

# THE ECOTONE

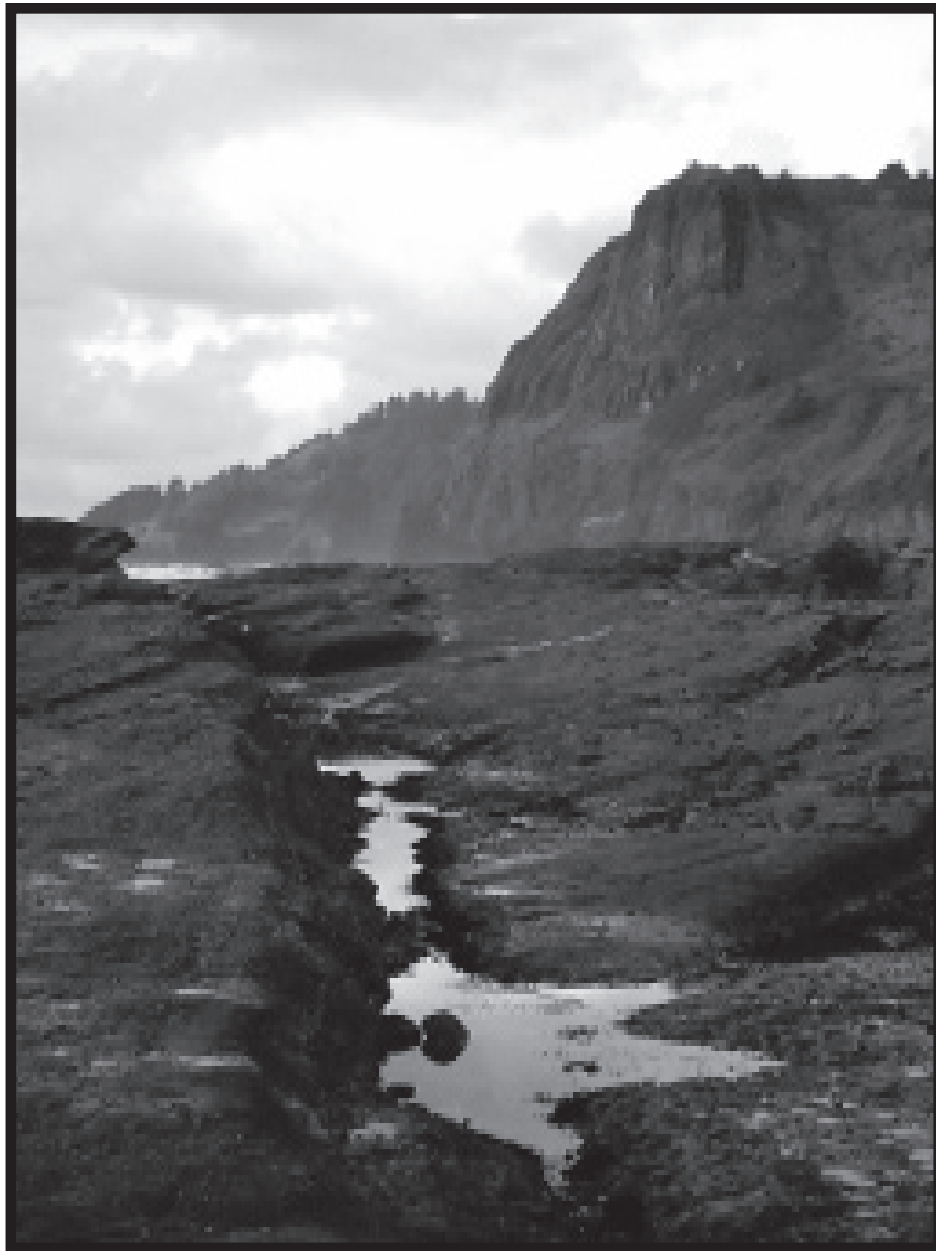
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Being in the World, Living with the Land



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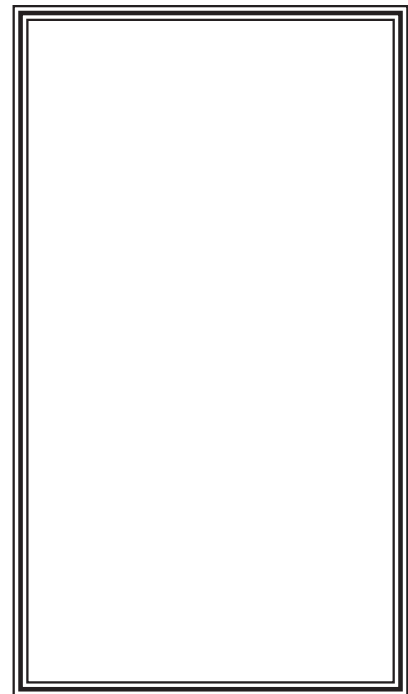
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*ECOTONE: A transition zone between two adjacent communities, such as a forest or grassland. It has some of the characteristics of each bordering community and often contains species not found in the overlapping communities. An ecotone may exist along a broad belt or in a small pocket, such as a forest clearing, where two local communities blend together. The influence of the two bordering communities is known as the edge effect. An ecotonal area often has a higher density of organisms and a greater number of species than are found in either flanking community.*

### EDITORS' NOTE

This issue of *The Ecotone*, “Being in the World, Living with the Land,” coincides with the theme and title of the 6th Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), which is being held at the University of Oregon June 21-26. Many Environmental Studies Program students and faculty are involved in this conference, and so the work represented here speaks to the philosophical, ethical, and historical dimensions of what this theme means. Contributors write from a range of perspectives and disciplines, illustrating the relevance of these dimensions to *The Ecotone* and to the Program.

Cover Image Credit:  
*Photo by Sarah Jaquette*



# BEING FOR THE WORLD

## A BRIEF REFLECTION ON ETHICS AND THE BODY

Jason Schreiner

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The question of our being in the world ultimately concerns the life of the body. To my knowledge, no one has yet discovered a way to escape the material and biological reality of the body and remain alive, at least not for long, and so any attempt to articulate the meaning of human existence must engage the facticity of corporeal being. Perhaps Marx and Engels were the first to grasp this point, noting that “the first premise of human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature” (1970, 42). To speak of the body, then, is already to speak of other bodies and the earth, and our relations with them. As Wendell Berry puts it, the human body “lives and moves and has its being, minute by minute, by an interinvolvement with other bodies and other creatures, living and unliving” and, more poignantly, consists of “moving particles of earth, joined inextricably both to the soil and to the bodies of other living creatures” (1995, 95; 1977, 97). That the life of the body always already interinvolves us with the lives of other creatures and the elements of the earth thrusts us beyond a mere being “in” the world to a being *of* the world and, strictly speaking, a being *for* the world. Our being, in other words, is first and foremost an ethical question, and our attitude toward and treatment and use of the body is the departure point for any attempt to embody, literally, an ethical existence on this planet.

Without exception, all humans—and every living being—must appropriate and assimilate elements into their bodies from the earth. We all have to breathe and eat and drink in some fashion, and this requires effort of some sort, whether it is the simple act of picking an apple from a tree or a more complex series of practices necessary for organizing a social system of agriculture, for instance. Likewise, all of us must pass along in some form what we take in, once our body has metabolized it. On the one hand, we pass along the nutrients we absorb in the form of action, expending energy in work or play; on the other hand, we pass metabolized nutrients along in the form of feces and urine. In either case, the body serves as a center and conduit for energy and material flows. The crucial point is that our existence requires corporeal interinvolvement with the world, which is to say that we must use things and give them back in some fashion and thereby make a difference.

Yet our interinvolvement points to something else: namely, that our body is part of a larger “energy community,” in which “all bodies, plant and animal and human... are indissolubly linked in complex patterns of energy exchange” or metabolic symbiosis that occurs in a continuous cycle of appropriation, production, consumption, and return (Berry 1977, 85). Another way to think of this energy community is as a system of nested systems: embedded within the body are billions of energy centers, including our cells and the bodies of microorganisms, just as the body is embedded in criss-crossing networks of material and energy flows that constitute various ecosystemic levels. For this reason, Berry insists that the smallest unit of health is community, which he defines as “a place and all its creatures,” and therefore “to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction in terms” (1995, 90). Our corporeal being is thus inseparable from the well-being of the world around us, from the lives and health of the myriad of other bodies with which we are interinvolved.

We thus return to our ethical question, which is now something of a dilemma: given that, on the one hand, we must make use of other bodies in order to exist, and given that, on the other hand, the well-being of our body is inseparable from the life and well-being of other bodies, how are we to live ethically? As I see it, the question concerns the necessary difference we must make, in both our appropriation of energy and nutrients and our return of them to the earth. We might thus devise this principle: *we ought to take no more than we can give back in appropriate expression*. By giving back “in appropriate expression” I mean not only the expressed byproducts of our metabolism, in the form of vegetative compost and “humanure” that enriches the fertility of the soil, but also energy in the form of creative work and play that we can apply to enriching the vitality of ecosystems and the relations of community in which we live, human and otherwise. In other words, we can give back *more* than we take, provided we take for the purpose of giving back. For this to happen, though, we must shift our economy—our “management” of our earthly household—from an emphasis on appropriation or labor for the purpose of production and consumption in order to accumulate riches in terms of capital and goods, which neglects appropriate metabolic return and impoverishes ecosystems and communities, to an emphasis on work

for the purpose of production and consumption in order to accumulate riches in terms of health and nutrients, which presupposes appropriate metabolic return and vital ecosystems and communities. In short, we must shift from being in the world and using it as we please for accumulating wealth, to being for the world and using it as we need for accumulating health.

A genuine shift of our economy and, by necessary extension, our ecology, requires deep changes in how we live. I must confess that I am not optimistic about the possibilities for wide-ranging structural changes to the dominant, global system of capitalism, industrialism, and militarism; the sheer scale and institutional inertia of these global designs suggests that major transformation will only come on the heels of systemic implosion—perhaps peaking oil reserves heralds such a scenario. Yet to speak of impending “crisis” or “collapse” is already to betray one’s privileged status: for the social majorities of the world, existential crisis and struggles against social and cultural collapse due to imperialism have been the norms for centuries. Indeed, a genuine ethics must also engage the full gamut of socio-ecological issues, including concerns of indigenous sovereignty, peasant land tenure, sexual difference, race, class, animal rights, and so forth. Of course, we can lend our lives to movements that insist on wide-scale changes, though such movements ought not to have a monopoly on what counts as “legitimate” political expression. We can march in the streets or in halls of power *and* tend gardens, for instance, and it is better that our activist bodies be powered by nutrients with which we are intimately familiar—better still that we be agitating for the rights of people across the planet to have access to land for appropriate and responsible use. In truth, we need to participate in multiple “fronts of liberation,” and our body is perhaps the most immediate, and certainly the most intimate, source for liberation practice. It is well worth reminding ourselves that the word “diet” originally means “manner of living,” i.e. how we lead our life. Any changes in our economy and ecology must, I believe, begin with the life of the body, with our manner of being, and literally with what we eat and drink and what we do with our energy and our poop and pee. We have some choices in these matters, and where structural constraints impinge on our ability to choose, wider political engagement must ensue so that we can organize our manner of being appropriately. In any case, changing our attitude toward our biological existence and our subsequent treatment and use of our body constitutes an important and necessary first step in any process of deep socio-ecological

change.

Obviously, I have only scratched the surface of a very complex question, one which deserves more exploration than I can offer here. Yet in raising this question my purpose is to orient our attention to the necessity of corporeal interinvolvement with the world as the basis for our existence and the fact that any attempt to formulate an ethics and politics of socio-ecology must account for the life of the body and its intricate relations with other bodies and the earth. Some may argue that such an assertion remains “too humanist” or “anthropocentric,” but such terms are meaningless without precise definition, and I fail to understand how we can avoid being “humanist” to some extent. In thinking of our existence as a being *for* the world, I feel we can move from the human as a center around which the world revolves to the human as a center *through* which life flows in the process of becoming. The fact remains: we *do* exist and therefore have to account for our making a difference in the world in order to exist, as Marx and Engels insisted. Perhaps the more appropriate term is “anthropocosmic” or something similar, which recognizes that, ultimately, we are capable of creating ourselves and yet how we express ourselves is conditioned by our being enmeshed in a complex system of nested systems. However we wish to phrase it, the important point is that we must embody any ethics worthy of the name, and to do this we must use our bodies and adopt a particular diet, a specific manner of being. My suggestion is that we begin privileging our ability to give back, that we be centers of reciprocal interinvolvement, that we organize our existence for the health of the world. ■

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# COMING HOME

Kirsten Rudestam

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The year I lived in India the moon was full on New Year's Eve. I had been working for a small environmental organization in the Garwhal Himalayas, creating an environmental education program for village schools. Ironically I felt more like a student than a teacher. The culture, language and land were so new to me that my first few weeks I wandered around the terraced hillsides wide-eyed and amazed.

I had spent most of December sick in my bed, in a little concrete room nestled high up on the hillside. There are not many experiences more encouraging of loneliness than being sick in a foreign country, far from family and close friends. For years I had dreamt about India, but as I miserably weathered out my illness I began to wonder what it was that had brought me there. What contribution could I possibly make?

By New Year's Eve I was finally experiencing hunger again, and welcomed it with the eagerness of reuniting with a good friend. How wonderful it was to be alive in a body that walked, talked, ate, and moved with such joy and comfort! The little environmental organization threw a party for the New Year. When I wandered into the kitchen Siddhart was deep-frying vegetables and white bread. Outside a fire was blossoming, and Sita, Siddhart's partner, heated tomato soup over it. I sat and stared into the flames, comforted, and the space began to fill with people. Siddhart, always eager to get me drunk, pressed a cup of rum into my hand. Everything smelled and tasted sharp and vibrant after being sick. The soup warmed my palms, the rum warmed my throat, and the coals glowed like dragon eggs.

After devouring the food and marveling at each other's festive clothing, many of us sat again around the fire, subdued and contemplative. I heard a muffled drum beat far down the mountain and saw Mohun and Ankit exchange grins. "They're coming." The drumming became gradually louder and from the shadows appeared three men with dhols, traditional Garhwali drums. And what unfolded in the bright cold night around the fire was a ceremony of celebration. The drummers laughed, drank rum, sang and poured music out of their instruments with an ease that left me gaping in awe. Mohun leapt up in a Garhwali dance, twirling and jumping and fluttering his arms in the sky. I joined him, and soon many of us were dancing, stamping the earth, breathless, throwing our arms into the night and

the moon. My heart felt on fire.

Maybe it was the festive excitement of celebration, or the full moon, or the good company – the drummers drummed and we danced and sang for hours with no thought of stopping, except for water or to catch our breath. When the energy finally simmered down we sat and stared into the fire and sang Garhwali songs. People had collapsed in colorful exhausted heaps. The others with me spoke in Hindi and Garhwali and I did not strain to understand. Instead I let their words pour over my ears like water, and I played with the music of them, their rise and fall completely unpredictable and perfectly formed.

A little while later, I found myself walking in the bright light of the huge moon with Sita and Siddhart. I

wore every layer I owned and still shivered under my shawl as we crept up the trail towards Chandrabadni temple.

Though I had never before been there, I looked up at it every day. The temple marks the highest peak in the watershed, and occasionally the chanting from the priests floated down from its perch on the mountain to me in the village.

We walked in silence, the land spread before us glowing in muted, moonlit colors. Only when we began to climb did my body lose the feeling of being a serpent or a ghost, floating smooth and invisible over the earth. We hiked upward for three hours. As we reached the steps of the temple the sky began to lighten and colors softly and subtly entered the world.

"We'll miss the sunrise!" Sita cried and somehow we mustered up enough energy to run the final flights of steep steps. My legs ached and my body was soaked in sweat. And then there was nothing left to climb. I gasped as we entered the stone arch. There were the Himalayas! Vast and cosmic, spread in white jagged ripples against the sky.

How was it that I had been so close to them for months and never knew? Little huts dotted the hillsides below their expanse and I thought of living there, with the Himalayas a hidden backdrop, so close and yet shielded from view by a wrinkle of foothills. I wondered if the villagers there knew that the mountains were steadfastly watching over them.

The sun tipped into the horizon, a blinding streak along the earth. The snow on the mountains glowed and

darkness became light amplified by patches of shadow. All of us were stunned, like wild creatures facing headlights. The rows of hanging prayer flags fluttered in the wind with a sound that felt intimate, familiar, cloth wings softly flapping. Priests began their circumambulations, chanting in low drones.

This, I thought, is why I came to India. Winter winds, numb fingers and bare feet frozen on the hard concrete, the tired ache of my legs, the elation of being so high, the hills rolling below me in great green terraced waves and the unutterable magnificence of the Himalayas.

I turned and saw Sita, golden like an ancient Hindu goddess in the early morning light and something slid together. I had just emerged from sickness, a muted, cocoon dark slumber, into something bright and vibrant and sorely alive. In coming to India to give, I had been gifted by the realization that beauty resides everywhere. There are vast

mountain ranges directly in front of us, even if we can not see them. We are all living in little cottages placed in valleys before the Himalayas. All of us are searching for the peace that is already within our own hearts. ■



*Photo by Sarah Jaquette*

# “MAIMED AWAY FROM THE EARTH”

## DISABILITY AND WILDERNESS

Sarah Jaquette

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In his classic book, *Desert Solitaire*, Edward Abbey proposes a “polemic” against “industrial tourism,” which he sees as the primary threat to national parks and the wilderness experience. The problem with industrial tourism is its attendant machines—jetskis, motorized boats, RVs, and cars, for example—which make nature *too* accessible. Abbey despises these because they pollute wilderness, disrupt the wilderness experience for others, distance drivers from the physical encounter that defines that wilderness experience, and defeat the purpose of visiting the nature in national parks in the first place. In asking, “how to pry the tourists out of their automobiles, out of their back-breaking upholstered mechanized wheelchairs and onto their feet, onto the strange warmth and solidity of Mother Earth again” (64), Abbey suggests that these problems are epitomized by the automobile, which literally handicaps us. He conflates disability, emblemized by the wheelchair in this passage, with all the fetters of modern life, from air-conditioning to the work day.

In Abbey’s polemic, disability figures as the manifestation of our symbolic severance from nature; indeed, by equating the automobile and the wheelchair, Abbey drives his point home: modernity has literally and figuratively handicapped us. Wallace Stegner reiterates this in *Angle of Repose*, in which protagonist Lyman Ward’s paralysis stands in for all of humanity’s malaise, disenchantment, and sense of having been “maimed away from Mother Earth” (Hepworth 17). Even Ralph Waldo Emerson, father of American Transcendentalism and nature writing, invokes the image of the “invalid” as an “icon of bodily vulnerability,” against which the self-reliant, ideal “man” should be defined and disciplined (Thomson 42).

That the trope of disability symbolizing humanity’s disconnection from nature works so well reflects the notion that a close connection to nature requires a certain kind of body, and conversely, that having this body brings you back to a nature we have lost. So what kinds of bodies fit best into nature? The ideal of a rugged and athletic body—what Rosemarie Garland Thomson calls the “normate”—signifies distinctly American values of work, masculinity, will power, independence, and moral virtue. And, not coincidentally, they are inextricably tied to America’s historical

any, have mapped the construction of American wilderness alongside a history of disability.

But theorizing wilderness through a disability theory lens is a necessary project; even if we accept Abbey and Stegner’s assumption that industrialism and modernity have disconnected humans from nature in tragic ways, the linking of this loss to physical disability or deformity deserves closer scrutiny. If a socially concerned ecocriticism aims to address the inequities of environmental thought, then wilderness’s literal and figurative inaccessibility to people with disabilities must be taken more seriously<sup>1</sup>. Further, literature about nature by people with disabilities suggests not only that the idea that disability manifests disconnection from nature is a myth, but also, perhaps, that wilderness, be it a real space “out there” or a “social construction,” fulfills important purposes that “society”—wilderness’ real or constructed opposite—cannot.

Disability theory reminds us that all environments, built and wild, are not innocently constructed, and that disability itself is a relative category, contingent upon social and physical contexts. Our physical surroundings are manifestations of social values, in that landscapes signify societal attitudes by disciplining, shaping, defining, and determining our bodily abilities. Rob Kitchin speaks to the organizing power of our material surroundings: “forms of oppression are played out within, and given context by, spaces and places” (223). The same assumption that makes disability an analogue to alienation from nature function successfully as a literary trope also contributes to the under-theorization of wilderness as a built environment; they share the same bias that connection with nature requires certain bodies. Thus, the theory, like the landscape, is imbued with apparatuses of access and exclusion that are as careless as poorly cut curbs.

The accessibility of *built* environments has received much more attention than wilderness spaces. Planners are increasingly considering issues of lived experiences of urban spaces (Imrie and Hall 2001). Echoing geographer Rob Kitchin, they have demonstrated that “the oppressive experiences of disability are rooted in specific socio-spatial and temporal structures,” and “spaces are currently organized to keep disabled people ‘in their place’



relationship and places written to convey to disabled people that they are ‘out of place’” (Kitchin 223). The geography of disability exposes the socially constructed nature of built environments, and the ways such environments mirror and organize social hierarchies.

Susan Wendell further argues that disability is as much about the way society is structured, both physically and in terms of its values, as it is about an individual’s physical capacities. “Societies that are physically constructed and socially organized with the unacknowledged assumption that everyone is healthy, non-disabled, young but adult, shaped according to cultural ideals, and, often, male,” charges Wendell, “create a great deal of disability through sheer neglect of what most people need in order to participate fully in them” (39). Much of disability is caused and defined by society, rather than being some generalized set of static, immutable traits. This distinction can be usefully discussed in terms of “disability,” the social construction, and “impairment,” the bodily reality of disability (Liachowitz, paraphrased in Davis, *Enforcing* 10), although this distinction has its limits as well.

Although disability theory has focused primarily on built environments, wilderness is as much constructed, managed, and designed as any built or urban structure. All experiences with wilderness are mediated to some extent. Anne Whiston Spirn affirms that “all landscapes are constructed. Garden, forest, city, and wilderness are shaped by rivers and rain, plans and animals, human hands and minds. They are all phenomena of nature *and* products of culture” (113). Wilderness spaces are as regulated, planned, and organized as downtowns; their constructedness is just much less visible.

Yet making wilderness more accessible would not necessarily make it more visibly constructed. Leo McAvoy’s extensive research on outdoor recreation and disability suggests that people with disabilities desire the same pristine experience, untainted by disability accommodations, as those without disabilities. This research debunks the myth that making wilderness accessible means ruining it. But it implies that access technologies for people with disabilities are qualitatively different than the kinds of “extensions” people without disabilities require. All access to wilderness requires some degree of accommodation. Recreational activities rely on “sets of humans, objects, technologies and scripts that contingently produce durability and stability, a social order of particular leisure landscapes involving various hybrids that roam the countryside and deploy the kinesthetic sense of movement” (McNaghten and Urry 8). Relationships with wilderness

are mediated not only by the managed nature of wilderness spaces, but also by these “extensions of man,” as Marshall McLuhan might call them. Such extensions allow us to perform the wilderness ideal; they mediate and stand between our bodies and nature itself. Abled bodies don’t experience nature any more purely than disabled bodies.

The same social norms that construct the wilderness body ideal and make wilderness inaccessible also make wilderness a desirable place to escape these constraints. “The realities of a disability, and the societal attitudes that place limits on those disabilities,” writes McAvoy, “make contact with nature and wildlands just that much more precious” (356). If, as McAvoy suggests, “the absence of distractions and obligations and the pace of nature encourages introspection and a clearer picture of who we are” (355), then such experiences are as appropriate for people with disabilities as for those without. Eli Clare’s description of her childhood growing up in the rural community of Port Orford, Oregon, surrounded by old-growth forests and intimately connected to the physical and political realities of “wilderness,” supports McAvoy’s assertions. Getting away from society can be considered a subversive act against the ways that society constructs disability.

In *Exile and Pride*, Eli Clare opens with an introductory chapter, “The Mountain,” in which she expresses her conflicted emotions about her cerebral palsy in terms of the challenge of climbing a mountain. The way she describes nature illustrates that nature is simultaneously a socially constructed place and, somewhat paradoxically, a necessary space of escape from society. The mountain is a metaphor of society’s construction of disability. Clare begins:

The mountain as metaphor looms large in the lives of marginalized people, people whose bones get crushed in the grind of capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy. How many of us have struggled up the mountain, measured ourselves against it, failed up there, lived in its shadow? (1)

The mountain, because it is not a built environment, is not about disability, but about physical impairment. “In large part,” she writes,

Disability oppression is about access. Simply being on Mount Adams, halfway up Air Line Trail, represents a whole lot of access. When access is measured by curb cuts, ramps, and whether they are kept clear of snow and ice in the winter; by the width of doors and height of counters; by the presence or absence of Braille, closed captions, ASL,

and TDDs; my not being able to climb all the way to the very top of Mount Adams stops being about disability. (6)

The material obstacles imposed by society in built environments make it easier to identify them as constructing disability, following Wendell. But in nature, access is assumed; there are no constructed limitations, only one's own body, which Clare "come[s] face-to-face with" on the mountain.

The expectations implied by the wilderness ideal body, represented by the mountain here, contribute to a geography of exclusion, where "power is expressed in

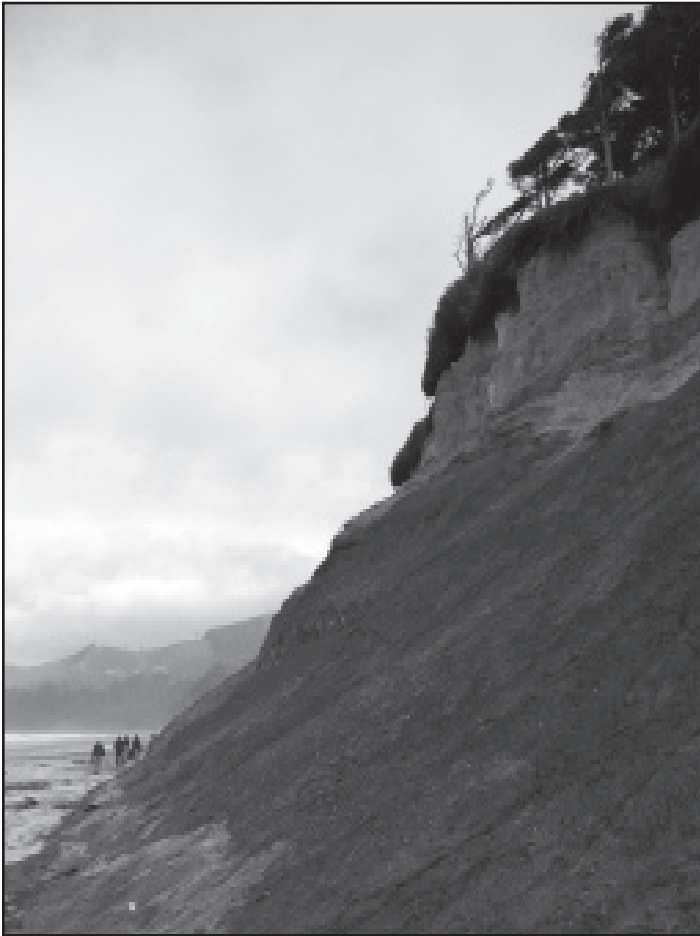


Photo by Sarah Mazze

the monopolization of space and the relegation of weaker groups in society to less desirable environments" (Sibley, qtd. in Germic 115). Cultural expectations are embedded in the mountain. Besides the actual policy decisions that ignore disability access issues (McAvoy, "Outdoors" 35), that there is a specific experience of nature assumed in the wilderness ideal does not leave us when we leave the city. We cannot escape our assumptions about autonomy and bodily capability, even in nature.

Nancy Mairs further debunks the myth that disabled bodies do not belong in wilderness. Her view of her disability offers an alternative and perhaps suggests a more ethical treatment of nature. Disability, she argues, creates a relationship to the environment that counters the rugged individualist ideal. Mairs writes:

I have lived now for more than twenty years in a landscape too large for me, and getting larger as my physical condition deteriorates, the conventional West—land, lots of land, 'neath the starry skies above—and the conventional responses to it—exploration, exploitation—demanding a physical vigor I've never enjoyed before. (176)

Mairs inverts the myth of the West—associated with wide open spaces to explore and exploit—and posits disability as allowing an alternative way of valuing land, informed by sense of spatial scale. Writing that "*moving* constitutes the Western experience," Mairs points to the possibility that a disability perspective can contribute much to the revisionist New Western History, a movement that challenges narratives glorifying the conquering of the West's "virgin lands." Mairs argues that mobility "is no longer essential to the Western experience. [It is an] anachronism that should be discarded from the way we imagine the West" (180). Our myths about how to experience wilderness imply certain kinds of mobility, which are not necessarily human-scaled, ethical, or the best means of access.

Mairs' critique of mobility—or the kind of mobility implied by the wilderness ideal and rugged individualist myths—implies that the pace at which one experiences nature is related to one's environmental ethic. If, as Susan Wendell notes, "expectations of pace can make work, recreational, community, and social activities inaccessible" (38), then an alternative pace of experiencing nature can not only be liberating, but also provide a foundation for an environmental ethic that counters what William Cronon calls "the annihilation of space and time" and David Harvey refers to as a postmodern "compression of space and time." If our environmental problems are partly a function of how transportation has disconnected our bodies from our environments, then pace matters.

Even Edward Abbey would appreciate this. If "distance and space are functions of speed and time," if "we could [...] multiply the area of our national parks tenfold or a hundredfold [...] simply by banning the private automobile" (69), and if "a man on foot, on horseback or on a bicycle will see more, feel more, enjoy more in one mile than the motorized tourists can in a hundred miles"

(67), then a slower pace of experiencing nature provides a more ethical way of relating to the environment. At the very least, then, the ethic implied in Mairs' writing suggests that disability is quite the opposite of "being maimed away from the earth." At most, though, this ethic could serve as a model of how to be "closer to nature," regardless of the ability and extensions of one's body. Either way, understanding alienation from nature as disability will not help us recover a viable relationship with nature, each other, or our own bodies. ■

### End Note

<sup>1</sup> Using disability to challenge the use of disability as a trope is problematic. Indeed, disability theory argues that disabilities too often figure in narratives only in symbolic ways, rather than as real, lived, subjective epistemologies. Lennard Davis has compellingly challenged the use of disability as a narrative tool; the normalizing of disability assuages cultural trauma, which he calls the "disability moment" in literature (Davis 3). I am aware that my use of disability as a theoretical construct, rather than an embodied reality, may not sufficiently undermine the effects of this disability moment, but I will use literature about nature by writers with disabilities in order to try to avoid further constructing the disabled body as a "storage site" or "trap for the very oppression we want to eradicate" (Clare 363). In this way, I hope to avoid "exploit[ing] the disabled figure's potential for challenging the institutions and political policies that derive from and support a narrow norm" (Thomson 16), or represent disability monolithically, without dimension or contradiction.

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# THESES AND PROJECTS OF THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2005

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## **Bringing Everyone Into the Foodshed: Improving Low-Income Community Members' Access to Local Food in Lane County, Oregon**

**Kate Darby**

Local food systems decrease the distance between food producers and food consumers. Components of a local food system, or "foodshed," include community supported agriculture, farmers markets, food cooperatives, farm-to-institution programs, and urban gardening and agriculture. Local food systems confront global structural concerns by providing an alternative to our increasingly centralized food system. At the same time, local food systems improve community sustainability by bolstering local economies, improving residents' health and wellness, and decreasing the environmental impact of food production and consumption. Communities across the globe are developing programs and policies to bolster local



food systems. Unfortunately, low-income community members face considerable transportation and monetary obstacles that prevent them from being fully engaged in local food system activities. Several scholars argue that inequities within the food system undermine sustainable agriculture and commu-

nity food security efforts.

My terminal project focused on low-income community members' access to local food in Lane County, Oregon. Oregon residents experience the highest rate of food insecurity, inadequate availability of healthy food, in the country - 14% of residents experience

food insecurity and 6.2% of residents experience food insecurity and hunger. In Lane County, several programs already connect these residents to local food - the FOOD for Lane County Youth Farm, gleaning programs, CSA subsidies, and the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Farmers' Market program. To provide context, I researched dozens of programs across the country that already aim to connect low-income consumers to local food. I used lessons learned from these programs and other research to develop recommendations to help groups in Lane County build upon existing programs and to develop new efforts to improve low income community members' access to local food. ■

## **Global Warming and Propaganda on Cable News: A Content Analysis of the Cable News Network and the Fox News Channel**

**Sol Hart**

For the past two years I've been looking at



how the mass media represents environmental issues. This has included an investigation of mass media content and how the content impacts public perceptions and opinions

towards the environment.

For my thesis, I performed a content analysis of Cable News Network (CNN) and Fox News Channel (FNC) to identify how the two cable news stations covered global warming during prime-time television view-

ing hours from 1998 through 2004. The study uses a full census of global warming relevant CNN and FNC broadcast transcripts to evaluate if, and how, the stations use propaganda techniques to discuss global warming, how the stations cover global warming, and the frequency of global warming coverage by year. The study finds that FNC uses propaganda techniques, offers skepticism about global warming, and interviews global warming skeptics (compared to global warming advocates), significantly more often than CNN. The study also finds that 2001 contains a significantly higher level of global warming coverage by both CNN and FNC compared to the other years in the 1998 – 2004 time period.

In August, I will be starting a Ph.D. program in Communication at Cornell University. There, I will continue to investigate how news organizations may be using propaganda techniques and slanting their coverage towards ideological viewpoints. Thanks to everybody for giving me support over the last two years! The road shines with blessing. ■

**Assessing Future Threats to the Jackson, Wyoming/  
National Elk Refuge Social – Ecological System:  
A Scenario Planning Case Study**

**Mark Neff**



Scenario planning has been used for several decades by the military and industry to systematically address long-term uncertainty, and there is a growing precedent for utilizing the technique for making ecosystem management decisions. My thesis employed a scenario planning

technique to investigate two key uncertainties in the Jackson, Wyoming/ National Elk Refuge social-eco-

logical system: the ecological and economic effects of wildlife disease and wolf recolonization. The local economy is dependent on elk for tourism and hunting, creating a close link between the social and ecological systems. The current elk management regime utilizes ranching techniques such as artificial feeding and vaccination to create large herds despite a paucity of winter range. There is an ongoing NEPA analysis to consider alternatives to the feeding programs currently in place. I presented four storylines portraying plausible future conditions to help managers and stakeholders consider long-term variability and potential vulnerabilities when making management decisions. ■

**Interdisciplinary Analysis of the  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's  
Hatchery Policy Proposal**

**Berry Wanless**



For my thesis, I examined the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Hatchery Policy Proposal through three distinct, but overlapping lenses. The first approach provided an impartial breakdown

of the NOAA's proposal with a political ecology study. This exploration used a metanarrative to reveal the roots of the struggle for political control over one of the Pacific Northwest's greatest environmental treasures, the salmon. The second approach attempted to ground the political ecology analysis by looking closely at the science behind the NOAA's Hatchery Policy Proposal.

Specifically, this section explored the rise of hatcheries, the current science surrounding them, and their future. The third, and final, approach used the

## COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENTS

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**Chet Bowers:** Adjunct Professor, Environmental Studies

Bowers co-edited, with Frederique Apffel-Marglin, *Rethinking Freire: Globalization and the Environmental Crisis*, published in 2005. He co-founded the international online journal *The Ecojustice Review: Educating for the Commons* ([www.ecojusticeeducation.org/](http://www.ecojusticeeducation.org/)).

His book, *Let Them Eat Data; How Computers Affect Education, Cultural Diversity, and the Prospects of Ecological Sustainability*, was translated into Chinese. The Japanese translation was published in 2003.

In addition to having two new book manuscripts in press, he is currently writing a new book tentatively titled, *Universities at the Crossroads: The Decline of Environmentalism and the Rise of Fascism*. ■

**Kate Darby:** 2005 graduate, Environmental Studies

Kate presented “Bringing Everyone into the Foodshed” at the 2005 Joint Campus Conference at Oregon State University in May. She worked with the Lane County Food Coalition to create the 2005 Local Food Directory, available at <http://www.lanefood.org/>. ■

**Alan Dickman:** Senior Instructor, Biology

Dickman was lead scholar on the Rediscovering Biology Project. The project includes video and print chapters on several topics in biology that pertain to environmental studies, including biodiversity, emerging infectious disease, genetically modified organisms. For more information, visit <http://www.learner.org/channel/courses/biology/index.html>. Videos can be streamed from this website or obtained in DVD form from the Biology Department. ■

**Janet Fiskio:** Doctoral student, Environmental Studies and English

Janet will be presenting her paper, “Becoming-Rat, Becoming-Roach, Becoming-Human: Urban Nature in ‘The Underlife’” at the ASLE conference in June. She is also on the local organizing committee for the ASLE.

Janet will also be presenting a paper, “Toward an Urban and Social Ecology of Knowledge” at the International Association for Environmental Philosophy in Salt Lake City in October, 2005. ■

**Sol Hart:** 2005 graduate, Environmental Studies

Sol will start a doctoral program in Communications at Cornell University this fall. He will focus on propaganda techniques and ideological viewpoints in news coverage. ■

**Sarah Jaquette:** Doctoral student, Environmental Studies and English

Sarah received the Krohn Award from the Department of English for the best paper in Literature and the Environment written by a second-year English student. She presented “Off-Roaded Back to Nature in SUV Advertising” at the Western States Folklore Society conference in April, and is presenting a version of “‘Maimed away from the Earth’: Disability and Wilderness,” which is featured in this issue of *The Ecotone*, at the ASLE conference in June. ■

**Sarah Mazze:** Second year master’s student, Environmental Studies

Sarah’s paper proposal, “Beyond Wilderness: Outdoor Education and the Transfer of Environmental Ethics,” was accepted to the annual North American Association for Environmental Education Conference, which will take place this October in Albuquerque, New Mexico. ■

**Ronald Mitchell:** Associate Professor, Political Science

Mitchell and Sue Weiler, Researcher, Whitman College, have received a major grant from the National Science Foundation as follows:

Fostering Cross-Disciplinary Relationships and Early-Career Development to Advance Interdisciplinary Research on Climate Change and Impacts.

The Dissertations Initiative for the Advancement of Climate Change Research, DISCCRS, fosters cross-disciplinary interactions across the natural and social sciences and facilitates early-career development for Ph.D. graduates embarking on interdisciplinary, socially relevant careers dedicated to understanding and mitigating climate change and impacts.

DISCCRS will improve the ability of new professionals to conduct interdisciplinary research and communicate results in a societally relevant context. The goal of the proposed program is to incorporate the social scientists to complete

the integration of all researchers focused on improving our knowledge and ability to mitigate climate change and impacts. ■

**Mark Neff:** 2005 graduate, Environmental Studies

Mark presented his preliminary thesis research at the 2005 conference on “Emerging Issues at Urban/Rural Interfaces: Linking Science and Society” held in Atlanta, Georgia. He received an NSF grant to present at the conference.

Mark will start a doctoral program in Life Sciences at Arizona State University this fall. He will be focusing on ecology and science policy. ■

**Adam Novick:** First year master’s student, Environmental Studies

Adam presented “What Policy Might Save the Willamette Valley’s Oak Savanna? Lessons from a Case Study of Private and Public Conservation Efforts” at the 2005 Joint Campus Conference at Oregon State University in May. ■

**Kirsten Rudestam:** First year master’s student, Environmental Studies

Kirsten won First Place in the student category of the Annual *Oregon Quarterly* Northwest Perspectives Essay Contest for her essay ‘Trail Grace.’ ■

**Krzysiek Sakrejda:** 2005 graduate, Environmental Studies

Krzysiek presented a preliminary version of his thesis, “Beyond Banking Germplasm” at the Association of American Geographers 2005 conference in Denver, Colorado in April. He was accepted to the doctoral program in Geography at Syracuse University. ■

**Jason Schreiner:** First year master’s student, Environmental Studies

Jason received a UO General University Scholarship for the 2005-2006 academic year. ■

**Ted Toadvine:** Assistant Professor, Philosophy and Environmental Studies

Toadvine will be presenting a paper in August at the 55th International Phenomenology Congress in Nijmegen, The

Netherlands. He will also be presenting papers in October at meetings of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy and the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, both of which are meeting in Salt Lake City. Also this fall, he is co-directing the 30th Annual International Conference of the Merleau-Ponty Circle, “The Child and the Animal,” which will meet here at the University of Oregon at the end of September.

Toadvine’s forthcoming publications include the following:

1. “The Melody of Life and the Motif of Philosophy,” *Chiasmi International: Trilingual Studies Concerning Merleau-Ponty’s Thought* 7 (forthcoming in 2005).

2. “Limits of the Flesh: The Role of Reflection in David Abram’s Ecophenomenology,” *Environmental Ethics* (forthcoming in Summer 2005). This essay will be reprinted in *Interrogating Ethics: Embodying the Good in Merleau-Ponty* (Duquesne University Press).

3. “Ecological Aesthetics.” In *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, edited by Lester Embree and Hans Reiner Sepp. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers (forthcoming in 2005).

4. “How not to be a Jellyfish: Human Exceptionalism and the Ontology of Reflection.” In *Phenomenology and the Non-Human Animal*, edited by Christian Lotz and Corinne Painter. Dordrecht: Kluwer/Springer Academic Publishers (forthcoming in 2006).

5. “‘Strange Kinship’: Merleau-Ponty on the Human-Animal Relation,” in *Phenomenology of Life: From the Animal Soul to the Human Mind*, ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, forthcoming.

He is also completing the editing of a four-volume set, *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, for Routledge. And he is co-editing, with Leonard Lawlor, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader* for Northwestern University Press. He will be finishing these two projects this summer, while also completing work on his monograph, *Singing the World: Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*. ■

**Louise Westling:** Professor, English

Westling is the University of Oregon contact and coordinator for the ASLE Conference Host Committee this year. The ASLE conference is being held at the University of Oregon from June 21-26. Westling is closely involved with the Environmental Studies Program. ■

# DARWIN IN ARCADIA AND THE HAUNTED ECOSYSTEM OF GILGAMESH

Louise Westling

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Glen Love's recent book, *Practical Ecocriticism*, offers a provocative reconsideration of Arcadian tropes from evolutionary perspectives that helps to explain why most human cultures are deeply attracted to green places of repose and natural abundance (See also Buell, Gifford, and Garrard). I would like to consider Darwin and the pastoral in what I hope is a complementary way, by looking at the oldest known literary work, the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, to see how anxiety about the relation of humans to other animals and the wild energies of the animate world haunted the first great human civilization, both in the poetry it left behind, and as we now know, in the archeological record of its fate. The dependence of human animals upon the natural ecosystems that sustain them, and the vulnerability of specialized human societies to environmental change, are part of the Darwinian story of evolution, especially as earth scientists have learned more and more about climate change in recent decades. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* expresses a deep fear about the arrogance of ecological destruction, at the same time that it seems to celebrate the heroic energies of an historical king of early Sumer.

*The Epic of Gilgamesh* is the oldest known extended written narrative, a product of the complex agricultural civilization of Sumer, whose extensive walled cities and irrigation systems once dominated what is now the desertified landscape of Iraq. The power and appeal of Sumerian culture can be seen in the long life of the epic, which existed in Akkadian, Babylonian, and Hittite forms for over a thousand years before the cuneiform libraries of clay tablets were lost beneath the sands until nineteenth-century British archaeologists recovered them. The fate of the rich world that produced, revised, and transmitted the epic for so long, hints at the ecological problems encoded in it. And now, of course, those problems are doubly poignant as we watch what was left of Iraq's fertile landscapes blown to pieces by bombs and tanks.

In *Pan's Travail*, J. Donald Hughes surveys the changed relationship between human beings and the environment in the ancient Near East as the plow and systematic large-scale irrigation gave rise to the first great cities. The respectful, attentive attitudes of hunter-gatherers, early farmers, and herders toward the natural environment began to disappear. "It as if the barrier of city walls and the rectilinear pattern of canals had divided urban human

beings from wild nature and substituted an attitude of confrontation for the earlier feeling of cooperation" (32-33), he writes. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh* one can see this process symbolically enacted in a strange, dream-like narrative of gigantic appetites, arrogant determination, and defiance of the sacred powers of the earth and the gods which embody them. The standard interpretations of the epic refer to deeds of courage and strength, battles with monsters, and themes like "the grief and fear of death," "love and vulnerability and the quest for wisdom" (Mitchell 1-2). But it is really a tale of ecological tragedy. Gilgamesh and his beloved companion Enkidu arrogantly attack the independent powers of the natural world, figured as a huge cedar forest that is the dwelling place of the gods and the throne of Ishtar. The forest is guarded by the monster Humbaba, who personifies the independent energies of animal and plant life. Ishtar (Sumerian Inanna) herself is a great goddess of fertility and war, who is also the Mistress of Animals and was a central deity in Mesopotamia for thousands of years. It is very odd that the epic claims Gilgamesh's devotion to her and brags about his construction of her great temple, when at the heart of the narrative, he contemptuously rejects and insults her. What this contradiction suggests is that Mesopotamian culture simultaneously revered her powers and gloried in the heroic king who dared to challenge her and set human will above Nature. The tragic consequences of that challenge provide the epic's dramatic and emotive force.

Central to the meaning of Gilgamesh and Enkidu's actions and fate, are their complex symbolic relations with other animals. Before Enkidu appears and accompanies Gilgamesh on his heroic journey to the Cedar Forest, we are told a troubling story about a young prince, one that questions where wildness resides, and how the boundaries from wild to tame, human to other animals, indeed male to female, can be blurred, crossed, policed, erased, restored. This introductory tale includes a kind of evolutionary movement from protohuman to civilized man, but in the end that supposed progression is profoundly questioned.

As this introductory narrative opens the epic, we learn that young King Gilgamesh's behavior is so wildly excessive that it is devastating the city he is supposed to rule. Supposedly two-thirds god and one-third human, he is both "Mighty net, protector of his people" and "raging flood-wave who destroys even walls of stone." The citizens



of his city are oppressed by his outrageous energies and beg the gods for help, for “Gilgamesh does not leave a son to his father;” “Gilgamesh does not leave a girl to her mother.” How can this raging wild bull of a king also be “the shepherd of Uruk, . . . bold, knowing, and wise” (Kovacs 5)?

In answer to the prayers of the people of Uruk and the complaints of the other gods, Anu orders the goddess Aruru, who created mankind, to create another one, a counterpart or double for Gilgamesh, to match and restrain him so that Uruk may find peace. With a pinch of clay, Aruru shapes him.

In the wilderness she created valiant Enkidu,  
born of Silence, endowed with strength by Ninurta.  
His whole body was shaggy with hair,  
he had a full head of hair like a woman,  
his locks billowed in profusion like Ashnan [goddess of grain].  
He knew neither people nor settled living,  
but wore a garment like Sumukan [god of wild animals; i.e. wore animal skins].  
He ate grasses with the gazelles,  
and jostled at the watering hole with the animals;  
as with animals, his thirst was slaked with (mere) water (6).

Enkidu is thus formed in a kind of Eden as a primal human who seems to have both male and female qualities, living in harmony with the whole ecosystem of the grasslands around him and protecting his wild companions from human trappers.

This protohuman is domesticated by a priestess of the Temple of Inanna/Ishtar at the request of a trapper who fears and resents Enkidu. In an episode anticipating the Biblical theft of Samson’s energy by Delilah, the priestess Shamhat exposes her body to Enkidu so that he is aroused for six days and spends all his strength in lovemaking. The woman plays the classic mediating role between wildness and civilization which Donna Haraway has shown to be still operating in popular culture and in the discourse and semiotics of primatology with figures like Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey (133-185). His strength depleted, Enkidu is washed and shorn, given civilized clothing, and taught to eat and drink human nourishment. His wild animal companions now flee from him, and instead of their protector he becomes a guardian of shepherds. Then he travels to Uruk to meet his destined counterpart.

Gilgamesh has been having strange dreams of a falling meteorite that he embraces and loves like a wife, and an axe he finds that he also embraces like a wife. His

mother interprets these dreams to prepare him for a comrade and advisor who saves his friend, whom he will embrace and love as a wife, and with whom he will compete. Gilgamesh is about to enter the House of Marriage when Enkidu finds him at last and blocks his entrance in rage. The exact meaning of Gilgamesh’s role in the House of Marriage is unclear, as is Enkidu’s behavior, but I believe it refers to the King’s ritual marriage to a representative of Inanna/Ishtar which was sacred in most Mesopotamian cultures (20-21). Ordinary human procreation was understood to be similarly sacred, part of the cyclical flow of seasonal fertility among all animals and plants. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* sets this sacred ritual in a negative context, with Enkidu moving violently to prevent Gilgamesh’s participation. The two grapple together and shake the walls, smashing the doorposts, in some versions like wild bulls, but after the battle Enkidu vows allegiance to Gilgamesh, they kiss each other and become inseparable companions as the king’s dreams foretold.

This bond replaces Gilgamesh’s relationship with the fertile powers that Inanna/Ishtar represents, so that instead of acting in patterns that parallel the recurring cycles of life in the land, Gilgamesh sets himself against them. Gilgamesh’s huge appetites focus upon his ambition to attack the great Cedar Forest sacred to the gods. In this central episode of the narrative a strange transference occurs between Enkidu and Gilgamesh, in which first Enkidu tries to dissuade his friend from this plan, but then the roles reverse, with Enkidu urging him on once they have entered the forest. Enkidu has known the wild forest as one of its animal inhabitants, and he knows the power of Humbaba, whom the god Enlil has placed in the wild place to guard it from intrusion. As they travel to the forest across the transitional spaces from city to wild landscape, and as Enkidu uses his expertise from his earlier life in the wilderness to prepare their camping places, Gilgamesh has terrible dreams about mountains falling on him, a wild bull attacking him, and lightning striking and turning their surroundings to ash (27-38). These dreams are warnings of disaster, but Enkidu incomprehensibly claims that they portend success. Once they reach the forest, both are awed by its sacred beauty and lushness for a moment before they move on to find the monster Humbaba. Humbaba is in many ways a larger example of what Enkidu himself had been before he had known human kind, and he has heroic qualities similar to the wild energies of both Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

When Gilgamesh’s axe severs Humbaba’s neck, the forest shudders; he and Enkidu chop it down, pack up

the great timbers to float down the Euphrates to Uruk, and go to present the head of the monster to the gods. The ruling god Enlil is enraged that his sacred wilderness and its guardian have been destroyed, and a council of gods decides that Enkidu must die in recompense (Sandars 80-84). Thus he and his monstrous wilderness double both perish as the sacred forest does, because their lives were energized by the same forces. By symbolic extension, Gilgamesh's relationship with Enkidu shows that his life is as well. Gilgamesh lives on, but as a chastened man whose grief for Enkidu is so devastating that he is reduced to a figure very close to what Enkidu was before he traveled to Uruk. Gilgamesh strips himself of the emblems of his civilized power and all his clothing, reducing himself to the "poor, bare forked animal" of King Lear's description of unaccommodated man, with matted hair, wandering in the wilderness and burned by sun and ice, hunting wild creatures and covered with their skins. His impossible quest for eternal life ends in futility, and he lives out his life as a tamed, diminished mortal.

With anguish *The Epic of Gilgamesh* examines the shifting, uncertain boundaries between humans and other animals, demonstrating that their strengths and vitalities are shared and are part of the sacred energies of the landscape. But human will cannot be controlled, apparently. Gilgamesh's arrogant ambitions lead him to commit terrible sacrilege, and the gods take their revenge on the human animals that devastate the natural world. Probably the inconsistencies and conflicting divine figures in the epic reflect conflicts within ancient Sumerian and Babylonian and Assyrian societies, some traditions that urge careful behavior within the natural environment that sustains all living things, and some that champion the manipulation of other creatures for human purposes. What is certain, however, is that the environment of ancient Mesopotamia changed disastrously as soils became salinated by intensive irrigation (Diamond 48), forests were cut down for the building of enormous cities, wild creatures were pushed out of their habitats by human activities, and the landscape became progressively impoverished. Somehow, in spite of the celebration of Gilgamesh and his marvelous city of Uruk, the epic understands the tragedy of human illusions of separation from the wider animal and plant community.

We now know that Mesopotamian civilizations suffered catastrophic destruction from climate change and environmental degradation by humans. In his new book, *Collapse*, Jared Diamond has examined a whole series of similar ecological disasters in other parts of the globe caused by climate change in ancient times. A recent article

by Elizabeth Kolbert in the *New Yorker* also describes the effects of climate change on many ancient societies but is specifically focused upon the same world that produced *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Clay tablets from the city of Akkad, just south of present-day Baghdad, preserve cuneiform records of complex governmental activities but also a lamentation called "The Curse of Akkad," which describes the fall of a magnificent empire caused by sacrilegious behavior much like Gilgamesh's attack against the sacred cedar forest. Enlil, the god of winds and storms who punishes Enkidu in the Gilgamesh epic, is also the main deity in "The Curse of Akkad." He destroys King Naram-sin and all his people, who actually lived around 2200 BCE, some five hundred years after the historical King Gilgamesh. The lament describes how the fields produced no grain, the irrigated ponds no fish, and the irrigated orchards no syrup nor wine. Clouds gathered, but no rain fell. "He who slept on the roof, died on the roof,/ He who slept in the house, had no burial,/ People were flailing at themselves from hunger" (64-66). Archaeological excavations at the site of ancient Akkad in present-day northern Iraq, together with soil samples taken from the site, show that, in about 2200 BCE, a drought of terrible proportions coincided with the abandonment of human habitations and death of the very soil. Even earthworms died out (66). This was also the time when the Old Kingdom of Egypt collapsed and villages in ancient Palestine were abandoned. It corresponds with a cold snap that drastically changed global climates, reducing rainfall in dry areas so severely that many forms of life simply disappeared for a time (72). The emerging historical record of human societies on the changing landscape of our planet begins to show that "Nature" is far more dynamic and dangerous than nostalgic or escapist pastoral habits might lull us into thinking. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and "The Lament for Akkad" express a grim Darwinian understanding that violent change and death are central to the natural world, and that we humans must respect our fragile membership within it (See Love, 83-88; and Diamond). ■

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## CULTURE AND CULTIVATION

### PROLEGOMENA TO A PHILOSOPHY OF AGRICULTURE

#### Ted Toadvine

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With few exceptions, academic philosophers have had little to say about agriculture, at least during the past 150 years or so. One such exception is a small book from the 1960s entitled *Roots in the Soil: An Introduction to Philosophy of Agriculture*, the preface of which begins with these words: "One of the striking features of the history of philosophy . . . is the almost total absence of reflection on agriculture, agrarianism, and the significance of farm labor" (Hill and Stuermann, ix). Paul Thompson, the author of another notable exception in the recent literature, puts the point more colorfully:

While sociology, economics, history, and literature tolerate rural studies, philosophy does not. Farming is like farting in most philosophical circles: one avoids mentioning it as assiduously as one avoids doing it (Thompson, 49).

But, to be more precise, the recent avoidance of farming as a topic for philosophical inquiry is an Anglo-American aversion. In the historical section of *The Second Sex*, French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir devotes an entire section to the "Early Tillers of the Soil," arguing there that agriculture marks a turning point in masculine self-awareness and control over nature, leading to private property, cultural institutions, and a new temporal self-understanding. Although she is rarely granted this honor, I believe these pages justify identifying Beauvoir as the first ecofeminist in our contemporary sense of

the word. According to Beauvoir, "all nature seemed to [the early agriculturalist] like a mother: the land is woman and in woman abide the same dark powers of the earth" (Beauvoir, 68). Although other thinkers have suggested that the original agricultural societies were matriarchal in character, Beauvoir denies any golden age of matriarchal power since, in her view, political power has always been masculine: "In spite of the fecund powers that pervade her, man remains woman's master as he is the master of the fertile earth; she is fated to be subjected, owned, exploited like the nature whose magical fertility she embodies" (Beauvoir, 73). Agriculture, then, is exploitation, perhaps in its most fundamental form; and this exploitation is symbolically and historically inseparable from the exploitation of women. On Beauvoir's interpretation, agriculture marks the development of culture, while women find themselves on the side of nature, the Other.

We find the opposite interpretation of agriculture just a few years later in Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology":

The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In sowing grain it places seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase.

But meanwhile even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which *sets upon* nature. It sets upon it in the sense of challenging it. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. (Heidegger, 320)

For Heidegger, the peasant farmer is on the side of nature; he does not *challenge* nature but works together with it. The break from nature is a function of the setting-in-order, the enframing of nature apparent in contemporary agri-business. We see here the agrarian strain of thought in Heidegger, along with its politically reactionary overtones.

Beauvoir and Heidegger locate agriculture at different points on the nature-culture spectrum. Or, rather, agriculture lies at the juncture of nature and culture but, for each, it faces the opposite direction. This ambivalence is apparent in the shared etymological origin of our terms “culture” and “cultivation.” Both have their root in the Latin *cultus*, “tilled or cultivated,” the past participle of *colō* /*colçre*, to cultivate or till the soil. Although the primary sense of the verb was agricultural, its derivative senses are also relevant: to *inhabit* [a place], to *practice or cultivate* [one’s pursuits], or to *worship* [the gods]. These different senses are reflected in the derived noun, *cultus*, referring not only to cultivation in the agricultural sense, but also to training, style of dress, refinement, sophistication, and civilization. Except for the religious sense, culture as worship, which became obsolete in English after the 15<sup>th</sup> century (but remains in our word “cult”), our current terms “culture” and “cultivation” retain these many figurative echoes. They also clearly retain the interesting double sense or ambiguity of the original: On the one hand, cultivation is the dirty work of tilling the soil. This is what those sweaty farmers do out in the fields, outside of town, far from the opera house and the fine dining establishments. On the other hand, “cultivation” is sophistication, refinement, gentility, keeping your hands clean, pursuing the life of the mind, acting civilized. The terms “culture” and “cultivation” harbor the seed of an entire series of oppositions like mind vs. body, city vs. country, theory vs. practice, culture vs. nature. *Cultus*, our Latin starting-point, is related to *culter*, blade, as in the blade of the plow. This is a blade that cuts two ways.

This strange ambivalence of “culture/cultivation” results from its situation as the fundamental boundary, the mediating point or site of passage, between nature and culture. In justifying their call for a philosophy of agriculture, Hill and Stuermann make this point:

the complex superstructure of a sophisticated, technological civilization rests upon that group of workers who handle the soil and deal with nature’s resources

and who are, therefore, an indispensable link between the level of industrialized, urban civilization and the riches and resources of nature from which humane culture springs. (Hill and Stuermann, xi)

This position is stated more plainly by classical scholar Stephanie Nelson in her examination of the metaphysics of farming in Hesiod and Vergil:

To discuss our relation to “nature” is to discuss the interconnection of society, wild nature, and domestic nature. It is, in other words, to discuss farming, since farming is where nature and culture meet. (Nelson, 152).

Seen from the side of nature, cultivation is the first and essential step toward civilization, the fundamental human manipulation of nature that makes all later technological and social development possible. But seen from the side of “culture,” the farmer is on the outside, out in the natural world. Leaving the city for the farm is a “return to nature,” to a “natural” way of life. Agriculture is at the edge—the margin, the barbarian frontier—of culture. This Janus-headed quality is a consequence of farming’s situation as a fundamental boundary or threshold. In a sense, agriculture is the excluded center of culture, the supplement that founds the system, the outside that makes the constitution of the inside possible.

While, from the perspective of culture, agriculture is the Other, the excluded, it is simultaneously the condition for the possibility of civilization as we know it. This is perhaps a point that seems too obvious to warrant mention. “First, there must be food,” Aristotle tells us when enumerating the functions of a state, and thus there must be farmers to procure it (*Politics*, 1328b6). Rousseau writes that, “for the philosopher, it is iron and wheat that have civilized men and ruined the human race” (Rousseau, 51-52). Agriculture, for Rousseau, makes possible the first large-scale cooperative efforts of human technology and the first division of labor. This moment marks the introduction of inequality into nature, since it leads with inevitability toward the division and accumulation of property. While Rousseau’s speculations often fall short of anthropological accuracy, he is not alone in identifying agriculture as the crucial step that marks the historical and technological dawn of our culture, nor alone in condemning this beginning. For Daniel Quinn, whose recent string of ecologically-minded “novels” has attracted a cult following, the neolithic agricultural revolution represents the parting of ways in human societies: while the “leavers,” the world’s vanishing hunter-gatherer societies, continue the traditions of human life handed down through millions of years of cultural acquisition, the “taker” society, having crossed the spiritual and mental

threshold of the agricultural revolution, practice a massive cultural amnesia designed to obliterate any recollection of pre-agricultural human life. The transition to “taker” life represents, for Quinn, the crossing of a fundamental spiritual and mental “border” (Quinn 1992, 1996).

The question of agriculture, then, is more than one environmental issue among others, since it raises in a profound fashion the fundamental problem of environmental philosophy: the relation between human culture and more-than-human nature. Agriculture has often shouldered the blame for the very origin of this split, and it has somehow leant itself to interpretation in strongly religious terms. As we cast our glance back at the dawn of our culture, the Czech phenomenologist Erazim Kohák notes, “the transition to the pastoral/agricultural mode of sustenance might well seem like the original sin, a step from the Garden of Eden directly to Broadway and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street at 1:00 a.m. on a hot Friday night” (Kohák, 158). Daniel Quinn, in fact, takes the association of the agricultural revolution with the story of the Fall quite literally, reading the Cain and Abel story as a piece of ancient war propaganda. On his reading, the murder of Abel symbolizes the slaughter of Semitic herders by Caucasian agriculturalists expanding their territory. To non-agriculturalists, Quinn suggests, the agricultural way of life must have seemed like a curse, like a punishment for the original sin. This original sin is our culture’s claim to have the knowledge of the gods, to be in a position to decide who should eat and who should starve, who should live and who should die. The curse of Cain is the curse of “taker” culture, the curse of agriculture, our curse. Whereas the rest of the natural community accepts, by default, a law of limited competition, the underlying premise of our agricultural practices is to wage total war on any creature that resists our aspiration to reproduce without limit. We carry out this war of “totalitarian agriculture” by annihilating our competitors, destroying their food, and denying them access to food, with the end goal of converting all resources available on the earth to the production of food for humans. The same desire for absolute control over our own destinies that drove the neolithic revolution should be recognizable as the underlying motivation for our entire technological civilization.

The philosophical problem of agriculture is not a technical problem; it is distinct from such questions as whether we can feed all of the starving people in the world, or whether we can make our agricultural practices sustainable while continuing to maximize production. The question concerns instead whether such technological progress would count, in a deeper sense, as real success – whether, as Paul Shepard contends, the agricultural way of life would remain only

the “next-to-best of all possible worlds” (Shepard, 107n50). The philosophical problem of agriculture cannot be solved by developing new technological fixes, since it concerns the meaning of the agricultural way of life, the relationship between agriculture and human self-understanding, and the relationship between nature and culture.

Seen in this light, the problem of agriculture rejoins the larger debate among environmental theorists concerning the “place” of humans within nature. In the rhetoric of Rousseau, Shepard, and Quinn, agriculture marks a “fall” from “nature” into “culture.” But what do these authors understand by “nature” and “culture,” and what ideal relation do they envision between these terms? William Cronon finds in such condemnations of agriculture the traces of what he has called the “wilderness myth”: “nature, to be natural, must also be pristine—remote from humanity and untouched by our common past” (Cronon, 83). As illustration of the wilderness myth at work, Cronon cites remarks about agriculture by Earth First! founder Dave Foreman:

Before agriculture was midwived in the Middle East, humans were in the wilderness. We had no concept of “wilderness” because everything was wilderness and *we were a part of it*. But with irrigation ditches, crop surpluses, and permanent villages, we became *apart from* the natural world. . . . Between the wilderness that created us and the civilization created by us grew an ever-widening rift (Foreman, 69; cited in Cronon, 83).

The divorce of humans from nature that Foreman attributes to agriculture leaves no possibility for reunion — not unless we wish, as Cronon puts it, to “follow the hunter-gatherers back into a wilderness Eden and abandon virtually everything that civilization has given us” (Cronon, 83-84).

From a practical perspective, such a position offers no more than a “self-defeating counsel of despair,” according to Cronon: “if nature dies because we enter it, then the only way to save nature is to kill ourselves” (Cronon, 83). The defeatism of this position stems directly from the exclusive disjunction it establishes between nature and culture. “Real” nature excludes human culture, and consequently agriculture, by definition; on the other hand, “civilized” human beings and their activities are no longer a genuine part of the natural world. Black-and-white metaphysical categories here come to the service of a political agenda, but what is the rationale for cutting reality at these joints?

In taking the ideal of “pure” nature as our standard, Cronon suggests, we turn a blind eye to the environmentally harmful practices of our everyday lives, the “middle ground” where we actually live. We also denigrate the lives and work

of those people who actually make a living from the land, whether indigenous inhabitants or “country people” who “generally know far too much about working the land to regard *unworked* land as their ideal” (Cronon, 79). Anti-agriculturalists, by ignoring the actual experience of farmers, have missed those aspects of nature that may be disclosed only through such experience, such as the love for and knowledge of a particular place that Wendell Berry finds at the heart of stewardship for the land, or the sacramental value of indigenous foods and the respectful care devoted to propagating them described by Gary Paul Nabhan. What we make of such examples depends in large part on whether we leave open the possibility of a fruitful interaction between culture and nature, humans and the land. Even if there are genuine differences between the processes of spontaneous nature and those that are guided by human interests and interactions, agriculture marks a threshold where a new hybrid may emerge, where we may perhaps be able to speak of a co-evolution that is no more ours than nature’s own. It is toward an investigation of such mutual exchange that a philosophy of agriculture must turn, which gives it a privileged position in articulating a new language for that “middle ground” where nature and culture meet. ■

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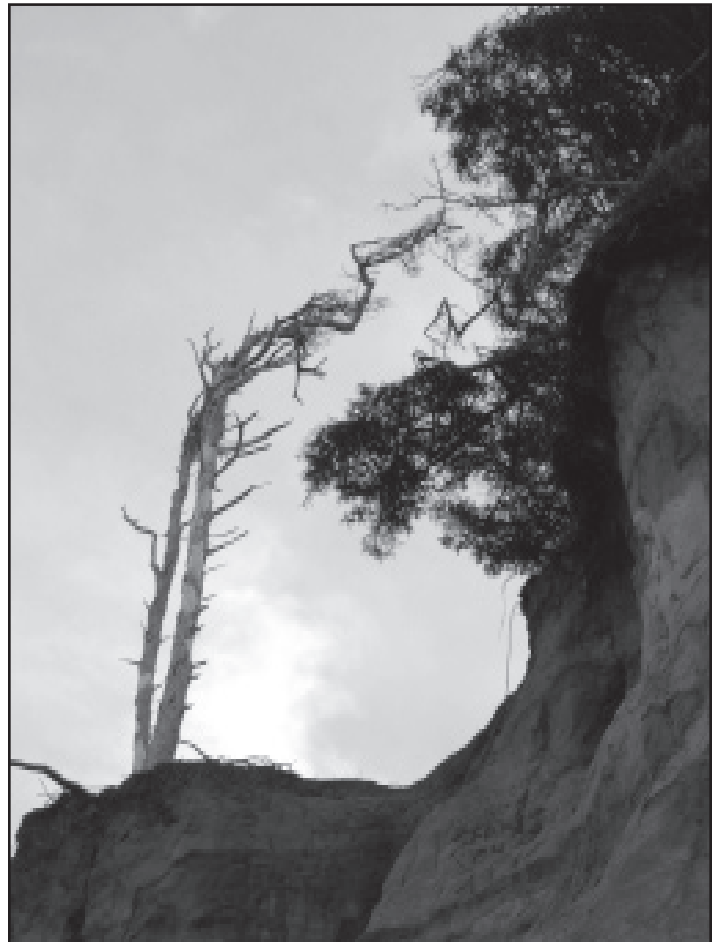


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