

CONTROL

In the age of "news" we hear what happens (or, what other people say happens) in countries we never heard of before a few years ago. More than we know about our own environment. Many of us forget to pay attention to what is in our own lives, what is happening around us.

I find what is around me fascinating and it continues to add to my knowledge of who we, humans, really are. For instance, I am fascinated by chickens. I feel no particular affinity for the species, or for individual chickens, but they are amazingly like us. I am not studying them scientifically, I don't measure or count, I just observe. They, like we, are not herd animals, although we like being with each other in small groups. But in a large group we get to be a mob. They, as we, are not carnivorous, but we both eat meat. They normally are not loners, nor are we. Chickens live in the moment, as we used to. Animals that eat small quantities much of the day, are much like the hunter/gatherers I knew (they gathered much more than they hunted). The people I knew wandered around much of the day, picking a fruit here, digging a root there. Chickens do the same. They don't walk a straight line, they go in zigzags and that is also how they eat, they pick at tiny morsels here and there. I feed them "scratch," chicken food we buy in 50 lb bags. I scatter it wide and far (picture "the Sower") because I noticed that chickens must move and eat, they cannot stand still and eat. The ducks prefer to shovel it in. I give them little heaps of scratch. The first thing I learned is that I cannot feed the ducks differently. The chickens also eat from those heaps. At first they eat and move on, but a few chickens (hens, no rooster) have learned to stick around the heaps meant for the ducks.

Our chickens and ducks are fairly "wild," they roam freely. We do not provide shelter, they have to find their own. Chickens sleep in trees here, sometimes quite high. Yes, they fly; quite well, in fact. They make nests hidden in the bushes. We rarely find eggs. We feed them not much, just enough to keep them around. They are wonderfully efficient in getting rid of centipedes and scorpions.

There are two tribes of ducks now. Muskovi ducks have been here for a few years, the males grown large as a mid-sized dog. Not long ago three mallards flew in, and stayed. The big Muskovi ducks used to eat slugs, but with age they have become lazy. They don't forage at all, the males hang out, in the same place all day long, watching the world go by. Not too different from human males in some indigenous tribes that I know. The mallards are busy all day. They wander widely, picking at whatever it is they see edible. Yesterday I watched some chickens look in amazement at these mallards who found things to eat that they, the chickens, obviously had missed. I could see them amazed, following a mallard, looking this way and that. What are these ducks eating? I saw them pecking where the mallard had pecked at something, but what? Their confusion seemed very human.

The chickens here make very fluid relationships. There is only one rooster who has a harem, three, sometimes four hens leading the way. Yes, roosters follow, they do not lead. The ducks here do not make relationships, not even short ones. When it is that time -- and I have not seen any pattern I can recognize, Spring perhaps -- they mount one of the females. A strenuous affair: a lot of huffing and puffing on the part of the male, females totally passive. In fact, it looks as if the female--probably half the size and weight of the male--is squashed flat if it is on the ground, or under water if it is in the pond. But it must be all right, no female ducks have died from sex. When a female duck sits on a nest and produces a brood (never more than once a year), at first

the new mama will hide the ducklings, and only after a few days, or even a week, she will come out. It is easy to tell when a female has very young ducklings: she will come to the feeding, quickly eat as much food as she can, then rush back to where she has hidden the babies. But, in contrast to chicken mothers who teach their chicks how and what to eat, duck mamas eat greedily, leaving the ducklings to find their own way in the world, even when they are barely able to walk yet. No wonder very few ducklings survive here. At least half the chicks survive in this almost wild environment.

At night, when the chickens fly up in the trees to find a branch to sleep on, hens with small chicks must stay on the ground until the chicks can fly. The ground is dangerous for baby chicks at night, but hens are fierce fighters. For ducklings danger comes from above, when they sleep floating on the pond. I have not seen little ducklings use their wings at all until they are almost full grown. Even very young, chicks exercise their tiny wings to gain extra speed when they run. Ducklings don't fly, in fact they have no feathers when they are born, but a sort of fuzz that looks and feels like very soft angora wool. The two big Muskovi drakes are amazingly clumsy. They cannot walk very fast. If they need to, they walk/fly, flapping their large wings while hopping on their big flat feet. They are probably too big to fly now. The females, half their size, fly, but not very far. The mallards fly with grace. All chickens here fly very well, even long distances.

During the hottest hours of the day, most animals rest, but the rest of the day they look very busy. When it rains--and this is a very wet part of the island--the poor chickens look miserable. Duck feathers must be better protection: ducks don't seem to mind getting wet at all. Chickens hide under leaves if they can.

These chickens are much more aggressive than the ducks. I read that they are distantly related to Tyrannosaurus Rex -- I can believe it. Hens are fierce! Roosters --at least the ones here -- are not at all very aggressive. They don't need to be. One of the rules of chicken culture is that roosters can go anywhere. They are allowed to steal food away from hens and baby chicks, something another hen better not try! The big drakes are literally hen-pecked. Almost daily i see a hen chasing a drake at least twice her size. Roosters don't do that. The roosters here rarely fight each other; they threaten, fluff up their feathers, bump chests, but usually one of them will run away before it goes any further. I doubt any rooster has killed another rooster here.

I enjoy observing two or three different kinds of birds, and a multitude of wild birds. It helps "seeing." It helps me see and think of the grand scheme. In a setting that we try to keep wild, as much as possible, it is possible to see that animals are really not that different from us, when it comes to the basics. Eating, sleeping, mating, raising young. What we eat is different, but that we must eat is universal. What is also natural is that Life eats Life--in our man-made world we don't know that any more. We, humans, have drifted far away from live food to processed, manipulated, manufactured food that is no longer recognizable as having once been alive. Unless you go to a farmers' market, in supermarkets everything is sold in plastic, often two or three layers of it. I remind you that most plastic are made from oil. Observing animals is a reminder that all their food is alive, as it has been all through time, as our food is, or used to be alive: organic.

I spent one Spring and Summer observing chickens raising young. Again, recognizably similar to raising human young. Chicks that have only recently worked themselves out of their shells are not stable yet. They don't move much, shiver at times, and look utterly lost in this big new world. Much like new born human babies. One cannot help feeling protective. The mother hen stays very close to the brood the first hours, does not look for food. The first day and the next few days and nights are probably the most dangerous for chicks. They spend most of their time under

the hen's wings. The second day she begins to walk her path, and for several days she will rest frequently, the chicks under her wings. It is not unusual to see a large hen sitting in the middle of a path, not moving away when I come. She has fluffed herself up, protecting fragile chicks. I'm careful to walk around her. Mother hens show chicks how to eat, and what to eat. She will pick up something, then drop it, all the time clucking a certain sound that the chicks must recognize. She continues to do this "teaching" until all the chicks have learned. Mother ducks don't seem to do that; at least not here. Human babies are fragile and vulnerable at birth, and need a much longer time to be protected, but the process of protecting is much the same. As mammalian babies are born with an instinct to suckle; bird babies have an instinct to eat when shown to pick up something with their beaks and swallowing.

A significant difference between animal young and human babies is that most babies are raised one at a time. Humans stress the uniqueness of a baby. Our civilization reinforces that a hundredfold. The animals I observe are raised in a brood, sometimes only two, but more often as many as a dozen chicks grow up together. When grown, they will stay in touch, recognize each other as siblings perhaps -- although they may not have the same father, genetically. When a hen makes a nest, lays eggs, other hens frequently lay eggs in the same nest. Paternity, in chickens at least, is obviously unimportant.

I have seen child raising practices in indigenous societies that are quite different. Babies are often raised in little groups. Individuality is not stressed, if anything, played down. In our society a mother thinks of "her" baby as belonging to her only. I have lived in societies where babies, children, are not thought to "belong" to anyone, not even to the biological mother, or parents. In that society nursing mothers frequently nurse other than their own babies (even toddlers). Until a child can walk, around age two, s/he is carried, held, touched, probably 24 hours a day. Babies are handed from person to person. It is not at all unusual to see an old man cuddling a baby, then handing it to a thirteen year-old boy. From a very young age the children know themselves part of a village, a group, rather than a mother/father family. In those human societies children grow up with a strong sense of being loved, being wanted, belonging. Western children don't know that kind of "unconditional" love. In our society we have to earn love. Love is something that is given and withheld as a way to control a child. We say and think that we must educate, teach children how to behave, what to believe, how to live. In most indigenous cultures that I am familiar with, belonging, being wanted and loved, is a given, and being a part of a larger group, an extended family or a village, is more important than who one's biological parents are. Our ideas about what we call "love." has to do with sex and with liking and caring for, but certainly also as something that is given and withheld in order to control. That is unnatural--as our civilization is unnatural.

We, modern man, have created a world that is no longer natural, but man-made. Our unnatural world begins at birth. Babies are put in a sealed box, with carefully controlled temperature and oxygen level, probably sterile -- but lacking the touch of another human, the feel of skin, of a breast, hands that cuddle and hold. A baby gets a crib to sleep in, then its own bed, its own room. Its own life. And "life" we are told, is a struggle, requiring a great deal of conditioning. And above all "control." Parents feel they must control the growth and development of a child, children learn for endless years to control themselves. Success, after all, is measured in how well we control others and control our environment.

What is *control*? I define it as refusing to adapt to given circumstances, and so having to adjust circumstances and the environment to our imagined needs.

I discovered that chickens cover a lot of ground. Chickens are not territorial, they don't have an area they defend. They have paths they follow each day. Depending on the path, they might come through the same spot every hour, or once a day. Chicks follow the mother hen's path, of course, and, as their independence grows, they begin to wander off to the sides, making their own paths as a variation of the mother's. There are great individual differences, from an early age. Some chicks are more independent than others. I thought perhaps roosters-to-be might be more adventurous, but that is not true.

Chicks grow fast, in visible stages. I think how much, and how fast chicks grow depends on how much they eat. If they eat more they grow more, faster. Is that true for humans? Probably.

There is an obvious period in a chicken's life when I call them adolescent. Their bones grow faster than their muscles, they look awkward, all legs. Not yet adult, but obviously on the way. Now it is becoming visible who will be roosters, although very little sign of the colorful plumage and long tail feathers of adult roosters show yet. The first sign is always that they suddenly seem to grow taller. Roosters-to-be look the same as the ones who are going to be hens, but their legs are longer. They look like awkward teens on high stilt legs. They don't have the bulk of a rooster, nor the gaudy plumage, but first their tail feathers are beginning to grow out and they begin to strut. Roosters here are not more aggressive than hens but they do strut, show off, looking very regal. Actually they are not regal at all, they are cowards, all of them. Wimps. Yet they have free entry anywhere, at all times. Even a hen with a brood of young chicks will ignore a rooster who eats the food virtually out of the mouths of chicks, but she will ferociously fight and chase a hen away. If a chicken finds a morsel that is particularly tasty she will cluck a certain way. In seconds the nearest rooster will run to steal it from her. She lets him. Young chickens will run away and sometimes keep food from the rooster. Older hens will drop it and the rooster will carry it away.

In a large group, the roosters stay on the outside, Roosters eat faster, more greedily than hens. He crams as much and as fast as he can in his gullet. Hens eat less frantically. Roosters act as if they are constantly fleeing from the enemy, they are paranoid. They dance, always on the go, always ready to flee. They are also, obviously, not as smart as hens. Roosters do not learn, hens do.

It is in the large group that individual differences between hens comes out. There are (older, I think) hens with a brood who stay along the back of the area where I feed them, staying calm even in the excitement, seeing to it that the chicks get their share. Young hens abandon their brood and dive into the melee. At every feeding there are chicks left outside, pitifully squeaking. They often look as if they don't know where they are. I've seen boys and girls stand like that at the edge of a play ground. But, amazingly, after the food is all gone, the mother hen rounds up her own chicks. It is rare for a small chick to stay lost.

There are orphan chicks, however, and after they are old enough they survive. Orphans seem to be the consequence of the rape of their mother. When a hen with a brood is raped--not common, but it happens--the chicks are abandoned. More often than not, the orphans cling close together and do quite well. These bonds continue well into adulthood. There are "families" of hens who travel in groups, who were orphans together. Until one has the urge to make a nest. From then on, she is on her own.

There are very few families that include a rooster. I had heard of rooster "harems," but have only seen one here. There are small families of hens that allow a rooster to accompany them for a while, but never for long. There is one "family" of three hens and two roosters, the roosters almost of equal age--one is slightly larger (older) than the other. The great majority of roosters here are single, although they too travel in sibling pairs and threesomes. There is one very loose group of four roosters who travel their path more or less together, perhaps siblings. They seem

cautious friends. An almost all white rooster acts as if he has a crush on a red and gold feathered rooster. The colored rooster usually acts as if he does not know that the white rooster is following him, but I have seen him wait for the white rooster to catch up.

We, humans, make families, but I suspect that our idea of monogamous marriage "forever," is not a natural arrangement. I cannot escape my observations of indigenous and aboriginal groups where men and women pair for a time, almost never "forever." And it is almost never thought unusual or regrettable that a man or even a woman prefers to live alone. Children grow up knowing many caring adults and other children, older as well as younger. That seems to make for freer, happier adults. It seems healthier--because more natural--to have children grow up at their own pace, in a loose group of children, always in the arms of a loving group of adults, male as well as female.

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As an observer of the natural world in a small enclave of fairly wild, natural woods I pretend I am just observing, but of course that is not true. I am a part of a whole that is very porously bordered by our fences. This is an ecology of lava rock with a little soil here and there, trees and plants -- many of them planted by us, some not native to these islands -- and chickens, ducks, cats, dogs, pigs, and a host of smaller animals and beings that I cannot see. And humans. We, humans, are certainly also a part of this little bit of Nature that we pretend to be almost wild. We eat some of the life that is here: lots of bananas and other kinds of fruit, taro and breadfruit. Occasionally we eat a chicken, and when we have big parties the family makes a huge imu, an earth oven, and cooks the meat of one or even two pigs, many chickens, taro, bananas, guavas, and more. We have had as many as a hundred people eat the food from here on occasion.

We are not very aware that we are also the controllers of this piece of wild. But modern humans cannot be anything else any more, it seems. We must control, shape, make. We are the ones who put up fences--here very hard work, requiring drilling holes in the lava, cementing poles, stringing the wire fencing (also very expensive). We are the ones who planted a variety of tropical fruit trees. And we are the ones who are supposed to maintain this little preserve, and maintaining is a job that takes hours every day. We buy some food for the animals. We try to control how much we feed them, because we don't want them to rely on our food but we want them to eat what they find here. It is not really a farm, we don't live on what we grow, although if we had to, with a little more work, we probably could.

I grew up a very long time ago in a part of the world where the wild began a few meters from our house. There, at that time, the wild was really wild: no fences, no feeding of animals. We, humans, were part of that wild but definitely not its controllers. All kinds of wildlife freely entered our space.

In mid life I spent time with people who lived their entire life in the true wild, a dense jungle, who knew they were part of a whole, and they also knew that their role was to fit in, and only that. The idea of controlling nature had not come into their awareness. They were the most joyful people I know. They owned nothing, lived entirely off what they could find, and occasionally hunt. I'm sure they did not live as long as we do, but they lived with smiles on their faces. They did not clear land to grow food, they found food where it grew. They found clearings to put up rickety shelters from bamboo that grew nearby. They made fire with stones, cooked sometimes. Perhaps it is because of those experiences that now I am acutely aware of my heavy hand in our wild that is not really wild any more. They had different names for me, but one of them was Ele-

phant. A big foot print, but able to walk very softly. Elephants can destroy, but they can also hide. I still don't know whether I like that name.

Controlling Nature has become how we define ourselves as a species: *the species that controls the planet*. We see Nature as background, scenery, and as resource. We are so conditioned that we cannot accept what is, we need to change what we find to conform to our idea of what is beautiful, pleasant, peaceful, fruitful. A very important intention of modern man is to make money -- the most ethereal of imaginations. Certainly, we now have the power to do almost all we dream up, by force, by clever design, by ruthlessly ignoring Nature. We can, and do, destroy an acre of virgin wild in hours. We no longer see, or know, that we are part of All That Is, because we have come to think that we "own" land, Nature, trees, plants, animals. As we also own our children, our wives (are husbands owned?)

The wild people I knew, were very certain that they could not possibly own Nature, or own any life form. They themselves did not own anything -- they were nomads, whatever they owned they had to be able to carry on their backs.

We, who think we are the masters of all, are very sloppy owners. If we really owned, we would take care of it. We don't. We use a piece of land, we use the oil and coal we get out of the ground, and walk away. We are messy users, we throw away more than we steal -- yes, of course we steal: if nothing else, we steal from our children. Somehow we imagine that there is no limit to this planet. What a childish belief!

Brief interruption. This morning it rained very hard when I fed the animals. The mallards did not appear. Just now, several hours later, they came around to my house, letting me know they were here. Poor ducks, I thought -- no, I did not think: I felt. Went outside to give them a handful of scratch. Briefly I forgot what I learned years ago: I cannot feed just the ducks, or just one hen with chicks. When I threw scratch on the ground, I feed whoever is there. This time it was a rooster who saw the mallards eating. A rooster has free entrance anywhere, so he went for the little heap of food. The mallards, however, do not fear chickens (the big ducks do), so there was a commotion. I "had to" go outside, and... The western in me had to control. I don't own this land -- one of my sons holds title to it --, I don't even own my little house. The only function I have here is to feed the animals. And keep the place where I live as wild as I can. I should not have controlled the rooster-mallard conflict. I am ashamed to admit that I did.

Control has become a problem for me. I know that my sons, and almost all other people who come here, cannot understand what I am making such a fuss about. The fuss is because I know that controlling Nature is something that needs to be considered with awareness. I know that if we take responsibility for a chunk of living earth, we are also responsible to keep it alive and well. When I look around me at the larger world, we don't do that. We do not manage the living earth well, because we have forgotten that it is alive, and that it is part of an ecology that we too are part of. A forest is changed by cutting one tree; flattening a forest and all that grew in the shade of the trees, destroys the earth. Yes, in time, another forest may grow -- if we leave it alone --, but over a time that is measured in generations.

We, humans, think we are utterly different from animals. The more I observe, the more I am struck with how alike we are. What I think is the great difference between modern man (not original man) and animals: is that he can be cruel. Only humans torture their fellow man. Are there animals that are cruel, or vicious, by nature? No, I don't think so. We must train recruits to kill. Viciousness must be trained into animals as well -- or perhaps bred into animals by us. Perhaps

crowding makes vicious. Withholding food, reward, attention, is another. Here in Hawai'i "everybody knows" that a dog who is tied up, particularly on a short leash or chain, will become vicious.

What do we think imprisonment does to men and women?

We don't think. Out of sight, out of mind. But that is another story, for someone else to write.

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Almost all the chickens here were black, some just plain black, others with "gold" feathers around the shoulder. Some hens even have two or three tiers of shoulder capes in graduated colors of gold to brown. Most hens have black legs, a few have grey legs. All roosters are the same fiercely rococo pattern, differing only in how bright the black, reds and gold are.

Last summer, suddenly, there was one all white hen. Not totally white, she had one or two dark feathers. Her legs too were pale. She was exceptionally aggressive, picked fights with other hens. My western self imagined her "difference" made her snappy. We, are taught that Nature is logical. There must be "reasons" for what a species looks like. This hen, who happens to be white, is also more aggressive -- "because" she is white? I am learning again that Nature is not logical at all. Why do roosters have such showy feathers? To attract females, was my first thought. Wrong. Roosters rape. Hens don't choose, and if they choose company it is almost always another hen. Here is another crazy observation for which I tried to figure out a reason. A hen and her brood of young chicks wander around. I come on the scene. Panic! It is not the hen who leads the pack to safety, no, she follows where the majority of the chicks run. Almost always there is at least one chick, and often two or three, who run(s) away in a totally other direction. The hen hesitates, then she follows where the most chicks went. I've gone around the next tree and waited. I would say in 99% of the cases the hen gets all her chicks together again very quickly. And if the panic was great, and the chicks very young, the hen sits down and as many as a dozen little chicks crawl under her wings. The other day I dreamed up a wonderful reason for chicks to scatter. An instinct for survival of the species (that is what most instincts are for). An enemy would be misled, perhaps confused, having to choose which of the chicks... But why do I need reasons? That is assuming Nature is reasonable. All observations deny that. More and more I see Nature, all Life, as playful, trying this and that, endless colors, shapes, functions, for no particular reason. Randomly -- and yes, eventually, what works survives. But evolution is not dull and straightforward. It looks to me as if Nature tries anything and everything. Colors, shapes, number of legs, feathers, hair, scales. What works stays, what does not work disappears. Is what we call intelligence -- but smarts without considering consequences -- one of these wild trials?

At some point Early Man learned that he could interfere in the natural reproduction of plants and animals. We made hundreds of different breeds of dogs, horses, cows. Even camels have been specialized.

It may have been control that started our trip along the evolutionary path that leads to where we are now: a whole world created by us through control of Nature, plants, animals, the earth itself, and, of course, ourselves.

There are grades and kinds of control. Fences and walls to keep others in or out. Very ancient, and very modern; in the end not very effective, as we should have learned by now. More effective control makes permanent changes. Bulldozing, to me, has become the metaphor for permanent changes willfully made. Destruction of Nature, interfering in the ecology. And in order to

maintain our man-made world-- truly a house of cards-- we must control people's thinking, people's view of reality. Our education system is a form of control, meant to funnel human behavior in a narrow path. Advertising--very smoothly morphing into propaganda--is control. Changing adults' lifelong beliefs, attitudes, points of view, may be possible, but it is hard; much easier to form children's beliefs. What will change even adult humans' outlook, however, is experiencing the radical change of our natural and human environment that is now happening. That will switch people's behavior more rapidly and more extensively than any education or propaganda could do.

Walking back today, I thought about not being able to feed one chicken, or one duck. I feed whoever is there. Similarly, I cannot get mad at one duck: all animals flee when I even raise my voice.

A long time ago I was administrator of a day care center for very young children, three and older. When a teacher would mildly scold the three year-old boy who kept taking other kids' toys, all the six or seven three year-olds would burst out in tears. It must take some years for humans to learn to distinguish between me and other. Adults have learned to make distinctions, me and everyone else. We make walls, as we do in Baghdad, and as the Israelis do; walls to keep out "the other." And prison cells, another kind of walls, for those we cannot accept.

Life is a lot simpler when the walls are mostly down, when I and other are very close, where "I" am less important than "we."

Once you start any kind of interference in the natural order of things, you have shaken the web. There are consequences. So, the smart way to live is to be very careful, to interfere as little as possible. A small foot print.

Western Man has grown very big feet, and forgot -- ignores or denies -- that there might be consequences. By our crude, violent, extreme controlling of plants, animals, the earth itself, we set ourselves apart. We, humans, against all the rest of creation. From there it is only a step to *we, humans, own this planet*. Own land, own our pets, and "my" children, "my" wife. With owning comes hierarchy. Some own more than others. Men own women. Men own other men.

Did we just evolve that way? Is all of that the natural consequence of learning to grow wheat with larger seeds for us to eat? A natural consequence of domesticating animals for our use? Or did we choose, and continue to choose to think that we can control, and so we learned to control more extensively and more effectively? Forgetting consequences?

My own hunch is that we chose, and continue to choose to ignore consequences. We know a lot more about control than about consequences because we chose not to learn about consequences. We continue to try controlling unwanted species by chemical or biological control and inevitably a few years later find that our control backfired. It turns out our control affected some other species altogether and the one we wanted to eradicate is doing just fine, thank you. If we had considered consequences before, we would not be worried about global warming now. In fact, even now there are people who deny that GW is.

We lived sustainably for the first hundred thousand -- some say more -- years of our existence as homo sapiens. It is only in the last, say, ten thousand years that we turned a corner and decided to think of ourselves as above Nature. We think we know better. Most of us still do. That is why I think we *chose* to come this way however many thousand years ago it was when Man settled down, grew a crop that saw him through the winter, domesticated animals, made villages, then cities. We dug up metals, then oil. And look at us now! We fly through the air with the greatest of ease. We have personal computers, telephones, entertainment, movies, DVDs. Hos-

pitals, and a hundred different kinds of medical professionals, and drugs that allow us to live twice as long as ever before. And we throw away tons of stuff that we don't know what to do with.

Originally, I think, obviously women knew themselves the mother of the future of the species. When men began control, men proclaimed their importance, and so made a new world, run by men who thought themselves the more important gender. Biologically, of course, ridiculous. Only a few men are needed to impregnate a lot of women, who are the future of mankind.

All of that, and no consequences?

Today we feel ourselves separate, and in control. Until a hurricane, an earth quake, a flood, drought, "happens." And even then we find it almost impossible to give up the idea that I own this place, I own these trees, the animals. I'll rebuild my house, my city, my land.

I live on an island that really is an enormous volcano, alive through one or two openings, spewing lava and sulphurous fumes. We have become almost used to earth quakes, and we accept that now and then Pele, the goddess of volcanoes (of life as well as destruction), flows hot lava over a village, shakes trees and houses. When the lava runs over a road, you can sometimes rebuild the road on top of the lava when it has cooled (a year or two later). But we don't rebuild the village on new lava. To most of us here that is just the way it is. Not good, not bad, it just IS.

I know that we, humans, did not always think ourselves apart. For eons we must have known ourselves part of the earth and all beings. "All my relations," as Native Americans say: all and everything that I have connections to, and they to me. I have known people who still lived in the unshakable surety that they were part of the jungle and everything in it.

When we cut those connections we imagined a whole new and different world, a man-made world, constructed on top of the earth, based on that separation. That is why it is so difficult for us, modern humans, to remember what it felt like to know ourselves part of everything. As long as we knew ourselves to be an integral part of all there is, the idea of "control to permanently change" could never enter our minds. But when we loosened the contact, control slipped in. Or, maybe, somehow the idea of control came into our heads, and that cut the connections? Either way, we went off on a tangent.

Today, the almost universal reaction to the changes that are brought about by global warming is that we must "do" something to turn GW back, or off, or invent new energy sources that will allow us to continue living as we do. All of these ideas are just more control. The next few years (well before the end of this century, I think) we shall be forced to rethink our hubris, our arrogance, our thinking that we own this planet, that we can force Nature to do our will. So far, it seems abundantly clear to me, Nature is winning on all fronts: earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes, all in unimagined severity, have demonstrated in no uncertain terms that we have not been able to control Nature at all. Whether we want to or not we are part of the planetary ecology.

As I write this I look out on trees; on one of the trees an orchid that I am particularly fond of. It grows a cluster of red flowers maybe three or four times a year. A special kind of red. Only today I realize why I have always had a special feeling for orchids. Not because their flowers are sometimes stunning, many orchids -- wild orchids here -- have insignificant flowers. A memory itches in my head. Again I hear him say, "Orchids are special because they are temperamental. They resist." Now I understand what he meant all those years ago. Orchids resist human control. As I do with all plants I buy, I left it in its little pot with gravel around the roots. I carried it

around for a week, two weeks. Trying to think where this plant would like to live. I cannot really explain how I decide this, but sometimes I get a hunch. And even after I had chosen a place to plant this little orchid, I left it in the 3 inch pot. I moved it twice, I remember. Until suddenly I had this idea that it would like to grow on a certain tree. I tied it around the tree, got some moss to cover the roots. Kept it moist when it did not rain. A few weeks later I saw that this plant was going to be happy on this tree. The roots crawled all over the tree, every now and then dipping behind the bark of the tree. The tree does not seem to mind, it too is thriving. The first time it bloomed, right in front of where I sit when I work, I knew that this plant was happy.

robert wolff, 22 September (equinox) 2007 -- edited and rewritten 2 November '07, and again
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