

Democracy of the Land

THE MOO MOO WORLD

By Jay Critchley

COWS ARE AS UBIQUITOUS to the New England landscape as rolling forests, pastures, and fall foliage: languishing on their bucolic fields, holding the land, owning the land.

This iconic tableau has affirmed itself over the four centuries since the Puritan Separatists first implanted themselves on North American soil in 1620, one year after slaves arrived from Africa. At the time they called this the “New World,” a mythological reverie of an undiscovered, pristine Garden of Eden of valuable un-extracted commodities such as beaver, sassafras, timber, and white pine (Trees of Life), but we now know that it was misnamed. Revisionist historians now more accurately call the “New World” the “Moo Moo World.”

Barnyard animals, cows, pigs and horses—our familiar Beasts of Burden—have gotten too little credit for the ecological catastrophe they and their masters propagated on the Americas: all invasive species. It’s common knowledge that these disease-ridden creatures did not exist in the Western Hemisphere until Columbus and the Spanish Conquistadors, themselves immune, paraded their horses and pigs off the boats with arrogant fanfare, a caravan of aliens moo-mooing and oinking.

These imperial soldiers, not far removed from the Black Plague and the rise of white nationalism in Europe, marauding Crusaders and ecological disorder on the Continent, were on a clear Christian mission of “discovery,” recruitment, and enslavement. In fact, thousands of indigenous people were captured and shipped off to the Caribbean and Europe.

What about all that pristine, unproductive virgin land waiting to be civilized, commodified, and cowsplained? After all, there were no fences or rigid enclosures, so familiar to the English landscape. By the 1530s Europeans were reading about Noble Savages, “gentle as cows,” with no history, living in a limitless nature. Living in prelapsarian innocence, these creatures were merely waiting for Christianity to save and civilize them.

But that didn’t stop the “emasculated” Native Americans in Maine from mooning European traders as they left the shore for their ship. Is this moo-mooning?

I’m sure Europeans weren’t thinking that “new” meant advanced or superior quality, as the marketplace now defines the word, or spick-and-span, but rather untrodden, unspoiled. Uncontaminated. Not for long. This idea of Manifest Destiny pervades to this day. Famously, even in 1964—centuries later—the landmark US environmental legislation, the Wilderness Act, was created to protect vast lands that were “untrammelled by man.” Empty?

And the Apollo 8 mission reminded us of who still runs things as the astronauts read from the Gideon Bible’s Book of Genesis on a 1968 Christmas eve broadcast from space.

As eminent poet Robert Frost wrote unabashedly in *The Gift Outright*: “The land was ours before we were the land’s.”



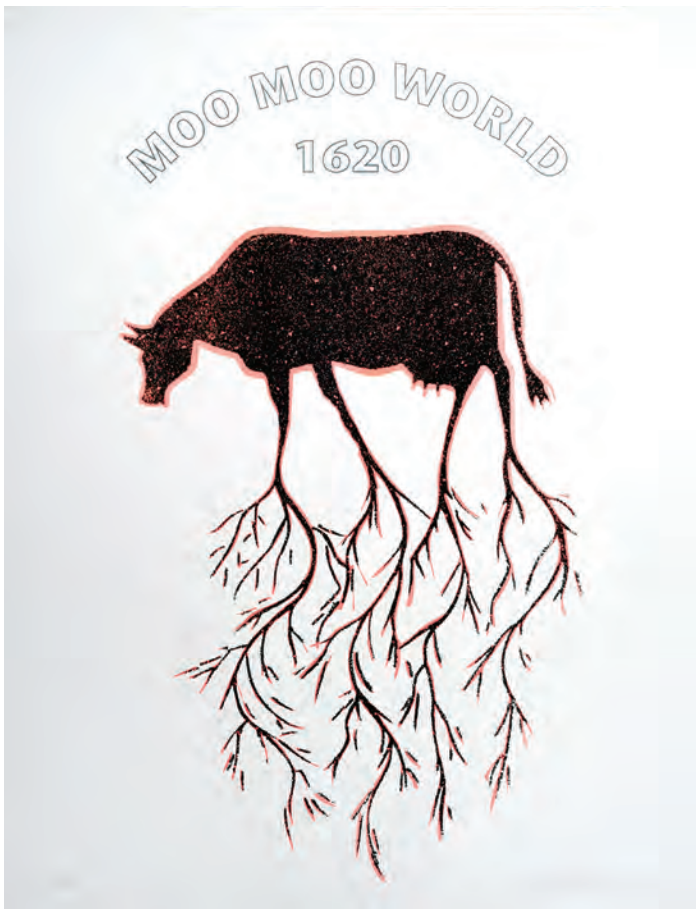
Flagged. Protect. Repel., 2006, tie-string surgical masks, 6 x 3½ feet

Humankind has always looked to the sky and the heavens to the cow-deity, Hathor, to make sense of our existence. No wonder! The twinkling, mesmerizing, star-studded lights of the dark night sky rapturously connect us to the ancient mysteries experienced by our ancestors. It’s the great Milky Way of the cow-diety, recognized globally across cultures from the Fertile Crescent in Mesopotamia to Egypt to Eurasia and to Mesoamerica as a sacred mapping of the universe. Did the settler colonists in the Americas look to the sky to the cow-deity, with her milk flowing from the udder of this heavenly quadruped—her grand waterway, a pathway to the heavens and the Great Unknown. We think not. Their focus was on the udder of the cow on earth. This was, after all, the land of milk and honey.

The First Peoples of the Americas were expert astronomers, studying and honoring the sky as a mythic journey. The Incas, for instance, celebrated many animals in the sky, like fox, baby Llama, toad, partridge, and serpent, and organized their life cycles based on astronomical calculations. As “Westward Ho” inspired waves of “pioneers” to cross the continent, they looked to the sky and saw millions of passenger pigeons darkening the land, and they shot them to extinction. They then went and killed off tens of millions of buffalo, an ungulate relation to the cherished cow. Extraction of the land again, this time with a larger purpose: to starve and kill off the Native Americans and destroy their culture. And the other iconic American animal, the whale? A direct ancestor to the bison, who slipped back into the water from the land to form the great sea mammals, the Leviathan. Also killed to near-extinction.

“The woods were almost cleared of those pernicious creatures, to make room for a better growth.” —Cotton Mather

Indeed, Pope Alexander IV wasted no time in 1493 to decree the primacy of Christendom and bestow his formal blessings to the overthrow of the “barbarous” peoples of the Americas and bring them to the faith. Yes, the historic year of 1620, when the Mayflower Compact was signed in Provincetown harbor—400 years ago—was the inevitable result of these Papal Documents of Discovery, which decreed that “the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted” and that any land not inhabited by Christians exists to be “discovered,” claimed, and exploited by zealous rulers.



Moo Moo World 1620 (1/35), 2020, unique print on archival paper with found sand, 30 x 23 inches

Even the Diet of Worms conclave in 1521, which cemented the Catholic/Protestant schism, didn't affect the universal Christian claim to the Moo Moo World. Everyone wanted a piece of the pie, which transcended religious differences.

This from King James I of England in 1620, from *The Great Patent of New-England*:

There hath, by God's visitation, reigned a wonderful plague [that has resulted in] the utter destruction, devastation, and depopulation of that whole territory, so as there is not left . . . any that do claim or challenge any kind of interest therein.

We, in our judgment, are persuaded and satisfied, that the appointed time is come in which Almighty God, in his great goodness and bounty towards us, and our people, hath thought fit and determined, that those large and goodly territories, deserted as it were by their natural inhabitants, should be possessed and enjoyed by such of our subjects.

The Americas, however, completely unknown at the time to the "Western Civilization" of Europeans, evolved in parallel fashion like the Fertile Crescent—no, not hunter-gatherers—that is considered to be the "cradle of civilization." Not so fast. This Neolithic breakthrough in the Tigris and Euphrates region, where farming was established, was also happening in Mesoamerica: present day Central America, from central Mexico down through Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. Indeed, two hemispheric revolutions in the history of the human race.

But our colonial brethren only perceived that the Native Americans were lazy and slothful—yes, unemployed, living the life of leisure out hunting—like the one percent of Englishmen! These guys are wimps! The Pilgrims had to admit that they were healthy and clean, while the Native Americans joked about how dirty these aliens were—they smelled!

Conquistador Hernando De Soto, a soldier, venture capitalist, and

slave trader, arrived exultantly in Florida in 1539, shortly after the Diet of Worms, on a search for gold and riches. He was already a wealthy man, having plundered the Aztec, spreading Old Europe's zoonotic diseases, leaving close to ninety percent of the population dead. He showed up with a mere six hundred soldiers, two hundred horses, and three hundred virulent pigs, and proceeded on a rampage, ravaging the land and massacring and enslaving dozens of indigenous peoples. The pigs, mating with local razorbacks, did the rest of the devastation throughout the Southeastern United States.

Now today, these fecund feral swine have migrated and found an expansive and inviting home in Canada, even adapting for winter weather by building themselves "pigloos" in the snow. But watch out, they are the latest creature rebellion since the killer bees scare, the vicious Asian Carp threatening the Great Lakes, and the invasion of plastic tampon applicators washed up on beaches. Agricultural officials are fending off disaster as these raucous animals regroup at the northern Canada/US border, preparing for their expected ecological assault.

It's the border, stupid. The northern border!

The Pilgrims imported their custom of divvying up the land to keep the cows and pigs out of their gardens with fences and walls. The first wall known to be built in North America was constructed as a fort in Plymouth. If Denmark had to build one to protect itself from feral swine itching to cross over from Germany, why shouldn't we?

This is bona fide Natural Security! Perfect.

This barnyard army of uninvited critters—pigs and cows—also had a direct connection to the foundation of modern capitalism: Wall Street. A wall was built in Manhattan to keep the marauding farmers and their livestock apart from the newly minted bankers on "Wall Street"! Thus, the phrase "Capitalist Pigs" was born.

Against your world that loomed too big
I felt myself quite small.
I purchased me a tiny house
And surrounded it by a wall.

What urge so moved me then
I am really now in doubt.
Whether this wall was meant to keep me in
Or keep you out.

—Grace Gouveia

As the wild swine continue their aggressive comeback, our beloved, resource-inefficient and exploited cattle continue their corporate march



Codfish Crucifix, 1983, codfish skins, mixed media, 11 x 7 inches



SARS to CARS: weapons of gas destruction, 2003, digitally altered Time magazine cover (May 5, 2003)

into deforested rainforests in the Global South, as worldwide demand for—this time—a diet of hamburgers. Indigenous peoples cultivated this ancient land, like much of the Americas, creating complex and sustainable societies—without cows. Their methane load, which averages thirty to fifty gallons a day (mostly from burping) is now competing with human fracking and our own methane and gas emissions. Yes, we humans, nearly eight billion of us, each releases three pints per day. And scientific investigation has shown that older people pass wind more often than younger folks. This presents a problem for the aging population and the quality of life on Cape Cod. A challenge to a carbon-neutral future.

But an economic opportunity for the Cape. Research shows that if the 1.5 billion cows on the planet were fed seaweed, their flatulence quotient would diminish by fifty to seventy-five percent. Let's put our elderly to work harvesting seaweed while exercising and taking in mostly fresh air and sunshine. Farming seaweed in Provincetown harbor would scare off the seals and sharks, giving the town the only safe beaches on the Cape.

From Club Medicare—Harvested Fruit from the Sea!

An enhanced tourist destination for twenty-first-century hunter-gatherers!

But wait, this global cow rampage, begun with our perceived unlimited land and unrestrained reach, is being undermined by a revolutionary plant-based protein—lab meat! Is synthetic biology (“synbio”) algae-based protein going to upend the global meat epidemic and cause the industrial livestock corporations to become obsolete? Perhaps hacked DNA will live up to its promise of sustainable food production, eliminating the resource-intensive, old-school use of water, land, petro-based fertilizers, hormones, and antibiotics! Or is technology riding high once again on its planet-saving predictions about technological innovation and salvation?

Just maybe, once and for all, we could celebrate our inherent animal nature and erase our arrogant place in her supply chain by granting personhood to nature, to all living things. Imagine if the Cape Cod National Seashore were given the rights, duties, and liabilities of a living person. If the government tried to sell or parcel her off, wouldn't that be a form of human trafficking?

It's conceivable we could reclaim the innocence of the classic Holstein cow, so long exploited, languidly moving about in the green pastures of Vermont, even moo-moaning us, modeling a more wistful society of enlightened global mindfulness. Once again, we look to the sky and the Milky Way, to the cow-deity Hathor, and breathe a sigh of relief.

Maybe the corporate mystics are right. Have we evolved? Can our thought-and-bought leaders justify our well-being through “conscious capitalism” while appropriating indigenous spiritual practices? Or will radical individualism continue unabated toward “natural capitalism?”

Have we fallen from grace?

Some have suggested we all plank pose, inspired by Ruth Bader Ginsburg. De-colonize the cows, refuse credit card implants, reclaim soil security, and move beyond profit-driven reciprocity? Or, rely on the tech magic of Memory Prosthetics?

Indeed, the spirit of the Pilgrims lives on. The New Normal. The Pulpits of Commerce are OOM, OOMing. The religious and corporate venture of the *Mayflower* has evolved into the Religion of Recycling—Extract and Repent. Repent and Extract. Recycle and Extract. Recycle and Repent. It's We, the People, after all, who are responsible. Treat the symptoms, not the root cause.

Let's thank China for saying no to accepting our gluttonous fossil fuel products. *Mobil Warming is real!* And what about the symbiotic connection between the global waste stream and the spread of viruses and pathogens? Disruptive invasions continue.

Extract and Repent.

Repent and Extract.

Recycle and Extract.

Recycle and Repent. ☒

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