

Love is the Law, the Passion of Revolt

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*Not a full year since, being quiet at my work, my heart was filled with sweet thoughts, and many things were revealed to me which I never read in books, nor heard from the mouth of any flesh, and when I began to speak of them, some people could not bear my words, and amongst these revelations this was one: That the earth shall be made a common treasury of livelihood to whole mankind, without respect of persons; and I had a voice within me that bade me declare it all abroad, which I did obey, for I declared it by word of mouth wheresoever I came. Then I was made to write a little book called *The new Law of righteousness*, and therein I declared it; yet my mind was not at rest, because nothing was acted, and thoughts run in me that words and writings were all nothing and must die, for action is the life of all, and if thou dost not act, thou dost nothing. Within a little time I was made obedient to the word in that particular likewise; for I took my spade and went and broke the ground upon George Hill in Surrey, thereby declaring freedom to the Creation, and that the earth must be set free from the entanglements of Lords and Landlords, and that it shall become a common Treasury to all. . . .*

— Gerrard Winstanley, *A Watch-word to the City of London and the Armie* (August 26, 1649)¹

The radical writings of the seventeenth century English press pamphlet reside at the threshold of our modernity. They represent a navigation from sacred to secular, a negotiation of the source of meaning between Word of God and Heart of Man. For the radical writers discussed below, each meaning was invested with, and each action was apprehended as, a reconstitution of the communicative bonds which attach us to the world. Briefly put, through an analysis of desanctified power and an understanding that without love there is no bond, civil or natural, they posited love as the law.

For some, this analysis was knowing and reflexive, intimate with the conditions of

production, circulation and reception of their writing. Their analysis – a “law written in the heart”² – was concerned with the dispersal of power and control. As such, these writings have a particular relevance for the present in contesting the meanings applied to memory and to history by the scriptural economy, and in re-attaching them to notions of community.

The Culture of the Press Pamphlet

Discourses on Liberty in England were first conceived as religious questions expressed in Biblical images and theological formulas. When the government broke down in mid-seventeenth century many looked to the Bible, to their everyday experiences and to communal memories to provide the foundations for new political and economic ideas. Christopher Hill has underlined the central role played by the Church in organizing social space:

The Church throughout the Middle Ages, and down to the seventeenth century, was somewhat different from what we call a Church today. . . . The Church educated children . . . the sermon was the main source of information on current events and problems, of guidance on economic conduct. The parish itself was an important unit of local government. . . . The church controlled men’s feelings and told them what to believe, provided them with entertainment and shows. It took the place of the news and propaganda services now covered by many different and more efficient institutions – the Press, the B.B.C., the cinema . . . and so forth. That is why men took notes at sermons; it is also why the government often told preachers exactly what to preach.³

By the end of the 1640s, a constellation of possible associations and meanings of community (family, sect, political coalition) contingent on a whole array of religious interpretations and political practices were established. Political solutions which were to become the revolutionary commonplaces of the future, were put forward by groups like the Levellers, True-Levellers or Diggers and Fifth Monarchists. Religious solutions were offered by sects including Baptists and Quakers, while others, like the Seekers and Ranters, questioned *all* beliefs and institutions. It was a period of intellectual passion. A period when, as the Digger Gerrard Winstanley put it, “the old World . . . is running up like parchment in the fire.”⁴

A freedom of the press brought about by the collapse of the government and its censorship, along with ecclesiastical controls, in 1640 enabled an outpouring of printed material in the form of pamphlets, newsheets and books. Between 1640 and 1642, as a part of a propaganda war between King and Parliament, the numbers of pamphlets published increased ninety-fold, from just twenty-two in 1640 to two thousand in 1642. Newspapers, which were banned in 1640, had risen to 700 in circulation by 1645.⁵ Just

as a relaxation of censorship had enabled Protestantism to become established in England one hundred years earlier, the collapse of censorship in the crisis preceding the English Civil War enabled the conditions for an outpouring and dissemination of both conservative and radical ideas.

For the first time people who had been excluded from intellectual debate, including apprentices and women who had no university or grammar school education, could publish their writings and reach, in many instances, a wide readership.⁶ The entry of uneducated laymen, apprentices and women into opinion forming arenas led to a notion of 'the people' as a significant political force. The emergence of groups hitherto denied expression had profound effects on received hierarchies, orders of knowledge and ideological assumptions around control of and access to meanings, bringing into question all beliefs, assumptions and institutions. Not only the values of the old hierarchical society were questioned, but the new values of the protestant ethic itself. In retrospect, the call of the Presbyterian parliament of 1641-43 for 'the people' to rise against the abuses of the monarchy and the ruling class, was by 1652 qualified, in the wake of the Leveller demands for manhood suffrage and the emergence of groups like the Ranters and Diggers: "When we mention the people we do not mean the confused promiscuous body of the people."⁷ Thus Christopher Hill writes of two revolutions in England in the period 1645-53:

The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property (abolition of feudal tenures, no arbitrary taxation), gave political power to the propertied (sovereignty of Parliament and common law, abolition of prerogative courts), and removed all impediments to the triumph of the ideology of the men of property – the protestant ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in legal and political institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic.⁸

The Leveller movement – part of the revolution which threatened to happen – arose as a second order revolt to the dispute between Monarchy and Parliament as well as from spontaneous local events characteristic of medieval peasant revolts. It was a movement that was informed by the historical awareness and organizational abilities of 'masterless' men and women in the crafts and trades of the growing cities. At the outset of the Civil War in 1642, this revolt consisted of rent strikes and "levelling" land – literally pulling down hedges, fences and enclosures of land which had been commons before appropriation and improvement by the gentry. Such actions were perceived as a restoration of common rights which had been taken away by the nobility both within living memory, and historically through communal memory, encapsulated in the myth of the Norman Yoke.

More sophisticated strategies, according to Brian Manning, were attacks on the households of royalist landowners with an aim to destroy records of tenure and debt. Generally, the commoners took back the land and the rights they considered to be their own once they perceived that the monarchy no longer prevailed.⁹

The reforms proposed by the Leveller programme attacked the relation between property, wealth and political power. The lack of executive government in the Leveller proto-constitution *The Agreement of the People* (i.e., the absence of central government besides committees elected on contingency from the body of parliament) reflected the principle goal to decentralize government, giving local communities more political powers. One of the main revolutionary demands of the programme, as Manning has explained, was a reformation of the legal system directed toward a dispersal of legal powers, and hence of political power. Since laws and legal proceedings were “locked up from common capacities” in Latin and French, which kept the people in ignorance, “enforcing them (like slaves) to walk by their [the lawyers] own light,”¹⁰ the Levellers wanted the laws to be laid down in a common book in English so that all may understand their own proceedings and hence represent themselves or be represented by a commoner without recourse to lawyers. A consequence of this was the decentralization of the courts to the “Hundreds” (ancient administrative units within counties) with locally elected monthly juries to decide upon all controversies where they arose.¹¹ Such decentralization extended to all areas in the social formation: from the universities, whose monopoly of learning was to be abolished, to the church in which pastors were to be elected by the local inhabitants and not to be appointed by the Church hierarchy, and even to the army in which officers were to be elected by the people of the place in which a regiment was raised, and removed as the local community saw fit.

The discursive complexity that accompanies decentralized authority is illustrated in the dialogue between those protecting Charles Stuart (the King) and the radical Cornet Joyce who led the troop which took the King into the New Model Army’s custody. When challenged to justify his authority, Cornet Joyce pointed to his troop: “All did command yet were under command.”¹² The dispersal of power inherent in the Leveller conception of law as a property of community may be situated, in Ernesto Laclau’s terms, as “the hinge of the transition to the kingdom of God on earth.”¹³ The main problem posed for power relations by this transition is the legitimacy of authority. While power in Plato’s philosopher king stems from a pre-existing objectivity, the authority of the Hobbesian monarch is, for Laclau, based on a radical creation in which socio-political objectivity stems from power. The Hobbesian monarch, through the elimination of dissension and antagonism,



The Explanation of the EMBLEME .

*Ponderibus genus omne mali, probrisq; gravatus,
Vixq; ferenda ferens, Palma ut Depressa, resurgo.*

*Ac, velut undarum Fluctus Ventiq;, furorem
Irati Populi Rupes immota repello .*

*Clarius e tenebris, caelestis Aloha, corusco.
Victor et æternum-felici hæc triumpho .*

*Auro Fulgentem rutilo gemmisq; micantem,
At curis Gravidam spernendo calco Coronam.*

*Spinosam, at ferri facilem, quo Spes mea, Christi
Auxilio, Nobis non est tractare molestum .*

*Æternam, fixis fidei, sempiternq; beatam
In Cælos oculis Specto, Nobisq; paratam .*

*Quod Vanum est, sperno; quod Christi Gratia præbet
Amplecti studium est: Virtutis Gloria merces .*

*Though clogg'd with weights of miseries
Palm-like Depress'd, I higher rise .*

*And as th'unmoved Rock out-braves
The boistrous Windes and raging waves:
So triumph I. And shine more bright
In sad Affliction's Darksom night*

*That Splendid, but yet toilsom Crown
Regardlessly I trample down .*

*With joie I take this Crown of thorn,
Though sharp, yet easie to be born .*

*That heav'nic Crown, already mine,
I view with eies of Faith divine .*

*I slight vain things; and do embrace
Glorie, the just reward of Grace .*

Τὸ Χρῆσθὲν ἠδίκησας τῶν πόλων, εἰδὲ τὸ Κράτωρα .

becomes an embodiment of power to the exclusion of plurality and deliberation: "If all previous historical actors have been limited in their inability to prevail over the powers of evil, the actor who has the strength of will to objectively suppress evil and to impose divine justice must himself be divine, or at least to have been transformed by God into the incarnation of his omnipotence. He must therefore be a limitless actor."¹⁴ The incompatibilities between a statement attributed to Charles Stuart on the divine right of Kings, and Richard Overton on the right of the individual under natural law become understandable in this context:

So that I being (as King) instructed by God and the laws with the good both of Church and State, I see no reason I should give up, or weaken by any change, that power and influence which in right and reason I ought to have....¹⁵

To every Individuall in nature, is given an individuall property by nature, not to be invaded or usurped by any: for every one as he is himselfe, so he hath self propriety, else could he not be himselfe, and on this no second may presume to deprive any of, without manifest violation and affront to the very principles of nature.¹⁶

These profound political differences were nominally resolved by the King's execution (the separation of the person from the office would have sufficed for the radical cause) and a democratic programme founded on "common sense, the reason of Nations and by conscience."¹⁷ Yet this programme elided the incompatibilities between 'liberty' and a political power which stemmed from property; a contradiction that was becoming more apparent to the radicals as the revolution progressed.¹⁸ The English Civil War and Revolution was about the right of the propertied, in particular the emerging bourgeoisie, to govern through their representative body of Parliament. The problem of legitimacy for a representative body of the people was complicated by the fact that only those who had an estate could vote (women, servants and apprentices, the poor and the majority of the 'middle-sort' were excluded from the franchise). Jèsus Martin-Bèrbèro has encapsulated the circularity which inaugurates the Enlightenment tradition of political philosophy: "One must oppose tyranny in the name of 'the people', while at the same time one opposes 'the people' in the name of Reason. The invocation of 'the people' legitimizes the power of the bourgeoisie to the same degree that it articulates the exclusion of the people from power."¹⁹

The Presbyterian (conservative) response to the problem of legitimacy, advised on the submission to the possessors of *de facto* power. In *Considerations concerning the present engage-*

ment, whether it may be lawfully entered into – the “present engagement” being truth and faithfulness to the rule of a government of a free state, a Commonwealth, without a King or a House of Lords – John Dury argued that submission to *de facto* power was ordained by God and that subjects, private men, should not dispute but obey those in supreme power. No loss of liberty was threatened by such submission since “Christians are the only free men of the world: all the rest are slaves to their proper passions, lusts, opposite interests; but he that is subject to the law of liberty, doing all by a Rule, is truly free and none but he.” This “rule” by which men will choose their superiors is “agreeable to *sense*, to *reason* and to *conscience*”:

Sense will show him who is actually in possession of all power... and by [sense] he will know under whom he doth stand. Reason will show what he who is over him pretends unto; whether... his pretenses are backed with power to maintain his right... and conscience will show... he to whom God hath committed with... unconfutable power... over the society of those to whom his administration doth extend itself.²⁰

Dury’s Reason is a “Reason of Nations... of the Body in their Parliament,”²¹ which, for the Leveller William Walwyn, “allowed the rich thieves to make a combination and call it a law... They make themselves thieves by Act of Parliament”²² and which for the Ranter Abiezer Coppe was a “carnal reason” which pled privilege and prerogative from Scripture and which “shall be confounded and plagued into community...”²³

47

The Passion of Revolt

The People are becoming a Knowing and Judicious People, Affliction hath made them wise, now Oppression maketh wise men mad.

— William Walwyn, A Pearle in a Dunghill (June 30, 1646)

There comes a moment in the course of passion when laws are suspended as though of their own accord, when movement either abruptly stops... or is propagated, the action ceasing only at the climax of the paroxysm.

— Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization (1973)²⁴

Revolt belongs to the realm of madness, of the mystic, the prophet, and the lover – he or she denied ‘voice’ until conditions emerge in which their utterances become a possibility. ‘Prophecy’ was the way in which the lower class radical could gain an audience. According to Christopher Hill in “the freer circumstances of the 1640s and 50s most

'madmen' appear to be political radicals. . . ."²⁵ Madness did, nevertheless, have its orders and its hierarchies: the Presbyterians, who sought to bring about a settlement with the monarchy, were purged from Parliament by the Independents who also considered the Levellers a naive and dangerous extreme. The Levellers were anxious to disassociate themselves from the lunacies of the True Levellers or Diggers who would dissolve property and make all things common. While the Diggers, in turn, distanced themselves from the unbridled passions of The Family of Love, whose 'Californian marriage' referred to combinations in shared sexual relationships, and from the Ranters who rejected all moral restraints.²⁶ Degrees of madness corresponded to degrees of dispossession – the extent to which material and celestial boundaries were to be dissolved.

This process of dispossession is part and parcel of the process of social transformation, of the transitory phase to "the kingdom of God on earth." And for expressly this reason, it is central to the thinking of Abiezer Coppe, a ringleader among the Ranters for whom God had his being nowhere else but in *all material things and creatures* :

My most excellent majesty (In me) hath strangely and variously transformed this forme. And behold, by my own Almightyness (In me) I have been changed in a moment. . . . And it hath pleased my most Excellent Majesty, (who is universal love, and whose service is perfect freedom) to set this forme (the Writer of this Roll) as no small sign and wonder. . . .²⁷

The coming of Christ's kingdom, the millennium, should not be construed as a rhetorical appeal. On the contrary, the Civil War was perceived as the beginning of the last times prophesied in Revelations. As the crisis deepened, Christ's kingdom seemed immanent. Milton, writing in the 1650s spoke of "Christ, shortly expected king." It was, according to Hill, a perfectly respectable belief, the result of the best scholarship of the time.²⁸ This immanence is exhibited in Coppe's pamphlet *A Fiery Flying Roll* (January 4, 1649) not merely at the level of content but in a conscious discursive way, intimate with the transformation brought about by the unity of body and soul. This is what Foucault means when he writes of "an empirico-transcendental doublet which is called man." For Foucault, madness appears not simply as a possibility afforded by the union of body and soul but more precisely, madness insinuated by that union contains a reflexivity – "each being a limit imposed upon the other and the locus of their communication" – which interrogates the very terms of the unity.²⁹ It is in this way that madness presents a radical and sometimes revolutionary challenge to the parameters of Reason. And it is significant that Abiezer Coppe's parenthetical statements about God "In me" resemble Charles Stuart's divine reason.

Coppe, for whom "God is a base thing," attributes his *Fiery Flying Roll* to the urging of

A Fiery Flying Roll:

A

Word from the LORD to all the Great Ones
of the Earth, whom this may concerne: Being the
last WARNING PIECE at the dreadfull day of
J U D G E M E N T.

For now the LORD is come

to {
1 *Informe*
2 *Advise and warne*
3 *Charge*
4 *Judge and sentence* } the Great Ones.

As also most compassionately informing, and most lo-
vingly and pathetically advising and warning *London.*

With a terrible Word, and fatall Blow from the LORD,
upon the Gathered CHURCHES.

And all by his Most Excellent MAJESTY, dwelling
in, and shining through

AUXILIUM PATRIS, ^{q^d} *alias, Coppee.*

With another FLYING ROLL ensuing (to all the Inhabi-
tants of the Earth.) The Contents of both following.

*Iſa. 23. 9, The Lord of Hoſts (is) ſtaining the pride of all glory, and bring-
ing into contempt all the honourable (perſons and things) of the Earth.
O London, London, how would I gather thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens
under her wings, &c.*

*Know thou (in this thy day) the things that belong to thy Peace —
I know the blaſphemy of them which ſay they are Jewes, and are not, but are
the Synagogue of Satan, Rev. 2. 9. Jan. 4. 1649*

Imprinted at *London*, in the beginning of that notable day, wherein the
ſecrets of all hearts are laid open; and wherein the worſt and fouleſt of
villanies, are diſcovered, under the beſt and faireſt outſides. 1649.

a voice “(I within)” to “go up to *London*, to *London*, that great City, to write, write, write.” Wandering the streets of London and Southwark, Coppe “cursed the rich with my hand stretched out . . . Give up your houses, horses, goods, gold, Land . . . account nothing your own, have all things common. . . . It’s but yet a little while, and . . . propriety [property] shall be confounded into community and universality. And there’s a most glorious design in it: and equality, community and universal love shall be in request to the utter confounding of . . . oppression.”³⁰ The date of the publication of his rolls, January 1649, is the date that for the first time in European history a Monarchy was to be abolished and a King was to be executed for treason against ‘the commonwealth’. In such a context, the urging of “(I within)” to go to London “to write . . .” is not only understandable but imperative; and his ‘rantings’ are not the apparently timeless verbiage of the lunatic, the prophet or the visionary, but the passions of the revolutionary.

For Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers, the limitations inherent in the Ranters’ passions of revolt lay in their inability to recognize that material transformation resided not internally, but externally in concrete historical action. Winstanley, rebuking the Ranter Lawrence Clarkson, would write: “Some of you have got a speech; That those [who] see two powers within themselves, of darkness and Light, Love and Envy . . . see everything with a single eye. . . . But if your eye be truly single, and full of Light, then the Light power wholly rules in you, and the actions of your outward man will be full of Light, and Life, and Love, towards every single branch of the whole Creation.”³¹ Hence, for Winstanley, whatever the case for the inner being regarding moral law, social action was the light of all. Morality for Winstanley was not a question decided only in the heart of man, but in the intramundane world, in community: “The manifestation of a righteous heart shall be known, not by his words, but by his actions . . . in the strength of the Law of Love and equity one to another.”³² And the “Law of Love” was to be found in community.

The Law of Love

If the Ranters experienced the moment of the millennium as historical, no longer like the medieval peasant awaiting God’s Word, they were nevertheless indulging in the endless play of the signifier – ranting – without concrete action. For Margaret Fell, “the true light could be distinguished from hypocritical pretence only if words were tested by deeds, and deeds by their effect on the community – meetings, families, neighbours.”³³ The Diggers or “True Levellers” – and this is the distinction between the Digger and

Ranter milieu – took practical steps in addressing property as the basis of all oppression by attempting to dissolve property.

In *A Watch Word to the City of London and the Armie* (1649), Gerrard Winstanley traced the movement from revelation to preaching, to performative writing and publishing, and finally, through the imperative produced by the circulation of his ideas in community, to historical action. Concerned, as many radicals were, with giving an origin to his ideas that would go beyond the provenance either of the old or the new order, he wrote proudly that he got his ideas neither from books nor from men, but from an inner light: “being quiet at my work, my heart was filled with sweet thoughts, *that the earth shall become a common treasury of livelihood to all mankind...*”³⁴ This insight became the repetitive core of much of his subsequent writing, and ultimately the refrain which justified the political action he and others undertook.

He moved rapidly, as the revolutionary circumstances demanded of him, through traditional forms of broadcasting revolt but he found no rest “because nothing was acted and thoughts run in me that words and writings were all nothing and must die, for action is the life of all, and if thou dost not act, thou dost nothing.... Within a little time I was made obedient to the word... for I took my spade and went and broke the ground upon George Hill in Surrey, thereby declaring freedom to the Creation, and that the earth must be set free from the entanglements of Lords and Landlords, and that it shall become a common Treasury to all...”³⁵

On the 1st of April 1649, a group of soldiers entered the parish church of Kingston-on-Thames in Surrey and declared that the Sabbath, tithes, ministers, magistrates and the Bible were all abolished. Outside Kingston in April a group of poor men began to dig the common land on St George’s Hill in a symbolic action to declare “freedom to Creation,” inviting all the poor to join them.³⁶ Here was founded a “Digger” community, so called by their opponents. The place chosen, symbolically enough, St. George’s Hill was just outside London, within easy reach of any of the London poor who wished to join them, and adjacent to the King’s great estate of Windsor forest, land whose title was under question with the overthrow of monarchy. Kingston, moreover, had a radical tradition in that it had been the site of Marprelate’s secret press in 1588, and was in 1649 a military centre of the New Model Army.³⁷ The St. George’s Hill Digger community was not isolated but part of a general movement. Other Digger communities had already appeared or would appear in at least eight other shires or counties besides Surrey (Northamptonshire, Kent, Middlesex, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, Gloucestershire and Nottinghamshire).

Significantly, these communities were intimate with the terms of their publicity. They were bound in a common cause by pamphlets and broadsides, co-signed by the members of the community: *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire; or A Discovery of the... original Cause of all the Slavery in the world, but chiefly in England* (1648) which protested against not only the whole ‘Norman’ power but also the mercantile class who “live on other men’s labour and bread... and give them bran to eat”; and *More Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1649). Such tracts saw the restoration of the land to the poor as both a natural consequence of the overthrow of the old regime, and as a precursor to the reign of Christ in community.

Gerrard Winstanley’s words summarize the aims of these movements better than any commentator:

Our digging and ploughing upon George Hill in Surrey is not unknown to you. Now we desire your public preachers... to consider these questions... that we that are the common people born in England, ought to improve the Commons, as we have declared for a public treasury and livelihood, and those that hinder us are the... enemies of Creation...

I affirm, (and I challenge you to disprove) that the earth was made a common Treasury of livelihood for all, *without respect of persons* and was not made to be bought and sold... This question is not to be answered by any text of Scripture [but] in the light of itself... that Word of God... which [now] dwells in man’s heart...

I desire all of you seriously, in love and humility, to consider this business of public community, which I am carried forth in the power of love... to advance as much as I can [for] I can do no other, the Law of Love in my heart does so constrain me, by reason whereof I am called fool, mad man... I hate none, I love all, I delight to see everyone live comfortably... if you find anything destructive to Creation in this work, open your hearts and declare my weakness to me. If you see righteousness in it... then own it, and let the power of love have... freedom and glory.³⁸

At the heart of this movement was a notion of community which goes some way beyond the limited definition normally accorded the word by the scriptural economy – community as the residue, the ‘loyalties’ and ‘solidarities’, or internal ambiguities which became provinces of the bourgeois public sphere. The Digger’s notion of community arose from an awareness of the internal contradictions of abstract inclusion and concrete exclusion bound up in the conception of ‘the people’. It was informed by the communicative bonds – “the power of love” – woven both within sects (i.e., the Digger ‘trance’: “Eat together, break bread together, declare this abroad”) and between communities (i.e., in the circulation of pamphlets). Moreover, it found a new law in community

not only because of the assumed redundancy of kingly power but because, at the margins of modernity, new forms of systematic exclusion had to be negotiated. “Reason,” for Winstanley (“by reason” called “fool, mad man”), “knits every creature together in a oneness... and so everyone is an assistant to preserve the whole.” Reason was God, but God, as the Ranters made clear, had his being nowhere else but in all material things, and Christ (the material manifestation of God) preached secularism. These communities were not produced through the internal revelations of imagination alone but through shared reception and interpretation; they came into being as a consequence of oppression, but were not yet bound by the terms of such oppression, the requirements of effective reason. Thus Winstanley writes in *Fire in the Bush* (February, 1649):

Oh, say men, if this power of universal love be advanced; this will destroy all property, and all trading, and bring everything into confusion. It is true, [it] shall be advanced for that end... Oh, saith Imaginary, covetous, proud, selfe-seeking flesh; If I take not the sword, to restraine the unrulinesse of mankinde; we shall not live one by another; But his intent is not in Love to peace, but that he may rule over all himselfe, and beat downe [...] others under him; And indeed this power is the cause of all warres; for if this murdering selfe-honouring power were once cast out; Love would live in peace, and know warre, division and sorrow no more.³⁹

Our difficulties with reading such tracts lie not merely with Biblical references and an often obdurate language, but with our notion of reading. The culture which received these writings was literate in a sense which differs profoundly from our normative and quantitative definitions of literacy. A familiarity with, and access to, the means of production and circulation, combined with the assumption of a particular communal form of reception. John Thompson has emphasized that an intimate knowledge of the allegories and imagery of the Bible, provided a stock of allusions and beliefs from which all, including those who could not read, drew shared meanings.⁴⁰ Thus, such writings reached not only the learned, and not only the literate. Reading matter was no longer dominated by those with a shared Classical education who assumed that discussion must follow formal rules. What was written was to be read aloud, performatively in alehouses, sectaries meeting places, marketplaces, within sects, in the Army and within families.

For Mary Carruthers, medieval culture is fundamentally *memorial* to the same profound degree that modern Occidental culture is documentary: “This distinction certainly involves technologies – mnemotechnique and printing – but it is not confined to them. For the valuing of *memoria* persisted long after book technology itself had changed.”⁴¹ *Memoria*, according to Carruthers, is a social institution, a modality of

medieval culture in which particular texts, whether in oral or written form, provide the sources of the community's memory.⁴² Such communities are, in Brian Stock's phrase, "textual communities."⁴³ Social and intellectual experience in societies acquiring literate sensibilities, Stock maintains, can be regarded as 'text'. The text itself, whether a demanding programme of reform, or a few simple aphorisms, was repeated and performed orally. What was integral to a textual community, then, was not a written version of a text, "but an individual who having mastered it then utilized it for reforming a group's thought and action."⁴⁴

It is in terms of reading, of reception and interpretation, that community is to be understood here. Textual communities may be thought of as religious sects with particular 'takes' on Scripture. The New Model Army and the Digger communities may, arguably, also be thought of as textual communities, just as the Open University in England and Trance or Hip Hop might be thought of as other instances. Such communities are, in a form discussed by bell hooks and Cornel West in *Breaking Bread*, necessarily radical in that the normative relationship between author and reader, between writing as a transitive activity and reading as a passive reception, are transformed within a communal dialogue shaped by a common oppression.⁴⁵ For Stock, an understanding of heresy and reform involves the transitive force of such writings. "Behavioral norms... are part of the movement which binds the text, the speech-act and the deed."⁴⁶ In this way, community grows by the discovery of common meanings *and* common means of communication, since, as Raymond Williams has emphasized, communication is in fact the process of community: "the system of common life."⁴⁷ Indeed, Mary Carruthers has pointed out: "The Latin word *textus* comes from the verb meaning 'to weave'... literary works become institutions as they weave a community together by providing it with a shared experience and a certain kind of language... Their meaning is thought to be implicit, hidden polysemous and complex, requiring continuing interpretation and adaptation."⁴⁸

In the radical writings of the English press pamphlet, in the political and religious coalitions these writings responded to and informed, and in the actions of the Diggers, the source of sense – that is, of social meaning – becomes embodied in the demands and desires of community. *Love is the communicative bond*. This bond becomes the productive process linking both the political reality of the world – in terms of systems of property in intellect, land and labour – with the ecological reality of the earth. This inter-relationship is precisely what Michel Serres finds denied in the subsequent trajectory of Reason within the History of Ideas.⁴⁹ It is this relationship between "human community" and "community of the earth" which Winstanley calls *Creation*.

Common Treasury

Love is the Word. The Creation is the House or Garden, in which this one Spirit hath taken up his seat. . . . For if ever Love be seen or known he appears either in the inward feeling in your hearts . . . or else appears toward you, from outward objects, as from other men or other creatures.
— Gerrard Winstanley, *A New-Yeers Gift* (January 1, 1650)⁵⁰

Love is the bond that links your earth and the Earth, and that makes the familiar and the foreign, the near and the far, resemble each other.
— Michel Serres, “*The Natural Contract*,” (1992)⁵¹

In “*The Natural Contract*,” Michel Serres does not refer to Winstanley’s writings. Yet his consideration of the relationship between humankind and the physical earth has profound resonances with Winstanley’s Law of Love. As such, the two writers echo each other across more than three centuries at the opposite ends of modernity. In Winstanley’s usage love has two related forms, or powers, which must be integrated: “*Community of Mankind*, . . . or the Law written in the heart, leading ‘mankind’ . . . to be of one heart and one mind; and *Community of the Earth*,” in which “the spirit of Love appears to preserve creation by uniting all creatures into a sweet harmony.” Each are “one in two branches of the Creation ruled by the Spirit of Universal Love, which unites not only mankind, but mankind with all other living things.”⁵² Similarly for Serres love is the fundamental law: “There is nothing real but love, and no law other than this.”⁵³ Based on this law of love, Serres is concerned to renew “the relationship that we once held with the world” by way of a natural contract: “We must change course and move away from the direction set by the philosophy of Descartes . . . mastery lasts only a short time, and turns into servitude, and in the same way ownership remains a short-lived expropriation.”⁵⁴

A return to nature! This would mean drawing up and appending to our exclusively social contract a natural contract of symbiosis and reciprocity; a contract in which our relationship to things would no longer involve mastery and possession, but an admiring stewardship, reciprocity, contemplation, and respect, in which knowledge would no longer imply ownership, nor action mastery, and in which neither ownership nor mastery would imply stercoraceous conditions or results.⁵⁵

According to Serres the passage from the local to the global erases the world. The social contract – *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* – becomes deadly to the symbiosis between human society and ‘nature’, as from “the epistemological point



of view" whereby all things in the world are "willed to destruction" through "mastery and possession."⁵⁶ Once mastered and possessed, "the enormous collection of things reduced to the status of passive objects of appropriation," become, for Serres, "minors in the pact pronounced by the law." Since nature is the "hostel" and "the enormous collection of things" nurtures humanity, "without them we would die tomorrow." What is essential is that: "Nature conditions human nature that, then, conditions it in its turn." It is in this sense that nature "behaves like a subject."⁵⁷

Since the earth "speaks to us in terms of force, bonds and interactions" this suffices, insists Serres, "to make a new contract. A 'new law'."⁵⁸ Opposed to an exclusive *social* contract which refers to Man while meaning merely men and to a *natural* law which reduces nature to human nature, Serres posits a "natural contract" which recognizes the new equality between "the force of our global interventions and the globality of the world." His argument is that nature has grown, through technological developments, to the dimensions of the world, or is "defined by a set of relationships whose network unifies the entire Earth."⁵⁹ The natural contract connects our global interventions and the globality of the world in another network. A network that, like the twin meanings inherent in the French expression *le temps* – which refers both to time and the weather – would recognize and connect the temporal (historical) and spatial aspects of global nature.

Serres recognizes "the power of love"; and like Winstanley, his natural contract is governed by two laws which themselves are doubled: "Love one another, that is our first law" since no other law has allowed us to escape our "hell on earth." This law is divided into local and global law which requires us to "love our neighbour" and, to avoid tribal

consequences of such love, to "love humanity, if we do not believe in a God." The second law asks us to "love the world," an obligation divided between old local law "that attaches us to the land in which our ancestors are buried" and a new global law which is "not yet written," that "requires of us a universal love of the physical Earth."⁶⁰

These "laws," and the divisions within them – love similarity and difference, humanity and community and the physical earth – raise incompatibilities which require negotiations and translations. These micro- and macro-processes must be analyzed, as David Morley has put it, "in relation to the simultaneous processes of homogenization and fragmentation, globalization and localization in contemporary culture."⁶¹

The new global law which, according to Serres, is "not yet written" will not be *written*. The point Winstanley and the Diggers made was that such a law is to be performed, enacted. Gerrard Winstanley emphasized the particular and practical action he perceived necessary to preserve Creation – the common bonds which unite "community of mankind," and "community of the earth." In this same vein, Serres writes: "Never forget the place you came from, but leave it and join the universal. Love the bond that links your earth and the Earth."⁶²

These negotiations are, perhaps in part, being performed within the languages, gestures and physical displacements of migrations, producing new subjects who retain links with the traditions and places of their origin. Whatever the case, since the global world is under systems property over peoples, knowledges and land, such a 'law' cannot but have consequences both for our received *written* notions of property and the *written* emphatic stresses which deny communities their common bonds and hence their potential shapes.

Notes

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2. Gerrard Winstanley, *A New-Yeers Gift (January 1, 1650)* in Sabine, 386.
3. Christopher Hill, *The English Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1940), 10-11.
4. Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness (January 26, 1649)* in Sabine, 185.
5. Christopher Hill, "The Bible and Radical Politics," paper given at the *Marxism '93* Conference in London, June 1993.
6. Brian Manning, *The Crisis of the English Revolution* (London: Bookmarks, 1992), 150.

7. Marchamont Nedham, *Mercurius Politicus* (1652) quoted in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin, 1972), 60.
8. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 15.
9. Brian Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution* (London: Heineman, 1976), 187-88.
10. Richard Overton, *An Appeale* (1647) quoted in Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution*, 302.
11. Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution*, 302-05.
12. Cornet Joyce, *A true impartial narration, concerning the Army's preservation of the King* (June 4, 1647) quoted in H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (London: Cresset, 1961), 206.
13. Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), 72.
14. *Ibid.*, 73.
15. Charles Stuart, *Eikon Basilike* (1649) (London: Elliot Stock, 1880).
16. Richard Overton, *An Arrow against all Tyrants and Tyranny* (1646) (Exeter: The Rota, 1979), 67.
17. Francis Rous, *The Lawfulness of obeying the present government* (1649) quoted in John Dury, *Considerations concerning the present engagement, whether it be lawfully entered into* (1649) (Exeter: The Rota, 1979), 5-6.
18. cf. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 118, 389.
19. Jèsus Martin-Bèrbèro, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony* (London: Sage, 1993), 7.
20. Dury, *Considerations concerning the present engagement*, 15.
21. *Ibid.*, 3.
22. William Walwyn, *Tyrannipocrit Discovered* (1649) quoted in Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 116.
23. Abiezer Coppe, *A Fiery Flying Roll* (1649) (Exeter: The Rota, 1979), 8.
24. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1973), 89.
25. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 279.
26. *Ibid.*, 313-14.
27. Abiezer Coppe, *A Fiery Flying Roll* (1649), 9.
28. Christopher Hill, "The Bible and Radical Politics," 1993.
29. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 86.
30. Abiezer Coppe, *A Fiery Flying Roll* (1649), 9.
31. Gerrard Winstanley, *A Fire in the Bush* (1649) in Sabine, 477-78.
32. Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness* (1649) in Sabine, 185.
33. Margaret Fell quoted in Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 338.
34. Gerrard Winstanley, *A Watch-word to the City of London and the Armie* (August 26, 1649) in Sabine, 315.
35. *Ibid.*, 315-16.
36. Gerrard Winstanley, *The True Levellers Standard Advanced* (April, 1649) in Sabine, 251-66.
37. cf. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 107-13.

38. Gerrard Winstanley, *A letter to Lord Fairfax, General of the English Forces (1649)* in Sabine, 281-92.
39. Gerrard Winstanley, *A Fire in the Bush (1649)* in Sabine, 488.
40. John J. Thompson in *From Medieval to Medievalism*, ed. J. Simons (London: Methuen, 1992), 84.
41. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12.
42. *Ibid.*, 259-60.
43. Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 101.
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51. Serres, "The Natural Contract," 21.
52. Winstanley, *A New-Years Gift (1650)*, 375.
53. Serres, "The Natural Contract," 21.
54. *Ibid.*, 7.
55. *Ibid.*, 11.
56. *Ibid.*, 9.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*, 12.
59. *Ibid.*, 18.
60. *Ibid.*, 20-21.
61. David Morley, *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992), 289.
62. Serres, "The Natural Contract," 21.