

COVERT REPERTOIRES: ECOTAGE IN THE UK¹

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Abstract:

Ecological sabotage (ecotage) has been a feature of the more radical parts of the environmental movement in the western world for several decades. While it may be perceived as being the preserve of underground cells of 'eco-terrorists', in the UK those who carry out small-scale acts of sabotage are also often engaged in relatively conventional political activity; view sabotage as a complement to other action, not as an end in itself; and are committed to avoiding physical harm to people. Drawing on ethnographic data from research with British activists, this article seeks to define ecotage and to explain its place in the repertoires of the environmental direct action movement in the UK. It is argued that the self-limiting form of ecotage in the UK has its roots in cross-movement debates that have developed over several decades and that national traditions remain important in understanding the development of social movement repertoires.

Keywords: Earth First!, Ecotage, repertoires, non-violent direct action, Earth Liberation Front, affinity groups.

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING ECOTAGE

Ecotage is sabotage carried out by environmental activists that is intended to cause material damage to their opponents (della Porta and Diani 1999: 176-78). As a form of direct action it attempts to change perceived political, social or environmental injustices directly rather than through an appeal to political elites. Most often associated with radical environmental direct action groups such as Earth First! (EF!) in the USA and the UK, and similar groups in other western countries such as Australia (Doyle 2000), it generally takes the form of property damage, sometimes to cause financial costs, at other times to damage machinery which activists believe is being used to destroy a valued part of the environment. Its practitioners usually aim to avoid identification and arrest and although violent in the sense that it entails material damage to property, in practice, ecotage, by EF! in the UK at least, is subject to strong moral codes based on avoiding physical harm to people or animals. Viewed as a form of collective violence, it is a form of what Charles Tilly (2003: 15) would define as 'scattered attack', with relatively little co-

ordination by practitioners regarding targets and low salience of violence. Moreover, like most instances of scattered attack it developed from, and is still combined with, non-violent political action.

Sabotage has long been part of the repertoire of social movements. In the early nineteenth century the Luddites, the 'Captain Swing' rural workers and other groups used industrial sabotage as a means of resistance to the new forms of political economy (see Rudé, 1995, Howbsbawm and Rudé 1969). Interestingly, these groups are often celebrated by contemporary environmental direct activists as precursors, but the central differences in context are that those movements were defending livelihoods under threat from new economic forces and could not campaign overtly without facing severe repression.² In contemporary environmental activism, it is movements in the Third World, often engaged in violent conflicts with their own governments and Western corporations, that seem most similar to these early industrial struggles (Doyle 2002). Earth First! groups arguably face some repression too,³ but they are also able to maintain public activity, and we argue that the opportunities and choices that this at least partly democratic context provides, explains a degree of restraint in their use of sabotage.

The study of ecotage may be seen as an area of fringe concern. Indeed ecotage might be seen as a product not of popular movements but the often fictitious construction of marginal entrepreneurs of violence. However, we believe that ecotage deserves more attention from scholars of social movements for several reasons. First, because without acknowledgement of the existence of these covert forms of action, movement activity will inevitably be misrecorded and its influence on movements neglected. Second, social movements scholars are often sympathetic to the aims of those they study and there has been a temptation to skate over or downplay forms of action such as sabotage that might damage the movement politically. Others have pointed to comparable silences such as that over the role of emotion in social movements (Aminzade and McAdam 2001). A similar blindspot may also occur in relation to forms of action that challenge the liberal forms of democracy. Third, understanding the origins and development of ecotage can help us to move beyond the position in which violence is assessed by observers only in terms of whether or not they sympathise with its practitioners.

Our central argument is that the kinds of ecotage carried out in Britain reflect particular traditions of collective learning in UK direct action networks, which we show through examination of the links between Earth First! and previous direct action movements. EF! activists could justify ecotage as part of their repertoire because they absorbed previous debates about property damage and included activists with experience in peace, feminist, and animal rights direct action, among others. They also responded to contingent events, such as the Poll Tax riot. We also argue that ecotage in the UK is best explained as the product of national traditions, and that there may be constraints on globalising direct action repertoires.

The main aim of this article is to fill a gap. There is very little empirical material on ecotage, for obvious reasons. For that reason the greater part of the article is necessarily descriptive. We focus on the UK for reasons of limited space and expertise but make some comparisons with the US and Australia because of the mutual influences between radical environmental activism in these three countries. The data on which our argument is based comes from ethnographic work with Earth First! activists in the UK between 1995 and 2002.⁴ This included life history interviews, observation and textual research. For the purposes of this paper, we have decided to focus on a more 'intangible' and

contested area of the direct action repertoires and discourses mapped during the research, precisely because it is this type of more hidden activity which normally remains outside the boundaries of action research.

BACKGROUND: EARTH FIRST! IN THE UK

Ecotage in the UK can be better understood by looking at the structure of direct action environmentalist networks. Organisationally, environmental direct action (EDA) is constituted through a network of local eco-activist groups rather than a formal organisation with a bureaucracy. Nomenclature does not necessarily help to distinguish these groups. For instance, Earth First! has overlapped with networks operating under different names such as Reclaim the Streets and there are also myriad affinity groups, which come and go. Taken together these 'organisations' are really better understood as temporary and often locally-specific manifestations of a national network which has no formal organisational centre. Locally, these groups are embedded in 'submerged networks' (Melucci 1996) in which current, and previous activists mix with a wider and fluid community of supporters. Earth First! UK activists are often involved in publicly funded community projects, and sometimes in Green Party activity, or paid media work, alongside protest activity.

Earth First! was launched in the USA in 1980 on the back of Edward Abbey's novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, first published in 1975, which he based on accounts of ecotage that stretched back to the early 1970s. *Ecodefense*, an ecotage manual, produced by EF! (US) co-founder Dave Foreman (1985) was widely distributed, with hints on attacking the corporate offices of polluting companies, felling and burning advertising hoardings and dismantling animal traps. Most controversial were tactics of treespiking, which involved hammering nails, preferably ceramic, to avoid discovery by metal detectors, deep into trees to destroy sawmill blades and wreck chainsaws, potentially causing injury to logging workers.⁵

British Earth First! groups emerged in the early 1990s⁶ more than ten years after the formation of Earth First! in the USA (Lee 1995) and the earlier use of direct action by Australian activists defending rainforests (Doyle 1994; Hutton and Connors 1999). The new UK Earth First! (EF!) networks, never numbering more than a few thousand activists, initiated a new wave of direct action against roads, other development projects, and the inter-woven chain of construction and oil companies. Anti-roads protest camps were the main locus of EDA protest activity in the UK during the 1990s, but other forms of action and targets (including action taken in cities by autonomous direct action groups) were also important. New tactics were continually being adopted and old ones re-worked; treehouses, tunnels and 'lock-ons'⁷ (used by protesters as means of occupation of threatened land) were key examples of this. Other standard forms of action included office occupations, disruptions of company AGMs, rooftop demonstrations, blockades, occupations of construction sites and the outlets of 'pariah' companies such as McDonalds, Gap and Shell. Significantly, it was during these years of rapid tactical innovation that ecotage diffused throughout EDA networks.

Some militants in nascent EF! (UK) groups sought to construct an Earth Liberation Front (ELF) which would promote a radical political agenda and repertoires of sabotage. Shortly before the first EF! UK national gathering in April 1992 a press release was sent to the media claiming responsibility for sabotaging a Fisons peat digging operation in South Yorkshire. Many EF! activists at the time believed that it would be legally difficult for them if the network publicly endorsed such 'ecotage'. After much debate,

it was agreed at the Gathering, Earth First! would be split into two. On the one hand there would be an underground group the Earth Liberation Front which would do ecotage and all the embarrassing naughtiness stuff and, on the other hand, all the open civil disobedience kind of thing that would retain the name Earth First! [...] people were insisting there if there was going to be a split it shouldn't be a case of competition between units. They should be supportive so there should be toleration by groups. ('Edgar'⁸, 1996).

The acronym ELF was playfully taken from the initials of the Animal Liberation Front. Repertoires of covert sabotage practised by the ALF (Lee 1983, Roberts 1986, Ryder 1989) were an obvious source of inspiration for such activists, who used animal liberation networks to recruit others sympathetic to their approach into EF! (UK). One early EF! (UK) supporter formerly active in the animal liberation movement noted,

a good way in was to approach the hunt saboteurs because they are already into [a] sort of direct action and it is quite easy to show them the links [...] if you are going to save the fox from the hunt why let it be killed by a contractor [...] from that Plymouth EF! was set up ('Geoff', 1996)

One link between an ALF approach and ecotage in EF! was via several tiny green anarchist networks. *Green Anarchist*, a newspaper produced by radical greens, had long championed the ALF and the growth of EF! (UK) in the early 1990s was also aided by the paper. A second existing network - Greenpeace London (best known for distributing the leaflet that led to the McLibel trial, Vidal 1997) also had early links with the new EF! groups and was sympathetic to the ALF. A joint EF!/ *Green Anarchist* activist noted in an interview that, 'a key model throughout the 80s was the Animal Liberation Front of course, in terms of they were directly resolving things in a clandestine manner.' ('Edgar' 1996). A number of short-lived ELF publications including *the Terrarist* (pun intended) aimed to propagate covert action and a discourse of anti-capitalism, and a few actions were claimed by ELF supporters. But most in EF! (UK) were hostile to the ELF, viewing it as a product of masculine posturing. During this same 1992 EF! national gathering a newspaper report was published containing an unattributed statement from an EF! (UK) activist that argued that radical greens might carry out bomb attacks (Cohen 1992). This polarised positions even further.

[Someone]...had been conned by some reporter into going on about how bombings would soon be seen in the cause of environmentalism [...] so he was all terribly embarrassed by this. That was used as a stick to beat the militants with. ('Edgar', 1996)

Ultimately no durable ELF network developed as a consequence of this gathering. The ELF as a separate covert network, if not stillborn, soon decomposed. A close study of direct action movement newsletters such as the *Earth First! Action Update*, *Schnems*, *Do or Die!* and the ultra militant *Green Anarchist* shows that virtually no actions have been claimed by the UK ELF since 1996⁹ and ethnographic research showed no evidence of a continued ELF presence. Yet, notwithstanding the effective disappearance of the ELF, during the 1990's, ecotage diffused amongst the growing numbers and networks of direct action environmentalists. And while the ELF failed to take off in Britain, the name resurfaced later in the 1990s in the USA where the ELF (claiming to have been inspired by the British ALF) claimed responsibility for a series of major arson attacks.¹⁰ Ecotage in the UK, though frequent, has generally been comparatively small scale and has almost always avoided violence to persons.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: RECORDING ECOTAGE.

While we know that ecotage is occurring it is impossible to map levels in any finite way. The evidence we have gathered suggests that much ecotage is known only to those who carry it out and to those who clean up the damage. Critics are bound to ask, how is it possible to analyse its consequences when it is impossible to be sure about how much of it there is? Yet it is possible to shine a light on some of this activity. Firstly, even ecotage is sometimes reported. It is a feature of both the ALF in the UK and the ELF in the USA that actions are acknowledged via ‘communiqués’ to the mainstream or activist media. Although this is the exception rather than the rule in UK EDA publications, it does surface occasionally, as for instance, when activist publications report the sentencing of activists. Spirit of Freedom (Earth Liberation Prisoners) a UK support network reports such cases:

Dear friends, ELP has just learnt that Lee Himlin has been on remand for six weeks for criminal damage to quarrying equipment at the Nine Ladies quarry...(ELP email Bulletin March 24th 2001)

Thus protest event data sequences based on the published activist sources can be constructed that include reported ecotage as well as other forms of action such as site occupations and blockades. Table 1 shows results from a survey of protests involving three local EF! groups based on reports from the national Earth First! newsletters between 1992 and 2000.¹¹ The survey analysed protest events in which more than one form of action might be used. The same repertoire of action was used by groups in each area, the differences in proportions, such as the higher numbers of occupations and blockades in Manchester, being mainly due to the greater number of suitable targets in a city. The ‘property damage’ category includes instances of minor attacks on property, such as subvertising, GM crop sabotage and the relatively few instances of major attacks on property such as large-scale destruction of construction and peat cutting machinery. It is notable how few reported events, even within the newsletter of a network unembarrassed by such matters, included instances of property damage.

	Manchester	Oxford	North Wales	Protests in other areas involving members of EF! from each of Manchester, Oxford and North Wales.
Signatures/leaflets/judicial	9.1	8	13.5	2.2
Demonstrations	13.1	19.2	21.6	12.4
Gatherings	7.7	11.2	5.4	2.2
Occupations/Blockades	47.8	39.2	32.4	39.3
Protest Camp Events	13.8	9.6	18.9	31.4
Property Damage	6.1	6.4	5.4	10.1
Other	2.3	6.4	2.7	2.2
Total Forms (n)	297	125	37	89
Total Events (n)	136	81	20	30

Table 1 Forms of action as a % in protests by Earth First! Activists in Manchester, Oxford and North Wales Reported in *Earth First! Action Update* and *Schnews* 1992-2000.

Since very little ecotage is reported in mainstream newspapers, protest event surveys based on such sources are bound to miss this dimension of the movement's action. If we are to include this dimension of movement activity in analysis of levels of protest we need to include activist sources as well as the mainstream media,¹² but even in activist sources, not all instances are necessarily reported. This was clear from interviews and observation in our research and has been noted by other analysts of direct action too. "To write anything like a complete history of actions at Greenham would be an impossible task. For several years there were dozens of actions taking place each night but no written log was kept. Even the women who did the actions do not necessarily remember every one in which they took part." (Roseneil 2000: 186).¹³ Much of the distribution of news in direct action networks is now through the internet, making reporting of events fast and cheap in comparison with previous eras, but even this does not mean that all actions are made public. As Pickerill, shows, in the case of Indymedia site set up to allow reporting of the pulling down of the fences at Woomera detention centre in South Australia in 2002: 'not all news could be reported, because communication could have jeopardised the freedom of the escaped refugees, thus "there's some things I don't want to say because I would think it would compromise the safety of some of the actions that have taken place ... I just think they might be stories that may never get out"' (Alex, 2002) in Pickerill 2004).

By pointing to its partial invisibility, we do not want to exaggerate the extent and importance of ecotage in the UK. It might have attracted more attention for instance, in the financial or specialist trade press, if it was more extensive. But, whatever the real extent of ecotage, it is not wholly invisible and academic accounts which aim to explain how and why mobilisations happen, why people take action and under what circumstances, need to acknowledge its existence.

TARGETS AND TYPES OF ACTION

In the USA and Australia ecotage has primarily been targeted at developments that threatened to erode wilderness areas, such as new access roads, dams, and logging (Lee

1995; Doyle 2000). The absence of wilderness in the UK has meant that targets included a wider range of opponents who caused environmental destruction. Our research also suggests a pattern of many small acts of sabotage as more typical of Britain. These include 'trashing' machinery, site workings, and related targets often at construction sites and quarries. As a tongue in cheek report in *Earth First! Action Update* says, activists might, '*smash JCB's, pour sugar into dozers' petrol tanks, wipe computer hard drives etc: which obviously you shouldn't do, never ever...*'¹⁴ A significant amount of ecotage took place on the construction sites adjacent to protest camps such as those at Twyford Down, Newbury, Solsbury Hill, the M11, Manchester Airport. As one activist involved in the campaign to prevent the extension of the M3 at Twyford Down said: '*I became aware... that pixie-ing [covert ecotage] was rife...although it was very seldom spoken of...*' ('Andrew' 2001). For some doing this was an alternative to living in the camps:

I went on rallies for example, but I never really did that thing of kind of living in the trees and being there when evictions were happening. But things I did were more like 'pixieing.' So at that time I was going along in the middle of the night and you know putting knives in tyres of the Landrovers that the security guards were in, and you know, or otherwise when they started putting out signs for where the road was going to go...I'd be out there moving them somewhere else.' 'Eve' (2000)

From 1998 covert ecotage against genetic engineering test sites became common. As one interviewee commented, '*I think with GE the profile of criminal damage has escalated exponentially because it's the only way people see of getting rid of the test sites...*' ('Jenny', 1999). Other forms of ecotage occur within public protest actions. For instance, during the 1996 Reclaim the Streets Party on the M41 (urban freeway) in West London, the skirts of giant pantomime dames on stilts were used as cover for activists using pneumatic drills to break up the road. Also, during office occupations activists often refile or remove paperwork, damage hard disk drives and 'borrow' material.

Not all sabotage carried out by EDA activists in Britain is based upon purely environmental motivations. Companies and public institutions have also been targeted for their role in arms production, exploitation of the Third World or racism. For instance in 2000 electricity supplies to Campsfield detention centre for asylum seekers near Oxford had to be switched off after the supply cables were cut by saboteurs, apparently from EF!, and in 2001 the newsletter of Manchester Earth First! carried the following report:

Four women from Manchester were stunned one day when they saw that 'Thorntons', the chocolate shop, claimed in their window displays that '1975 – women get equality' and '2001 – women finally got what they wanted – 5 new Belgian chocolates'. ... They visited two Thorntons shops in central Manchester to show them what they thought and what they wanted! A letter was written to the manager; the window displays were graffitied; the shop window displays had posters glued to them. Women are still discriminated against in jobs and pay, are still the subjects of domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment. For these reasons and lots of others we want FREEDOM, JUSTICE and EQUALITY and most of all we want to SMASH PATRIARCHY ... here's to a REVOLUTION!' They got away from both shops before police were called. A spray glue was used – very quick drying and strong!

(The Loombreaker No.23 October/November 2001)

The survey of protest by EF! groups in Manchester, Oxford and North Wales showed that issues of democracy, human rights or the actions of pariah companies represented 37% of the claims made in 190 actions between 1992 and 2000 (Doherty et al 2001). Since then, this proportion is likely to have risen further as anti-globalization and anti-

war protests have assumed greater importance for EF! groups. At the end of 2002 and in early 2003 EF! activists in these areas were heavily involved in protests against the threatened war in Iraq, some had been part of the International Solidarity blockades to protect Palestinians from the Israeli army, while others had covertly smashed the windscreens of Land Rovers in a Manchester car showroom in protest at Land Rover's sales to Israeli Special Forces.¹⁵ Thus the targets of sabotage by EDA activists can be companies or government institutions responsible for a wide range of perceived injustices and EF! (UK) cannot be understood only as an environmental network. Rather, its frames of action have been shaped by a long-standing tradition of British direct action politics, based on what Roseneil, referring to the precursors of the women's peace camp at Greenham Common in the 1980s, calls 'a legacy of anti-establishment attitudes, a strong strand of anarchist hostility to hierarchies, a critique of the materialism of industrial societies and of representative forms of democracy and the state, and a belief in the legitimacy and necessity of non-parliamentary forms of action.' (Roseneil 2001: 95). Traditions that embrace non-violence have also influenced the restraint shown by networks of 'ecosaboteurs' in the UK

INTERNAL DIFFERENCES: THE DEBATE ABOUT ACCOUNTABLE ACTIONS

The variety of approaches to direct action in the UK fuelled differences amongst those who advocated ecotage. Thus in the late 1990s there was much discussion, including themed debates at the annual Earth First! gathering, about the viability of the tactic of 'accountability' for pulling up and destroying GM crops. A group called GenetiX Snowball asked people to pull up a single plant and accept responsibility, and thus be accountable publicly for their actions. The aim was to publicise the principle of opposition to GM crops, rather than to destroy as much of the crop as possible. GenetiX Snowball campaigners won important legal cases against their prosecutors Monsanto. This, however, did not stop many activists within the direct action networks from arguing that accountability was a flawed tactic, and that getting away with 'trashing' as many GM crops under cover of darkness as possible whilst avoiding arrest was a more effective strategy.¹⁶ The priority, they argued, was to make the Government's trial programme for GM crops unworkable and to try to prevent cross-contamination of other plants from trial sites.

Each side in this discussion was drawing on different logics of action. GenetiX Snowball was based on the model of an earlier peace movement campaign in the 1980s, targeted at Cruise missiles. In that campaign the plan was that civil disobedience would snowball into a major campaign, but it never expanded beyond the direct action networks (Maguire 1992). Some of those involved in GenetiX Snowball such as Rowan Tilly were also peace activists (Tilly had been among the four Ploughshares women who won a famous acquittal after damaging Hawk fighter jets due to be sent to Indonesia in July 1996).¹⁷ They hoped that civil disobedience targeted against GM crops would be more successful than the earlier snowball campaigning and that a sustained and large-scale campaign would make it politically impossible for the government to carry out its trials.

But most EDA activists favoured the covert strategy. It was argued that the network of those involved in crop trashing was too small to be able to risk large numbers of arrests and that the government's crop-testing programme could best be made impractical by destroying as many sites as possible, covertly. Furthermore, many activists felt that they should not have to be accountable to a criminal justice system that they rejected. *If we're gonna do criminal damage to my mind there are times and places to be accountable and I don't think being accountable to corporations is the right way to go about things*' (Dave 2000) Pursuing a classic

anarchist line, and rejecting the liberal concept of political obligation, they argued that individuals should do what was morally correct and that to accept arrest was to accept the legitimacy of the state. Interestingly, GenetiX Snowball campaigners did not offer a classic liberal defence of civil disobedience in response. Their argument was that the court and the media provided useful vehicles for making their arguments public, but that accepting arrest and trial was a pragmatic rather than a moral decision, and conferred no legitimacy on those institutions.

While the Earth Liberation Front failed to establish itself because activists rejected the idea of a specific group which would base its strategy on ecotage as its principal form of action, GenetiX Snowball also failed to win sufficient support because it was seen by most UK EDA activists as too reformist and impractical. The specific form that ecotage took in UK networks was therefore worked out through a process of testing alternative repertoires with their respective ideological and organisational implications in collective practice and debate.

ACTIVIST RATIONALES FOR ECOTAGE

Attention to these debates is important for understanding how social movement repertoires develop. Tilly (2003) argues that one reason for favouring relational explanations of collective violence over those based on ideas is that it is usually impossible to find reliable evidence for the motivations of violent actors. But, while this may be true for more high salience cases of violence, it is not so true for cases such as ecotage. Activists often referred to ecotage in interviews or in discussions around the fire at protest camps and such talk often provides an insight into motivations. Emotional, strategic, ideological and pragmatic rationales for mobilising covertly were all flagged as important on such occasions. When activists went 'pixie-ing'¹⁸ they recognised the need to offer an explanation. This might be in terms of efficiency: *'I think you need to use what resources you've got to the best of your ability...doing things in the dark which cost me nothing...'* ('Andrew' 2001). When resources are low, then ecotage is viewed as the most effective way of getting results: living in an area where there are few other activists and the costs of overt mobilisation are too high; having a criminal record and wishing to carry on being effective, but without being photographed or arrested; working in a job or organisation where you would be compromised by being seen in public taking part in disruptive action; having a number of ongoing campaigns which stretch one's resources but still wanting to target an opponent; having limited resources for other forms of mobilisation (money, activist networks, friends in NGOs, IT facilities), were all reasons given by activists for undertaking ecotage.

Many activists gave particular weight to the economic effects of sabotage:

economic sabotage is far more effective [a tool] against corporate enterprises to cost them money, and the most effective way to do that is to physically damage their property...yeah. It's the only thing that they recognise and take notice of... That's my strategy' ('Andrew' 2001)

High levels of covert machine 'trashing' at the Twyford Down and other anti-roads protests in the 1990s, combined with overt tactics such as stopping work on site through 'digger-diving' ensured that contractors incurred severe costs because of security spending and contract delays. Kent County Council had to spend £1 million building a chain link fence after protests damaged road construction machinery in Thanet. At Guildford a planned road was abandoned because such costs became prohibitive¹⁹.

I have no problem at all with considered targeted political damage, my proviso being provided it's not going to put anyone's safety at risk, it has to be really considered. That can work on a number of levels

when you are causing economic damage to a company making it harder for them to carry on with whatever they are doing. Then they have to pay for security to the extent that it makes things difficult for them. And sometimes if it is strategic and really really critical it can be that you are removing crucial pieces of infrastructure, crucial pieces of good research, so in some ways on a direct level it can be very effective.' ('Dave' 2000).

Further evidence for the potential effect of ecotage came in October 2003 when major UK insurance companies listed arson or vandalism due to protesters alongside scientific uncertainties about long-term effects as reasons for refusing to issue cover for farmers growing GM crops (Brown 2003)

As with other direct action repertoires, emotional responses are interwoven with other rationales:

well, put yourself in their position...they're angry...something very easy they can do which doesn't harm anyone else, is to go and destroy that machine, and I also know people who see taking acts of criminal damage as being an act of love, you know [laughs] ('Jenny' 1999) .

Anger, frustration, love - passionate emotions fuel the fire of ecotage. In some activist circles, ecotage also comes with an element of macho posturing, a certain 'swagger'. This is perhaps most true of 'late at night, round the fire' talk on protest camps. Activists also acknowledged that a proportion of ecotage happens partly through a desire to 'show off' to friends. The potential dangers of the 'ego-warrior' and the gender implications of tactics were a subject of much internal debate in the network in the UK and also in the US and Canada (Moore 2003). In such cases the anarchistic ethos that individuals should take responsibility for their own actions, without imposing restrictions on others, clashed uncomfortably with the recognition that the actions of hotheads could endanger others.

Most ecotage is carried out by affinity groups (small groups of activists who trust each other sufficiently to take direct action together) and often these groups preferred not to publicise their action to other activists, not least because they do not always trust them to be discreet; *that's what it takes, small groups of people who you trust implicitly...* ('Katie' 2001). But activists themselves occasionally worry about the closed nature of 'strong ties' (Granovetter 1973), since if covert affinity groups are the only means of taking action, then the movement could drop out of sight:

it's something you could do whilst having a job...You just go out at night, and you'll do something, and then you go home and live your life in a very ordinary way.... Yeab, it's a very tempting way to go [but] I think what it does, is it stops us being a mass movement...If you're 18 and you've left school, and thought 'I really want to do this stuff', how do you get involved with it?... so I think whilst we see that path of covert cells to go down, I think that we also need to keep our feet on the ground and be involved in things that are bringing about change in communities...' ('Jenny' 1999)

Thus, ecotage was generally seen as an extra, a complement to other forms of public action, rather than a strategy for the movement as a whole. It is the kind of action that small affinity groups might take opportunistically, when the risks are not too great.

A key feature of activist discourse was that ecotage could be said to be non-violent because it was carried out in a way that ensured, as much as possible, that human or animal life was never put at risk. For example, putting orange juice with a high sugar content in the fuel tank of a digger, meaning that the machine simply wouldn't start, was seen as justifiable in a way that cutting the break cable was not. In interviews, activists held firmly to a moral line regarding their (self- defined) non-violent perspectives but

nevertheless saw 'pixie-ing' as part of a legitimate repertoire of non-violent action. Typically, this activist said, '*I don't count violence to property as violence, I don't count the destruction of property... the destruction of machinery I think is perfectly valid, something that I enjoy immensely [laughs] and is something that is important to do...*' (Liz, 1999)

Definitions of violence remain contentious,²⁰ but it is important to note the level of restraint in environmental direct action in the UK. There has never been, for example, an acceptance of targeting individuals through letter bombs, as there has within parts of the animal rights movement. There is no necessary continuity from specific instances of property damage to physically harming people and ecotage, as practised by groups such as EF! (UK), was not advocated as a strategy in itself. Ecotage only makes sense as a tactic for UK radical environmentalists when it is used in combination with public and overt action. From an activist perspective, if there was only covert ecotage and no other kind of action occurring there would be some retribution for perceived injustices, but little or no political effect, since such action would be largely invisible. The economic damage caused by ecotage is probably small in relation to the profits of the major corporations usually targeted, but its effect is greater when combined with public campaigns against the same targets, which seek to mobilise a wider opposition and transform such companies into pariahs. Moreover, the impact of ecotage is likely to vary greatly according to the target. In the case of GM crops ecotage helped to maintain the controversy about the issue and received surprisingly high levels of support.²¹ This is one reason why those who carry out ecotage are unlikely to take the kind of action that would mean having to go underground.²²

The most common reasons given by UK EDA activists for choosing non-violence were pragmatic. It was rare to hear arguments of the Gandhian kind, based on a philosophy of non-violence. For Gandhi the choice of non-violence made the protester morally superior to the violent oppressor, and this allowed protesters to build their own spiritual position. The strategy of *satyagraha* was intended to touch the heart of the oppressors, making them aware of their own moral weakness, and demonstrate the immorality of colonialism to a wider audience. As Tim Jordan has pointed out, recent direct action does not depend on the equation of moral superiority with non-violence. Non-violence is no longer necessarily an end in itself, rather current direct action is an attempt to bring about a better world by revealing power, disrupting it and creating alternative ways of life. Once non-violence is tactical, 'that means that violence is a possibility within activism!' (2002: 65). Violence and non-violence are not fixed categories in activism, and the growth of groups such as the Black Bloc, prepared to plan and use violence at Seattle, Prague and Genoa, reflects this. But in the networks we studied the commitments to non-violence against people were more than just tactical. Pragmatic arguments for non-violence are not incompatible with ethical arguments in which the use of violence against people is a serious moral step that should not be taken lightly. And there is strong emotional and principled resistance to the use of violence against people, even though philosophic non-violence in the Gandhian sense, is rare. This commitment to non-violence and the form of ecotage used in the UK, have developed together within a particular British tradition of non-violent direct action.

EXPLAINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTAGE IN THE UK

The casual acceptance of ecotage in EDA networks in the UK in 1990s contrasts with a more cautious attitude to property damage in the direct action of 1970s anti-nuclear movements and 1980s peace movements in Britain, the USA (Epstein 1991) and Australia (Doyle 1994)). Three Earth First! activists interviewed in 1995 all made this

point. *'I mean there'd been whole big meetings at Greenham about whether or not we should cut a fence, you know. I remember that as being a big, big thing that happened.'* (Maxine' 1995). The same issue plagued the occupation of the Torness nuclear reactor site in South East Scotland in 1979. At a planning meeting of the Torness Alliance, *Peace News* noted that *'A solution to the problem of fence cutting was not, however, acceptable and many hours were spent in lengthy argument'* (*Peace News* 6 April 1979). Torness was viewed at the time as the first large-scale NVDA in UK since the Committee of 100 demonstrations against nuclear weapons in the mid 1960s (*Peace News*, December 1st 1978). The Committee of 100 had itself carefully avoided damaging the fences at military bases by placing banners across them when entering the base (Randle 1987: 134).

How then can we explain the shift towards sabotage since then? The most obvious explanation is that these movements developed independently and therefore changes are more likely to be due to the differences in their aims and issues (perhaps reflecting a change from civil rights to environmental issues), or as a result of external changes such as tougher policing and reduced political opportunities.

Dealing first with the question of increased repression and a potential closure of opportunities: it is difficult to show that increased repression is a cause of such a change. After all, Committee of 100 organisers were sentenced to 18 months in prison in 1962 simply for planning public demonstrations. Policing has arguably become more militarised in the UK, and surveillance has become more sophisticated (Marenin 1996; della Porta 1998; Statewatch 2003), but that has not prevented Earth First! from organising regular and sustained public protest action for a period now exceeding ten years. Ecotage is not therefore an alternative strategy chosen because public action is impossible. Elsewhere we have shown that the strongest contextual explanation of the emergence of Earth First! in the UK was the disappointment of a young generation of activists in the weakness and moderation of the existing green groups in the UK (Doherty 1999; Wall 1999), even at a time when the latter were gaining resources and institutional access in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Thus it was not so much that the situation was closed, than that the existing groups were viewed as too moderate given the new salience of environmental issues. Extra-parliamentary action, however, gained added impetus from the closure of the Labour Party to radical ideas after 1987, as well as the weakness of the Green Party, which was hampered by the UK electoral system.

UK EDA networks were never simply 'environmentalist' and as we have shown, not all the sabotage they have carried out was ecologically motivated, but direct action against environmentally destructive projects might offer more obvious targets and reasons for sabotage (construction sites, company HQs, branches of McDonalds, GM crop trial sites) than for those struggling against patriarchy or heterosexism, for instance. But even if the opportunity existed, activists still had to decide that sabotage was appropriate and in doing so they took account of previous debates on property damage and non-violence in UK direct action networks. The founders of Earth First! UK drew on the resources, networks and experience of earlier generations of direct activists, including those who had been involved in Torness, Greenham and local grass-roots direct action on issues such as squatting, gay and lesbian rights, feminism, and anti-racism (Wall 1999). A number of writers have pointed in general terms to the influence of successive generations of non-violent direct action in the UK on subsequent movements (Randle 1987: 142; Welsh 2000; Roseneil 2001: 95). This continuity also applies in the case of sabotage.

Analysis of *Peace News* (the main forum for national debate for the non-violent direct action networks prior to the 1990s) and other local alternative newsletters shows that sabotage was not wholly absent in the 1970s and 1980s. It had been an occasional part of the repertoire of opponents of nuclear energy in the late 1970s; there were occasional covert attacks on sex shops by Women's Liberation activists in the 1970s and 1980s; one interviewee referred to the practice of damaging the ATMs of Barclays Bank (the target of anti-Apartheid campaigners) by pushing cheese into them; as well as the actions of the ALF, hunt saboteurs and other animal rights groups. Prior to this, the Angry Brigade had carried out a short-lived bombing campaign in 1971. Some of its members had been part of the social networks around the anarchistic left in Manchester in the late 1960s (Doherty 2002a), but the failure of the Angry Brigade and of the more sustained urban terrorism in Italy and Germany (della Porta 1995) was well understood by the British NVDA networks. The Angry Brigade's project was rejected at the time by such groups not only because of its violence, but also because they wanted to move away from the idea of creating a revolutionary crisis through an assault on the state and instead aimed to create the physical infrastructure of an alternative society from below. This vision of an alternative society based on non-hierarchical practice was sustained in the practice of subsequent movements. These movements, linked by overlaps in personnel, were able to learn how to manage differences, such as those over property damage that had bedevilled activists at Torness and Seabrook (USA), through sustained debate and practice. At Greenham, for instance, sabotage became more frequent after the first years of the camp with 'an increasing tendency for actions to have a direct impact as well as a symbolic one' (Roseneil 1995: 100). This continuity in the use of sabotage within the British direct action milieu is evident in this comment by an Earth First! interviewee: *'The whole hang-up about damage to property, I think, was pretty much dispelled from an early age, because we had bits of the Greenham fence decorating our Christmas tree'* ('Ken', 2000).

The ALF were freeing animals from laboratories, damaging boats used in seal culls and later 'trashing' research laboratories, and sending letter bombs to vivisectionists in the 1970s and 1980s and they were an influence on the spread of ecotage in the 1990s. As in other networks there were disagreements over the most effective forms of action. One interviewee who had been involved in radical animal rights action in the 1980s recalled:

'At the time the ALF were still rescuing animals mainly, but they were also getting involved with damaging stuff as well... And then there was another strand of direct action which was based on daylight raids involving hundreds of people and they were called the Liberation League... and these were responsible really for kind of smashing their way into a laboratory for example, but with minimum force and then nicking the documents and then photocopying them and giving them back or dumping them on a journalist because part of the legislation of vivisection is that you are not allowed to let anybody in to monitor... so this was like exposé-type stuff. A few people got jobs [in labs] and there was a bit of tension between the ideology of the daylight big break-ins and the night-time small break-ins in the sense that some people would say well, if you're going to all the trouble of getting in there you should at least smash the torture equipment up, and you can imagine the kind of thing you break into a set of dungeons and there's all the shackles there, do you leave them or do you take them that sort of thing, and so you can see where that tension was coming from.'

(‘Phil’ 2000)

As was noted above, some EF! activists had experience within militant animal rights networks and the radical animal rights network was less separate from other direct action groups in the 1970s than in later decades. Key ALF activist Ronnie Lee had been an important contributor to *Peace News*, writing its annual appeal in 1976 (*Peace News* 11 June

1976).²³ Violence by the ALF was criticised in *Peace News* then and many of our recent EF! interviewees regarded animal rights groups as too single-issue in their ethical concerns, but the debates within animal rights networks over what kinds of actions were justifiable made property damage seem less morally problematic at least in comparison with violence against people, for later generations of radicals.

Another factor that contributed to change was the Trafalgar Square Poll Tax riot of 1990. Although the riot itself did not cause the collapse of the tax, it was part of a wider campaign of resistance which did, and the riot was mentioned by many 1990s EDA activists as important in convincing them of the value of more confrontational action. While sabotage and property damage is therefore not wholly a development of the 1990s it is now more common and much less controversial in direct action networks. To the pull of the increased opportunities provided by construction sites and GM crop trial sites, we can add the push of shifts already occurring within the UK direct action networks since the 1970s. The form of ecotage chosen by Earth First! can be seen as based on existing repertoires, maintained, altered and refashioned in collective learning processes that cut across the various UK direct action networks.

THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL REPERTOIRES

Such an explanation could be criticised for its wholly national character, particularly as there is much evidence of tactical inter-change between EDA groups in different countries (Wall 1999, Doherty 2000). British tactics were also influenced by those of US EF! and Australian environmental direct action and more recently tactics have been re-exported back to both countries. For instance, the US EF! activists who joined the Minnehaha occupation in Minneapolis in 1998 saw themselves as trying to develop an anti-roads protest movement on the scale of the one in Britain and even experimented with new tactics such as tunnelling, based on British examples (Losure 2002). Some of this kind of diffusion occurs as a result of published action manuals, others through activists visiting each others' countries, not as emissaries, but as part of the nomadic movement of individuals who are able to move between activist communities because of a shared sub-culture. For instance, UK activists joined those defending old growth forests in Western Australia and showed Australian activists how to build tunnels at a forest camp in East Gippsland, Victoria (Pickerill 2004).

But while some tactics are modular, it is notable that the repertoire of action adopted by a movement is less so if we take a repertoire to include the rationales and meanings that shape forms of action. The form of ecotage reflects particularities of local tradition. In the UK, as we have shown, both the more militant Earth Liberation Front strategy and the more reformist GenetiX Snowball were rejected by most of the EDA network. In the USA, however, there is a stronger commitment among activists to biocentric values and the defence of wilderness and the Earth Liberation Front has carried out regular arson attacks, claimed to have cost developers \$45 million up to 2001.²⁴ While US Earth First! activists tend to be similar socially to their UK counterparts, mostly in their twenties and with higher education (Losure 2002), examination of the *US Earth First! Journal* shows much less attention to non-environmental struggles than in the UK.²⁵ It is the more specifically ecological and wilderness-defending character of US EDA networks that sustains the Earth Liberation Front. This more ecocentric perspective was clearly expressed by Derrick Jensen in a debate on non-violence in the *US Earth First! Journal* in 1998. His argument is essentially a call to transcend reason and act on natural instinct: *'Discussion presupposes distance, and the fact that we're talking about whether violence is appropriate tells me we don't yet care enough. There's a kind of action that doesn't emerge from discussion, from*

theory, but instead from our bodies and from the land.' It would be difficult to challenge this argument without also challenging some of the more strongly held deep ecological commitments of many US EF!ers. Jensen compares the actions of humans defending the wilderness to grizzlies defending their cubs and argues that only by reaching this level of instinct and stripping away the false accretions of civilisation will people be able to act naturally. While it is vital to note that not all US Earth Firsters! share this kind of 'primitivist' perspective, it has been a frequent part of US EF! discourse, whereas it has been almost non-existent in EF! (UK)

And yet, in the less ecocentric UK networks there is plenty of evidence of how ecotage suffuses movement culture and identity, making up part of what it *means* to be a direct activist. The (UK) *Earth First! Action Update* between 1993 and 1996 advertised 'Earth Nights', supposedly a national night of covert action: From EF! AU no. 16 May 1995- 'Diary dates' [May] 15: *'Earth Night- Pixies and Elves are coming out to play'* The tone of the 'diary date' is worth focusing on. It is consciously light-hearted, portraying covert action as 'a bit of a giggle'. UK activist references to covert action are very often of this quirky nature, contrasting with the far more militant tone of the US ELF. Possibly this is primarily to 'normalise' it for the readership so they are more likely to do it themselves- to make it seem less 'hardcore'. The association of EF! ers as 'pixies and elves'- as 'agents of mother earth'-²⁶ is also an implicit claim to occupy the moral high ground. The more playful, even self-consciously 'naughty' character of ecotage in the UK is a reflection of the cumulative development of a particular irreverant tone within the non-violent traditions of the UK direct action movement. Roseneil (2000) has characterised the politics of Greenham Common peace camp as 'queer feminism' referring not simply to the out and public lesbianism of many campers, but also to its combination of provocation, irreverance and fun. We argue then that the development of a particular self-limiting form of ecotage in the UK was a product of experiments and experience in a variety of overlapping activist networks, including the local direct action networks around *Peace News* in the 1970s and 1980s, the peace camps, and the animal rights movement.

It may be that protests such as Seattle, Prague and Genoa, and ties developed through networks such as People's Global Action mark a new stage in the globalization of direct action repertoires. For instance, the 'pink and silver' activists from British Earth First! who led the samba and carnival march of direct activists at Prague in September 2000 (Chesters and Welsh 2001) have inspired similar groups in other countries. In turn the London-based White Overalls Movement Building Effective Libertarian Struggles (WOMBLES), was partly inspired by the *Tutte Bianchi* in Italy. The inter-changes of personnel between British and Australian activists may make their repertoires more similar. Australia has also had its own traditions of irreverant direct action, as with the *EcoAnarcho-AbsurdistAdelaideCell?! (Doyle 2000 39-40)*. The Black Bloc, specialising in masked rioting within larger protests against international capitalist institutions evolved from German urban anarchist networks in the 1980s and spread by example to the USA in the 1990s, and thence to other countries following the Seattle anti-WTO protests. Nevertheless, to substantiate a thesis of trans-national direct action repertoires, it would also be necessary to look beyond the form of action to the specific rationales for action and the tone of activist discourse. The WOMBLES provide evidence that national traditions may still be alive even within trans-national movements. For instance, they distinguish themselves from what they regard as the greater hierarchy and discipline of the Italian *Ya Basta* group, who they criticised for attacking other activists who were damaging property at the G8 demonstrations in Genoa.²⁷ The WOMBLES are here

maintaining the British (though not exclusively so) direct action tradition that emphasises anti-hierarchical practices and the related reluctance to impose a strategic discipline on others. There are also relatively few British activists among the Black Bloc, whose participants appear to be best represented by those from countries with traditions of strong police repression of illegal protest (Germany, the USA, and Italy). We argue therefore that national repertoires reflecting accumulated experience in local activist settings, still have a discernable place within trans-national networks.

CONCLUSIONS

Sabotage and violence were usually seen as part of the pre-democratic repertoire of movements (Gamson 1990) and in decline as the media and spread of education provided more people with the resources and repertoires to protest within the system (Tarrow and Meyer 1998). But, as we have shown, sabotage is not only the preserve of an alienated and desperate fringe. Our research indicates that activists often combine it with a range of more familiar social movement repertoires and even forms of conventional political participation. Ecotage in the UK evolved from debates across direct action networks over three decades and, even in an era of increased transnational protest, there are distinctive national traditions. Equally our empirical work suggests that affinity groups, rather than the revolutionary cell, have been the organising basis of ecotage. Affinity groups have been the constitutive force underlying non-violent direct action in the UK and the USA since the 1970s (Welsh 2000; Epstein 1991) and as McDonald (2002) has argued, their form of solidarity differs from that of the cell or party organisation. The bond in affinity groups is based on trust between friends, rather than loyalty to an organisation or a particular plan for the future. The model of the affinity group is that it must be small enough to allow individuals to take effective responsibility for their own choices. There is no expectation that everyone will take the same action. Moreover, insofar as they are the invisible group – with no media, no spokespersons and acting and speaking only for themselves - they are the natural organisational form for contemporary ecotage.

But while affinity groups make ecotage possible, they are also a sign of its strategic limits. Affinity groups mostly act autonomously and against targets chosen by their members. There is no central direction or plan (at best there may be brief co-ordination regarding GM crops or mass anti-capitalist demonstration so that the same targets are not hit by different groups). And the silence of the practitioners of ecotage also might weaken the movement overall, leaving it open to the attacks of opponents who have described ecotage as ecoterrorism, with the aim of discrediting protesters.²⁸ As a result, ecoterrorism has become an accepted term in the media and among political elites,²⁹ despite the lack of evidence of violence³⁰ or plans of violence, other than against property, by direct action networks. By providing empirical evidence and academic analysis of ecotage we can at least show that the use of concepts such as eco-terrorism to describe it, cannot be justified.

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² The International Workers of the World (aka 'the Wobblies') also included sabotage in their tactical repertoire in the early twentieth century. The IWW also combined overt campaigning with covert action but arguably faced more repression than Earth First! and certainly more violence as they were often targeted by the police or thugs hired by employers or the AFL (Zinn 1980: 328).

³ For instance, legislation such as the Criminal Justice Act (1994) and the Terrorism Act (2000) were framed by British governments to include the kinds of protest action undertaken by Earth First! The Terrorism Act of 2001 (pre-September 11) defines criminal damage for ideological and/or political reasons as a terrorist act. Failure to pass on information to the relevant authorities is also a prosecutable offence. At the time of writing this legislation has been used to prevent several demonstrations in the UK (Burrows 2003) although no prosecutions of eco-activists have been attempted. In the USA Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPS) threatening massive legal costs have often discouraged environmental activists from taking action, even though SLAPPS were almost always rejected by the courts and activists had also been able to counter-sue winning large damages for the loss of political rights (Pring and Canan, 1996).

⁴ Part of the research for this paper was funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) as part of its Research Programme on Democracy and Participation (L215252034). We studied Earth First! communities in Manchester, Oxford and North Wales between 2000 and 2002. For more detail on the rationale underlying the choice of these areas, see Doherty et al (2001) and FN 11. In relation to ecotage there was no evidence of a locality effect and for this reason our discussion is based on the national EF! Network and also draws on other and earlier research by the authors.

⁵ It should be emphasised that tree-spiking (a 'standard' US covert action) takes place only very occasionally in the UK and then within certain parameters and safeguards; namely, if tree-spiking is to occur, then warning must be given to ensure that there is no danger to life. Not to do this would be to invoke censure from peers.

⁶ Previous research by the authors has discussed the nature and ideology of the UK EDA movement in some detail: see Wall 1999; 2000; Plows 2000 and Doherty 1999 and 2002b.

⁷ 'lock-ons' are immovable defences- often barrels filled with concrete- which activists lock themselves to. Many EDA tactics involve activists putting themselves in positions of danger; see Doherty (2000).

⁸ All names of interviewees have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

⁹ Typically, the years 1997/1998 showed only one claimed ELF action.

¹⁰ As for instance in this instance in late 1999: 'The Earth Liberation Front (E.L.F) has claimed credit for a fire on December 25th, which destroyed Boise Cascade's regional

headquarters in Monmouth, Oregon. Boise Cascade has been active in deforestation practices in the Northwest (USA) a communiqué sent by the E.L.F stated. "Early Christmas morning elves left coal in Boise Cascade's stocking. Four buckets of diesel gas with kitchen timer delay destroyed their regional headquarters... Let this be a lesson to all greedy multinational corporations who don't respect ecosystems. The elves are watching.' (*Earth First! (UK) Action Update* No.65 February 2000)

¹¹ Manchester, Oxford and North Wales were chosen as locations because each had active EF! groups and had also had local direct action groups in the 1970s and 1980s. They were also chosen because of the structural differences between them. North Wales is a mainly rural location, Oxford is an affluent medium sized city and Manchester is a major conurbation with significant levels of inner city poverty.

¹² While it has been argued that protest event surveys are not intended to demonstrate actual levels of protest, but rather that protest which reaches the public domain through the media (Rootes 2000), not all practitioners of protest event surveys are so modest. Either way, the evidence presented here regarding covert action requires that any effort to talk about the action repertoire of EDA groups acknowledges covert ecotage. A second objection might be that covert and unclaimed action is not protest action simply because it is not public. While this may be true as regards certain definitions of protest, it is not a convincing argument for ignoring it as a feature of the activity of EDA groups.

¹³ David Henshaw (1989) estimated in the late 1980s that there were at least six animal liberation actions taking place every night.

¹⁴ *Earth First! Action Update* no.17 June 95. The humorous tone is a common feature of UK activist references to 'ecotage'.

¹⁵ See *The Loombreaker* No. 34 January/February 2003, online at www.loombreaker.org.uk.

¹⁶ See the 1998 critique of Genetix Snowball by some in Leeds Earth First! www.leedsef.org.uk/critique.htm.

¹⁷ For more on the Trident Ploughshares campaign see www.motherearth.org/nuke/trident/php

¹⁸ The Earth Liberation Front initial ELF led to the use of the term 'elf' and then to 'pixieing'.

¹⁹ 'Sabotage forces delay and £1 million security measures' *Construction News*, 21 September, 1995.

²⁰ We follow Tilly, in defining collective violence as that which 'immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and/or objects... involves at least two perpetrators of damage; and results at least in part from co-ordination among persons who perform the damaging acts.' (2003: 3). Activists' definition of violence as involving harm to people and animals but excluding property damage is nevertheless consistent with that offered by John Keane, who stresses physical harm to bodies (1996).

²¹ In an ICM Poll of 2401 UK respondents in October 2000 when asked 'How justified are the destruction of genetically modified (GM) crops in government approved field trials?' 28% said 'definitely justified'; 27% 'perhaps justified'; 18% 'perhaps not justified'; 24% 'definitely not justified' and 11% 'Don't know', *Sunday Times* 11 November 2000.

²² Importantly, this also means they are not isolated from ties with a wider activist community and therefore unlikely to undergo the kind of psychological transformation noted in leftist terrorist groups of the 1970s (della Porta 1995) in which members of isolated terrorist cells became increasingly reliant on each other for their view of the outside world, reinforcing the tendency to self-justification.

²³ He was also one of the 14 activists found not guilty of inciting soldiers to disaffection in a landmark trial of activists who had distributed leaflets in support of the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Committee (*Peace News* 11 December 1975).

²⁴ see 'US arsonists put the heat on the FBI' *The Guardian*, 15 March 2001.

²⁵ This is true even after departure of Dave Foreman and others in US Earth First! who had opposed strategies based on the inter-relation of ecology and social justice (Lee 1995).

²⁶ Paganism, explicit in the movement at the time (mid 1990s), is also an influence on this type of movement discourse.

²⁷ See www.wombles.org/uk

²⁸ One less than successful example of this occurred in Tasmania where a pro-logging group hijacked a train and pretended to be Earth First!, with the aim of undermining the growing green movement in that state (Doyle 1994). Their subterfuge was discovered because they forgot to use the customary exclamation mark at the end of EF!

²⁹ Congress subpoenaed Craig Rosebraugh Press Spokesperson for the US ELF to special hearings on eco-terrorism in February 2002. It has also been argued that ecotage has provided employment promotion for the security services (O'Hara 1994; Rowell 1996). Ben Gill, the leader of the UK National Farmers Union, suggested that the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in Britain in 2001 might be the work of 'eco-terrorists', although no evidence was offered (Brown 2001).

³⁰ Terrorism remains an essentially contested concept, but we believe that the most objective definition is that terrorism is distinct from other forms of political violence because it deliberately targets 'innocents' (Arendt 1971). Whether or not it is morally and politically justifiable, ecotage as practised in the UK did not involve violence against people. Moreover, we found no evidence that UK EDA groups (as distinct from some others) planned to create violent confrontations in mass demonstrations. Nor was there any evidence of EDA groups harming the individuals they saw as responsible for abuses of power. This is in contrast with some parts of the animal rights movement.