

Captain Paul Watson: the grand illusion

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Lately, I forced myself to watch the quite popular *Paul Watson: A Life for the Oceans*, broadcast on ARTE. After I learned I've made an appearance, I sort of had no other choice but checking it out, right?

Full disclosure: I don't like Watson, and you'll quickly understand why.

The advertising film (because that's what it really is) tries to ennoble the pseudo captain, a fake title that suits his equally fake character very well.

Because if the "captain" has neither title nor official certification, he is part of a short list of characters who have managed, like other guys of the genre (Rael, Brian Davis, Joel Osteen...) to make a living with others' money, and that, before the advent of web influencers. Applying a well tested recipe, these characters have all experienced a "moment of awakening". One was contacted by the aliens, the other by God... for Watson, the epiphany came from the eye of a dying sperm whale. In the narrative, it looks chic.

One can, of course, romanticize Watson's life, as ARTE has done so well. Other can also see it for what it really is.

Like hundreds of thousands of young people, especially in the 1970s, Watson wanted to change the world and participated in protests of all kinds. Environment issues were starting to get traction around that era. He joined Greenpeace, which quickly kicked him out in 1977 because of his instability and violent temperament. As he relates in the long ARTE commercial, his father was violent, and his mother died when he was still young. Any human being remains unsettled by this kind of childhood.

A year later, he gave an interview to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) where, in an attempt to take revenge on his former colleagues, he revealed the true motivations and financial tactics of these activist groups ([Barbara Frum - Paul Watson Interview, 1978 CBC](#)). Decades later, their tactics stayed the same: using charismatic species to get donation from people. Truly endangered species, if non-charismatic, rarely gets attention.

When Watson realized that his strategy did nothing to diminish donations to Greenpeace, he created the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) and used the same tactics, with the same animal that filled the coffers of Greenpeace and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW): seal.

It was following this period that I met Watson in the Magdalen Islands. You can see me for a few seconds in his commercial... without my permission, of course. I am the only one who speaks in this excerpt (being French, in approximative English), but not the only one whose images have been used without permission and who would refuse to be associated with such a criminal.

Because that's what Paul Watson is, a criminal.

He and his minions would like the world to believe that the Magdalen Islanders expelled him (too politely, by the way) from their archipelago because they were drunk assholes and hated him for wanting to "save the baby seals," but that's obviously very far from the truth.

As he did very regularly during his career, Watson and his crews have, on several occasions, carried out maneuvers endangering the lives of sailors, fishermen, hunters, husbands, fathers, brothers and friends. The sailors of the Magdalen Islands have not escaped his intimidation tactics, and they hated him for his scatterbrained and dangerous behavior.

In the few minutes that this section lasts, Watson tells more lies than I can detail here, but the funniest is when he claims to have "knocked out three of them with my stun gun". Even today, thirty years later, if you were to run into one of these sturdy guys, you'd quickly realize that the "captain" was no match for anyone in the group, even with the stun gun he invented to make it look more Hollywood like.

More precisely, when the dozen hunters entered the room, he crashed to the floor, livid, fear having sawed off his legs.

He knew what he was doing by coming to taunt them on their own territory with his wacky proposal. As usual, he came to collect media images that he would use in fundraising activities. Efficient deceptions still require some effort and investment.

Since he was born not far from the Magdalen Islands, in New Brunswick, he is well aware of the affable character of Maritimes people. He certainly wouldn't have benefited from the same leniency in several other areas, and he knew it very well.

Paul Watson has built his entire career on provocation. In 2008, when four Magdalen Island sealers lost their lives at sea, Watson couldn't resist shining a spotlight on himself by defiling their memory. His comments enraged all sailors worthy of the name and, in solidarity, fishermen from the French territory of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon cut the moorings of his boat while docked on their archipelago. "He can return, but at his own risk," their representative said at the time.

In truth, Watson is a troubled, megalomaniacal and dangerous being. Not in great physical shape, he had no choice but to calm down with age, but that does not forgive his past actions.

It's nothing short of a miracle nobody (officially) died because of its reckless action. But then again, lots of alcoholics drink and drive their whole life without killing anyone. That doesn't mean they shouldn't be taken out of the circulation for everyone's sake.

Watson only shifted to the whale saving business because the funds intended for the rescue of the "baby seals" went for the most part to other organizations like his own, but more effective in their propaganda and disinformation campaigns since they used media stars to reach people's pockets. At the SSCS, he was the star and couldn't stand sharing the spotlight.

He says it himself in his interview with CBC "There are thousands of animals on the endangered species list... the harp seal is not there. » And neither does the whale because there is no such thing as "the whale". There are almost a hundred cetaceans. Some populations are doing well, others less so, but Watson does not trade in subtlety, it would become too complex for his generous admirers.

It was more valuable to create "THE whale". The majestic, singing, intelligent, protective, wise one... The charismatic one. The one that brings in money for its valiant defender.

Watson went all-in with the bad boy persona (as his logo proclaims loud and clear) and he naturally had the personality to match: the one who decides right and wrong, who doesn't have to follow the laws of inferior beings, i.e., all those who think otherwise. An interesting marketing strategy.

To simplify things further, Watson decides alone who's poaching. Not the competent authorities, the scientists or the sovereign nations. And whoever contradicts him obviously becomes the villain in his narrative. Sometimes in a Hollywood movie, the one who defies authority becomes the hero, but, unfortunately for him, in reality, that's also what defines a criminal.

The empathetic hunter

For decades now, I've been wondering why even seemingly brilliant minds sometimes fall for such devious characters and their masquerade.

Religious gurus have been around since the dawn of humanity and the phenomena is well documented, but environmental ones (environment being sort of the new religion) operate on new parameters.

When I discovered the fascinating work of the French ethnologist Charles Stepanoff¹, I found some clarity as a couple of our specie's particularities caught my attention. Cooperative parenting, as an example, incites us to take care of offsprings other than our own. And trans-species empathy allows deep feelings for otherness. The plethora of interaction between

¹ Read « L'animal et la mort » (2021), but also his latest work "Attachements" (2024).

humans and other species, mixing ownership, companionship, domestication and sometimes even a form of family love, presents a complexity that is, indeed, difficult to match elsewhere in nature.

Most of the time, people living in natural settings (rural people) weave complex links with animal otherness. For example, a farmer can consider a dog or cat as a family member, spend nights watching over a sick cow and slaughter pigs. The entanglement of those forms of relationship are common and widespread. These people usually see themselves as an integral part of nature. Stepanoff qualifies their interspecies relationship as “dense network”. They love nature so much that they choose to live in it.

On the other hand, urban fauna maintains much simpler links with nature and other animal species. In the city, plants are potted, birds are caged, and cats are neutered. They visit a countryside they would prefer virgin and wild like the ones they observed on NatGeo channel. They observe nature from afar and want to protect it, while removing any sign of it from their sterile environment. For the ethnologist, they maintain “spread network” with animal otherness. Their lack of closeness with nature makes them vulnerable to animalist groups simplified rhetoric.

Besides, from a young age, we’re all comforted by plushies, humanized critters and Walt Disney’s cartoons. Some simply never really grow out of it.

On top of that, our world is increasingly urbanised, and those dense pockets of voters hold the balance of power in most democratic society. In other words, the most nature disconnected among us are the ones calling the shots for us all, which explains in large part why our environment is deteriorating.

Paradoxically, urbanites believe they are part of the solution, not the problem. At best, letting them decide what’s ecologically sound is counterproductive. Most of the time, it is eco colonialism in its purest form.

Stepanoff speaks of Homo sapiens as an "empathetic predator". His ability to imagine himself in his prey’s position makes him an excellent hunter, but, without discernment, his empathy also questions him about the morality of taking lives. Prey’s fate is rarely enviable.

Some groups and individuals have turned this human duality into a business and prey on those of us who don’t maintain a dense network of relations with animal otherness. I don’t give them credit for that finding. Brian Davis, founder of IFAW, was one of the first to uncover the immense economic potential of this human singularity with seal in the 1970s, but that was a total fluke.

Most of those groups are disembodied ideological organizations such as the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animal (PETA) or Humane

Society International (HSI). Others, such as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) rely heavily on a single persona. In this case, "Captain" Paul Watson.

His feat is to have succeeded in convincing an impressive number of people of his act. Many have tried to apply the formula: "A lie repeated a thousand times becomes the truth", but before internet, few have succeeded on a large scale. It's also true that the lone ranger fighting against the evil corporation story fits well in the now popular "conspiracy theories". It's all very poetic and everybody loves bedtime stories.

Logo, slogans, shocking images, charismatic species, good vs evil... the man knows how to manipulate media and masses, I'll give him that much.

Does he now believe himself in any of it? Of course. He's adored for it by many, and all is surrounding identifies him that way. A couple of years of that regime and there was no turning back. He became the character he created, and it served him well too. I'm sure it's the same with Rael and all other gurus.

Here, I would like to make a distinction. Most followers of these activist groups are sincerely hoping to do some good for the environment. Because of their urban living and natural disposition for otherness empathy, they just don't know any better. Leaders of those movements don't have such excuses. Being fatly paid full-time to improve their knowledge on those issues, they either should know better and are being dishonest about it or suffer from intellectual deficiency which, to that extend, is unlikely.

Beyond lying, individuals who take advantage of other humans' weaknesses to enrich themselves leave negative impacts in their wake. Watson is no different.

By helping to overprotect seals, he has also contributed to weakening the Gulf of St. Lawrence's ecosystem in Eastern Canada. Since the debacle of the seal industry, the over predation of this pinniped has had a huge negative impact on the marine biodiversity of the region. Honest observers, hunters and fishermen predicted that much as early as the 80s, but today, it is scientists who have no choice but to admit it ([Item 12-Prédation phoque Seal predation.pdf](#)).

Yes, you've read it well. Captain Watson is also an ecological criminal.

Isn't it the ultimate irony? Animalist groups have created the perfect loop: the more you give them money, the worst the environment. And the worst the environment, the more people are giving them money.

There it is. The grand illusion. People who give support those groups think they're contributing to a better planet while doing exactly the opposite.

Now you know. Laughing all the way to the bank, the disappearance of Atlantic cod, yellowtail flounder, white hake and many other fish species does not bother the noble captain in the slightest.

It is not he who will have to go bankrupt, it is the evil fisherman in his 17 meters boat. He is not the one who will have nothing left to feed his children since his fortune is assured. It is not his community that will decline since he now lives in France. Who cares about uncharismatic species that are not even good for a small fundraising activity? Biodiversity? Bah... who cares?

Not ARTE's hero captain, in any case.

The egologists' tyranny

We all have a vague idea of what ecology is.

The term, whose invention is often attributed to the German biologist Ernst Haeckel, is composed of two Greek words: *oikos* for house/habitat and *logos* for science/knowledge. Basically, the science of our habitat or, if you prefer, our environment.

It is a young science since it only took off in the middle of the last century. At first, only those who studied the discipline were called ecologists, but as the subject became increasingly important, more people appropriated it. It seems it is now enough to have ecology at heart to consider oneself an ecologist.

We live in an era where you can be a model on TikTok, a soldier on Call of Duty or a citizen journalist, so why not? A certain drift from liberalism, initially defending individual freedoms, today gives the same weight to personal wishes as to regulatory frameworks, often and sadly to the detriment of a certain social cohesion.

The terms "ecologist" and "environmentalist" has followed a similar trajectory.

The vast majority of these self-proclaimed people wear the title discreetly, a bit like one calls oneself an egalitarian, atheist or hedonist. One vision among others.

And of course, real ecologists and environmentalists exist. Those who have completed higher education in these respective fields and have, at the end of their long years of effort and discipline, seen their relentlessness rewarded with a higher education diploma awarded by a recognized institution. The latter have generally learned so much that they are aware of their limits since the more knowledge one gains, the more one becomes able to see the extent of his ignorance. They are usually rational people who have solid, structured opinions that can be trusted, but also challenged.

To borrow a well-known formula, they do not ask what ecology can bring them, but what they can bring to ecology, to the environment, to the collective good.

And then there are those who follow the TikTok method: after the self-coronation, they look for a very naïve audience that reinforces their illusion and the demographic weight, like gravity, then does its work.

This growing number of people, but also of organizations, often highly funded by their gullible supporters, are taking up more and more space in international meetings that establish regulatory frameworks aimed at improving the habitat in which humanity evolves.

The problem is that, unlike true environmentalists, they are more interested in what the environment can do for them than the other way around. The term "egologist" suits them perfectly. One letter apart, their disguise confuses the masses while their effect is diametrically opposed to that of the real ecologists.

The majority of people living in the countryside do not have an education related to ecology and environment, but they maintain a dense network with animal otherness, as previously explained earlier in this article. That more than compensates in terms of experience and knowledge.

Urban egologists, on the other hand, only develop spread out networks with nature. Combined with a lack of theoretical knowledge, the latter elaborate their certainties and guide their actions on the only matter they can relate to: themselves. Consequences: Goodbye objectivity, welcome to the dictatorship of feelings.

Largely based on subjective and often aesthetic criteria, their priorities turn to charismatic and easily anthropomorphizable species. With its large eyes, voluptuous eyelashes and slender silhouette, the doe becomes noble and benevolent, while the snake and crocodile, crawling and mischievous, deserve less consideration. While soils and plants play a leading role in the ecosystem, for egologists, they take on a secondary role to mammals, easier to relate to. Lacking the basic knowledge necessary for a real understanding of the complexity of ecosystem relationships, egologists invent a whole Walldisneyian cosmology that is completely out of step with reality.

Obviously, these egologists are not making any positive contribution to improving environmental conditions and are wasting precious time, money and energy that would otherwise be invested in this crucial sector. Much worse, and I insist on that point, they have succeeded in creating a devastating spiral: the more they get involved, the more the environment deteriorates. And the more the environment deteriorates, the more the fanatical dupes give them the financial means to get involved.

This is another tragic example where, even more damaging than ignorance, the illusion of knowledge wreaks havoc.

Invested with a mission, convinced that they are right, ecologists do not even realize that the more they get involved in environmental issues, the worse they get. And again, the more they deteriorate, the more they get involved. A devastating loophole.

True environmentalists should have separated the wheat from the chaff from the beginning. But intoxicated by the money and power that comes from this confusion, they probably figured that no matter where this renewed influence came from, they would probably be able to put it to good use. Boy, were they wrong.

A few groups, such as Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), have occasionally distanced themselves from these ecologists, which has greatly contributed to increase the credibility of these organizations, but in most cases, the lure of profit prevails over the search for accuracy and efficiency.

Today, the ecological movement, although extremely important, suffering from an overdose of abuse and dogmatic drift, is becoming corrupted from within and is dragging the environmental conditions of our planet into its downward spiral.

One of the key factors of modern environmental disarray is related to our species disconnect with nature... and this is due, in large part, to our increasing urbanization.

To function, states need producers of goods and services that can be monetized and taxed. Since the autonomous communities do not need a central government to develop, it is not surprising that the replacement of traditional knowledge by specialization has been forced, since, in that system, a state specialist will always be more productive than an autonomous generalist.

The march of "progress" has produced citizens who can recite the periodic table by heart, but who are unable to identify the slightest species of tree, insect, plant or star in the sky.

Of course, specialization and the sharing of discoveries also allows us to expand our global knowledge as a species, but in return, it remains highly unlikely that we can properly defend and protect what, like the environment, has become unknown to us.

The educational system should undoubtedly make more room, from an early age, for a better familiarization with nature. Knowing how to orient oneself at night, recognizing edible mushrooms and animal tracks is not only useful in unlikely scenarios of survival in the forest. These skills connect us to our environment, anchor us in reality, establish links with nature, and clarify our position in our ecosystem. Some Nordic countries, often pioneers in the education sector, agree with this, and it would probably be wise to follow their example.

A deep connection with nature makes us true ecologists rather than ecologists. And it is definitely the former who will contribute to the improvement of our living conditions, not the latter.