Clayoquot & Dissent, essays by Tzeporah Berman, Gordon Brent Ingram, Maurice Gibbons, Ronald B. Hatch, Loys Maingon, Christopher Hatch; published by Ronsdale, Cacanadadada, 1994.

Reviewed by Jill Thomas

The common element in this collection of essays, *Clayoquot & Dissent,* is an old growth forest ecosystem on Vancouver Island called Clayoquot Sound. Each essay in the collection examines the conflict surrounding the decision of the provincial government of British Columbia, to clear-cut log in Clayoquot through a different lens. Each author highlights different problems and proposes different solutions. In this way, the essays are a metaphor for the conflict itself for, the actual social conflict surrounding the Sound is a complex and diverse as the forest ecosystem itself.

Between them, the essays provide a detailed history of the conflict. In "The Ecology of a Conflict," Gordon Brent Ingram, opens his essay with a long, somewhat monotonous but crucial, list of the major events. His chronicle opens in September of 1979 with the founding of The Friends of Clayoquot Sound and ends a decade and half later in September of 1994. It's a distressing outline and basically goes like this – clear-cut logging, blockades, arrest, forestry yield increases, series of failed government tasks forces, more blockades and arrests, more government whitewash, inadequate compromise, escalated blockades, hundreds of arrests, national outrage, international boycotts, 'forestry reform' and finally, fifteen years later... "the continuing problems in Clayoquot Sound are temporarily out of the public's mind. Clear-cut logging continues at a rapid pace"(17).

Ingram outlines the complexity of the conflict and highlights government ineptness and bureaucratic dysfunction in finding a 'solution'. My advice is to grab a coffee and plod through this information because it highlights the diversity of the Clayoquot Sound ecosystem as well as the number and variety of interest groups fighting over what to do with the trees that live there. By forcing us to grapple with the complexity of this conflict, Ingram discredits the simplistic binary of the 'jobs vs. environment' debate which has been force fed to us by sensational and shallow media coverage and supported by industry propaganda.

Ingram urges forest activists to move beyond narrow green dogmatism and learn to listen to and work with members of the logging communities – yes, this means hanging out in Port Alberni for longer then it takes to put gas in your car on the way to Tofino. The simple fact that 20,000 loggers invaded Victoria last year to protest *any* decrease in cutting levels on Vancouver Island should make it obvious that it's time for 'forest protectors' and 'tree cutters' to sit down and chat.

Ingram provides us with a strong foundation for a political analysis of the conflict in Clayoquot Sound. However, he neglects the social and cultural dimensions of this crisis. By doing so, he fails to place Clayoquot where it should be, which is at the at the centre of the latest round in the valley by valley 'battle for the trees' in British Columbia. Ingram ignores the fact that 'saving' Clayoquot Sound will not end the forestry conflict in BC. or bring us closer to undermining the social and cultural assumptions at the root of our global 'ecological crisis'.

Loys Maingon, in his essay "Clayoquot: Recovering From Cultural Rape," examines the conflict from the cultural angle that Ingram neglects. He circumvents political analysis, totally ignores debates about "Forest Practices Codes" and insists that we ponder the culture that produced this crisis. Our culture, Maingon argues, has been "raped" by technology and "usurped by technocratic pseudo-culture" (158). He depicts radical environmentalists as cultural saviors battling to save us all from 'ecosuicide'.

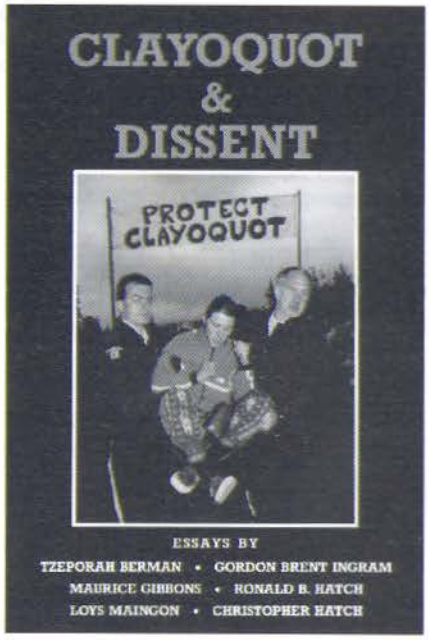
The essay paints a naive picture of 'radical environmentalists' but otherwise provides a helpful critique of the technology dependent, progress worshipping culture we live in. Maingon links the mandates of powerful corporations with their sophisticated public relations campaigns to the passive compliance of the "mainstreaming" media. In doing so, he demonstrates how ecological values are misrepresented, marginalized and therefore, "raped" of their cultural meanings.

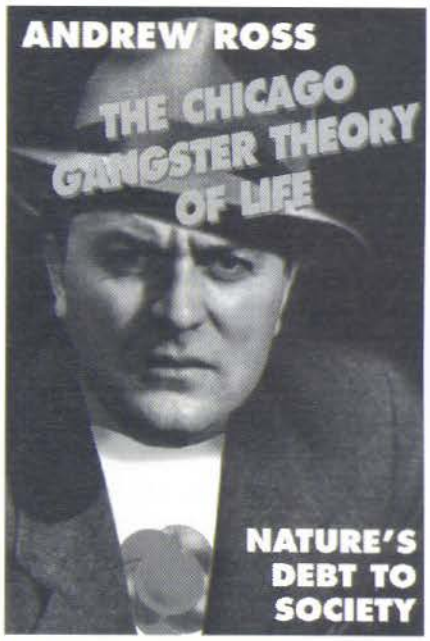
Ronald Hatch's essay, titled the "Clayoquot Show Trials," looks at the Clayoquot conflict from the perspective of stuffy rooms in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. This rigorously researched essay examines an important aspect of the conflict which until now has been sadly neglected. The only trees in this Clayoquot story have long since been converted into intimidating platforms built to elevate 'his lordship', the judge, above society's delinquents engaged in civil disobedience in order to save the forest.

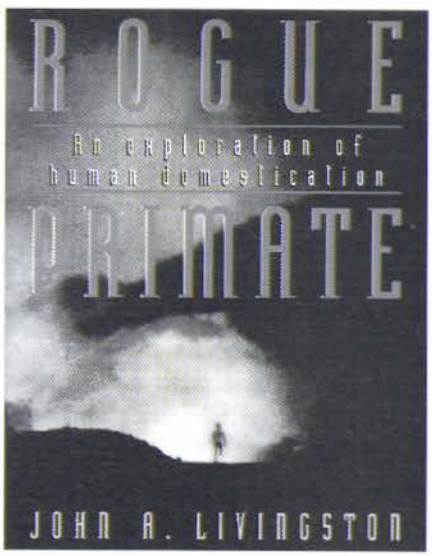
In the summer and fall of 1993, almost a thousand protesters were arrested in Clayoquot Sound. It took almost a year for 'the authorities' to herd the 'arrestees' through the BC. 'injustice' system. Hatch points out that no one, including lawyers, judges, defendants, the police or government officials, was happy with the way the trials were conducted. I personally attended the majority of the "Clayoquot trials" and can only describe the trials as a joke – sometimes funny, but most often sad.

Hatch refers to the trials as "show trials" which is also a enlightening description. Judge after judge sentenced the Clayoquot protesters to excessive jail sentences and fines to "show" us the dangers of public dissent and discourage further "illegal tantrums".

Hatch also effectively highlights the absolute absurdity of the trials. In brief, Clayoquot 'arrestees' were denied their individual legal right to defend themselves and were often not given time to consult lawyers. They were charged with 'criminal contempt' of court for an act of civil disobedience, which 'coincidentally' saved Macmillan Bloedel the







hassle, expense and embarrassment of filing civil suits against the blockaders. Protesters who committed the same 'crime' were given vastly different sentences – it seems punishments depended on the mood of the judge. Defense lawyers revealed that the RCMP provided Macmillan Bloedel with "mug shots" and detailed personal information on all 'arrestees'. And the list goes on... Anyone who still believes that justice system in British Columbia is a fair arbitrator should carefully read this essay.

Hatch provides us with a launch pad from which we may start to fully understand how this 'battle for the trees' is only a small part of a much bigger struggle. His extensive bibliography lists sources which may otherwise have remained hidden in a quagmire of government whitewash and oppressive judicial bureaucracy.

Dr. Maurice Gibbons' essay, "The Clayoquot Papers," fills a space that, despite their diversity, all the other essays miss – personal experience. Dr. Gibbons eloquently tells us the story of his arrest and trial. In doing so, he translates for his readers the powerful emotional energy of the blockades at the Kennedy River Bridge.

The momentum of the Clayoquot protest and social conflict peaked in the summer of 1993 and has now faded. These essays are, in essence, a reflection and an important after-the-fact analysis of the biggest illegal protest in Canadian history. It seems on the surface that change did not evolve out of this conflict – the trees are still falling at an ever increasing rate. However, sometimes change is subtle.

Christopher Hatch opens his concluding essay, "The Clayoquot Protests: One Year Later" with a question – "Did the Clayoquot protests fail"(199)? Hatch admits that on the ground the status quo is strongly in place but highlights that in a broader sense change has happened. He sites various initiatives of the provincial government of British Columbia to improve forestry practices and industry initiatives to 'green' their images as evidence of this change. Well, it's not the most encouraging news but its an important start.

However, perhaps change took place in some almost imperceptible ways. Tzeporah Berman, in her essay "Takin' it Back," explores this idea. Berman highlights the accomplishments of the Peace Camp, the most important of which was the power of this special community to act as a vehicle for social change. Berman writes, "Ultimately, the struggle is not only a struggle for "wilderness" or sound forest practices but fundamentally a struggle with how we interact with the natural world..."(6). Reading *Clayoquot & Dissent* should be a priority for anyone engaged in this struggle.

• • • **Jill Thomas** is currently pursuing her Master's in Environmental Studies at York University. She worked at the Clayoquot Resource Center during the Clayoquot trials in Victoria, BC. . . . . .

The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society, by Andrew Ross, New York: Verso, 1994.

Reviewed by Mark Lutes

That Andrew Ross has his finger on the pulse of North American cultural politics became evident to me when, shortly after reading his *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, I began clipping a large stack of newspapers that had piled up over Christmas. There I found *Globe and Mail* arts columnist Robert Fulford, lamenting the popular wisdom that virtue and capitalism are at odds, and embracing the "reasonable idea" that "we will be more intelligent when we embrace the natural desires that give rise to capitalism." I then found a lengthy and circumspect *G&M* editorial which noted that we are being 'geneticized' by the saturation coverage of research claiming genetic origins for more and more areas of human behaviour and health. Next was a story of a Manhattan subway car explosion "sparking fears of a new terrorist assault in the heart of the financial district." Ross has a lot to say about these and many other current fascinations of popular discourse; little of it original but all of it interesting, and written with humour and a keen insight into the political pitfalls of current environmental discourse.

The Chicago Gangster is a lively and very readable critique of cultural locations where ideas and discourses of culture and ecology intersect. Ross seems to suffer from the typically postmodernist fear of being insufficiently complex – thus he tells very complex and ironic stories that combine, pull apart, juxtapose and critique the stories, images and ideas circulating through popular culture. Ross' genre of 'postmodern cultural criticism,' could be read as the mutant offspring of post-structuralist literary criticism and nature writing. Think of a Barry Lopez, informed by all the preoccupations of postmodern and poststructuralist theory (e.g. suspicious of essentialism, origin stories, binary dualisms and totalizing theory), writing about various sites in modern culture where ideas of nature intersect with struggles for liberation and social change in the context of relations of power, race, class and gender. Yet Ross' stream-of-cultural-consciousness writing style propels the reader almost effortlessly through this sometimes bizarre array of subject matter.

The Chicago Gangster follows the format of Ross' 1991 book, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits*. It examines disparate areas of cultural responses to issues, events and movements – debates about cultural preservation in Polynesia, the bombing of the World Trade Center, media images of ecology and the Gulf War, the men's movement and ecofeminism, and sociobiology – in a series of chapters connected by a loosely structured set of common themes. These sites are important to Ross because the discourses and ideas that inform and emerge from them play a crucial role in defining and delimiting the potential for political and social change. Ross offers a trenchant critique of what he sees as politically regressive elements of alternative movements and cultural trends.

Ross takes the title for his book from a passage in sociobiologist Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene:*

> **Like successful Chicago gangsters, our genes have survived, in some cases, for millions of years, in a highly competitive world. This entitles us to expect certain qualities in our genes. I argue that a predominant quality to be expected in a successful gene is ruthless selfishness. This gene selfishness will usually give rise to selfishness in individual behaviour (254).**

The kind of circular reasoning employed here by Dawkins, involving the use of often suspect metaphors from human life to conceptualize nature, then reading them back on social life as deterministic laws, is for Ross a pervasive feature of all the areas of cultural politics covered in this volume. This tendency underlies the main themes running through Ross' essays: first, the hazards of appealing to the authority of 'nature' to explain and legitimate problems that are rooted in social relations of domination and inequality, is a critique of a trend he sees in ecological discourse that preaches denial, scarcity and limits, which for Ross are incompatible with a progressive political project. This discourse of limits, he argues, is closely linked to coercive forms of social control and the logic of corporate capitalism, and is closely linked to the misguided attempt to find guidance for human affairs in laws of nature.

The first chapter, the longest and most fully developed, examines the complex ways that discourses of cultural preservation have played out in political, cultural and academic debates over ethnic identity in the Polynesian South Pacific Islands. The stories that Ross tells about these islands are always informed by an ironic appreciation of their role as the "birthplace of modern ecological romanticism" (28), and the role of their inhabitants as a backdrop for European stories of noble savages, scarcity and abundance, cultural destruction, and encounters of Westerners with 'primitive Others'. Ross wants to subvert the standard stories told by or for Westerners about Polynesian culture, while aware of the fact that his may be yet another contribution to this tradition. But, he says, "I will press on anyway, in the hope that since my stories are neither romantic nor apocalyptic, they may help to dissipate the power of the genres that have fueled this long obsession" (28). Ross cautions against an attitude of uncritical respect for traditional values, which has been mobilized to legitimate corrupt and authoritarian governments in places such as Fiji, where the island's traditional elite sponsored a military coup against a newly elected and moderately left-leaning government. The contradictions of Polynesian cultural politics emerge most fully in an extended examination of a Mormon-run 'ethnic theme park' in Hawaii.

In his examinations of various sites of 'cultural politics', Ross usually manages to