerned about the fate of the English royal family, or the result of a game of football, than the imminent collapse of life on earth. The only reason such a massive campaign of death and destruction can take place is because most of us don't have to deal with it as a daily reality, and those who do, such as indigenous people, have no voice in modern society. If we had a real relationship with the natural world we wouldn't allow it to be ransacked and degraded.

### *Exodus*

During the last two hundred years we have seen a mass migration from the land to the city of biblical proportions. Prior to 1600, it's estimated that the share of the world's population living in urban settings did not reach 5%. Even in 1800 it was only at 7%. But by 1900 we start to see a sharp rise in the number, doubling to 16%. The 20<sup>th</sup> century is when this trend starts to expand past the industrial centres of Europe and the USA and take hold of the whole world. In 2000 the percentage of city dwellers stood at 47%. Today it stands at 55%, and it is predicted that by the year 2050 the figure will be 67%.<sup>2</sup> What is happening here? What's behind this huge transformation in the way we live?

To many people, the process of urbanisation seems natural. It's just what happens when the population reaches a certain level. But this would be to mistake a correlate for a causal relationship. The advent of industrial society saw huge population growth and also huge urbanisation, these trends often happened side by side, and were somehow related, but one did not necessarily cause the other. To take Ireland as an example, we see that urbanisation happened while the number of people actually declined and remained low (because of famine and emigration). Population growth by itself doesn't lead to urbanisation. So what does? Another idea that people sometimes have is, 'it's just what happens when a country modernises'. And this getting closer to the heart of the matter. It is a process bound up with modernisation. But here it is essential that we cast a critical eye on this very process. Modernisation is not, as it is sometimes presented, some apolitical force of history that

---

2 <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization#long-run-history-of-urbanization>



takes place when a society reaches a certain level of technology. It is rather, first and foremost, a political and economic transformation, one that has brought about the concentration of wealth and power to a previously unimaginable level. But how does urbanisation fit in this constellation? What are the actual factors that explain the trend?

Perhaps the most important factor is the transformation of agriculture in the modern era. Before the modern era the countryside was a patchwork of wilderness and small farming communities. These communities would manage communal land, with a diverse polycultural system of crops and perennials to ensure they had everything they needed the whole year round. Their inputs were incredibly low, mainly consisting of their own labour, and they kept a relatively closed system, composting everything themselves and ultimately contributing to the wider ecosystem. This was the most common form of human organisation since we first began practising agriculture 12,000 years ago. But during the course of the modern era we begin to see a number of changes that begin to erode these small community structures. The first of these changes, beginning in England, was 'enclosure' - common land being seized by the powerful and fenced off. With the land they worked communally for generations now taken from them, small farmers had little choice but to sell their labour to the landlords, often as travelling farmhands, meaning the break up of many communities. This is a process that begins in England, but then, with the expansion of European colonialism, begins to play out all over the world.

The next important factor was the industrialisation of agriculture. With the advent of coal power heavy machinery, farming did not necessarily need lots of people in the fields, you just needed one person with a tractor. This had the advantage of bringing down labour costs for landlords but it also meant that the old style of agriculture, with more complex polycultural systems, was no longer possible. What modern machine farming does best is huge mono-cultural plantations. Anything that varies from the single crop would be too much oversight for the single farmer, who now had huge tracts of land to work, and any perennial plants could block the machinery. However, initially it seems like this new form of machine powered monocultural farming was a success. It produced a higher yield with apparently less human labour. However, pretty soon farmers began noticing problems with these new methods.

First, the use of only a single crop pretty quickly led to the depletion of nutrients in the soil. After a few years, nothing would grow on the land. Instead of this leading to a reassessment of the viability of monocultural systems, proponents of modern agriculture decided that the best solution was to industrially produce chemical fertilisers. These fertilizers would be made in a factory and farmers would have to buy them every year to provide their crops with nutrients. But these chemical fertilisers were lacking in everything that makes a living soil so vital, and the mono-cultural crops, living on a diet of fast food, were easy prey to all kinds of pests. Rather than trying to solve any of these problems at the root, proponents of modern agriculture went out in search of ever more complex technical solutions to simple problems. The next bright idea, in order to get rid of the pests, was to spray the crops with poison. Spray our food with poison. In order that these plants can withstand the poison scientists genetically engineered plants that can withstand the toxic they are routinely sprayed with.

The modern mind is confusedly stumbling around a labyrinth of its own creation, and instead of the farmer growing food from the gifts that a bountiful natural world freely provides, they must buy a whole assortment of industrial goods to grow their crops. Modernity has brought about some amazing discoveries and inventions, but the insistence on seeking a technical solutions to all problems has developed into a kind of madness, one that is making a small group of people very wealthy, but brings with it severe repercussions. Instead of looking for generalised, technical solutions to our problems, we need to get back to the basics and learn to listen. Proper management requires observation, care, skill and nuance. Huge machines, and factory produced fertilizers and

poison, aren't capable of this. If we want to take from nature, we must also learn to give. We have to establish a two way relationship. We must understand its needs, its limits. We cannot give the natural world over to heavy machinery and toxic chemicals and expect anything other than a wasteland.

An oft sighted justification for industrial agriculture is that it saves labour. Instead of needing 10 people working the field, you just need one. Instead of 10 people working in a field, it's one with a tractor. But this idea leaves something out of the equation. In fact industrial agriculture uses much more energy than other forms. It just that we have replaced the energy of human labour with the burning of fossil fuels. When comparing industrial agriculture with human labour based methods, looking at the industry needed to even get the tractor on the field, we see that modern farming is an incredibly uneconomic, inefficient, mode of agriculture. The situation of the one farmer left behind is certainly not any better either. Instead of working with friends and family in a peaceful field surrounded by nature, you are dealing with the threshing bumping violence of heavy machinery alone. Neither are small farmers making any extra money because, as we have seen, they suddenly have a huge new set of costs; machines, fertilizers, poisons, genetically modified crops. The only group who this new type of agriculture really works for are big corporations like Monsanto/Bayer.

Why is it even assumed that saving human labour is necessarily something worth striving for? What are we trying to save the labour for? That more people can work in an office trying sell people things they don't need? Or more people living off government benefits because there are no jobs anyway? People having to do less alienating work they hate is certainly a good thing, but a meaningful and enjoyable task is something that enlivens the spirit. And what could be more meaningful than working to make sure life thrives, to manage a healthy ecosystem (the basis for any good system of agriculture). When looking at the environmental crisis in a realistic way, it's clear that we need a lot of people to dedicate themselves to the task of restoring ecosystems, developing balanced ways of feeding human beings and the natural world at the same time. This does not mean forcing people from the city to work on the land. As we will see in the next section, the neo-indigenous movement is anti-authoritarian to its very core. People being forced from the city would be no better than when they were forced from the land in the first place. What it would mean, however, is making it possible to be a small farmer again.

Because right now life as a small farmer is almost impossible. If you want to farm in ways that are beneficial to the environment, you still have to compete with all the people producing fossil fuel based crops. These people can work fields 20 times the size of yours, and so produce 20 times the amount of crops that you do, meaning they can sell them at a much lower price. They have to in fact, to make up the huge costs of modern farming. The most absurd thing about this situation is that the modern farmer can't even sell most of the crops he produces. Instead the EU gives large landowners a guarantee that everything they produce will be bought, in order to keep food prices artificially cheap. So most of the food ends up rotting in warehouses or is sent to be sold cheaply in Africa, to make sure small farmers can't survive there either. EU subsidies are given out based on the size of your farm, with the larger your farm, the more subsidies you receive, and most small farmers receive nothing. So we can see that modern farming, along with being environmental catastrophic and socially unjust, is not even economic or efficient, but rather monumentally wasteful and can only exist with governments pouring money into it (the EU spent 35% of its budget on these subsidies in 2020 – 58 billion euro).

Along with the seizure of the land by powerful landlords and the industrialisation of agricultural, there are other important political and economic factors that contribute to surge of urbanisation and the abandonment of nature in modern times. With the advent of industrial production, suddenly a new class of industrialists needed people to work in their factories, and the rural poor who were

long ago dispossessed of their land, and no longer needed by wealthy landowners, began flooding into the cities. So the centralisation of the population in densely packed clusters is the social expression of the centralisation of wealth in the hands of the new class of industrialist. While this was the initial impulse for the the centralisation of the population, it proved useful to the forces of government in a wider sense than just this. People who live as individuals and are dependent on the city are a lot easier to govern, influence and control than people living in widely dispersed autonomous communities. Essentially, cities facilitate, and are the social and geographical expression of centralisation - the centralisation of wealth and power in the hands of a minority.

Although we can see that government machinations are the main cause of mass urbanisation, there are still those who would say that more people on the earth means that more people have to live in cities. It's better that we inhabit small spaces, rather than spread out across the land. However, exactly the opposite is true. The more people on earth, the smarter we must use our finite resources. And having people centred in dense urban clusters necessitates huge industry for the mere fact of moving things to these centres. Instead of people living sustainably from what is around them, they need to ship in the necessities of life from elsewhere. This was not a huge problem in the past, as cities had a natural limit to their growth, generally what the surrounding hinterland could support. But with the advent of modern industry there is no stopping the urban sprawl. Cities have grown far beyond being able to manage themselves sustainably, and are dependent on huge industry and exponentially increasing energy inputs to continue existing. The modern city is bad way of managing our resources, at a time when a population explosion has made good resource management essential. And even the idea that humans should stay in the cities and leave nature to itself comes from the erroneous idea that humans have an inherently negative effect on the natural world. It is perhaps a fair judgement to make when looking at industrial society, but when looking at indigenous people we see that Nature is at its fullest, most diverse, most alive when properly managed by people that are attuned to its needs.

Cities are not bad in themselves, nor must everyone must live on the land. Far from it. The city, humans living in large clusters, have the potential to be places of cultural exchange and experimentation, places of mass co-operation, breathing life into their surroundings. However right now it sucks the life out its hinterland, stifles creativity, normalises and separates people. Cities must be rethought of and redesigned for a world that we now realise has limits to what it can give, and with the purpose of encouraging the freedom and creative development of human beings.

## ***Solution***

The first element of the eco-community movement is returning to the natural world. Realigning ourselves with the natural cycles. Making ourself again solely dependent on the natural world, without the intermediary of capitalist markets. Creating a direct relation between us and our surrounding. Tasting the gifts of the wild, seeing the stars at night, hearing the creaking and chirping of life flowing all around. This is one of the most important impulses behind the neo-indigenous movement, and perhaps its defining characteristic. The indigenous life is one in communion with the land. The natural world is the basis of the communal and spiritual life of human beings and the neo-indigenous movement aims to restore a balanced and deferential relationship with it. This is not only essential for our spiritual well-being, it is also essential for our survival and the health of the natural world. We need people living with the land, listening to the land, to ensure that the spring-well of life on earth doesn't dry up. And once we have reconnected with the natural world, once we again feel the needs of nature as we feel our own individual needs, feel its beating heart as if it were in our own chest, you realise that this is where human beings belong, this is where we are at peace, and that it is worth defending at all costs.

## ***Natural Building***

A return to Nature is not only a geographical move, a move from one physical place to another, it is also a return to nature as the foundation of our daily life, beginning with the home. The modern home is an expression of modern society - built with complete disregard for their natural surroundings, with energy intensive materials and machines that need to be shipped in from the other side of the world, and needing huge energy inputs to maintain. The people of the neo-indigenous movement are looking to make themselves home in a different kind of society. And this is often the first thing you notice when entering a neo-indigenous space - the buildings are alive, they breath, they have natural shapes and curves. This is not just aesthetic, they are built according to an entirely different philosophy than the modern house.

Natural building is a philosophy of construction that takes a lot of designs and techniques from indigenous cultures, but is not confined to them. It is a way of building that produces structures in harmony with their surroundings, tapping into the natural energy flows that surround us on all sides, using locally sourced abundant materials, and generally relying on the human labour rather than fossil fuels. The results of these design principles is a beautiful, unique, sustainable and healthy home. Tapping into natural energy flows means your home becomes a part of the natural systems, rather than needing to create extra systems with extra energy inputs. For example, you build your house on a ridge with south facing windows and an overhang from the roof with the angle just so that you get full winter sun and no summer sun – meaning the house is heated and kept cool by the elements alone. You can use deciduous vines hanging in front of your house to achieve the same effect. Or you can do things like add vents according to the prevailing winds to ensure natural ventilation. And these are just examples of some of the basics to ensure low energy inputs. The flow of energies around us at all times is immense and a house built to conduct these energies has a powerful effect on those we who live there. For this reason many cultures also align their homes with the cosmos, the stars and the seasons.

After designing your house in line with natural ebb and flow of its surroundings, you can then look to those natural surrounding for your materials as well. While natural building obviously varies from place to place, depending on the natural surrounding, in Europe, natural building is often done with timber framing<sup>3</sup>, straw bales, and cob (a mix of clay, straw and sand). Along with the obvious environmental benefits of using these materials instead of industrial produced and imported materials, such as concrete and steel, they also create beautiful houses, expressions of the intertwining of the inner life of human consciousness and the outer life of the natural world. You see the trees from the neighbouring woods holding the house up. You see the earth used to create the body of the house. You see the work you put into it with your friends and community, the shape and style that emanated from the mysterious force of creativity that lies within all human beings. You have worked with what nature has provided to create something beautiful and functional and you recognise yourself in your home and in the natural world.

Another advantage of natural building is that it democratises the building processes, dispensing with the necessity of high tech materials and methods, and instead employing simple but effective techniques. This empowers people to build their home themselves. Many people in the neo-indigenous movement have designed and built their own homes, using the material from their land, sometimes without having barely held a hammer previously in their lives. This doesn't mean that no skills or previous experience is necessary, but it does mean that anyone can learn these skills and put them into practice without the necessity of going through many years of training in State institutions, as is generally the case for modern architectural design and construction. Many of the best natural builders are entirely self taught, working their way up from chicken houses, to sheds, to outdoor kitchens, to houses. Another element of the democratising effect of natural building is that it significantly reduces the cost of building a house, using locally abundant materials and one's own labour. This makes housing once again accessible to ordinary people, without them having to take

---

3 However, ensuring timber is an abundant resource requires intelligent and sustainable forest management.

out huge loans and lock themselves in the system of debt servitude and wage slavery. It is for all these reasons that natural building is a pillar of the neo-indigenous movement.

### ***Small Scale Artisan Production***

And the philosophy of using one's natural surrounds and one's own labour and creativity doesn't end when the house is built. You can extend this way of thinking and organising your life as far as you like: mould all your own cups, plates and bowls out of clay; weave all your baskets and containers out of reeds and other natural fibres; carve and join all own your furniture; tailor your clothes from cloth that you spun and wove yourself; forge your own tools, etc. Obviously it is not possible for a single person to do all this, but it is possible to dedicate oneself to one of these tasks, and do it with skill, while others in your community or local area dedicate themselves to what calls them and what they are good at. This is what most humans did for the majority of our history, provide for themselves, dedicate themselves to one of functional arts and realised themselves through their craft. But the advent of fossil fuel powered industrial production meant that this form of autonomous artisanry was no longer 'efficient'. A flood of mass produced wares destroyed local economies and the livelihood. So people today are instead slotted into a regimented and mechanised chain of production and realise nothing but their own alienation.

Which raises the question, in what way is industrial production 'efficient'? That it efficiently disempowers, exploits, and alienates human beings? Or that it efficiently destroys the natural world? While industrial production has the benefit of producing things on mass, we must also recognise its limitations and the dangers of its over use. Here we are touching upon another cornerstone of industrial society, its fetishisation of technology. Technology has always been central to human cultures, we have used tools to improve the quality of our lives since the earliest times. But the value of technology was found in the beneficial effect it had in our lives, or in solving a particular problem that we faced. An axe meant the ability to chop trees and build a solid shelter. The wheel meant the ability to move things from one place to another with greater ease. But most industrial technology is not designed to address our needs, but rather multiply our perceived needs. Technological advancement is no longer tied to some specific goal, it has become an end in itself. We measure a society's progress by its level of technological complexity. New technological is automatically considered good or beneficial, regardless of the effects of this technology on our lives. We invent mechanised forms of textile production, impoverishing a million villages around the world and forcing them into industrial factories, and call this 'progress'. We invent a bomb that kills millions of people in a second and call that 'progress' too. We have gone from a situation in which technological advancements serves human beings to one in which human beings serve technological advancements.

Behind this ethic technologically development for its own sake is the vague idea that technology will solve all the problems of the human condition. We believe that new agricultural technology will lead to the end of hunger and famine. But after 200 years of human industrial development there are higher levels of hunger, poverty and famine than has ever been. We have started to imagine that medical advancements will lead to the slowing of the ageing process and, eventually, eternal youth. Wealthy people now freeze their bodies in cryogenic stasis in the genuine belief that science will one day find a cure for death. Industrial billionaires promise humanity a better life in the sky; colonies on Mars for the event of the earth becoming uninhabitable. But if we make this bountiful earth uninhabitable, what makes us think that we will do any better on Mars? The problem isn't the earth, it's us. We imagine that technology is the path to our ecological salvation - that industrial technology will lead out of the danger it brought us into. But this fairytale only serves to obscure the real problem and hinder the proper course of action. The answer to our problems is not more industrial technology, it's less. That doesn't mean we 'regress', or forget about all the scientific advancements we have made in the last few centuries. It means that we start adapting these

scientific advancements to our real world conditions, and for the benefit of all human beings, instead of just a small minority of them.

### ***Appropriate Technology***

Appropriate technology is technology that is small-scale, affordable to all, decentralized, labour intensive, energy-efficient, environmentally sound, and locally autonomous. We have already seen examples in the previous sections, as natural building and artisanal crafts are prime examples of appropriate technology, but there are countless others. One example is small scale bio-gas production. When organic materials decompose anaerobically they produce combustible gas which we can use for cooking or warmth. The gas produced is essentially the same as what we call 'natural gas', but instead of drilling into the earth to release stores of gas that have already been trapped, you tap into the natural gas cycles - gas that will go back into the atmosphere anyway. The beauty of this technology is its simplicity. A biogas digester generally only consist of a few barrels and pipes. Or there are even simpler designs where all you do is dig a hole in the ground with two pipes for an in-and-outlet. But this simple design is enough to meet your needs for heat and warmth (along with producing some high quality compost at the same time). No huge industries, heavy machinery, extractors, intercontinental pipelines, etc. Just a couple of tubes, valves and a hole in the ground. This is technology that is already hugely important in India and China and is something that many neo-indigenous projects across Europe have adopted. And this is merely one example from thousands. Bicycles, ram pumps, and rocket stoves are some other examples of appropriate technology.

This is not to say that all complex technology is bad. The neo-indigenous movement in Europe is made possible through the internet. Many in the movement learn the skills and knowledge they need to live with greater autonomy from information shared online. The ability to share knowledge and skills, and connect with people on the other side of the world has is empowering for all humanity. Certain hi-tech medical technologies too have undoubtedly improved the lives of human beings and spared many people unnecessary suffering. If we were to limit ourselves to hi-tech solutions in areas where they were actually beneficial and there we no simpler alternatives, our planet would likely be able to sustain such industries. The problem is that, along with the genuine achievements of modern technological innovation, there is a mountain of crap that is either harmful, useless, or unnecessary. Why do we expend huge effort to increase the speed of the internet so that our fridge knows when the milk is running low, and can order more by drone delivery. Have we really become so adverse to expending even the minimum of human energy? What are we 'saving' our time and energy for? To work some office job we hate? To sit in front of a screen all evening? Pretty soon we won't even have to bother with the effort of maintaining social relations, and instead have robots that laugh at our jokes and agree with everything we say. Why spend so much resources and energy building a carbon capturing machines when we will never be able to construct something as efficient and beneficial as a tree? Why are we so fixated on replaced human labour with machine labour? It's long past time to start taking stock of the flood of new technological developments, and see what has actually improved our lives, and what is something that has just been sold to us but we are actually better off without.

So as you can see, although the neo-indigenous movement looks to problematise our society's relationship with technology, it is not anti-technology. It is rather an ethics based attitude toward technology. Technology should be judged according to whether or not it empowers people or improves their lives. If technology has the effect of exploiting or oppressing people, it is not progress, no matter how complex it is. Neither is it progress if it only serves to make our lives more 'comfortable' at the expense of the environment or other people. And complex, resource intensive technologies are inferior to simple technologies made with cheap and abundant materials that serve the same function. But, the problems that we face don't have a technological solution at all. Industrial society imagines that it can solve the climate crisis with technology. That all we need to

do is replace coal plants with solar panels, build a few carbon capturing devices and we can just continue to live as we have been doing up till now.

But climate crisis is not caused by the absence of the right technology, it's a behavioural problem without technological solutions. A section of the world population consumes far too many resources, and no technology is going to be able to fix that. The task for us, the minority of people on earth living in consumer super abundance, is not to invent some climate saving technology. It is to change our behaviour, to live in a way that the planet can sustain. For the last hundred years, modern society has been organised around increasing people's needs, turning luxuries into needs. But now, it is imperative that we do the opposite, deliberately reducing our needs. There is really no way around it. Although we may like to imagine that we can solve the climate crisis and maintain the consumer lifestyles that we have become accustomed to, that is a fantasy. Unless the industrial middle classes radical *reduce our consumption*, then we will literally consume the earth. The neo-indigenous movement is the attempt to begin this process, the process of organising our lives around taking less, simplifying the overly complex, and living within our means.

### ***Direct Connection with Food, Natural Diet, Herbal Medicine***

The last few sections have been looking at how the neo-indigenous movement is re-conceptualising the value we place on technology, aiming to once again make technology serve people rather than people serve technology, as well as developing technology that is less of a burden to natural world. But the type of technology we create is only of facet of relationship with Nature. Of perhaps even greater importance is the way in which we feed ourselves. Food is the ultimate expression of our dependence and ultimate oneness with Nature. Through the process of eating, digesting, and metabolising food we literally merge ourselves with the natural world, transforming nature's bounty in our own cells, our own blood. It is the life force that propels us forward. Nature's greatest gift. But many people are barely cognisant of this fact at all. To many it just comes from the supermarket, heavily processed and wrapped in plastic. They miss out on an essential part of nourishment. There is something about seeing a plant grow from seed, raised by the earth, sun and rain, and then directly harvesting this plant to eat, that goes beyond the bio-chemical reactions. It's food for the soul as well as the body. And industrial food leaves the soul feeling hungry. On top of this, by growing your own food (or personally knowing the people who grew it) you can be sure it comes with all the nutritional and health benefits that comes from plants grown in a functional ecosystem with organic compost and not coated in a layer of poison. For these reasons, *establishing a direct connection to our food* is of central importance to the movement.

And Nature is not only able to provide us with our daily nourishment. It can also provide most of the medicines we need to restore and maintain our health. Human beings have used herbs for their healing properties since before we were human (chimpanzees and other mammals also eat specific plants to treat various ailments). In all cultures throughout history we have looked to herbs as the first line of defence against sickness, but in modern times these ancient practices were suppressed. This happened for a number of reasons: colonial modernity seeking to assert itself over indigenous traditions, patriarchal society trying to delegitimise the role of medicine women (who were labelled as 'witches'), a fetishisation of all things 'modern'. But although it has often set itself apart, modern medicine is largely based on herbal cures. Many medicines are merely isolated compounds found in the natural world, and everything else is derived from what Nature provides. And while there is sometimes benefits to the isolation of particular compounds to enhance their effects (morphine is no doubt highly effective for acute pain relief), there is a lot of evidence to show that the whole is worth more than the sum of its parts. Scientific research is beginning to reveal that herbal cures are so effective because of the combination of constituents, the way they interact with each other, and the human body, rather than reducing their medicinal effect to one or two 'active' constituents alone.

As a large majority of pharmacological research is done on by pharmaceutical companies who seek to make a profit from their synthetic drugs, medicinal herbs remain incredibly under-researched. But the more research that is done, the more we see that many of the ancient plant based cures can be just as effective, and are far safer, than modern drugs, particularly for chronic illness. Our bodies have evolved side by side with plants over millennia and are geared toward digesting and metabolising plant based materials, and because of this they generally cause a lot less side effects than synthetic drugs. In the past couple of decades we have seen conventional medicine in the West begin to open itself up to indigenous medicinal practices, and in some countries herbal cures are being incorporated into conventional medicine, as it has been in India, China, Africa, and most other parts of the world for decades. The eco-community movement supports these developments and often function as centres for the learning and production of herbal medicine.

### ***Supporting Small Farmers***

And all of these different elements of returning to the natural world aren't merely theoretical ideas. Many thousands of people across Europe, across the world, have been returning to the natural world and rediscovering old ways and inventing new ones re-connect with Nature. However, we have already seen the difficulties associated with being a small farmer. These difficulties make taking the jump from industrial to sustainable farming too difficult for many already existing farming communities. But these difficulties are mainly based on the society organised around the agriculture, rather than anything to do with the methods of agriculture themselves. How can we improve the organisation of food distribution to make it possible to be a small farmer again? An exemplary answer to that, already practised in many cities across Europe and the world, is community supported agriculture (CSA). CSA is the creation of direct links between farmers and eaters. Instead of people buying vegetables from a supermarket, they subscribe to a weekly vegetable box from their local farmer. This cuts out any intermediaries and ensures the farmer a stable income. Often part of the arrangement is that subscribers come out and help on the farm at least once a year as well, providing the farmer with a bit of extra support, and the people with direct experience of where their food comes from. And this is only one great example, there are many ways we can make sustainable agriculture by small farmers is possible.

While the neo-indigenous movement is a grass roots movement, working from the bottom up, actions can be taken at every level of society to foster this bottom-up movement, including at the level of State. Because if, instead of subsidising the destruction of nature by wealthy landowners, governments would subsidise small farmers returning to sustainable methods of farming, we would see the number of farmers working to produce sustainable food and manage healthy ecosystems explode overnight. Not only that but the life of a farmer would be improved in an instant. Instead of spending all day, mounted in machines, spraying poison across their monocultural fields, they would be engaged in the noble work of caring for the land, as their ancestors did. However, since the time of their ancestors, many of the essential skills and knowledge needed to properly care for the land have been lost. In a matter of a few generations, the old ways almost vanished – but for a few who kept the flickering flame of knowledge lit. These old ways can be combined with and augmented by new techniques from early pioneers of the neo-indigenous movement (who we are about to look at in a moment). State programmes for the transmission of knowledge and techniques that can help strike a new balance with the natural world would help speed up the transition to sustainable agriculture, buying us essential time in the race against the clock that is global heating and the collapse of global ecosystems. State programmes, subsidies, and policies were the driving forces in the take up of modern farming techniques. Even if the neo-indigenous movement ultimately aims to overcome the State as a form of government, most people in the movement would see the imperative of using all available resources to meet the crisis of the ecocide head on.

### ***Rewilding & Landscape Restoration***



As we have seen, returning to the natural world is only the beginning. What is ultimately at issue is that we establish a new type of relationship with the Nature – one of service rather than exploitation. We can no longer see Nature as base resources for us to create every more elaborate ways to pleasure ourselves. Nature is made up of a million creatures who want to live and have their needs met just like we do. And even if we want to take an anthropocentric view of things - our own well being depends on the well being of these creatures. We urgently need to start working for the benefit of all life on earth, or pretty soon there won't be enough life to sustain even our basic needs.

The clearest examples of a disposition of service rather than exploitation are the many initiatives for rewilding or landscape restoration that have sprung up around the world. Most of the world's ecosystems have been degraded by human activity over the last few thousand years. This is not something that began in the modern era, although the modern society has greatly accelerated the process. The floodplains of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the Fertile Crescent, so overflowing with natural riches that it spawned the first large human civilisations is today a desert, and generally speaking, wherever large centralised civilisations have sprung up, they have left a desert in their wake. But it doesn't have to be like this. When we look to decentralised indigenous cultures, we see how human can help the natural world to flourish, can intelligently aid ecosystems in adapting to change. Landscape restoration projects aim to repair some of the damage done by centralised civilisations over the last few thousand years. Left to its own devices, Nature would recolonise degraded lands on its own, life is constantly seeking to multiply itself, but this may take many thousands of years, and our labour can help speed up the process.

After the scales being tipped in our direction for so long, it's time for us as a species to collectively work for the benefit of the natural world, to help nature heal its wounds. If we invested even a fraction of the time and resources into rewilding that we invest into the military, plotting ever more elaborate ways to murder each other, it would be springtime in the natural world, global ecosystems growing in complexity and diversity, and once again becoming fountains of abundance. Human labour directed in the right way can act against the force of entropy: planting trees, digging swales, and constructing retaining walls to slow erosion. There have already been many examples of successful large scale landscape restoration and rewilding projects, and they multiply every day. Along with these large scale projects, many people in the neo-indigenous movement are also doing it on a smaller scale, returning part of the land to Nature. The creation of a 'wild zone' is often part of the design in many neo-indigenous projects.

### ***New Types of Farming***

#### ***Permaculture***

Which brings us to a very important topic in the eco-community movement – the field of permaculture. Permaculture is so central to the movement that you almost call it the permaculture movement, and this article 'Three Aims of the European Permaculture Movement'. Many of the people in the movement that I am calling neo-indigenous, if they are cognisant of being part of a wider movement for transformation, would identify themselves as part of the permaculture movement. Many of the values of the neo-indigenous movement and methods used to realise these values are found within permaculture, and permaculture has been very important in transmitting these values and practices throughout Europe and the world. Many people's first look into the neo-indigenous movement is the hugely popular Permaculture Design Course. And the three aims of the movement that I am outlining in this text are very similar to three pillars of permaculture – earth care, people care, fair share.

So what is permaculture? Simply put, it is a design science for creating sustainable systems. The term 'sustainable' has been hijacked by corporate green washers who use it to sell environmentally destructive products, but it means something quite specific. Something is sustainable if it can go on forever, in theory at least. Obviously nothing will go on forever, but some systems would at least

have the potential to go on forever, if it weren't for external factors. Other systems, unsustainable systems, don't have the potential to go forever, even aside from external factors, because of internal contradictions within the system itself. For example, a village relies on wood from the forest to build shelter and make fire. This forest can regenerate itself at the rate of five trees a year. If the village were to chop down five trees a year or less, it would be a sustainable system (less than five trees would even be a regenerative system). However if they were to chop ten trees a year, this would be an unsustainable system of forest management. Eventually the villagers would have no forest left, and nothing to provide warmth and shelter. In this case there would be something inherently faulty with their system. The internal logic of the system is at odds with its conditions of existence.

If we look at our society, we can see it is highly unsustainable. Its internal logic, exponential growth in the use and consumption of resources, is at odds with its conditions of existence, a healthy natural world that can provide us with resources. The logic of constant economic growth is one that may function on a world with infinite resources, but this is not our world. Industrial society is one that is destined to consume itself, and all the people who have become dependent on it. The essence of permaculture is in creating systems with no internal contradictions, systems for the world we actually live in.

With this as its aim, those in the field of permaculture have developed a set of design principles and templates, as well as a broad set of techniques, for its practical realisation. These principles and design templates were first worked out by Bill Mollison and David Holmgreen, the founders of permaculture. Holmgreen was a student of Mollison at Tasmanian College of Environmental Education and together in 1974, inspired by the infinite productivity of Nature and the agricultural practices of indigenous peoples, they began developing a framework for sustainable agriculture, for which they coined the term 'permaculture'. Although it originally meant 'permanent agriculture', Mollison quickly realised that without a sustainable human culture, no healthy ecosystems would be possible, and so broadened the term to mean 'permanent culture'. Permaculture thus includes techniques and methods for social, as well as agricultural systems, although most permacultural activity is still focused on the latter. A huge part of the sustained success and importance of permaculture is its ability to assimilate other ideas and techniques – most of the techniques that are now considered permaculture weren't developed by Mollison, or Holmgreen, or any other permaculturalist, but were just assimilated into the field, as permaculture provides the framework to group together all of these different ideas and techniques for creating sustainable systems.

We can quickly glide over some of the principles, design templates and techniques that permaculture is composed of to give a better idea of what permaculture means in practice. The twelve principles are: Observe and Interact, Catch and Store Energy, Obtain a Yield, Apply Self Regulation and Accept Feedback, Use and Value Renewable Resources and Services, Produce No Waste, Design From Patterns to Details, Integrate Rather Than Segregate, Use Small and Slow Solutions, Use and Value Diversity, Use Edges and Value the Marginal, and Creatively Use and Respond to Change. All these principles have at their core the same idea: work with and learn from Nature. Some of the most important permaculture design templates include things like: guilds (putting plants into mutually beneficial groups), zoning (designing your system with different zoning that serve different functions), and layering (designing agricultural systems with many different canopy layers, like you find in a forest – high canopy trees, bushes, ground cover, fungi, etc.) Some popular techniques include mulching (ground cover), hügelkultur (burying large amounts of wood to increase soil water retention), and keyline irrigation (working with slopes and channels to maximise water retention).

However, while permaculture is important to the neo-indigenous movement, and runs parallel to it in many ways, it is not analogous to the movement. Because of its popularity, and because of the its

openness and tendency to assimilate ideas, many people use the term 'permaculture' in a very broad way, giving it a wider meaning than was originally intended. However, there are many who maintain that permaculture refers to something quite specific (the Permaculture Design Course, the twelve principles, the various design templates, etc.), and don't want permaculture to become a buzzword for all things sustainable. And there is some truth to this assessment, because what this text calls the 'neo-indigenous movement' is ultimately larger than just permaculture. Although there are people within the movement who see permaculture as the central element, there are also many people who have same goals, want to transform society along the same lines, but don't see permaculture as that important. Particularly when looking at the global context, many people have no need of a design science that was inspired by indigenous practices. Because unlike most people of Europe, they have maintained a vital link with their tradition. Another reason why permaculture doesn't have a universal reach is that it is based on the language of the material sciences, which doesn't appeal to all people or all cultures. Finally, there are elements of the neo-indigenous movement that are not encapsulated by the field of permaculture. The movement being outlined in this text is ultimately something larger than just permaculture, although permaculture is one of the most important banners around which it rallies.

### *Natural Farming*

Another important inspiration for the movement is the natural farming of Masanobu Fukuoka, Zen farmer and philosopher. After years of working in a laboratory researching plant pathologies Fukuoka became disillusioned with modern agricultural. He began to see that 'modern research divides nature into tiny pieces and conducts tests that conform neither with natural law nor with practical experience.' Fukuoka gave up his career as a microbiologist and returned to his familial homeland to take over his fathers orange orchard. Upon returning he stumbled across an orchard that had been left abandoned, and was astounded by its productivity. This inspired him to develop a method of farming that remains as close to Nature as possible. Fukuoka developed a system of rice and barley multi-cropping, in which the only thing he did was scatter seeds (rice, barley, and alfalfa as ground cover), lay the old stalks back on the field along with a bit of chicken manure, and harvest. No machines or chemical additives, no weeding or prepared compost, not even digging or transplanting or flooding like the traditional Japanese forms of rice cultivation. Despite this, to the astonishment of everyone, Fukuoka's farm produced yields as high as industrial farms.

A central pillar Fukuoka's natural farming is a concept taken from Zen and Tao philosophy – *wu-wei*, inaction. While what one does is important, what one doesn't do is equally important. Mould a cup out of clay, and it is the empty space in the middle that makes it useful. Natural farming is also sometimes described as 'do-nothing' farming because the aim is to do as little as possible. Whereas something goes wrong in modern agriculture and people are also looking to some addition that will solve the problem, 'what can we do to solve this problem?', natural farming takes the opposite approach, 'what can we not do to solve this problem?' The basis for this approach is the understanding of Nature as the source of wisdom and power, and of our view of the natural world as inherently limited. Even in a handful of soil there are millions of micro-organisms interacting in complex ways. How are we ever meant to get to the bottom of a vast world, of an infinite universe? Modern science treats nature like a puzzle to be solved, but how are we meant to a puzzle with no beginning and no end? We look at something from one angle and think its a cause, we then see it from another and it seems more like an effect. By thinking we 'understand' Nature, and constantly intervening based on our finite understandings, we have created a huge array of problems for ourselves. According to Fukuoka, humans thinking they can improve upon Nature is the source of all our current difficulties. The best thing we do is allow the Nature to unfold on its own, with only minimal interventions on our part to ensure we have enough to live.

Unlike permaculture, natural farming offers little in the way of practical techniques. While Fukuoka outlined the details of his system in detail, it was developed around his own personal surroundings.

And although it was outwardly simple, it was the product of decades of observation and experiment. It may be called 'do nothing farming', but it takes a lot of work to do so little. Those who have simply tried to replicate his techniques have not had the same level of success. But Fukuoka was never pretending to offer a general template for everyone to copy. The whole idea is that generalised solutions turn Nature into an abstraction, freeze it in time and remove it from its living context. Ultimately, true wisdom arises not from abstraction, but from living experience and natural farming is a system that arises from the creative font of intuition, spontaneous knowledge, and actionless action, as it sometimes referred to in Zen. Natural farming is not a formalised system of agriculture, it is an application of the Zen mind to the farmer's field. 'When it is understood that one loses joy and happiness in the attempt to possess them, the essence of natural farming will be realized. The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings.' And while the techniques of natural farming have had little practical application in neo-indigenous projects, its philosophy has long inspired many within the movement.

### *Syntropic Farming*

Whereas natural farming offers a spiritual philosophy of farming, and permaculture a broad set of principles, templates, and practices, syntropic farming is a specific and replicable method of high density planting according to specific codes to create regenerative and highly productive agricultural systems. The system was developed by Swiss farmer Ernst Götsch after he moved to Brazil in the early 1980's and took over 500 hectares of land. The land had previously been rainforest, but the rainforest had cleared for intensive cattle ranching and left in a degraded state. Contrary to the received wisdom of modern farming, that claims all plants are in competition with each other and must be highly spaced out, Götsch started experimenting with highly dense and diverse planting in tightly packed lines. Along with high density planting, different canopy layers and including succession within the design were highly important elements of syntropic farming. The results were astounding, in less than two decades Götsch's farm had been transformed back into rainforest, with comparable levels of diversity and growth. Where previously there had been bare earth, there was a deep layer of humus. And it not only served nature. Along with restoring his natural environment, he also created a highly productive farm. Instead of producing yield from a single crop, he was producing a yield from ten different plants in the same amount of space. For this reason many people are excited for its potential in the commercial sector, allowing small farmers who rely on agriculture to pay their bills, to also engage in landscape restoration. Although relatively new to the movement, its demonstrable success, and replicability is ensuring its fast growth and propagation.

### *Bio-dynamic Farming*

Another current of ideas and techniques that resonate with many within the movement, particularly in the German speaking world, is the *bio-dynamic* farming of Rudolf Steiner. Similar in many ways to organic farming (the exclusion of poisons and synthetic fertilisers), or even some elements of permaculture (the preparation of compost and other herbal and mineral additives, the treatment of soil, plants and livestock as single system), it sets itself apart in other respects. Like natural farming, biodynamic agriculture is not only a technique of cultivating crops, but also of cultivating spiritual awareness. While permaculture or syntropic farming are based on the methodology of modern science, biodynamic agriculture unfolds from the romantic impulse to give back to nature its mystically quality - a quality it that has been stripped from in the quest to rationalise the world. Many of the methods are about aligning one's activity with cosmological forces, such as farming in accordance with lunar cycles. They are also methods of harnessing these forces, such as burying a cow horn full of quartz in your field. Although the more rationally minded may scoff at these more mystical methods, they may want to reflect on the fact that the entirely 'rational' modern farming has caused the collapse of ecosystems around the world and is now threatening our ability to feed ourselves.

### ***Indigenous Land Management***

Permaculture, natural, syntropic and biodynamic farming are just some examples of methods of agriculture that establish a balanced relationship with Nature and still produce everything that we need. There are potentially many others, and people throughout the world and throughout history and have always developed, and continue to develop, unique modes of living that fulfil their own needs and the needs of the natural world. There is an idea in our society that human beings have an inherently negative effect on the natural world, a fair assumption to make if the only human-nature relationship you have ever witnessed is that of industrial societies. But when looking at other cultures throughout the world, we see that Nature is at its most abundant and diverse when it is intelligently managed by people who truly understand the land and its needs, indigenous peoples. The Amazon rainforest is the world's largest tropical forest and one of the most bio-diverse places on the planet. Our image of it is that of virgin forest, the ultimate expression of Nature unsullied by human hands. But this idea is starting to change as we begin to understand the important effect that indigenous people have had on this jungle for millennia. One indication for this is the very high percentage of different plants that serve humans as foods and medicines, which is much higher than would be expected from a 'natural' ecosystem without much human influence. More evidence came in the 1950's, when scientists flying over the Amazon were perplexed at the fact that some areas had a canopy many metres higher than its surroundings. Upon investigation they realised that underneath these higher canopies was an incredibly fertile soil made by indigenous people and composed of ash, bones, ceramic, shit, food residue. This black soil, terra preta, was essentially all the natural waste products of a human settlement and wherever it was found it was surrounded by abundance. All of this is backed up by continuing archaeological evidence, as well as accounts of some of the earliest Spanish and Portuguese colonists, that portray the Amazon rainforest, not as untouched virgin forest, but as highly populated and managed food forest. A paradise of abundance in which humans and Nature worked in harmony. A model for our own development.

### ***New Relationship with Nature***

So as we have seen in section, the neo-indigenous movement is, in the first instance, a return to nature. This is not only a physical return, once again allowing Nature to thrive around us instead of paving over it with concrete, but also a return to having Nature at the centre of how we organise our lives and provide for ourselves. The neo-indigenous movement aims to make themselves once again solely dependent on the natural world, without the intermediate of global markets. And in recognition of this dependence, we also see the true value of Nature, and our true relation with it. If we are to survive as a civilisation, and as a species, it is necessary to give up on the suicidal logic of infinite economic 'growth' - the valuation of nature as base resources to be exploited. The 'growth' of the economy is the growth of inanimate commodities at the expense of real growth - that of life. It is time we stop degrading the natural world and ourselves, and *re-establish a spiritual relationship with the natural world based on love and respect*. We are not the centre of existence. We are rather one small thread of an infinitely large web of existence. The natural world was not created to serve us. All living creatures have their own needs, their own will to live and to prosper. We are not the owners and rulers of Nature, but are rather its humble servants. If we recognise this we will once again see that the natural world provides such overflowing abundance that we didn't have to fear scarcity at all - that it was foolish to try and control Nature, that we didn't have to be afraid, and that a free and flourishing Nature is all we really need.

And part of recognising our place in the world, recognising that we are finite beings in an infinite universe, is recognising the futility of our Faustian pursuit of knowledge. The modern mind believes itself to have unlocked, or be in the process of unlocking, all of nature's secrets - but in reality we are digging deeper into the depths of our own delusion. The mysteries of Nature are infinite, as is the human capacity for confusion. Once we believe ourselves to have understood Nature, troubles rain down upon us. We lose access to the source of knowledge, we start viewing everything with through the abstract lens of finite. This is not to say that the rational mind isn't useful, it is

undoubtedly one of humanity's greatest tools, but unless we recognise the proper use and limitations of this tool, we will continue to use this hammer to whack ourselves over the head, rather than build ourselves a house. The rational mind is not the source of knowledge, it is just one way of ordering the knowledge we receive from the source. Many people are starting to recognising this, and new (or old) spiritual relation to Nature is being cultivated; one in which we humbly recognise our own smallness as human beings before the vastness of existence, but at the same time recognise our own essential identity with this vastness.