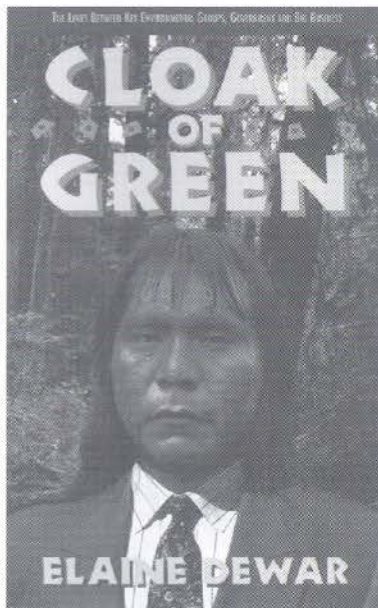


of the automobile, we may have simply created a new box within which to live. In the closing essay, Zielinski describes an auto-dominated future in which “smart” cars are guided in “packs” at predetermined times onto highways that would otherwise be permanently congested. As the complexity of the technology grows, so does its power to control our movements and our daily routines. We will have *become* the car rather than just simply users of the technology.

Beyond the Car artfully offers both simple and complex alternatives to the freeway Orwellianism that Zielinski describes. It is an essential user guide to life after the car and, as such, it is worth our thoughtful reflection and attention.



Elaine Dewar, *Cloak of Green*, Toronto: James Lorimer and Co., 1995

By John Sandlos

The latter days of the 1980s were heady ones for the environmental movement. Unprecedented levels of concern for the ecology of the earth was expressed through opinion polls, community projects, and financial support for environmental causes and organizations. Even national governments were adopting rhetoric that had been dismissed as radical “Green” sentiment only a few years

previously. It seemed the “age of ecology” was reaching its zenith moment in the annals of world history.

Only a few years since that time, a worldwide economic recession, chronic high unemployment, and the ascendancy of deregulative neo-conservative ideology has forced green politics to return to its familiar marginal status.

In many ways, Elaine Dewar’s *Cloak of Green* is a chronicle of the fall of the environmental movement from its prominent position on the public agenda. Starting the story at a “grassroots” 1988 meeting in a Toronto church featuring speeches by Kayapo leader Paulinho Paiakan, Dewar investigates the entire apparatus of NGOs, corporate donors and Native leaders surrounding the Amazon rainforest protection movement. Her exhaustive and meticulous research leads her into the “underworld” of environmental politics, a place where Governments covertly further their political aims as the sole funders of supposed Non-Governmental Organizations, environmentally challenged corporations (Brascan, DuPont) create “company unions” by providing large sums of money to environmental groups, and where “green” businesses (the Body Shoppe, Ben and Jerry’s) channel money through research oriented NGOs to help set up extractive reserves that further their business interests in the Amazon.

Dewar’s journalistic trail eventually leads to the 1992 Rio Summit, where environmental NGO’s (she calls them Private Government Organizations) sit as delegates with business and government representatives. Unelected, unaccountable and aloof, these umbrella organizations are in what Dewar describes as “the loop,”

a loose coalition of interests bent on managing the environment and the economy on a global scale. At the centre of this “loop” is Maurice Strong, and what Dewar describes as his vision of “global governance.” (Strong’s Business Council on Sustainable Development was a key power broker in Rio, but was listed by Greenpeace as an anti-environmental organization). Dewar appropriately contextualizes the “loop” within the rising tide of free trade and, in a retrospectively funny passage, the emergence of a computer network called “the Internet.” As Dewar’s portrait of Rio shows, the environmental consciousness raising of the late 1980s has been dimmed by an effort sail on the perfect edge of sustainability (usually meaning sustainability somewhere else), using technology to manage the earth in a way that serves the voracious appetites of global capitalism.

Dewar’s work provides a valuable insider’s look at what Wolfgang Sachs has described as the new “ecocracy” of global environmental managers and bureaucrats. Her insightful interviews, her journalistic insights into key events, and her tenacious ability to penetrate the back rooms, parties and closed door meetings of various groups and conference delegates are the glue that binds her work together. Moving from meeting to meeting, and from personality to personality, Dewar never reveals too much at once, and her book holds the reader like a good mystery novel from beginning to end.

Nonetheless, despite the high quality journalism in the book, there are some theoretical weaknesses in its central arguments. First, Dewar suggests her prime concern for the Amazon relates to her children’s health, and that this should be the prime consideration for environmental organizations. The argument implicitly lends credence to the global management ethos she wants to critique. The destruction of the Amazon is, presumably, permissible so long as it managed in a way that doesn’t affect our children.

Second, Dewar questions the global implications of deforestation, playing the endless cat and mouse game that demands further scientific “proof” for planetary warming trends. Thus, rather than provide an alternative vision for global environmental management, she questions the need for it in the first place. Dewar clings hopefully to the nationalist status quo, suggesting that legal action by one country against another is by itself a sufficient deterrent to transboundary pollution. She ignores the failure of strong national governments to effectively manage the natural world, as well as the persistent efforts of governments to undermine local economic relations and subsistence livelihood in the name of the national economy. As such, economic nationalism can be seen merely as globalization in a microcosm, and not a viable alternative to it.

Lastly, by ignoring the grassroots and local activist voices of the environmental movement, Dewar paints a picture of the movement as monolithic and homogeneous, with everyone from David Suzuki to Elizabeth May inside a sinister conspiratorial “loop” of influence and power. A more balanced discussion of the dialogue between grassroots and mainstream environmental activists would have been of great benefit to the volume.

Nonetheless, kept in perspective, *Cloak of Green* is fascinating look at the consolidation and co-optation of various environmental “players” in the years leading up to the Rio summit. Though deserving of thoughtful consideration, it is Dewar’s “cloak and dagger” storytelling abilities that make this book difficult to put down.

John Sandlos is currently pursuing a Master’s Degree in Environmental Studies at York University, where he focuses on wilderness issues.