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POWER TO DESIGN

Keynote Speaker: Paola Antonelli

Maryhelen: I would now like to introduce Paola Antonelli. She is a writer, a teacher, a senior curator, a promoter, a cultural critic and I think most particularly; a very careful observer with the ways in which design helps shape and is shaped by culture. She is on a worldwide mission to introduce and explain design to the world, to promote a better understanding of the role of design in culture, and to celebrate design as an art. In that pursuit, Paola is a senior curator in the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, senior fellow at the Royal College of Art in London, recipient of the 2006 Design Mind Award from Cooper-Hewitt and National Design Museum, author of many books about design…including *Humble Masterpieces: Everyday Marvels of Design* as well as curator of her recent and most heralded important exhibition to date, “Design and the Elastic Mind.” She is also a member of the School of Visual Arts faculty in the MFA Design Criticism Department. Her topic today is “Power to Design,” Would you please welcome Paola!

[applause]

Paola: Thank you very much, Maryhelen. You know it’s funny because I was telling Maryhelen how almost impossible it is to, for an Italian, to understand the educational system in the United States and the liberal arts. It’s almost like the translation of names of flowers and fish, it is always impossible. The liberal arts are probably what we have been brought up in. Even though I studied architecture in Italy, in Milan in particular, we were 15,000 students only in architecture, only in Milan, we of course, mostly learned the theoretical cultural historical part of architecture and not the practical one. And that’s what, I think gave so many pseudo architects in Italy such cultural mélange and the possibility of becoming great writers, fashion designers, pizza makers instead of architects. So, I’m one of them.

[laughter]

Paola: The title, “Power to Design” is very simple. I believe that design is the highest form of human creative expression, I do. You can throw me tomatoes if you’re not really strong art believers, but I think that design condenses the best of art and the best of the social sciences and the best of reality checks, and that’s why I’m so vehement about pushing its importance and making sure that people understand how relevant it is. That’s easier in a place like Italy where designing is normally chewed, you know. They chew it normal. When you go to the hairdresser in Italy, you find *People, US Magazine* and then you find all this highfalutin architecture and design and so it’s part of the discussion. When I got to New York in ’94, I found myself in a place where design was considered a luxury, there was no design critic in any of the major publications. The
New York Times to this day has critics for theater, dance, painting and sculpture, photography, you name it, even perfume, but not a design critic. The same can be said about all the other publications. It’s great, because I found myself with a big gaping hole to fill. I just started really pushing it. In Italy, architecture and design are considered part of the same genealogic tree, so it was quite a natural move to design that I was asked to make when I started MoMA in ‘94. Usually the way design is present in society, celebrated very often like in the business pages of magazines, sometimes in the decoration pages, MoMA was a precursor, because from the very start, Alfred Barr, Jr., who was the founding director in 1929 included architecture and design as part of the Museum of Modern Art. He had just gotten back from a grand tour of Europe in ‘29. He had visited the Bauhaus, which was a glaring example of how the unity of the arts was able or would be able to shape the future of the world. At the Bauhaus, he saw how architects and designers would come together with artists poets, and everybody together would collaborate without a distinction. I don’t know if any of you saw the Bauhaus Show at MoMA last year, but truly nobody would call himself an artist versus a designer; that we’re all doing whatever was an experiment and a valuable experiment at that time. So Alfred Barr started with that idea and since the beginning at MoMA, you had six departments; well, almost since the beginning there are a few like, historical mixing and matching and emissions and you know, it’s always less simple than it seems. But still, since the beginning you had painting and sculpture, of course; prints and illustrated books, of course; drawings. But then also photography, film and architecture and design – we’re talking ‘29, so really it was quite a foresight that Alfred Barr had, and Philip Johnson were one of the first curators in the Department of Architecture and Design. What I’m showing to you here is an example of an exhibition that set a milestone. I believe that the Museum of Modern Art has as its task. It’s an educational institution: our mission is educational. But also, when it comes to art and architecture, we are responsible for setting new benchmarks. As the world evolves, as technology evolves, technology is so fundamental together with the liberal arts for architecture and design, MoMA sets new benchmarks. The digital revolution happens; let’s deal with it. The post digital revolution happens; okay, what’s the new benchmark? In 1934, Philip Johnson set a new benchmark for design by showing naked in all their stunning platonic beauty, as he said, parts of machinery on white pedestals against white walls, as if they were Brancusi sculptures. You had propeller blades, coils, the famous ball bearing that has come to the fine art collection. It was a real shock for the visitors, because nobody had ever looked at things, at pieces of engines that way. It was a necessary distance that Philip created between the viewer and the object that led and pushed the viewers to have more reverence and more respect for design because it was presented as if it were art. There’s a language in exhibitions that makes whatever idea curators have very powerful. And those ideas are so powerful that they continue along the years. Interestingly enough, what Philip began with in machine art, we’re continuing today. We keep adding pieces to the collection, like this blade
of a jet engine by GE made of carbon fiber and titanium. Or to the right hand side, the diagram of a computer microchip that was done by IBM. It’s actually a little old. It’s 10 years old. So you see, we continue those ideas because, ideas are much more long lasting than styles, than any kind of vagaries of history. Ideas remain, especially if they are informed by a strong belief in the idea of modern. And you know, modern is objective. It’s an attribute that we have to deal with. We’re called the Museum of Modern Art and it’s a blessing because we can sometimes be arbitrary. We can tell people this is not really for the collection, because you know, modern and instead, sometimes it’s a curse, because we need to update it continuously. The best definition of modern I ever heard comes from Kirk Varnedoe who was Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, a wonderful curator. It was not his own quote and I don’t remember who’s it is and Kirk passed away, and I can’t find the original author, but he told me that “modern is everything that does not hide the process of its making”. So it’s something that shows the idea even in the final object. You see the idea shine, you can divine the process, you can understand the inspiration. There’s a generosity of sharing that you don’t find in certain post-modernism, which is instead just like completely made up with heavy, max factor pancake and you cannot get to the mind of the designer. So following this idea of trying to make, to pick objects where everything shines through...the process shines through. When I came to MoMA in ‘94, I started working on an exhibition about materials. In a way, it continued the idea of machine art. It was about revealing the guts of design and at the same time it was about making design exciting for the public. This was mutant materials in contemporary design where plastics look like glass and wood behaved like foam, and objects were made with advanced materials or were treated so as to make all materials look new. It was a very good exhibition for designers because they could feel part of a revolution that was happening in the engineering of materials. It was good for the public because the public could see that the designers not only curly cued chairs that cost too much money, but it’s also new evolutions and progress. And always with an eye to aesthetics because we’re still at the Museum of Modern Art. It’s not only about meaning, it’s not only about political and historical relevance; it’s also about aesthetics or lack thereof so long as there’s intention. I don’t have to tell you, you’re all versed in this particular part of the aesthetics discourse, but one of to the other...I’m highlighting the work of the curator in trying to establish new benchmarks and work in a very opportunistic way. As I mentioned to you, it was about explaining to a New York and worldwide audience the importance of design by all means necessary. The second show, it was not really the second; I’m not showing you all the exhibitions; just a few that are introductory to this idea of: design is relevant to society. The second show was a monographic show. I don’t like to do monographic shows, especially when the artists are alive, I’m sure you understand that, but in this particular case, it was really, really a good opportunity because Achille Castiglioni is one of the most important designers. Achille Castiglioni designed this lamp, the Arco lamp. It’s the one that has a marble base and throws the light source 7
feet away. He was a great teacher; he was my teacher, but also he was great because...we’re talking about the idea and the process shining through. Behind every single object, there was a story and a story that could be told, and in that particular case, we hired an illustrator, Steven Guarnaccia, to make labels that had an illustration showing how objects came about. It was once again, educational, didactic without being heavy. Then came exhibitions like “Project 66” with the Campana Brothers and Ingo Maurer. That was another experiment. Sometimes when you work in a museum, you have to catch whatever opportunities you have to have a gallery and a budget. So sometimes, you fit your ideas to what’s available and the project series, not [UI] Law, [UI] was open and so I had forever wanted to show the work of Ingo Maurer, who’s the most amazing lighting designer alive, German, now 78. And then I wanted to show the Campana Brothers that nobody had ever heard of, from São Paulo, Brazil in their late 30’s. I wanted to show them both and I said you know what, I’m going to show them together. What I did was I almost made a horizon line. Everything below the horizon: gravity, the furniture was the Campana Brothers; everything above: lighting was Ingo. They didn’t know each other, they didn’t really know what they had to do with each other; different generations, different geography and different education. Yet, it really worked well. Sometimes you just take whatever opportunity, throwing things together and pray that it works out and it did.

[laughter]

Paola: So, but that and, and...usually the public in the states...so generous. I mean, compared to Europe, where they’re really mean...

[laughter]

Paola: So generous. You can get away with so much and so, these were the works. You see all of the Ingo Maurer lighting – very beautiful and then the Campana Brothers chairs. You might have seen their work. Sometimes names are not familiar, but objects are. After that, more exhibitions really involved in what was going on in the world at that time. You’re looking here at a picture from Workspheres. Workspheres happened in 2001, before September, and it had been in [UI] station, let’s say, since 1999. During the time of the dot.com boom and it was about how people were changing the way they worked. MoMA has been involved throughout its history, social issues from dealing with the CT to change the laws for low cost housing; it always had a very, very deep involvement. There was a series of shows that were called” Good Design Under $1, Under $5.” Then there was “Good Designing, Times of War” where certain metals were not available, so not doing anything new here. It’s about marrying the fine arts and design and architecture with real life, which is what Alfred Barr had in mind by putting design and architecture in the museum. And it’s the whole idea of the Bauhaus. Workspheres was in that vein. It was the beginning of wireless technology. For instance, we all had the promise of wireless technology, but nothing ever worked, right? Or you were traveling and thinking you could link to your server, but you had the wrong plug or you had to dial into the server and it
wouldn’t answer. It was just lots of promise and lots of frustration, lots of myths about how we will work in the future. What we decided to do was to commission certain projects that really responded to some of these issues. This, for instance, was the work of Naoto Fukasawa a Japanese designer to whom we had assigned the task of dealing with cubicles. Let’s say you have a cubicle; there’s nothing you can do about it. It’s horrible. It’s suffocating. What do you do? He invented this personal sky. It was the beginning of OLED technology, which is that edited screens technology costs less and can have a bigger span. The idea is you would put an OLED screen on top of your cubicle, little breathing space and then you could project onto it a sky that...let’s say your friend would send to you a sunset from Hawaii in motion or whatever sky you preferred. You would have your own hole in the cubicle. And there were other commissions like that. There was one about working at home. You know the theory about working at home at that time was that it was really dangerous, because you wouldn’t be able to keep your family life separate from your professional life. You had to put your computer on a timer so it would turn off at 9 p.m. and it wouldn’t turn on until the morning. And there were all these strange myths that were very, very funny that were then completely put to size by the dot.com bust just a year later. It was an interesting time. It was about MoMA harvesting, some were calling...harnessing the best minds in the world because of its authority and asking them to work on real issues that people had. “Safe” was another similar situation. Funny story about “Safe” is that the exhibition that was dealing with how design is, about protecting and preventing problems for people was actually barred in 1999. At that time, it was called emergency and it was all about emergency equipment. It was about rescue, triage centers. It was about ambulances, fire trucks, and it was going really, really well until September 11th happened. And for some reason, I could not deal with that exhibition anymore. I was dealing in the real world with all the objects that were in my checklist on the computer and they were bloodied and dusted and it was real. It was almost like the psychological shock whereby I dropped the show and didn’t want to deal with it anymore, until I picked it up again two years later. But at that time I had gone through what all New Yorker’s had gone through, the strange cycle of despair, depression, and then picking it up again and all of a sudden becoming more optimistic. So, instead of the half empty glass of emergency, became the half full glass of safety. So, it’s being proactive instead of being reactive, and design is about this. I used to say that designers almost take a Hippocratic Oath. I mean even when they show something dystopic, they always have some kind of improvement or progress in mind whether they show tough love or not, they’re always going in a constructive direction. “Safe” was showing all examples of protective and comfort in design in a very amoral way. There were protective and safety objects like the United Nations high commission for refugees, TARP’s and there were band aid for blisters for Upper East Side ladies. It was really about showing the whole gamut of possibilities and how all designers really work in the same direction. Then came “Design and the Elastic Mind.” “Design and the Elastic Mind” represents a need
that curators and the public had to turn to a new page for design because of so many different reasons: the digital revolution, first and foremost; but then also the limitedness of resources, the environmental crisis; the economic crisis. But more and more designers have had to move away from objects. They’re hard to produce, there’s not much money going around, you have to be careful about resources; there needs to be a movement towards a more conceptual and a more critical and sometimes a more immaterial and digital form of design. “Design and the Elastic Mind” came from the idea that what designers do really well is they take major revolutions in science and technology and they transform them into everyday objects that you and I can use. For instance, the Internet used to be lines of code. Only a few scientists, academics and the military could use it because they knew the coding. Then the first designers of the Mosaic interface came about and Tim Berners-Lee with the WorldWideWeb, and all of a sudden you had an interface with buttons and windows and hyperlinks and you and I could use too. That’s what they do, they make things from a microwave oven, which is like a little nuclear reactor at home basically…

[laughter]

Paola: It’s all about adapting things for our life. It’s really quite interesting, but that’s what they do. The thought behind” Design and the Elastic Mind” was: what if we short circuit? Designers have always worked on scientific revolutions, but there’s always been technology in between. What if we put designers and scientists together? Is it going to be like a fusion, like a nuclear fusion? It was an experiment and it really worked out, because the exhibition gave birth to a series of new collaborations, and also made a whole generation of designers feel validated. That’s what I’ve recognized as one of the most important roles that MoMA had. Designers come to me and teachers come to me and say we felt that somebody was recognizing what we do. The feeling of validation, when you get a little bit outside of your normal disciplinary boundaries, is really important. It’s a role and it’s a task that we have and that we always must remember.

“Design and the Elastic Mind,” had a Nano physicist working with architects on a new pattern that is self-generative based on Nano structure, structural algorithms, which could become a façade of a building or an urban plan. This idea of the indifference to scale comes from fractal geometry. You had examples of plants that were really growing according to sensors placed outside MoMA that would measure temperature and precipitation. The plants would grow with it, but they would project digital plants and people would pollinate them by moving them, by just walking in front of them. It was this idea of bringing together worlds, the digital and the physical, science and design, working at scales that were so small, like the Nano scale that cannot even be optically reproduced. And, then moving to the scale of the human beings with examples…I’ll go into more details later. But it was really odd stuff. Usually when you think of design, you think of chairs, you think of cars, you think of posters, well not really. There was a live coat made of my stem cells. There was a façade that was reactive. There were other
examples of Nano technology. It was not your usual type of design. And also, when you got to the large scale, there were many examples of visualization. Visualization is a new direction for design that is extremely important because the more our computing capabilities increase, the more we need to deal with the data that are rendered back by the computer. A whole generation of designers, architects and artists are working together on this field of visualization design which is extremely interesting. From “Design and the Elastic Mind” came the realization that there are many new fields and directions for design. There are many different fields for design that are open right now. One is Nano design. As I was mentioning to you, many scientists are right now working at the Nanoscale and they’re actually discovering the pleasure of design. Scientists have always been very weird, because they’ve always rejected the idea of aesthetics. When you see a science presentation, usually it’s the ugliest background of PowerPoint that you can find…the most squalid typeface. They’re afraid that if they are too cute, they’re not taken seriously. Now, instead, they’re discovering real muscular aesthetics at the Nanoscale and it is really interesting to see how designers and scientists could come together. Up here, you see a new protein marker by two biologists from UCLA. Usually protein markers are florescent dyes, and instead in this case, they also have an alphabet soup so you can mark proteins much more precisely. They were in the exhibition next to this typeface designer from Israel, who if you go on his website, he’s wearing a lab coat and he’s pretending to be a scientist. This is one of his projects in which he said, he postulated that he could insert a different letter, a different typeface in each spermatozoa so that each ejaculation would be like a different poem.

[laughter]

Paola: A completely naughty idea, but you should have seen the scientist and the designer coming together and being so happy to be next to each other…hugging and exchanging cards. I don’t know if they’ll ever do anything together, but still, maybe this project will happen, we’ll see. There are so many possibilities and there are students trying to figure out scenarios when Nano technology becomes reality. What’s that going to mean for the differences between classes? I mean, it’s really interesting. The rich people with Nano technology will find new cosmetic rituals, will have hair growing on their nails and their eyelashes will grow long. And poor people will transform their bodies into factories of spare parts for the rich. We’ve seen it so much in science fiction. I’ve seen students make videos that are far more, creepier and horrible…

[laughter]

Paola: …than any sci-fi movie you’ve ever seen. I was telling you about tissue design. Of course you can really think of tissue as a material for design. You can have a wedding ring that’s made of your loved one, bone cells, just a little prick here, take out a few bone cells, it hurts for a second and then you make a culture and you get the whole wedding ring. But the most interesting thing is that there’s this group in Australia that’s been
able to develop cells in vitro. They made the first in vitro meat patty; very disgusting, but its meat that’s grown in vitro. If you have meat in vitro; then, are you still going to be vegetarian? Is it because of killing the cow or not? And what’s a steak going to look like in the future? It might look like this if it can have any shape. The most interesting object in the show was on the right hand side and it was a coat made of mice cells, stem cells that were actually growing in the exhibition. At some point, I had to stop the cells, I had to kill, because it was growing too fast. I didn’t sleep for two nights at the idea of having to stop the nutrients to kill a coat that was completely artificial to begin with.

[laughter]

Paola: That’s when art is really successful, right? When it keeps you up for two nights, even though you’ve always been pro-choice and pro this and pro that, and all of a sudden, a little mice stem cell coat drives you nuts. So…

[laughter]

Paola: …you know, more power to art…and to design. And you know, we were talking, about nature and this is the theme for your whole conference. Visualization happens today also in natural phenomena. The computer paradoxically has brought us so much closer to nature than ever because we’ve always tried to find out secrets from nature since the Middle Ages. Since mankind was born, we’ve tried to understand how nature builds because it always builds more economically and more elegantly and more efficiently than any of us can imagine. The computer has brought us closer. There are several examples, they’re still experimental, of not only bio-mimicry, but also an attempt to understand how nature truly builds. This is a chair. It’s a precious chair. It costs a lot of money but it’s still a very interesting experiment, because it’s made with software that was developed by the car industry to mimic what nature would do if given a certain set of tensions and weights, it had to develop bones, or it had to develop joints to sustain that framework. It’s really interesting. What you see here is what nature would do if it had to build branches or bones to sustain the weight of a person seated. You can imagine how the software could be used. It’s really quite interesting, there are many, many possibilities. One of the most interesting… directions for design right now, which brings it so much closer to art is this discipline called Design for Debate or Critical Design. It’s basically design that doesn’t have an immediate application, but rather it’s a commentary either on a new technology or about a possible danger of certain tectonic movements in society. It’s more of a design that is meant to raise questions. I know people say that design is problem solving. What this is, is a problem making design. Some of these designers get hired by companies to be their internal thorn in their side. It’s very interesting, just the idea that you become the conscious or you become the devil’s advocate or you become the problem maker as the designer, is quite beautiful. You see here, for instance, it’s about thinking really of the future. For instance, now that the computer and all other devices are such a big part of our lives, when we die we don’t leave behind only clothes, money, cars if we
had them we also leave our computer, all of our pictures, all of our music, all of our letters. What if we could organize, if we had time to organize all of that into this little digital urn before we die.

[laughter]

Paola: These things that you see here, they’re beautifully crafted by hand in wood and lacquer; they’re basically hard drives. They contain your whole computer and after you pass, your loved ones can put that beautiful urn next to their computer and by blue tooth, puff, your desktop appears.

[laughter]

Paola: It’s funny, but it’s beautiful. Or, you see that battery on the right hand side, that’s a little creepier, but the idea is that you can take the gastric juices of a corpse and they can become…they can power a battery. So your loved one can live on as pure energy…so this one has inscribed: John [UI], the year of birth, the year of death, shine on, Dad.

[laughter]

Paola: It can be a part of a flashlight. The designers also recommended it can be part of a vibrator.

[laughter]

Paola: It’s this idea that they can live on. These are kind of beautiful ideas that are important to make companies and to make us think. It’s the role of art. Art lately has lost a little bit of compass. I mean there is some art that has a very precise direction, but sometimes, I stroll around Chelsea and I get progressively more and more depressed. I guess it’s because I am a designer and an architect. I want results. But still, I don’t understand where it’s going? There is a vector in design that helps you understand when you’re so limited as I am, helps you understand better where not only design, but also life and society is going. Interestingly, more and more of the design that we acquire at MoMA is not an object anymore. For instance, this beautiful thing that was part of “Design and the Elastic Mind” was by Graffiti Research Lab. They were fellows at I-Beam, the digital art center in New York City that devised a way to write graffiti on buildings with a laser pen that is temporary. You use the building as a screen, you write your thing and then if you click bottom right, it just disappears. It’s very fun and totally non-invasive. Well, you might not want to have your eyes stare into it, but still…non-invasive, temporary and still. Whenever they go to a city and start doing that, graffiti is still such a subversive act that the police comes and then everything happens. So, how do you acquire this? We had to acquire the video; the equipment is not that interesting, so we acquired the video. Right now we’re looking into acquiring 27 digital typefaces and in a way, the Acquisition’s Committee has already said yes two months ago, and for two months, we’ve been dealing with lawyers from Microsoft, Apple, EMI Gray, to actually revise the license to include the words: gallery and museum collection. It’s interesting the kind of trouble that you have to go through when your collection advances with the world. We’re also looking into
acquiring video games. My assistant is already freaking out because that’s going to be maybe, even worse than digital typeface. Pac Man will be one. What we would like to do is to acquire more and more liminal spaces. Liminal spaces – you know what that means so I don’t have to explain to you. You realize that more and more, we are inside our computer, inside our telephone. We’re really moving in another space in a very comfortable way, and we mix reality with whatever is on the screen in a dangerously easy way. What you see on the right hand side here is a very, very funny game developed by Area/Code. Area/Code is a company here in New York that does mixed reality games. You have a Motorola phone and you see it’s an old one and you see the streets of the West Village on your phone. It’s like a Pac Man game so you and your friend are the two little yellow dots, and you are in the real world, and then there’s this skull monster that wants to eat you. He does not exist in the real world, he’s only on the screen and yet, you’re running for your life…

[laughter]

Paola: …completely terrified, because you know this imaginary skull wants to eat you. I would be terrified too. We fill in the gaps. We need that kind of imperfection to be filled in and we’re very comfortable in this space. I very often use this slide. It is by Area/Code and it shows that there’s the real world, physical billboards, everything physical. Then, there’s the digital world and the sky of the digital ads and everything that goes with it on the Internet. And then there’s the world in between, which, right now is still represented by those QR tabs, with those codes in the middle. But soon technology will become transparent. That’s what all technologists are working towards. Then we will be in that middle world very comfortably all the time. More and more designers and architects are working for that particular goal. And also, we have to work on it as curators, because that’s where design and architecture will go in the future. That kind of in between world works also for very real problems. For instance, there are many designers right now that are working not really on objects, but rather on systems. This is the work by Participle, which is a company in London that does social programs. In this case, the program is The Circle Movement. It’s a way to help elderly people who have lost their companion regain a social life, because very often, when it happens when you remain alone, you stay home, you don’t want to go out. You’re a mixture of scared, depressed and disenchanted. These designers have devised a way to teach elderly people to be on Skype, to use their cell phone in a very easy way so that they create a network that is at first, on screen and then can become real. The digital becomes a re-introduction into the physical, and that’s also why I’m working a lot on impossible acquisitions.

[laughter]

Paola: We acquired the @ sign in the spring and it was a big deal. The big deal was not to acquire it because it belongs to nobody, it’s on the wall, it’s yours, it’s mine, you know. Our job is to have a checklist of the best design in the world so the @ sign is part of it. The 747 might seem
different, but it’s the same because it’s another impossible acquisition. It’s another object that cannot be had. It doesn’t fit in the museum. So I’m thinking of how to acquire it by leaving it with an airline and just saying that’s the MoMA plane. It’s like you have to be fair, it has to be really impossible, right? It must not be a question of money. You cannot tag an object and say it’s in the collection just because it costs too much, that would be unfair. But, if it really is too big or is everybody’s or it is in space, like a satellite, then you can tag it. It’s this idea that collecting doesn’t mean possessing physically and taking out of the public domain, but rather it can be sharing. It’s just about making the statement about the quality of an object. The next show that we’re working on, is called, “Talk to Me.” It’s a show about the communication between people and objects. There are a lot of interfaces that range from the bar code to the nutrition facts label, which are great examples of design; clear, elegant, useful, ubiquitous, universal. That’s what we want from design. I was telling you before about certain interfaces that change the world. You’re looking at the World Wide Web on the left and the first graphic cues are interfaced on the right. That was Xerox. Of course, Xerox always developed great technology and then loses them to somebody else.

[laughter]

Paola: So, it became the technology. It became the interface for the first Apple computers. And then we’re looking also at interfaces that let the whole world speak with you. There are more and more buildings that have facades that are very communicative. Of course, some are only sounds and lights; others instead, really send you messages like this beautiful building in Graz, Austria. Visualization is really the future. It’s interesting because when you plunge into a new design realm, you find the same kind of rate of quality versus mediocrity that you find in other design realms. When I say mediocrity, it doesn’t necessarily mean bad, it just means standard. It’s difficult sometimes to find the peaks and the valley so you look for the peaks and you find certain people that are able to synthesize scientific precision and great artistic talent. The synthesis seems to be the key word today for talent in general, in the creative field. It’s about being able to always remember the idea of beauty or as I was telling you, an aesthetic intention, because I personally love punk. It’s not beauty in the old fashioned way, but it’s the capability of making sure that any kind of design is more than the sum of its parts. You see here thousands of visualizations of the Web and these are two of the best ones. There are so many visualizations of traffic in urban cities, in urban spaces, or on the skies of the United States again, these are two of the best ones. It’s an aesthetic choice. It’s almost as if you had a palette of possibilities, and the choices are about clarity, elegance and communication. These are two great examples by Martin Wattenberg, one of the best visualization designers – this is dynamic, but it shows a computer playing chess with itself. Every time you make a move, you see all the other possible moves. This is thinking in action, which is just amazing. And that kind of marking, like tapestry on the right hand side, instead, visualizes the editing wars on certain Wikipedia entries. Every
Visualizations are also a way of looking at things from an angle that were impossible before. The column in the center is the whole movie by Hitchcock, *Vertigo*; one frame per second. You’ve never been able to see it like that before, right? And maybe you didn’t particularly care, but still…you see certain weights that you didn’t know before. For instance, there’s an area that is all red and purple and you know there is something really bad happening and it’s not *Marnie*. I remember *Marnie* with red. There’s the modulation of light and night and day. It’s really an interesting new way to achieve information and knowledge about CT. This was visualization of all the telephone, cell phone and IP; so e-mail communications in and out of New York at certain times of the day, and you can zoom in and out so you could see different parts of Queens light up at certain times of the day; whether they were communicating with Pakistan or whether they were communicating with Ecuador. It is really fascinating. On the right hand side, it’s a live visualization of online dating with all the people that are looking for mates online appearing in pink or blue balloons.

Visualization can be also a very powerful political tool. This screen doesn’t give you as much red as I have on this screen, but this is called “A Million Dollar Block Project;” it’s by Columbia University. They are a mixture of architects and designers. It shows, from public data that is available to everybody, that there are more than 300 blocks in Brooklyn alone where the government, whether it’s federal or local government, spends more than $1 million a year to either keep some inhabitants of the blocks in prison or in halfway houses. It’s almost like a passive debt. All the individuals that are not re-entered into society. You can read this data and be really outraged if you read it on a newspaper for 20 minutes; but when you see them blood red over black it doesn’t go away. Just like reportage, visualization is never objective. You can fool people into believing that its objective. The way you start the color, you pick the first comma that you use to set the tone. And it’s good to embrace it as a political tool. This is the work by Mexican designers that represented the traffic over the Tijuana/San Diego border of five different individuals over one month—all legals, still having trouble going back and forth. This is from an exhibition that was in Paris, based on the belief by Jürgen Habermas, the philosopher that mankind today is defining by migration. So it was a gorgeous visualization that showed how migrations have defined the world. Migrations that were either generated by genocides or natural disasters. It showed also, how people [UI] remittances. How people would send money home from which country to which country. So it was like a global 360 degree roundabout view of the world and how it’s evolving, because of people moving around. Going back to something serious, *SimCity*. I was telling you how important it is for us to find a way to acquire new types of design and architecture. If you think *SimCity* was one of the first games in which you could build a city, build your own space, …this is an iPad app that shows groups, social networks coming
together. The games that we see today all emanate from the first one, from *Pac Man* to *SimCity*, and also the visualizations that we see today all emanate from an older one. This is a great visualization that is called [UI] from 2004; it showed all the different Boards, Corporate Boards of the United States and then you could...you know; you could click onto each other; there was still Enron at that time if you can see. And then you would see how they were connected into governments or how different Boards were connected to each other; one member on one Board; the other on the other, and they would exchange. It was like political accusations. All of a sudden you cannot hide things anymore. They are visible. Another way to clarify where the world is going is much more, old fashioned. This is a gorgeous book by a Dutch designer that takes one pig in a farm in Holland, pig 05049 and lists all the products and objects that are made with any part of that pig – from cigarettes made with hemoglobin of the pig. These are all the different some that you can eat, some of its cartilage goes into the glaze for ceramic pieces; it goes into the paint and so on and so forth. So there’s different ways to visualize. It’s not only a computer visualization, it’s also 3D visualization. I showed you before the chair, and this is the flight of a mosquito that is made into a lamp. This is Neri Oxman’s work. She takes phenomena that occurred in nature. For instance, a particular pattern of the bark of a tree that grows in Northern climates. She extracts the mathematical algorithm, puts it in the computer and then renders it 3-dimensionally with 3D printing machines with the idea of building a dictionary of natural phenomena that can then be used in the future, for instance, to become a new façade covering for homes in Northern climates to absorb more light. It’s about, once again, taking the secrets of nature and transferring them into our built in environment, and she’s trying to do the groundwork. These examples, instead, are quite gorgeous. A visualization of a sketch; there’s a way to sketch with a laser pen and capture the sketch with a software from Japan, and then print with a 3D printer into those quite horrible, and yet, very arresting furniture. So once again, I go back to this. This is the space. The space in the middle is the one that we want to be in as designers, as architects, as curators. And, the one that we should embrace, not be fearful of. Also, I believe when we teach we educate students and young people so that they can apply the same ethic and the same aesthetic and the same kind of rigor and discipline in humanity that we use to apply in the physical world. And they will continue having new ways to visualize things. This is a visualization of the city of New York that is very close to *inception*. I’m sure you’ve seen the movie, and they will be able to really embrace this world in which there’s an augmented reality that we deal with every day. This is a building in Japan that changes its bar code so you can speak with it with your cell phone. This is actually a way that you have with bar codes to augment your own reality. Through a cell phone, you can project the Beatles that are crossing the street. And some students actually came to MoMA and put their own art inside the MoMA Galleries. This is the work of a designer, by using lenses and projections, enables you to feel really like an ant and see what an ant sees. They are quite beautiful, experiments that are, as I
told you, borderline art but always important because they bring us closer to that space in between. This work that I really love is called 5th Dimensional Camera. It’s of course, completely fictional, but it’s a way to try and give a sense of what the new physics theories about the universe are. The idea that there are 11 dimensions. You look through this particular lens and the idea is that you see the same person in all the different parallel universe and realities that she can possibly have. I don’t know if any of you watch Fringe. Fringe probably explains it better. Who watches Fringe here? Nobody. Okay; all right. So, you know what I’m talking about...Then you explain to everybody it’s the idea that there are two parallel universes at the same time. And this is a beautiful example, which I would like to end with today. All that I’m showing you might seem like flights of fancy or loose experiments or games, but in truth they all go into the big minestrone of making mankind better. I always think about it that way. This is a student from the Royal College of Art in London that’s been working a lot with scientists and really doing serious work to make sure that visualization becomes almost actualization, and of course you know all of the different phenomena of the ghost limb and the fact that you can cure that particular pain by visualizing the lost limb by using a mirror. Well, if you bring it one step further, you can actually regain a sort of completeness without pain and the feeling that you also have that limb and a certain balance in your body. It’s very interesting; that is a temporary bubble that enables you to actually connect what you visualize with some electrodes until in the end, the whole body is rebalanced as if the limb existed. So there is so much that can be achieved by being in that middle space that are really exhort as to dive into it. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Paola: Thank you...Happy to have some questions if you have any. Please.

UM1: One thing you didn’t dive into very much was the theme of the conference which is environmental and design working more towards solving the environmental or real crisis that’s right in our midst...

Paola: Well...

UM1: your views on that?

Paola: Yeah, I believe that this particular type of design is more efficient towards the environmental crisis then so much designed the labels itself green. You know the reason why I don’t usually go into green design is because you immediately get into stereotypes and sometimes half-truths. So in the new show that we’re working on, there’s a lot of environmental design in terms of monitoring and being able to be more aware of energy use, etc. But it’s never labeled as green, and the same thing here. There’s a lot of design that is about doing away with resources and kind of filling in certain gaps with immaterial and low energy uses of other resources. I just don’t like to have a category: Green because I want it to become normal, not something...you know, it’s the same argument that certain people, certain women have against women artist shows, you know. I
don’t like to ghettoize the green, because I wanted to be part of the normal data. You could say it that none of the objects that we tend to pick or almost none; are not going in that direction. I’m trying to think; even the pig book is, you know, is a way to making more aware…I hope so, at least.

**UM1:** I just hope you’ll bring out more without [UI] ghettoize into the green [UI] the seriousness of the issue in the ways those things are really importantly…in there. I mean [UIP] vision of Museum of Modern Art, all the wonderful goals you [UI] out…what you’re doing with the social dimension, quite clear, and it’s been a long [UI] MoMA [UI] before.

**Paola:** Thank you…I remember that. Thanks…Lady and then the gentleman.

**UF1:** I’m really interested in the idea of what it means to acquire and I know; I’m in the Bay area and [UI] ideas behind [UI] and design thinking are pretty big where design is not just used for objects, but is used to…design experiences and solutions and I’m just curious that that might be at all on your radar in terms of acquiring…

**Paola:** Yeah, we’re getting there. If you wish that laser graffiti example was almost like an experience, ‘cause; what do you acquire? It’s really…it’s the term of position itself that we’re trying to change. Like I remember when the ‘at sign’ news came out, it was interesting because the debate was really, really intense. And the negative reactions were more towards the term acquisition, because people thought that we had bought it or that they had to pay copyrights to MoMA, and I was like, why? Acquisition is a…is a technical museum term and it’s not that anymore. I mean…I need to find a way to change it, and if that can happen, then there’s much more openness towards what one can acquire, although there’s also the need to redefine what design means, which is another matter. Please, uh hm.

**UM2:** [UI] two questions, but [speaking softly] follow up what you said…

**Paola:** Uh hm.

**UM2:** If you don’t [UI] ghettoize, but don’t draw attention to the greenness or the environmental aspects of [UIP], will people know that it is environment or green in, in some meaningful way?

**Paola:** I don’t know. See, as far as I’m concerned…I’ve always thought that the idea of environmental responsibility was a given, you know. Like, in Italy, when I go home it’s hell, we have to recycle everything and there’s trash for [sounds like: “humid’”] stuff, trash for dry stuff, paper on one side; so there’s like five bins at home and it’s been like that for 15 years. So maybe, it’s my problem…I don’t like to, I like to say it must be a given; that’s the way it must be. And I noticed that the more you highlight it, maybe you’re right and I’m just being…I’m not communicative enough maybe, but I think that the more you highlight it, the more it becomes like something that goes…you know like when PBS does documentaries and by doing them with the Phillip Blass music and that kind of special animation, it loses half of the audience it could have; that’s what I’m
thinking about. I don’t know how many of you have seen “Waiting for Superman”…great, great movie destroyed by the music and by the style of animation, because it immediately goes into an ideological sphere. Style becomes an ideological sphere, so I hope that what I’m trying to convey doesn’t seem…snooty. I really…is about trying to make the idea of the environmental responsibility normal, and maybe I have to try it in another way if it doesn’t come through…Uh hm.

[laughter]

Paola: There was another question here or the second…you have the second one, yeah…Yeah, uh hm.

UM3: I’m just curious, because it’s a big issue where I work. How do you define the difference or the similarity between art and design?

Paola: Yeah…it’s, it’s like endless. I mean I remember…

[laughter]

Paola: …you know when I was a…when I was teaching at UCLA, I was teaching a course open to the whole campus, and it was called the Nature of Design. It was about explaining what design is, and I used to tell them: look, it’s not on form, it’s not on, you know, materials; it’s not even on price, sometimes, even though that can still be discrimination. But what I used to tell them is that artists can choose whether to be responsible towards other people or not, and instead, designers have to be by definition. That’s, to me…But you know, Milton Glaser…you know we’re doing this series of design evenings at MoMA, which we invite people and we talk with…Milton Glaser said, gave a definition that I totally disagree with, totally, totally, totally. He said that design is what you use and forget about and art is something that you remember.

[laughter]

Paola: I mean…like, please!

[laughter]

Paola: I will never forgive him for that…That was terrible. So, I think my definition’s better.

[laughter]

Paola: Anybody else? Yes, please?

UM4: I’d like to say something positive on the environmental front. I teach Environmental Studies and I, I deal with a lot of issues related to sustainability and I actually think there’s great power in a lot of that.

Paola: Yeah.

UM4: Especially the visualizations to make people actually mindful of how they…how they consume resources that for example, the visualization with the pig…

Paola: Yeah, that’s so beautiful, huh?
UM4: I think that can get at people on a level and create an awareness about sustainability issues that all the green rhetoric doesn’t do.

Paola: Thank you; that’s the spirit. I just never know if it works out, but that’s the spirit, yeah; thanks. Yeah?

UM5: I also want to say that in your definition of design [UI] to that same conversation [UI] when you talk about caring for the user and understanding of that, then we begin to…’cause I’ve heard in lot of presentations today in the language [UI] that we are [UI] linked directly to that environment. So when you care for the [sounds like: “user”], you’re caring for nature, and it carries through in design that’s your definition of design that [UI] in museums; so I think it is clear through the definition that you established within a curatorial [UI].

Paola: Thank you.

UM5: That is…and it seems to show through. I mean as with any art you take or anything that is displayed as art or its object, I think the user then is open to the interpretation. And to…and what you’re saying basically is you’re beginning to filter too much when you begin to classify and categorize and in a way that maybe you’re being asked to, and I think that’s respectful in terms of the museum goal.

Paola: Thank you. This is very interesting…all that you’re saying, the pros and cons; very interesting; thank you…Anybody in the back, back, back that I don’t see; no. Yeah, there was one lady…sorry, just…the lady behind and then I’ll come to you…yea.

UF2: I…I just completed reading a [speaking softly]...

Paola: Yeah.

UF2: …and in the beginning of it, she talks about the systems in nature that [UIP], and her cautionary message was about the nature understands the power of [UI] that the humans [UI] in that…you know we see limits as a challenge to go to an extreme at the cost of any resources, and I’m wondering what your thoughts are with that?

Paola: I…you know I read the book and I didn’t remember this, which is a really good quote…hmmm. Yeah, I mean…probably nature doesn’t have our arrogance, you know, and our hubris and so I guess it’s true, you know, and…I guess it’s true. And my thoughts are that so many of these designers are working within limits that designers tend to have more of an awareness of limits and more humility than say, architects or artists. So…

[laughter]

Paola: …at least [laughing]…that’s a really good point; thank you. Yeah?

UF3: So, I teach classes on [speaking softly] inspired design concepts and I was really fascinated by what you were talking about [UIP] and in general, this kind of collaboration between designers and scientists [speaking softly].
Paola: Right.

UF3: And I’m wondering about what your thoughts are on those kinds of collaborations going even deeper designer certain information as a new way of inspiring designers…

Paola: It’s happening already. It’s really interesting because there’s this iJam that you might know about; it’s a jamboree that happens at MIT every summer – I mean it’s only the second or third time, but it’s about genetically engineered machinery and it links together synthetic biologists, especially people like Drew Endy out of Stanford or, and others at the University of Edinburgh, and last year, there was a team of designers from the Royal College of Art that now have become like, everybody wants them on the team, because they’re so powerful in visualizing possibilities and really giving ideas about prototypes that one of the two designers has become the director of a fellowship programs of designers and artists working with scientists in seven different universities in the world. So right now, she’s basically touring to go and observe all the fellowships; so especially in London, it’s been going on for a while based with you know, the Royal College of Art [sounds like: “as a fulcrum”] and now it’s expanding a lot, also here in the states, especially because of synthetic biology, which is this idea that you can build organisms almost as if you had lego bricks of DNA. So, yeah, there’s a lot going on in that field and it definitely is a new field of inspiration for designers. Well, think we have to close, because, you have to go to lunch. You want to give announcements…come here.

Maryhelen: I just want to say, thank you, Paola…

Paola: Oh no, thank you…thank you very much.

[applause]
BUSTER SIMPSON’S *HOST ANALOG*: THE RE-EMERGING LANDSCAPE

Anna Heineman
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Buster Simpson’s landscapes do not include paint and canvas; instead, his artwork consists of decaying logs and new green growth. Ecological information can be taught through classrooms, books, and oral history. Buster Simpson’s artwork, however, provides yet another way of conveying information about caring for the environment. He creates public artwork using these materials in order to educate cities about their environmental surroundings and uses his work to promote the care of local places.

Simpson’s works are not necessarily implemented only to please the eye, but rather to promote action. Simpson’s aesthetic statements are not meant to fix the problem at hand; instead, they are used to highlight environmental problems. In Simpson’s own words, his work attempts to “mitigate the history of negligence and create a holistic future.”¹ Through analyzing this sculpture entitled *Host Analog*, I will examine how Simpson’s commingling of science and art provides context for the ills of the environment in which this work is placed. The success of this sculpture depends not on solving problems scientifically, but instead by engaging viewers and spurring them on to envision the long-term impacts of human activities on certain sites.

Commissioned by the Portland Convention Center in Oregon in 1991, Simpson’s *Host Analog* consists of a decaying log, cut into eight segments. Seedlings, which came from an Oregon forest, now sprout from the trunk. To help the new growth, Simpson added an irrigation system that mists the saplings.² Today, the log sprouts trees native to the forest, such as Western red cedars, hemlocks, and Douglass firs. Seeds that grow in drier climates such as grasses, oaks, and field plants also thrive, as well as vegetation that likes sunny and wet sites, such as horsetails, cottonwoods, and willows.³ Simpson’s goal was to generate a forest from one fallen eighty-foot Douglass Fir tree. As stated on one sign-post in front of the log segments:

> The intent of the piece is to introduce into the urban landscape an indigenous natural phenomena known as a host, or nursing log. This piece is about a real-time, accommodating landscape, which hosts the notion of metaphorical history and the measurements of time with concurrent events that affects the host log’s regeneration.⁴

The sculptural significance of the tree is the growth that continues on the dead wood. The installation provides a visual example of the slow cycle of life.

In the 1960s, the tree fell naturally after a windstorm in the Bull Run watershed, which is the city of Portland’s water source located within the Mount Hood National Forest. Deemed unsuitable for lumber, the tree lay prostrate on the ground until the 1990s.⁵ Simpson found the decaying tree and moved the massive log to Portland. He cut it into eight, eight-foot long sections and arranged the segments on crushed volcanic rock in the public space.⁶

Due to the work’s prominent location—near the front doors of the convention center and right in the middle of the city of Portland—the sculpture is accessible to many. The 225,000 square-
foot convention center contains fifty meeting rooms. The hundreds of functions scheduled at the center bring thousands of both city-dwelling and rural living residents past the work. The accessibility of the sculpture is not only for convention center patrons—on an average week-day in June, Portland residents were eating lunch on nearby benches, reading books, and enjoying the public space surrounding the sculpture. Positioned right in the middle of a plaza surrounded by other public works, terraced vegetation, trees, and sidewalks, Simpson’s sculpture is the featured work in the area.

Simpson uses the tree as a didactic tool, and the community he is educating is both local and global. Community, to Simpson, is “everywhere.” Thus, community could be urban professionals who have never walked through a pine forest, or rural folks who watch logging companies take their trees off nearby land. The community could also include the loggers themselves, corporate executives who profit from logging, and even the tree-hugging environmentalists. Through Simpson’s sculpture, Portland residents and tourists alike, regardless of background, can learn about the effects of deforestation through this installation.

The climate of the Pacific Northwest is very conducive to tree growth. The state of Oregon alone boasts eleven national forests; the Pacific Northwest contains many more. Despite their ecological importance, Pacific Northwest forests provide most of the building lumber and a large amount of paper pulp for the United States as well as exports to Asia. Along with the logging industry’s tangible goods, they have also provided thousands of jobs over the last century to help Oregon and Washington’s economy. However, as Edward O. Wilson, biologist at Harvard University, noted,

>The worst thing that can happen—will happen—is not energy depletion, economic collapse, limited nuclear war, or conquest by a totalitarian government. As terrible as these catastrophes would be for us, they can be repaired within a few generations. The one process ongoing in the 1980s that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.

Logging affects the ecology, the water flow, and the geographical formation of land. The Pacific Northwest is not the only region affected by deforestation; the Amazon Rainforest in Brazil, the Congo in Central Africa, Indonesia, Eastern Europe, and many more forested areas around the planet are being logged at impressive rates.

Simpson’s installation provides an accessible and easily digestible example of the rate of vegetative growth in a forest. Sapling growth is incredibly slow—seedlings grow at a rate of one foot every five to ten years. In forests, it truly is easy to miss the forest for the trees in terms of understanding the length of time and perfect conditions it takes to grow verdant life. Because this log has been taken out of the context of the forest where it once lay, the slow rate of growth is now highlighted through the growth on the logs.

The aspect of time is also noted through the signage around the installation. Five signposts line the front of the installation. Each sign is nearly three feet high, and has a light fixture that illuminates the information on the sign at night. The signs educate the viewer about five different aspects of forest life: the human impact on the environment, the continuation of life,
the importance of trees in a forest, the human impact on the land, and the path of water from Mt. Hood to the Portland water system.

The first sign begins, “Host Analog is evolving into a laboratory where natural phenomena have been transported into a new urban context.” Along with the inscription, three distinct images mimic each other in their iconography, but not in reality. The first image depicts a pine tree branch dipping its needles into water. The touch of the branch makes concentric ripples that extend to the edge of the image. Underneath this is a fingerprint. The last image is a tree trunk; the rings of the dead tree are visible. All three images show circles that move outward: the ripples in water, the individual curves of a fingerprint, and the rings of a tree. These simple circles represent the larger impact that humans could have on an ecosystem or forest.

The second signpost includes three images; all symbolize the continuation of life. The first photograph introduces the artwork as a work in progress. Simpson includes a photograph that depicts the installation in 1991—the logs are mere stumps placed in an arch underneath the irrigation pipes. Tiny spouts are evident, but the logs are the dominant feature. Simpson’s daughter, a small girl at the time, stands next to a naked log. Although the image is taken of the exact installation in front of the viewer, this photograph proves what a difference time makes in a forest.

An image in the middle of the same signpost depicts an undated, but older photograph of the Acropolis in Athens, Greece (fig. 47). One tall column stands in the left of the image, while another column lays in pieces to the right. The columns can be seen as symbolic of trees. The fallen column is split into many segments—it is evident that the Greeks stacked circular drums on top of each other in order to create the column. The fallen column lies along the ground. The final image on the signpost compares the fallen temple column to a fallen tree in a forest. The undated image is titled, “A Hundred or So Lumber Jacks Sit Down to a Meal at Two Long Tables in the Woods.” The photograph records numerous men eating a meal on two picnic tables apparently made from one log. Surrounding the men are massive trees on all sides.

All three images on this signpost, the segmented Host Analog, a fallen column, and a fallen tree, all show metaphorical skeletons—the remains of past lives. Life, however, does not end with the fall of the mighty. As the text on the sign explains, life always continues. The early image of Host Analog proves the change in the installation’s growth over time. The photograph of the temple ruins also captured the growth of Athens in the background. Buildings seem to sprout up out of the fallen column. In the final image, the loggers sit at a picnic table impressive in both size and structure. Although the table is not giving life in the same manner that the Host Analog sprouts seeds, the log now functions as a table, which allows for the sharing of meals and nourishment for the men that work in the forest. The men who eat at the log table, ironically, are the men who also log the forest. This juxtaposition shows both sides of the story—men eating among and upon magnificent pines, but also using these trees to make a living so they can bring food to their table.

The fifth and final signpost illustrates the path of water from Mount Hood to the Willamette River and finally to the Portland Water Works storage facility. Simpson positioned a drawing of Mount Hood at the top of the post. Underneath is a photograph of snowmelt on the mountain. The middle of the post contains drawings that represent the Portland Water Supply System. Dams, reservoirs, tanks, and pumps are all interconnected with pipes. One long pipe continues
down the image. Water, as this signpost illustrates, travels through many man-made and natural paths before it reaches the city.

This interconnectedness between the forest, trees, and water, is symbolized by a simple inclusion of a drinking fountain, positioned across from the last signpost. The pipes that bring snowmelt from Mount Hood and into Portland’s holding tanks also provide irrigation for the plants and quench the thirst of the people who visit the site. The fountain, however, does not just blend into the surroundings. Instead of a typical drinking fountain, Simpson attached a bowl with a human fingerprint printed on it. This symbol, with its swirling lines, is a bold reminder of the human imprint on the land. The people of the Pacific Northwest prize their coniferous forests, yet these same forests are ravaged by the timber industry. Although this particular tree fell naturally, many do not. With a swift swipe of the saw, a hundred-year-old tree can be cut down. The fragility of the forest is shown in both the signposts’ photographs and the living sculpture. In his installation, Simpson condenses complex natural processes into small, easily digested ideas.

The title, Host Analog, conveys its educational purpose. The viewers who visit the site can, over time, watch the host log’s new growth. The log becomes an analog for the forest, or a “mechanism that represents data by measurement of a continuous physical variable.” By reading the text and examining the images on the signposts, as well as noticing the change in the growth on the logs over time, an audience can extrapolate ecological information and come to their own conclusions about how to view a forest.

In closing, Simpson’s sculpture is not a static painting hung on a wall; instead it is a living sculpture that grows and morphs over time. By allowing the public to access the forest in the city, Simpson makes Portland residents, tourists, and conference center patrons aware of the growth and decomposition of trees. This work promotes an understanding of deforestation and advocates for taking care of the remaining pine forests in the Pacific Northwest.

Although Simpson’s Host Analog is simple in concept, the symbolism and educational purposes are evident. A viewer does not have to enter museum doors or attend art history classes in order to comprehend the artistic and educational nature of the work. Simpson’s marriage of art and ecology brings an artistic depiction of landscape to the city center, fostering a realistic—not romantic—view of nature in hopes of encouraging viewers to learn from and care for our environment.

NOTES:

1. Buster Simpson’s artist statement, quoted in Sue Spaid, Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies (Cincinnati, OH: Contemporary Arts Center, 2002), 143.
4. Taken straight from Simpson’s signpost on Host Analog.
6. Mark Dion also created an installation that involved a fallen tree, called Neukom Vivarium, in 2006. The work was created for the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle. Simpson’s Host Analog, created
fifteen years prior to Dion’s Neukom Vivarium, differs greatly in concept. Whereas Simpson’s work is meant to be exposed to the elements and change throughout time, Dion’s log was placed in a built environment: a vivarium. This artificial environment contains a sprinkler system that sprays the amount of water the log would normally receive in the forest, and the windows also open and close automatically in relation to the inside temperature. I visited Dion’s Neukom Vivarium with Simpson while I was in Seattle in June of 2009. In response to my question about how he perceived Dion’s work, Simpson said, “I think that people misread those two pieces of being of the same thing. His thing could be a log or it could be anything—it could be of the pressures of museums collecting things or containing it, enclosing it, possessing it, possessing nature. And how much it costs to maintain that fetish . . . . My other concern was that it was a very expensive piece. Which is okay, but it should have been located downtown next to one of the citadels of capitalism, that would have been much more appropriately contexted in that type of place than say, in the Sylvan landscape, where we already have lots of trees and nature.” Personal interview with Buster Simpson, June 26, 2009.

7. According to their website, their staff can handle events “of any size, from 10 to 10,000.” See: http://www.oregoncc.org/.

8. I witnessed this on June 22, 2009, while visiting the work in person.

9. Conversation and interview with artist, June 26, 2009. The whole quote is: “Big city people have community, [although] sometimes it’s more vertical than horizontal. I think communities are everywhere. Some people’s communities are more by profession than physical location.”


15. The writing continues: “Gleaned from the Bull Run watershed in 1991, this host log arrived at the Oregon Convention Center with a mix of micro-organisms, fungi, and plants attached to the decaying biomass of an old growth Douglas Fir windfall. Now the monarch is playing host to a diversity of indigenous and non-native plants and trees, propagated by chance conditions. The nurse log is an urban metaphor for accommodation and collaboration. Perhaps at this location Host Analog will remain undisturbed for the thousand years required to complete the regenerative cycle.”

16. For information about how logging, deforestation, and clear-cutting affects forests, see Daniel D. Chiras, Environmental Science: Creating a Sustainable Future (Boston: Jones and Bartlett, 2004), 257-59.

17. Webster’s Eleventh New Collegiate Dictionary, vs. “analog.”

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ART, ADVERTISING AND GREEN TECHNOLOGIES

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Although technology doesn’t immediately come to mind when we think of going green, art and advertising are increasingly using innovative green technologies to deliver their messages in compelling and distinctive ways. From simple video projections to LED-imbedded metal mesh, architectural surfaces and even wearable fabrics increasingly manifest themselves as translucent, receptive membranes, alive with abstract forms, moving images, color and motion.

Creativity is in the forefront of these new technologies. In Arizona, gauzy architectural mesh panels shimmer with reflected light as they provide refuge from the summer sun. At a California university, a vast, translucent media wall is alive with moving images of traditional weaving done in real time. An ethereal interactive media sculpture in Fort Worth Texas changes its holographic light display in response to movement as each visitor passes by. And at the Piazza del Duomo in Milan, a transparent media mesh wall integrates modern technology with the historic façade beneath, creating an instant link between the past and future. In Willimantic Ct, a simple video projection celebrates National Library Week and engages the public in a New England mill town. At trade shows all over the world, illuminated fabrics deliver illuminated animated messages via embedded LED lights and programmable fibers. In England and Canada, fabrics responding to human emotions send soothing messages, restoring calm to the garment’s wearer.

Boundaries between art and advertising, creativity and commerce are rapidly disappearing through the use of new technologies for communication and sustainability. Terms like medialization (the addition of programmable elements to fabric) and mediatecture (the fusion of architecture and media) signal a burgeoning technological evolution that makes sustainability, functionality and economy of resources an essential part of today’s art, advertising and media culture.

METAL MESH

The versatility of metal mesh, already used as wall coverings, furniture and sunshades is expanding to include a wide range of creative uses. Metal mesh fabrics have the ability to “clad” architectural surfaces in transparent, light reflecting-metal skins. With the addition of embedded, programmable LED lights, the mesh becomes a media wall, capable of delivering graphics, text and video on a massive scale day or night. In addition to adding distinctive aesthetic qualities to building structures, metal mesh can withstand the harshest weather conditions, is extremely durable, recyclable and high in recycled content.

Particularly intriguing is the ability of metal mesh to act as environmental shading systems while offering obvious aesthetic possibilities. Mesh shading systems such as Solucent Mesh, fabricated by Cambridge Architectural in Maryland, are a low maintenance, durable and sustainable category of stainless steel mesh offering significant energy savings by reducing solar heat gain within the building, while enhancing the structure’s outdoor presence. When used as building façades, these systems provide exterior shading, optimize outside temperature and
decrease energy consumption. As interior screens, they manage daylight, reduce heat and glare, increase interior space usage and maximize views. The beauty and strength of stainless steel mesh allows complete visibility from inside and outside the building, its surface can be etched, illuminated or embedded with LED lights, and it will last for decades, surviving all types of weather.

MEDIALIZED METAL MESH

Mediatecture company Ag4 in Cologne, Germany, pioneered the exploration of transparent media walls for architectural use in the early 1990s and began research on combining LED lighting and metal mesh in 2002. Their award-winning, programmable illuminated products, Mediamesh® and Illumeshe® have transformed building façades around the world into informational and artistic masterpieces of light, color and movement. Mediamesh radiates light outward for high image resolution, visible even in daylight while Illumeshe shines light inward onto the mesh surface for a lower resolution nighttime display. Ag4 has been recognized for the sustainability and integrity of these fabrics with the Design Award of the Federal Republic of Germany, the country’s highest distinction in the field of design.

One of the many advantages of these products is their transparency. When the lights are off, you can see through the mesh to the architecture behind it. The LED illumination has an extremely long lifetime of 90,000 hours of operation at 100% brightness - 10 years of continuous light. And the material is light and flexible making it easy to transport and install.

A special loom, created by GKD Metal Fabrics in Maryland is used to create these metal mesh fabrics. It is important to understand that media mesh walls are not simply giant television screens, but integrated architectural elements that transmit information and images. They are open systems that need no cooling and tolerate all temperatures including extreme heat. When used indoors, mediialized mesh can function as illuminated walls, advertising panels or dynamic informational backdrops. Applications for metal mesh are limitless – billboards, signage, furniture, awnings, stair panels, sunscreens and floor coverings are just a few. The potential of illuminated mesh fabrics hasn’t yet been tapped. It’s a lifetime material with endless possibilities.

MEDIALIZATION, INTERACTIVITY AND ART

The Lighting Science Group (LSG), an internationally based lighting design company, can create virtually anything in the realm of illuminated architectural and creative solutions from a simple sketch. Their projects vary widely from major museum installations such as Jenny Holzer’s 2009 installation at the Whitney Museum in NY, to exterior media cladding such as Saks 5th Avenue’s falling snowflake holiday display. Companies like LSG allow creativity to drive the process of commercial enterprise. The demand for these products is growing because LED technologies are increasingly being used as an energy efficient means of creative expression and community engagement. A good example of this is LSG’s Gossamer Galaxies, an ethereal interactive media sculpture in Fort Worth Texas that changes its holographic light display in response to movement as each visitor passes by.

Traxon Technologies has recently released an illuminated stainless steel mesh called IMagic Weave and an indoor/outdoor system called RGB Mesh, strings of LED lights encased in clear
plastic modular grids. Fully programmable for low to medium resolution video, RGB Mesh is virtually transparent when unlit and suitable for a wide variety of applications including digital billboards, trade show exhibits, restaurants, offices, clubs and even residences. These systems are in demand as architainment, architecture as entertainment, meaning illuminated spaces that are compelling in themselves. The energy efficiency of LED lighting combined with the versatility and maintenance-free life of mesh systems gives these products a great advantage in today’s art and advertising marketplace. Demand for responsive, medialized surfaces is on the rise as commercial, civic and cultural entities seek new ways of branding products, enhancing public space and delivering information and cultural content to a growing public audience.

**ILLUMINATED & PROGRAMMABLE TEXTILES**

“Luminated”, wearable fabrics are an exciting new technology that promise to revolutionize not only fashion but our living and working environments as well. Lumalive from Phillips Technology is a light-emitting textile embedded with programmable LED lights, powered with rechargeable batteries and controlled by software that allows users to upload graphics via a USB connection. Because the electronic components are removable, Lumalive garments are washable, making them practical as well as eye-catching. Another innovation by Phillips is the Bubelle Dress, which has an inner layer containing biometric sensors that pick up a person’s emotions and projects them in colors onto the second layer, the outer textile. Philips plans to increase these products’ sustainability through the addition of re-cycled materials, in response to increasing demands for products that combine fabric, creativity and emotion.

Fabrics woven with LED illumination are being used by companies like Lumigram in France to create dramatic night-time garments and event accessories. This mesh-like fabric is manufactured in Prato Italy by Luminex, and is being used by artists and clothing designers worldwide to explore the connection between light, space, art and fashion.

In development are interactive, illuminated wearable fabrics that don’t use a power supply or wires of any kind. Konarka Technologies in Lowell Mass is developing all-fabric electronic circuits which will allow textiles themselves to be made of conductive material. So far the best means of accomplishing this is via flexible multilayer organic photovoltaic (OPV) panels that can be affixed to all kinds of surfaces, including fabrics. These rollable, bendable solar cells called Power Plastic® create clean, portable, green energy that can power anything from a cell phone to electric lights.

Artists and scientists at the Digital Studios at Goldsmith College in London and Studio subTela at Concordia College in Montreal are working on a handcrafted one of a kind project called Wearable Absense—clothes fitted with sensors that respond to the wearer’s physical state. A database of audio, image and text files referencing an absent person is triggered by physical/emotional states such as nervousness and anxiety, and files from that data base (as if from the absent person) are played to soothe or stimulate the garment wearer.

**LIGHT PROJECTIONS**

From the technologically advanced to the locally possible, an interactive light projection on the façade of the Willimantic Public Library in Connecticut last April, celebrated National Library Week, engaging the local community in a way no gallery exhibition could
(junebisantz.com/library.html). Turning Pages was a simple, non-invasive public installation that used very little energy, required no physical installation or ongoing maintenance but yet had a large and lasting effect. The use of this simple projection technology gave rise to The Willimantic Screen Project, a series of outdoor light projections that will use existing architecture to deliver a wide range of constantly changing creative messages in February, 2011.

CONCLUSION

Boundaries are disappearing as creativity and commerce merge through new technologies. It is clear that creativity is the engine driving these new, energy efficient technologies, allowing innovative ideas to exist in public and private space, crossing – and even eliminating pre-existing boundaries between art and advertising, illuminating the future with a skillfully woven, technologically advanced fabric of communication, sustainability, innovation and creativity.
SUSTAINABILITY AND THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER

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INTRODUCTION

There is a growing movement in design, a movement toward products that are smarter in how they are conceived, manufactured, distributed and discarded. This movement of green design and sustainable design is in every discipline, from architecture to fashion, graphic design and new media.

Design is really the key ingredient for making sustainability a realistic possibility for our future. The purpose of this paper is to ignite interest is a greener outlook of design. The focus of our discourse is to highlight the growing trends in the graphic design field, show how designers can and should be more responsible, and move towards a more sustainable design culture.

SITUATED KNOWLEDGE

Before presenting our synopsis we want to provide some background about who we are and where we see ourselves in becoming greener designers. Designers are the distillers of information and product consumerism. We have the power to change the way the mass culture interacts with the world. As designers, we believe we should be at the forefront of a sustainable culture.

Designer and MFA graduate student, Brian Herbst was originally drawn to sustainable design through an interest in innovating package design. After working in the field and recognizing the incredible amount of waste being produced, he began to question whether there may be a more efficient ways of packaging and how new sustainable ways would also provide a benefit to customers as well as the environment. As Brian expressed;

It became clear to me is that it’s not a problem that’s going away. And it’s something that designers are going to have to deal with. When the opportunity to return to school and study for my MFA, the decision of what area I wanted to focus on was clear. I wanted to look at not only the things like recycled paper and vegetable inks–I wanted to really find out how this new focus was changing what we do as designers.

Dr. Paula DiMarco is a design educator, researcher, and graphic designer with an interest in Issue-Based Design Education (IBDE). Her alternative pedagogy to teaching design is to encourage meaning making and social responsibility while learning to think critically about design solutions. Working with her graduate students has reinforced an issue-based design education. As she states in an explanation about her teaching:

When I am implementing issue-based objectives in my graphic design classes, the social role of the designer is the purpose. The issues being addressed are global and local, but deal specifically on cultural, social, political, and environmental concerns. Even though, I have found that design students
become involved in the process of learning about these issues, their effectiveness in the message being addressed has always been related to design and functionality. In this case the message is sustainability and the process is learning efficient ways of addressing a greener design culture.

SUSTAINABILITY VS. GREEN DESIGN

There is no disputing that “sustainability” and “green design” are the buzzwords of the decade. And in graphic design the terms have in many cases become overused, bringing up mental images of recycled symbols and craft paper. Instead sustainability should be a new way of envisioning and expanding the role of the designer, where building efficiency and providing a service to our customers while at the same time, exercising more social responsibility in the world.

Green design and sustainability design have similarities but have subtle differences. These differences are tactics verses strategy. Using recycled and degradable materials is a tactical step towards more sustainable designed products. However, sustainability is more than just the materials, but instead it is about strategy; dealing with systems and process. When working through a true sustainable design, the designer needs to consider the social and economic implications of materials, designs and production processes (Sherin 13). This means that sustainability is an all-encompassing idea; one that includes green design, green materials and green processes.

Becoming a Green Designer

Like many other designers, we have both struggled with the idea of how to make our graphic design businesses encourage more sustainable or green products. Working towards green design has been the perfect place to start. Our approach to learning about how to become greener is to deal with the tactical concerns.

Becoming a green designer is important and often means the designer takes some action towards greener design solutions (Dougherty 32). Green Design is about execution, it’s goal oriented and deals with specifics. Green design is about new materials, it’s about recycling; it’s about better choices in manufacturing and reducing material usage. It’s about safer inks and using certified paper and finding ways to be more efficient (Dougherty 10). It’s tactical and measured; it’s how we make more responsible products and materials. And it’s very much inside the box of what we traditionally would consider the regular concerns of the designer.

An example of green design is in an identity system designed by Matt Simpson at Hello Stereo for a company named Foreverwood. When designing their letterhead Simpson chose a FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) approved 100% post consumer recycled paper stock which was then printed two colors with vegetable based inks. Made entirely of recycled materials, from the paper to the ink usage, this type of design project reflects the basics of a green designer.

UNDERSTANDING MATERIALS

Adding to the traditional concerns of the designer, we can relate to the use of materials. And this is a good start. One of the challenges of becoming greener in design is in understanding new materials choices and how they affect the look, feel and overall sustainability of a project. There is a lot of misunderstanding and misconception in regards to green materials. Many
people approach a project with the best intentions, but ultimately make poor, uninformed choices. In order for an eco-material to be an effective choice, it needs to be used correctly or it can end up being worse than the material it is replacing (Jedlicka 1).” For example, PLA is a plant based plastic that can be used instead of PET/PETE. Great if PLA collection and sorting systems are in place. If not, a small amount of PLA mixed in with PET/PETE contaminates the entire bunch making is unrecyclable. It is then burned, adding to pollution” (Jedlicka 1)

Another great example is the use of the recycling logo. There are very few guidelines and almost no enforcement over the use of the recognizable recycling arrows. In fact, often they appear on materials that are not themselves produced with recycled material, it simply means that you are able to recycle the item. In theory, it’s “possible” to recycle almost anything (although not always practical or common) but in that sense everything qualifies for use of the mark. Plastics are another blatant example of logo misuse. In the late 1980s the plastics industry developed a numbering system from 1 to 7 to aid in the identification of types of plastics. The use of the recycling icon in the numbering system gives the impression that the materials are recyclable or have been. The truth is the numbering system has very little to do with recycling programs and systems and in fact many of the products cannot be easily recycled.

**Paper**

Paper is probably the first thing that comes to mind when recycling is discussed. Paper is certainly the most obvious when discussing green design as it is the designers primary method of producing work. Paper can include not just the sheets we are used to seeing but also packaging materials, corrugated cardboard and box board and laminated paper labels. In spite of impressive recycling records the fact is that paper is an extremely energy consumptive process. One estimate is that producing one ton of ready to use paper product requires over 98 tons of resources including but not limited to industrial harvesting and road-building, processing of virgin wood fibers, chlorine bleaching and creates literally tons of hazardous by-products. (Imhoff 15).

Pulp and paper is itself responsible for eleven percent of the total volume of water used in industrial activities throughout OECD countries (Imhoff 15/17 Hershkowitz). And paperboard packaging now accounts for almost half of all paper used, more than 600 pounds used annually per person. Corrugated is used in almost ninety percent of all consumer wholesale and industrial goods which are usually used for that one purpose, then discarded.

There are many choices on the market for designers interested in using alternate types of paper. The thing that is important to note is that while many sound like untapped or unutilized “gold mines” of raw materials the key to a successful alternative is it’s level of renewability. Considering the massive quantity of paper products used globally every year, simply using banana leaves or wheat stalks won’t solve the problem, while they grow faster than trees, we simply use too much to sustain.

**Renewable Sources**

In addition to recycling programs, there is a growing focus being put onto renewable sources. Technically, wood for paper is a renewable resource. However, we draw on our forests at such a rate as to make it impossible for the forests to sustain themselves. This has given way to renewable programs such as the Forest Stewardship Council or FSC. The FSC is really the embodiment of the sustainable movement. FSC certified papers have verified renewable
sources, mainly virgin wood material that is specially grown in controlled, renewed locations. Thus, it is required that new trees are constantly planted to make up for the tree taken. Manufactures and printers must meet strict criteria to be allowed the use of the FSC logo in their materials. While the FSC is the main certifying organization for paper products, there are a number of organizations that have stepped in to help control the unstemmed waste of paper materials.

**Alternatives to Paper**

The search for non-wood based materials is growing in momentum. In fact, there are many high quality products available today. The only reason why they have not stepped in to replace trees as our main source is the massive quantity of material needed to supply our current use. This dooms these alternatives to serving only special needs of limited quantities.

One possibility is the use of wheat straw, using the stem and stalk waste left over from grain production. Numbers show that from Canada’s harvest alone, we would save 100 million trees a year. This sounds like a great option but it also requires a lot more energy to remove silicates present in wheat and the straw needed for compost would be gone. Other alternatives are hemp, banana, bamboo—the reality is we can make paper out of almost any fibrous material. It really comes down to cost and weighing the benefits against damage done in other areas. Because no easy solution presents itself by utilizing natural resources, manufacturers are also looking to synthetically produced paper products. These are papers that are manufactured from non-wood materials, oftentimes plastics. The book Cradle to Cradle by William McDonough and Michael Braungart utilizes a recycled plastic material for its pages that can be washed clean and recycled over and over again. Other options use calcium or limestone left over from mining operations along with a biopolymer binding agent. These are great as they can be manufactured without using any water in the process and are a great surface for printing. Whatever the future holds for paper products one thing is clear. While there are many realistic alternatives on the market, the real problem is consumption. We simply consume too much printed material. The best way to attack this problem is by managing the amounts of materials we use.

**Plastics**

Plastics are becoming more of a problem as time goes on. The high levels of usage generates a massive problem for the public health as toxic chemicals, landfills, and our environment have become clogged with an excess of discarded plastic materials. The biggest culprits are plastic drink bottles and plastic shopping bags just based on the many billions that are produced and discarded annually. But a lack of recycling programs and high toxicity levels has made other plastics just as dangerous.

Compounding that problem is the fact that labeling on plastics is misleading and confusing to the general public and designers alike. Therefore designers need to better educate themselves to make more informed responsible decisions in their material specifications. It is quite easy for a designer to specify a non-toxic, highly recyclable number two HDPE plastic rather than a toxic unrecyclable PVC. Educated consumers can begin a change from damaging plastics simply by avoiding those products produced in harmful ways.

**Alternatives to Plastics**
Because of the problem being faced with petroleum-based plastics, many researchers and manufacturers are searching for new means of producing plastic-like products without the same ecological damage. This has given rise to a whole new classification of plastics called “bioplastics” which are manufactured from organic sources.

There are three main engineering efforts in the search for new bioplastics, converting plant starches and sugars, producing plastics inside microorganisms via fermentation and genetically modifying crops such as corn and rapeseed so they actually grow plastic. All of these are interesting ideas that show some promise but they also each have drawbacks and dangers associated with them. For example, we would have to grow modified corn on a massive scale to satisfy our current plastics usage, which in turn reduces our ability to grow food. (Imhoff 108) While these may sound promising and like a solution is on the horizon, when we again view the entire system of sustainability we see that these new materials are, with the exception of PLA, very energy intensive to produce and as a result may actually increase the amount of petroleum products used. (Imhoff 113). When looking at the larger sustainability picture it becomes obvious that the long lasting solutions are not going to simply be one of materials. It has to come back to the designers ability to build awareness and reduce consumption. Designers must rethink the vast quantities of packaging and products that are filling up our landfills and find better, more efficient ways of communicating and producing.

UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY

In terms of design, sustainability is largely about designing for the entire lifespan of a product while at the same time minimizing the cost. In its more narrow usage, it means utilizing renewable resources with which to produce designed products with more eco-friendly materials or through the use of post-consumer recycled materials whenever possible. But sustainability is so much more than just paying closer attention to what materials we use. Sustainability is about entire systems. Systems include everything from the raw materials to the energy used to produce them; in all phases of the project including shipping, manufacturing, distribution and eventual discarding or recycling.

“Sustainability is the opposite of globalization and homogenization of culture and products” (Walker 127). Sustainability is about efficiency and efficiency comes with utilizing the resources that are at hand. There is nothing environmentally sound about purchasing organically grown food that has been transported hundreds, if not thousands, of miles, or using building materials from another part of the world when suitable resources are available locally.

Model 1:

A model for a greener more sustainable product is a company called Pangea Organics. Pangea creates a variety of food products and their philosophy is to examine the whole picture; the environmental and social life of their product. Pangea is not just looking for the right materials, they are continually searching for new ways to reduce materials and energy usage in the entire lifespan of their products, from the farm to after use.

Pangea looks at the whole picture to envisioning every possible outcome for what they produce. Starting with their ingredients, they purchase primarily from women owned farming cooperatives from around the world. Every ingredient is organically grown and their sale
directly supports the communities in which they are produced. None of their products contains, any petroleum products, genetically modified or synthetic ingredients. In fact, while many of the synthetic ingredients of their competitors can last up to 200 years in the environment, most of Pangea’s ingredients begin to bio-degrade just 48-hours after use.

In addition, Pangea’s packaging material is 100% post-consumer newsprint. To mold their containers, they create a paper pulp from used material such as newspapers but in addition the pulp is seeded with herbs such as basil and amaranth. After a customer has used the product, they are able to plant the package in their garden. The seed paper is uniquely manufactured through a process where any waste is fed back into the pulping system. There are no glues or other substances required in some of their product packaging and they cartons close other products without gluing. Although some of their labels are applied with a bit of spot adhesive the company is researching ways to change this and hoping to discontinue the adhesive. Even when plastics are necessary for some types of products, the plastic is recycled and rather than adhere labels, which require material and adhesives, they are screen printing directly to their bottled products.

**Model 2:**

Another example, is the 2006 redesign of Starbucks candies cartons. The project began based on improving the cosmetic look of their packaging, but their packaging designers realized it was a good time to incorporate a more sustainable approach to the package design as well. Their previous carton had some obvious areas for improvement. It was a 10oz box, which included a bag for the product, sitting in a tray, which was then slid into a printed sleeve. The tray was sourced overseas and made of a heavy material covered in a petroleum based poly-laminate. The sleeve was virgin white SBS carton stock and the product bag was also a poly-laminate. In addition, the overall product shape was hexagonal and presented issues when packing and shipping.

In addition, as a result of the many layers of material, much of it laminated or coated in some manner, the previous packaging was completely unrecyclable. It used virgin materials, shipped great distances and was manufactured in such as way as to render it unrecyclable and costly to pack, ship and stock. It was a great example of a non-sustainable product within a non-sustainable system.

The designers for Starbucks took this information and revised a new sustainable solution. Through their research, they found that the product could be supported with much less materials. Still packed in its poly-laminate bag for protection, it is supported by 50-60% less carton material. The carton/sleeve itself is manufactured from 100% post-consumer recycled content and there is no longer a need for the coating, making the package recyclable. Starbucks found domestic suppliers for the packaging as well, greatly reducing the energy needed for shipping.

The Starbucks project is a good example of a strategic “systems” way of thinking. Not content with simply switching to a recycled paper or reducing package size, they considered the source of the raw materials, the energy used in manufacturing, how that product was filled and shipped and how the product was used and discarded. They searched for ways each phase in the products life-span could be improved. In addition to design and manufacturing, sustainability also considers the social and economic implications of materials, designs, and
production processes (Sherin 13). For development to be sustainable, it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and non-living resource base; and of the long-term as well as the short-term advantages and disadvantages of alternative action. (UN WCS).

METHODS OF CHANGE (ENERGY CONSIDERATIONS)

So we have established that there are some subtle differences between green design and sustainability design. We determined that designers could move from their traditional role of seeing only a fraction of the overall picture to understanding the larger picture. So how do we as designers begin to facilitate a real change toward better industry practices and an improved environment? We will have to look at the life span of a product. The terms upstream and downstream are used to examine this artifact.

Upstream

Designers need to look not only at the outcome but also the origins of all the different ingredients of a job. Not only that, they must have an appreciation of the time, energy and resources that are used to produce the materials that produce that job. From fueling the delivery trucks to the water used in the manufacturing process, this is the upstream process designers will need to be concerned about. Examining the life of paper and the energy used in constructing a paper product, is looking upstream. Millions of gallons are used in the process of making paper but even millions more are used in printing on the paper as well.

An example of reducing that energy it take to construct materials, is a product distributed by the large food store Sam’s Club. Sam’s club had designers redesign their milk cartons. They changed the shape of the plastic cartoon so they could change the way the milk was shipped and stored. Previously milk crates were used to carry the cartons. By redesigning the shape of the milk package, they removed the use of the crate thus saving thousands of gallons of water previously used to wash the crates. This may seem like a small, indirect change but it’s significant when you look at the total volume of resource savings. The carton is still made from plastic, which is also harmful in its way, but the real environmental impact is with the part that we can’t see.

Downstream

Downstream concerns are a matter of overcoming cost considerations and timing. This is going to require a different way of planning a job, or at least an understanding of how project time lines are affected by the broader view. And careful planning before the actual production stage can mean the difference in making project deadlines. It is not only designers who are overhauling their thinking and ways of producing, printers and manufacturers are treading in uncertain territory as well and allowing for more experimentation and production time will make for more cost effective and successful pieces. In any case a whole system approach is going to prove to be the most successful.

Designing Backwards

A strategy for re-imagining the design to production process is to envision and design your projects backwards (Dougherty 50). So how can a designer best visualize an entire system and
see how their contribution fits into the whole? There are many different methods that may or may not be helpful depending on the individual. One helpful way of visualizing the project is to think about the process in reverse. (Dougherty 50) Designers need to envision first what is going to ultimately be the fate of the product produced. It may be a single use event poster, which could be displayed, collected and then discarded into a recycling bin. Or there may be a painted steel canister package, which is designed for a second use on a shelf in the home. Whatever the case, an effective designer should know upfront, the likely resting place of their project and think of ways to make as little environmental impact as possible.

Therefore the first question should be about waste. How is this product, package or item going to be disposed of? Will it be recyclable or compostable? Is there a way to design it for reusability? This is often called “designing for destiny.” Making decisions about where you want your product to end up when it is no longer in use, helps the designer make intelligent choices on how the item will be designed and produced.

Next is the user, or user experience. What is the intention of the user and how will they interact with the designed piece? Ideally the designer adds value through the design solution. This could be an opportunity to educate the consumer by supplying some instructions or information enabling some form of action. This is especially important in building new attitudes and understanding of sustainability. User experience includes everything from the time they receive or purchase the item to the point that they discard or re-use it.

The next consideration is delivery. How does it get into the hands of the consumer or the point of purchase? This should be a large part of the designers focus as it includes efficient packaging systems, reducing and optimizing shipping materials and finding alternative distribution channels. Packaging is obviously a big part of this consideration and in many cases, is the project the designer has been asked to perform. A successful design will use the least amount of material necessary to protect the product and utilize the most environmentally friendly sources it can. A good example of this is the Starbucks candies line (see case studies) in which a thoughtful packaging re-design enabled them to save materials consumption by 40%.

The last two considerations are Bindery and Printing. Many things can contribute to a successful green project on press. If printing on paper, a designer should investigate what options are available locally to avoid wasting resources on transporting materials. Recycled papers have improved so as to rival traditional virgin sheets. In addition many certified papers with percentages of post-consumer content are readily available. If other substrates are being used for printing, their contents and level of recyclability should be considered prior to printing. Of course, in addition to the printing materials, a careful designer can also think to specify vegetable based inks and water soluble coatings. Aside from the actual printing process designers should always work closely with their printing to lessen the amount of paper that goes to waste each time due to excess paper on the press sheet. If a designer plans accordingly, they can maximize the space used on their press sheets.

**PUTTING IT ALL INTO PRACTICE**

Conceptual strategies are useful is expanding our vision but it is also sometimes helpful to think of what we can do to reinforce those strategies in our day-to-day practice. From the very start creating a sustainable project is about asking questions. From these basic questions we can begin to conceptualize our final piece.
• Is this the best method to communicate my message?
• What is the impact of making this piece?
• How can we lessen the impact if we print the piece? (Sherin 19).

As we work through from concept to completion we can keep the following green strategies in mind: design for re-use and longevity, design cyclically, not linearly, choose recycled/nontoxic materials, minimize paper waste, minimize ink use, choose local vendors that are eco-friendly, educate and encourage others, both clients and colleagues to find increased value in sustainable solutions in the future. (Sherin 19).

One of the challenges we have found as designers is simply how to educate ourselves so as to navigate these previously unknown areas of professional practice. It’s not rare to find a willingness to instigate change, it is rare to find someone generally knowledgeable enough to make effective change. One great idea for interested designers is to develop communities of practice (Hamlett 188). Engage other disciplines in the dialogue on the topic and look to analogous efforts from those in other industries. We are talking about knowledge that is typically not in the skill set of the designer, so other outside influences and sources must be tapped. We need to understand how organizations work and are governed and be able to create change within those organizations. But perhaps most important of all, we need to recognize the changes that are happening and seize this opportunity to make a difference.

TOWARD THE FUTURE

Today’s designers view sustainability and green design as a sort of specialty within the industry. And as a specialty green designers are the ones who oftentimes take longer to turn work around and operate at higher costs than other more traditionally minded designers. As a result green design is still considered something of a specialty item for companies that are interested in promoting a higher level of social consciousness. However, this situation is a temporary one. An understanding of sustainability is going to become a necessity for designers in the near future as more consumers demand it and companies and marketers realize that sustainable solutions often times increase productivity and efficiency. Wasting resources is easy for a company, but is also costly in the long run.

We know that designers will be instrumental in communicating and convincing consumers of the importance of sustainability and or the strides being made by conscientious manufacturers. Designers will rethink entire systems of production and distribution, all the while shaping contemporary aesthetics to reflect a new set of values.

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A PINK FLAMINGO, A PAINTED COW AND A GREEN FAÇADE

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In a field of design a vogue of being green superimposes itself over truly genuine efforts and actions. The green design suffers gravely and can become nothing more than a décor or a façade.

The pink flamingoes have seen it all. From their semi-private protected spaces they have seen the invasion of the cows! The cows invaded almost all cities of the world. The cities that resisted this assault were the cities of the countries where money was scarce and the cows were perceived rather as a display of a pervasive luxury than a truly needed aesthetic enhancing a city’s image. The cows were welcomed with screams of admirations as they started to adorn the most prestigious streets and plazas. Thus the cows replaced the flamingoes—they were not pink, but they were bigger! Today they are important props of public and semi-public spaces.

There is something quite important though in this replacement: cows for flamingoes. It is the public and its perception. We claim to be responsible consumers and yet we drive hummers and buy several houses that are empty for most of the year. These houses and hummers pollute. Poetry of living smaller rather than bigger should appeal to us. This summer we spent some time in Portugal in a home of our friend’s grandfather. The home was located in a used-to-be small village. The humble homes in this village were replaced by new apartment buildings: anonymity replaced unadulterated identity. The abode we lived in was fortunate not to be destroyed since it was unconditionally loved. We were lucky raising our glasses filled with vino verde and picking fruit from the trees in a garden full of summer scents. Other gardens and orchards in the village were painfully cut to the bone to provide sites for the newest uninteresting developments. Simplicity is on trial and our consumption consumes us. Minimal, simple and delightful life is all too often forgotten in our dance to earn more, and to accept the bigger. In my neighborhood there is a construction on a beautiful site. We had admired this site in the past, because it had had several spruce and pine trees. But…alas in Calgary, a city, that calls itself a green place, your ownership is more important than a tree. If a tree grows on your property you can butcher it and put a cow on its place! How green! The virtual reality of pompous measures has entered our lives. Let us go back again to my neighborhood where there is a newly designed house. That building accommodates only one family but could have easily housed four or more. This dwelling is a very typical example of a total lack of understanding of what a green design shall be. It proclaims though its undeniable status of money and power. In the district that has a wonderful mixture of people, someone, actually, dared to add to a sign proudly displaying the name of the architect: “the architect of the ostentatious”. This is a refreshing statement proving to the architects that the public eye sees quite clearly the difference between the green and the non-green ostentatious architecture.

We do not need to be ashamed of our simple actions taking place in our lives. Let us walk, buy only what we need, read, drink and love. The old walls of a home have been once truly green filled with smells, memories and stories. We should think of ridiculous habits of people whose only ambition is to own more: buy one more home and call it a cabin because it has
only…2,000 sq ft. It is then easy to justify the owners’ every forth week-end journeys by a plane, a boat and a hummer.

A Finnish architect, visiting sometime ago one of many pretentious developments in the Canadian Rockies, had described it as a “perverse”. And it was perverse. There could have been several solar panels on the cabin’s roof, but does it really mean the cabin’s design is environmentally sound? What about the cabin’s architect, if there is one, of course? Does she or he feel responsible? Or what they committed to was simply a job done and paid for? The green responsibility was not a part of the job description. The owners though could felt very well because they were able to equip the cabin with the latest technological gadgets and toys to tell everyone how green they live. However the latest technological equipment is nothing more than a façade: it is a proof of one’s money, but possibly no brain to understand and no heart to feel. And what if somebody, like John McCain, who, while being interviewed on TV, could not even be sure how many residences he owned. Has he actually eleven of them? These types of residences do never become homes. They are buildings because they are just properties and no one invested love in them unlike in our friend’s grandfather home in Portugal.

Let us here consider beautiful and wise words of my hero—Jane Jacobs. “There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served.” Those words can be directly applied to pseudo green initiatives.

New York, of course, owns so much to Jane Jacobs. Greenwich Village is lively and dynamic because of her. Jacobs can write equally eloquently about cities’ economy as she can write about simple strengths of our communities. Wrestling with Moses was not easy, but the citizens of New York became victorious. Simple and yet wonderfully effective proposals came out of their class action. They were able to erase superficial decisions of hundreds of bureaucrats who aimed to be successful in their horrific responsibility in destroying our cities. There is strength in community if that community does not succumb to the narrow minded ideas proposed by the cities’ bureaucracies. A change for its own sake can be sometimes more threatening than no change. Philosophy of design that proposes simple solutions was not born only out of necessity, but also out of a deep understanding of our environment. Looking at old examples of vernacular architecture and design becomes increasingly helpful to newly proposed solutions. The wisdom in understanding the cycles of life, customs, systems of living are crucial elements in design strategies, but there have been some projects in the past that rejected environmentally friendly solutions: Flat roofs are as non-green as curtain walls. They can work in certain climates and topographies, but are disastrous in others. One of Richard Meyer’s latest designs, an apartment building on the East side of Grand Army Plaza in New York, proves to be not sustainable in many ways. The curtain walls expose the inhabitants to the immense heat and cold. They also expose them to voyeuristic sights of their neighbors and make the arrangement of their living spaces very difficult. …we see backs of the sofas and jumbles of computer wires from Grand Army Plaza as a result. One can only imagine the heating and air conditioning bills the residents have to face. In the name of what? To tell their friends and acquaintances they live in a building designed by Richard Meyer? It seems that we often prefer a pink flamingo and a painted cow to sustainable designs. Status replaces ecology.

Almost everything about this type of architecture alienates us because its aesthetics are connected to a name of a designer rather than to his imaginative concepts emphasizing
environmentally responsible approaches. Beauty, function and environment shall be fused together otherwise we allow ourselves to beat the drums of superficial green design systems. Designers seek complicated solutions, quite often, beyond their comprehension, instead of learning from the insights of the past and combining them wisely with contemporary propositions. Creative interactions of humans are undermined and mindlessly used technology have been granted a status of superiority. Economy plays a major role in design processes affecting their final results. It is not surprising to see how money is being spent in support of design projects that only appear to be green. Let us not accept the propaganda’s claims that wisdom of architecture lies in the big and the bigger. A use of a simple technology can enhance ecology as well as appearance of large glazed surfaces of curtain walls. Multiple approaches to the concept of a “smart window” were tested and developed around the world, practicality of these attempts seems to be the decisive factor in the success of a particular design. A French architect Serge Jaure’s designs are among the successful systems incorporating well known, proven and inexpensive technologies: such as thermostats, infra-red cameras (used today in building security systems) and simple manual controls that program opening and closing windows, louvers, shutters and heat exchange devices. Highly interactive, the system creates “living” elevation which adapts to the sun and weather as well as to the preferences of a user, doing away with flat, empty, glazed appearance of a curtain wall and assisting in ecologically sustainable architecture.

Paolo Soleri, an Italian architect proposed and developed the concept of arcology. The arcology allows for an interaction between architecture and its inhabitants. It is also supposed to create a system acting in similar ways to a living organism. This means that all incorporated systems work together providing an efficient circulation of people and resources, buildings of multi-use purposes, as well as solar direction, heating and cooling, etc. The concept is more than inspiring, but the outcome of its incorporation into practice is a very different and not such a glorious story.

The arcology was developed in 1970s, but it is still considered, by many architects and designers, as an avant-garde idea. If we are to learn from intelligent and environmentally sensitive solutions from the past, let us also be alert and critical to the mistakes in history of design. Soleri is a very talented propagandist of his ideas. His drawings are also works of art and one can spend hours looking at them, but his proposal is a tragic intervention into the dessert. Imagine Plan Voisin by Le Corbusier standing in the midst of a dessert and declaring its superiority to nature. Soleri’s Arcosanti is a huge disproportionate complex of buildings for 7,000 inhabitants occupying only 25 acres of … Paradise Valley in Arizona. The idea proposed is “opposite to urban sprawl”, but Arcosanti, despite its programmatic ideals, does not impress. The reinforced concrete structures look like sick large cells spreading over beautiful natural landscape… The ecosystem of Paradise Valley is weakened by this invasion and one can feel how easily non-green architecture alienates itself from its environment. Long live master Soleri, but it will be worthwhile seeing how nature invades its ailing concrete terror.

One of the most unimaginative green projects is practiced by the City of Calgary. In the past there had been several recycling bins all over the city. Plastic, glass and paper were to be recycled to separate bins. Calgary’s citizens recycled dutifully. Two years ago however the City Hall decided that it would be lovely to introduce at every residence a blue bin where the inhabitants would recycle glass, paper and plastic. All of it into one blue bin for a monthly collection fee imposed upon the residents. Most importantly though, the utilized collection
technology causes glass to shatter! More than brilliant…can you imagine that now, after we paid for thousands of blue bins and specialized trucks equipped with fork lifts, an expensive segregation process will be necessary to sort out broken pieces of glass from paper and plastic? In a more distant past we supported a group of recyclists who were taking care of our bottles in a very effective way and the city was greener than today. That group of glass recyclists was environmentally conscious and more useful than any of the City employees. One of the city official responsible for the introduction of blue bins’ system reports: “Glass is the one problem area largely because the cleanest and highest quality glass is collected through bottle depots.” The City proclaims its green action of blue bins a big success while amassing 4,000 tons of broken glass of not as high quality as glass collected by the recyclists and delivered by them to bottle depots. There is really no need for broken glass, but the creative minds in the City Hall hope that some of it might be used in road construction, the rest, well, it may end up in the garbage dump… The truth is that no one knows what to do with glass from blue bins, but likely a group of consultants may be hired to solve the problem.

New York’s bottles and cans’ recycling program works well. It is simple, environmental and communal. The recycling machines are located in a variety of sites in the city. The NYC’s recyclists do wait in lines, deposit their finds smoothly and cash-in instantly. Quick, effective and, interestingly, the recycling sites are kept quite clean by their users. Is it possible that the general populace can be affected by public art and design that are not kitschy but intelligent, sensitive and sensual? For the artists and designers to go beyond the gallery space is to confront the public with a socially unlimited diversity. The gallery spaces with their white sterile walls and gentrified audiences do not offer as much challenge as a street or a plaza. The challenge to unexpected unpredictability is thrilling and it replaces the white and the sterile.

Krzysztof Wodiczko’s work is provocative and intelligent. He is dedicated to public interventions and does not underestimate the public. He evaluates its potential and presents social or political issues in a challenging manner. The challenge that is ridiculously esoteric does not make any lasting impression, but the challenge that articulates and offers open-ended ideas can make its ever-lasting imprint. It is not a carbon imprint though. One of Wodiczko most significant works is The Vehicle for the Homeless. The idea for the Vehicle was conceived in Poland during 1970s and further developed in New York in 1980s. Wodiczko proposed and executed his Vehicle not as a solution to the problem of homelessness, but rather as project that would bring the attention to the problem. Vehicle raises many questions and above all, it emanates with warm and human approach. It also treats people on the periphery of society with dignity and friendship. Wodiczko interviewed many homeless people in New York providing them with a powerful voice of participation in the design of Vehicle. It turned out that a place to store bottles and cans within the Vehicle was mentioned by everyone. A part of life on the streets and possibility of a well deserved income.

Wodiczko’s perception of the homeless is highly contrasting to the attitudes of the officials representing the City of Calgary. The artist talks to the homeless as to his equals and valued design partners. He respects their observations and listens to their arguments. Respect usually instills a sense of belonging to a community that is built out of individuals: we remember their names and faces. To acknowledge and to listen count so much more than to ignore with a passive-aggressive attitude of unjustified rejection. Can lovers of flamingoes and cows become sensitive recipients of public art and public interventions by Wodiczko? My claim is that they
can as soon as they start comprehending messages embedded in the works by environmentally, politically and socially conscious artists, architects and designers. And, of course, as soon as they abandon trendy meaningless solutions and rather opt for resolutions that are sensitive, informed and community related.

The material and its claim can succeed only for a limited period of time, but the sensual, intelligent and suggestive can last forever activating the most refined strata of community’s perceptions. Let us remember that the creators of public spaces are also the members of the public.

Creativity in general, as well as art and science, does not require a total, absolute novelty of expression, but it requires the need for a search and a voyage beyond the visible. It also demands the independence from any political and social pressures.

The very last words of Voltaire in Candide are: “Cultiver votre jardin!” And yet Voltaire believed in merits of civilization. Thus perhaps we just simply lack the ability to wisely decide how to make our environment working with us rather than destroying it as well as ourselves.
CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS OF LANDSCAPE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

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The landscape by definition is described as expansive; the photographic medium by definition is framing, ‘cropping’ the world outside the lens. How and why has the photograph as mediator, the photographer as author, and the viewer as skeptic or subservient believer, evolved as the landscape changes around us?

My preoccupation with the photographic landscape stems from my own art-making practice. In my own work, I digitally merge and manipulate original photographs of architecture, pastoral scenery and urban landscapes, until they meld into a single composition; a visual allegory commenting on the fracturing of landscape as a metaphor for societal and economic upheaval. This process, is why my initial research into landscape photography focused primarily on the changing role of post production manipulation and its connections to the changing definition of the picturesque in the United States, as it deviated from the ideas of the picturesque in the Anglo-Saxon culture. However, while looking at various photographers, who dealt with the landscape by creating elaborate presentations such as stereoscopes, collage, and traveling photographic installations, I noticed the visual complexity of presentation in landscape photography began to fade, and by the time we reach the 1980’s there was definite trend towards the ‘un-manipulated’ image, printed on flat photographic substrate and traditionally framed.

In efforts to unpack this the evolving relationship of landscape and the photographic practice, I returned to my research, however, this time interested not only in the post-production manipulation of the image, but also focusing the methods of presentation, the camera apparatus as a mediated device, and the roll of the photographer as author.

Since, much of my initial intrigue into this topic was brought on by oddly contradictory simplistic presentation of the 1970’s landscape photography, as compared to the elaborate fabrications of their contemporaries in other artistic mediums; such as Donald Judd’s 1973 ‘untitled Six Boxes’ a room filled with several the seamlessly fabricated oversized mirrored box’s, I choose to begin with photographers whom on the outset appear to be creating photographic equivalents of their contemporaries in painting. Great American Landscape photographers of the late 1800’s; Carl Watkins, Timothy O’Sullivan and William Henry Jackson, appeared to be analogous to popular landscape painters of the time; Frederic Edwin Church and Thomas Cole. And, although, many formal tropes were shared, it is clear that the photographers’ visions came from a very different spirit than that of the painters. Consumed with the duty of fine-tuning a new science based medium, these photographers were part scientist, technician and unlike painters of the time, these photographers were hired workers. Employed by railroad companies or accompanying geographical survey teams, which were sponsored by various branches of the federal government, as well as by large industrial developers, these connections made photographers, above all: entrepreneurial businesspersons.

Exhibits and books of western photography tend to give a one-sided impression of the relationship between the photographer and the land in which they worked. What we usually see are pictures of the natural beauty in which
evidence of human occupation has been carefully avoided-or at least
minimized. This often leads to the assumption the photographers were on the
side of conservationist who wanted to preserve the world as it was. But in fact,
considerably more photographs were produced to promote economic
development than to foster appreciation of wilderness.”

In 1869, William Henry Jackson, won a commission from Union Pacific Railroad, which
resulted in many of the photographs now referred to as his most famous “artistic” works. This
is a revisionist concept, as Jackson and Watkins, viewed post-Civil War photography as a new
commercial industry that could prove lucrative as funded projects moved westward and as
businesspersons venture into the new leisure industry of tourism.

In the 1800’s the concept of leisure travel and the invention of the camera were both new, as a
result landscape photography was controlled by as select group of individuals, who had access
to both technology of cameras, and the support of the railroad industry. These elite
circumstances allowed the photographer to capture specific vistas from distant locations,
offering them access to grandiose landscapes. As image-makers, photographers were recording
and disseminating a vision of landscape that many of their viewers would never see firsthand.
Their elite access to the original landscape put them in a position of power over the viewer;
landscape photography of the 19th century was co-opted by class and access. The photographer
acted as an authoritative distributor of image and information, with the viewer reliant on them
as truth tellers and disseminators of knowledge about the unknown.

The hierarchical class structure of 19th century landscape photography did end here. The
viewers although subservient to the photographer, were still in a privileged position. These
photographs only reached the economically privileged. Once the photographs were recorded,
they were then mass produced, and distributed. The mode of presentation was complex and
often gimmicky. The cost of photography reproduction, and the elaborate presentation made
them pricey objects. The landscape was transformed into entertainment. William Henry
Jackson’s black and white images became shocking and colorful hand painted postcards, which
would be sent home by those who never travel.

Several glass plate negatives were printed of the same landscape, and then window matted next
to one another, creating elongated panoramas thought to display the true grandeur of America’s
landscape. Stereoscopes created magical 3D affects, which dazzled viewers. Often purchased by
the wealthy and put on display in their homes. Later in the late 1800’s the upper middle class,
whom would never had experienced travel itself, could pay an affordable fee to see the these
panoramic photos, as stereoscopes toured towns and villages much like circuses or performance
wagons. In post-production and presentation, landscape photographs became about
wonderment. The mode of presentation aided this mystical relationship to landscape.

In the 1950s the definition of natural landscape changes, as the landscape becomes ‘developed’
or ‘mutated’ by the visual presence of technology and industry. No longer does the
photographer present sublime vistas of the great wide-open. Photographers show us urban
sprawl, highways and byways that stretch over the earth, and suburban communities that
appear to be swallowing up the land. The camera as a device changed too, wagon sized large
format cameras are replaced with personal 35mm cameras. These cameras were affordable for
the photographer, removing yet another link between photographers and industry. Lee
Friedlander photographed the landscape with a hand held Leica, while Robert Adams, and Lewis Baltz founders of the landscape photography movement “New Topographics,” often didn’t get out of their car to create an image. The intimacy the photographer had with their device, shifted their relationship to the photograph, and as a result this shifted the viewer’s response to the landscape. This new camera format, also allowed these photographers to be much more prolific. No longer restricted by huge glass sheet negatives, roll film allowed them to photograph multiple images of a single landscape. Their work was not about gestalt, but rather about repetition and monotony, which mirrored the suburban landscape they recorded.

Similar, to the landscape photographers of the 1800’s, Lee Friedlander is relaying his findings of a new landscape to the viewer. However, Friedlander and his contemporaries have a keen awareness that as photographers, they are on a common ground with the viewer. Unlike earlier western frontier photographers, the viewer / photographer relationship is democratic. Both the photographer and viewer inhabit the same landscape. Friedlander, is not photographing as someone with privileged access to dramatic landscape, he is in his home, our home, the American landscape.

After, looking over dozens of Lee Friedlander’s photographs, it is hard to ignore that while his work is compositional brilliant, displaying a mastery of formal control, Friedlander’s work is a personally investigating the surrounding space in-which he inhabits. His prolific and expansive photographic career displays his personal relationship to the rapid changing landscape of the late 1960’s and 1970’s. This is evident as his often appears in his own photographs, in reflections of storefront windows or his car side view-mirror; he is implicating himself in the landscape.

This democratic access to the landscape is also rooted in a major industrial development of their time - the automobile. By the time photographers such as Friedlander and Adams had come into their prime in the 1970’s, the American family already owned more than one car per household. This demonstrates that unlike previous generations of landscape photographers, the viewers are as familiar with the sites in these photographs, and so the role of the photographer is no longer that of the authoritative figure.

Robert Adams describes the new role of the photographer in relation to the new landscape in the forward seminal book, The New West. He writes about how very little of America remains untouched and how this changes landscape photography, “this leaves photography with a new but not less important job: to reconcile us to half wilderness.”

In keeping with the photographer’s dedication to recording and possessing the newly redefined American landscape, the popular mode of presentation during this period, resembles the work of a police forensics department; clear, concise and thorough. The photographs of Friedlander’s, and “New Topographic” photographers often came in portfolio form. These artist shot in series, and presented these collections as complete bodies of work. They created portfolio books, and in exhibitions, you rarely see less than 10-15 images per photographer, often shown in succinct row or a grid. Landscape photography was truly about ‘reconciling’ the landscape. The photographer was simply, more dedicated to this cause than the viewer, but no more capable. The portfolio collection presentation reinforces this ideology, by allowing the viewer to see a wide spectrum of images, so they can democratically ‘reconcile’ their landscape for themselves.
In the 1970s, just as we had grown comfortable with our manmade landscape, by readjusting our definition of natural, a new generation of photographers came into the forefront. The photographer’s role was no longer that of investigator, striving to comprehend the landscape around them- they were a generation of light hearted observers. They had no concern with presenting the complete picture of how contemporary society plays out in the landscape. Photographers like Stephen Shore and Joel Sternfeld, put themselves a position of passive observer. Creating a photographic collection of obscure, sometimes humorous moments. They present themselves as innocent bystanders of the odd happenings that occur in the landscape around them. Moments that demonstrated that perhaps there was something not quite right with Adams’ “half wilderness” – it just wasn’t ‘natural’.

Following a period methodical photographic recording of the new suburban landscape, comes a new photographic practice, photographs were one offs, single shots that were more about a captured a moment, each image’s meaning relying on nothing other than the singular print. Coinciding with the popularity of color film these images lacked the aesthetic weightiness that had come to be associated with black and white photographs. These bright and saturated prints resembled the optimistic nature of new media culture and advertising, not of document.

A new landscape photograph; a print no larger 28” x 30” showing a long repetitive row of wood posts which once belonged to a fence, run down the side of the interstate. A landscape scene of America, almost as if it was lifted from the descriptive text of Jack Kerouac, only there is a humorous disruption. Stephen Shore’s ‘South of Klamath Falls, Oregon,’ from the series ‘Uncommon Places’, does not leave the great American landscape alone. A generation after Adams, we find Shore amusing himself and the viewer with the wonky half natural half man made landscape we have created. In the right hand quadrant of the photographic frame stands a giant billboard. This billboard looks almost superimposed, as it stands erect with a glorious painted image of a mountain range, off in the distance, with the prairie in front of it. As if, this was not odd enough, there appears to be text that has been covered over with a block of blue paint, meant to match the blue sky behind it. Shore’s and Sternfeld’s works are congenial photographs, which serve as an amusing precursor to the true destruction of the earth that we will see ten years later in the world’s landscape.

The relationship of author, apparatus, viewer and presentation shifts again in the landscape photography of the 1990’s. Photographers begin to seek out and research landscape sites that are fraught with the visual detritus of postindustrial development. The democracy of the familiar is gone, as photographers return to a position of privileged access. Only this time their access is not provided by commerce or commercial development, but by the individuals’ cultural consciousness.

Contemporary landscape photography spanning the last ten years retains the simplistic presentation of the generation before them. Galleries display borderless photographs, mounted on thin sheets aluminum, they appear weightless in mid-air, the image unobstructed by presentation. However, the scale of the prints, shifts dramatically. Viewers are confronted with large oversized prints, which contain almost super real detail, camera becomes scientist’s microscope, and the print becomes crucial findings. These oversized prints demand the viewer’s attention, leaving them no space to divert their eyes- assaulted to with information as photographs shouting look at me, ‘I am proof!’ In the 1990’s photographers have repositioned themselves once again, this time back in a role of authority. Photographers as researcher,
seeking out the specific locations where the detritus result of man’s supposed technological advancements, are visibly prominent. Photographer Edward Burtynsky, brilliantly refers to this as the “Residual Landscape.”

This new landscape photography combines emotions of terror and pathos together—horrifying, jolting and seductive. An early master of this landscape photography depicting devastation is Richard Misrach. His photographs appear at first glance to fit earlier ideas of the natural landscape, but after looking a bit longer you notice oddities; like a pipe running horizontally across the frame, in an image of a lush green landscape. Even then with this subtle disruption, the viewer is only aware of what they see, after they read the title, ‘Swamp and Pipeline, Cancer Alley’. Misrach has informed the viewer of the meaning behind this very specific landscape. Unlike the humorous moments of Shore, we find Misrach has not just happened upon these sites. Misrach has information for the viewer, he has researched and sought out and recorded a specific area in Louisiana, because it contains numerous industrial plants and scientific studies indicate that the incidence of cancer in this region is above the average for the United States and he wants the viewer to know. Suddenly, even the manmade—sometimes serine suburban landscapes, shown by Joel Sternfeld seem by comparison, endearing.

In the fall of 2010, when this paper was written, Peter Bialobreziski had just exhibited his second major landscape series following the success of his urban cityscapes series entitled “Neon Tigers”. In this new series he documented the nighttime skylines of major cities in Asia. This new body of work, more compelling and more disheartening, comes from his discovery that while photographing cities at night, he was essentially photographing not buildings but pollution—light pollution. In this current exhibition, he moves away from the cities center to shooting long exposures taken at night, just on the edge of the same cities, where the rural landscape begins.

Each image is mystically illuminated, creating stunning images of saturated lush greenery, that only become disturbing when you realize that the light creating these photographs is neon pollution emanating from miles away. Bialobreziski, like other contemporary photographers realize the viewer needs a reason too look. The devastation and meaning behind the landscape cannot be coupled with a repulsive esthetic. These are beautiful photographs of a horrible byproduct of man’s industrial advancements.

Also on exhibit at the time of this publication was and exhibition of landscapes by photographer Abelardo Morell. We see Morell, like Burtynsky gravitates towards an old world method of photographic recording—the camera obscura. Turning hotel rooms, into cameras and using the window as a lens he exposes images of the modern metropolis outside. This is our landscape; this is what we have created. A pastoral scene of Central Park, overlays the interior of an empty living room, nature, man, and city collide into contemporary landscapes. No trickery no digital manipulation, light casting images of technical purity—truth.

The contemporary landscape photographer needs you, the viewer to believe everything seen. Photographers are all too aware, that the viewer has become skeptical. No longer do an elite few have access to cameras and print production. Online consumer printing services make 20” x 24” prints as affordable as snapshots. Everyone owns a digital camera, in order to maintain a position of authority photographers’ return to antiquated painstaking photographic apparatus. Access to extinct Polaroid sheet film, separate them from the photographing masses. In an art world capable of complex digital trickery, and distracting presentations, these photographers want you to see how complex, surreal and worrisome, the actual landscape has become. They
want the landscape, and by extension themselves to do all the talking. And they don’t want the wonderment of new camera technology, digital post-production and an elaborate mode of presentation cluttering their visual arguments.

NOTES

3 Burtnsky, Edward ‘Manufactured Landscapes’ Yale University Press. 2003 pg. 14

For images supporting this essay please visit: www.desiano.com/SVA2010.html
Since the early 1980s, Edward Burtynsky, the internationally celebrated photographer, has been making beautiful pictures of what he calls “the new landscape of our time,” natural environments transformed by industrialization: mines and tailings \((5, 6, 7)\), quarries \((8)\), rail cuts \((9)\), factories \((10 \text{ ours}/ 11 \text{ theirs})\), recycling yards \((12)\), waste dumps \((13)\), oil extraction \((14)\) and the end of oil \((15, 16)\). Many look like “abstract-expressionist paintings” (Smith) until you lean in and squint: \((17)\) those layers of repeating circles are dead phone dials; \((18)\) this gay tangle of colors is wired; \((19)\) here’s a Paul Klee. Taken with a large format field camera and developed into high-resolution 50”x60” prints, Burtynsky’s photographs are housed in corporate, private, and public galleries worldwide, including the Guggenheim, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. \((20)\) He had made four shooting trips to China when chance resulted in the decision for Jennifer Baichwal, a fellow Canadian who makes films about artists, to direct a documentary about his work (Burtynsky in Smith). In 2005 they traveled to China to record the back story of his earlier pictures there, make new ones, \((21)\) and shoot his “photographic industry” \((2)\) on site: a device meant to authenticate Burtynsky’s images.

The scale and scope of its subject matter are only the beginning of what makes Manufactured Landscapes \((3)\) challenging to watch. Baichwal’s sequences revisit Burtynsky’s themes from 1983–2005 tracking the elements of global mega-development—\((22)\) from gargantuan Chinese factories \((23)\) to e-waste dumps where half the world’s computers end up, \((24)\) the vast shipping industry that imports parts to China and transports its products to world markets, \((25)\) whole coastlines appropriated for ship building and breaking or repair \((26, 27)\); and natural resource extraction \((28)\). The film culminates with the 17-year Three Gorges Dam project \((29)\), which is to house 26 turbines generating hydroelectric power equal to 16 nuclear power plants, enhance inland shipping, and prevent floods: but it has required dislocating more than 1.3 million people and destroying \((30)\) 13 full-sized cities, 140 towns, 1300 villages, 1600 factories and mines, some of the richest farmland in China, and cultural/historical sites. \((31)\) To make way for the water, residents disassembled their own communities by hand \((32)\), brick by brick, and were promised new homes in glittering urban utopias. The film’s last sequence critically \((33)\) examines these promises with the \((34)\) boom development of Shanghai. \((35)\)

Baichwal says the images “let you witness the places you are responsible for but would never normally see” (qtd. in Smith). Keenly interested in faces and individual stories, she incorporates interviews with construction crews, company spokeswomen, officials, and others in these sites to add the dimensions of worker alienation, exploitation, and national pride, the industrial production of stark class divisions, China’s penetration by the capitalist rhetoric of development, \((36)\) and the tricky business of getting access to sites. Baichwal also inserts footage of culture consumers \((37)\) back home looking at Bursynsky’s work in galleries. Representing the viewer in the film, and flipping back and forth, ‘micro-macro,’ from the framed photograph to the live scene in which it was taken (cf. Baichwal qtd. in Smith 5), Manufactured Landscapes, as she insists, is “not just about China but about all of us” (“Q&A”).
Burtynsky steps into the 21st century’s green revolution at the movies refusing to pontificate, politicize, or polarize. Understanding photography as the “Contemplated Moment,” he takes a “meditative approach” (qtd. in Smith), explaining in clips from a lecture threaded throughout the film that he wants to show “This is what it is,” not to glorify industrialization or damn it, but to “allow [people] to see what they’ve never looked at.” (The myth of the “disinterested photographer” only seems alive and well here.) His aesthetic philosophy is to take what he calls a “consciously ambiguous position” by leaving the image “open,” so that “the work of art [can be] completed in the mind of the person who’s seeing it,” with whatever they bring to it (qtd. in Smith). By demonizing corporations, he thinks the traditional environmental movement has made it “easy for the corporations to marginalize them by saying, Well, they don’t know how to run the world, are we going to give it over to them? . . . And so the conversation stopped.” Maybe that’s not the only reason it gets stopped, but Burtynsky and Baichwal are determined to stimulate dialogue—across disciplines, political lines, national boundaries, and interests, and within Western consumers wedded to their lifestyles but unable to repress a haunting sense of consequences and of limit: at some point all this stuff will run out.

Unlike An Inconvenient Truth, Baichwal’s documentary “brings aesthetics into the discussion” (Dollar). In its self-conscious art, it reminds us that all “landscapes” are “manufactured,” laden with conventions, values, and cultural processes even before they are aesthetically rendered or industrially transformed (Mitchell 14). But Manufactured Landscapes only starts with that truism. Watching this film demands discomfiting spectatorial work because its representational work is equivocal, like the title, engaging the viewer in contradictions, paradoxes, and double binds at the intersections of the ethical, the economic, the aesthetic, and the toxic. Baichwal and Burtynsky are caught in paradoxes too. I won’t have time to mount that critique but hope later we can discuss what might be problematic about the fit between the film’s vision, its artistic methods, and its weighty subject matter.

Burtynsky works at fashioning his images “so you can’t read them quickly”: you have to ‘look twice’ (qtd. in Smith). They are fundamentally equivocal because they offer pure visual pleasure and intrigue in compositional detail, symmetry, formal abstraction, line, tone, and color, while bidding our attention to the toxic impacts of technology’s long assault on nature and humanity. Striving to get away from the clichés of the genre, which I can attest are very hard to avoid, Burtynsky’s more recent work cuts off the converse between “Man” and “Nature” traditionally mediated by landscape by presenting the eye with terra incognita or terra nullis. In the Shanghai sequence nature is nullified except for an edge of bland sky scraped by soaring vertical shapes. In a weird “where are we?” moment, the camera presents us with an unpeopled utopian cityscape, exhibited to tour groups, eerily modeled in shadowless white mock-ups anticipating its future obstruction of sunlight (Nye 97), then auto-lit section by section in the surreal glow of neon light pollution that makes even the shadows look ‘unnatural.’

More than this, photographs and film together alienate the aesthetic responses they call for by deploying images that are both “invitational,” drawing us in to look, and “contrainvitational,” making us think by thwarting identification, gratification, and habit (Snyder 190). Constructing intricate patterns of disturbance, this “toggle” between “attraction and repulsion” (Burtynsky qtd. in Smith) provokes us from within the picture (47), in juxtapositions of individual photos or sequences, sometimes in contrasts between picture and live footage around it.
This elegant image of a ship under construction, beached like a whale, its symmetrical ribs looming bare against the sky, perfectly centered, is soon followed by the ragged human tolls of shipping: photographs and footage of Bangladeshis scraping oil tankers by hand, wading through sludge, and a chanting chain of men pulling apart a ship with a rope and a thunderous crash. We puzzle over the massed pleasing shapes of these circuit boards, then see Chinese women in coolie hats picking out precious metal bits in a recycling yard, a mountain of toxic waste where the workers live and children of the dump giggle over pictures Burtnsks has taken of them. The new Shanghai bulks over its mazy old neighborhoods, where the recorded testimonies of people being forcibly displaced, who fear their new homes “may not have plumbing or windows because the contractors are all corrupt” (Baichwal qtd. in Smith), recast the skyscraper as an “anti-social form” (Nye 97). Some hold out. Baichwal’s footage of an aged woman in her still-standing home, intently mending a fabric, a metaphor for the impulse to preserve amid “urban renewal,” gives us her exquisitely creased face as a portrait of individual will poised against the city’s iconic expressions of national aspiration.

This moving close-up is all human attraction. Burtnsky’s risk is inviting purely aesthetic responses that, in these contexts, become effectively toxic. While some photographs of railway tracks in his 1985 “Railcut” series literally slice across the land and the picture plane, others are wholly invitational by effecting the naturalization of industry within landscape (can you find the tracks amid the greenery?), recalling the pictures of mines and rail lines by Carlton Watkins, an early influence. In this photograph of Cape Horn, Watkins has harmonized the “regularity of the rails” with a wild landscape that seems untouched by the railway cut, while the tracks “drive the eye toward the background, where they disappear into the land, without a trace,” like the native people who had been “removed . . . less than forty years before” (Snyder 188-89). For Watkins, “pictorial coherence and integrity . . . mas[k] the broader enterprise of harmonizing nature and industry.”

Ten years after the green railcut I showed you, in Burtnsky’s “Nickel Tailings #34” (1996) attraction and repulsion bid from the same picture. (It appears in the film.) This riverine shape is astonishingly beautiful, its glow seeming to reflect some part of the sky we can’t see, evoking romantic pictures of mirror lakes “exhibit[ing] Nature representing itself to itself, “certify[ing] the reality” of the image (Michell 15). But this surreal color isn’t reflected; and the gaze can’t remain innocent when the spectator realizes what fills those lovely contours. The flood of toxic red-orange also widens toward the viewer and keeps going beyond the frame, while an infinitude of wasteland stretches behind where forest once flourished. Watkins represented the West as an “American Eden . . . in a way that encourages” viewers to see “it as a scene of potential exploitation and development,” and thereby imagine a “double salvation—a return to unspoiled innocence and an opportunity to profit from the violation of innocence” (Snyder 189): what W.J.T. Mitchell would call an essentially imperialist vision of the “unbounded prospect of endless appropriation and conquest” (17, 20). An anti-Eden, this Burtnsky terrain is apocalyptic, seeming to signify the end result of exploitation and of development itself, except that it keeps on coming.

This is one message of the film’s unforgettable opening: an 8-minute lateral pan of the Cankun Factory work floor (in Xiamen City, Fujian), a complex the size of four football fields, tracking slowly past row after row. At first it’s “mesmerizing” as you try to make out what they’re
assembling. (62) But as the pan goes on, and on, and on, in near-total silence, you begin to get “bored,” then “uncomfortable,” start to “fidget,” (63) look some more, and then think, “This is absurd. It’s still going!” (Smith); and still it goes on. (For the workers, even longer.) Burtynsky took these pictures from one end; the other is so distant it dissolves into mist. By extending his stills in a cinematic medium, Baichwal “convey[es] scale in time” (qtd. in Smith). Watching this opening shot, she says, “not only . . . get[s] you used to the [meditative] rhythm of the film . . . [It] saturates you” “visceral[ly]” with a sense of the “scale [of] everything you’re about to see.”

With scale as its formal subject, Manufactured Landscapes is also double in invoking multiple forms of the sublime and disrupting them. (64) When the Three Gorges reservoir was filled, we’re told, the rush of water caused “a measurable wobble” in the earth’s rotation. Here is Kant’s “dynamic sublime,” the “encounter with the overwhelming power of [wild] nature,” provoking feelings of “helplessness” (Abrams 318); before Kant’s subject goes on to “exult at the recognition of [the mind’s] inherent capacity to think a totality” larger “than [what] the senses can grasp,” realizing humanity’s “‘pre-eminence over nature’” (Abrams 318; Nye 7). For some minutes we marvel at this world wonder of geo-engineering as the modern Chinese dynamic sublime. Then tiny human figures struggle across our vision through the rubble of their former cities.

Burtynsky won’t overtly criticize China but his perspective is different: (65)

If you look at the early Romantics, the Turner paintings—a ship lost at sea, gale-force winds—nature was an omnipresent, fearful, sublime force. We were dwarfed within that world. And then fast forward 175 years: We’ve created a world that buffers us from nature. In the urban world we’ve built up, we’ve created this industrial complex that to me is the new sublime. We are dwarfed within that creation. My figures are usually players in a greater theater of industry, and therefore the individual isn’t necessarily my pursuit. It’s technology and our relation to nature. (qtd. in Smith)

Burtynsky’s photographic subjects, (66) most strikingly viewed from ‘above’ (Nye 10), convey Edmund Burke’s ideas of (67) obscurity, vacancy, silence, “immense power, and vastness” (Abrams 317; Nye 6), but by (68) filling the mind with alarm at the de-naturing of nature’s sublime. Colossal environments manufactured to serve a dominant economic world order that “recognizes no limits to its own expansion” (Magdoff and Foster 8) excite (69) astonishment and incomprehension but no romantic awe; (70) and entirely desacralized places rebuff a sublime that would “reinvest the landscape and the works of men with transcendent significance” (Nye). Vast man-made sites with fuzzy ‘beyonds’ suggesting their obscure(d) implications and endless consequences are infused with subtle terror. The wide black borders (71) that frame some of the photographs on screen, as in a gallery, would secure the spectator in Burke’s and Kant’s ‘safe place’ for experiencing “a delightful horror” (qtd. in Abrams 317), if only the images didn’t prompt anxiety to question the means and meaning of our ‘security.’

(72) China’s skyscraper cities projecting urban grids vertically (Nye 89), conquering upward space, embody the geometrical sublime, a “type of [Kant’s] mathematical sublime,” the encounter with seeming infinitude prompting feelings of “weakness and insignificance” (7) and ultimately signifying the “triumph of reason in concrete form” (77): except for the invisible figures we can only imagine on the ground whose skyscrapered habitat has destroyed the city’s
“human scale” (97). (73) Its “abstraction, the international and imperial style of the twentieth century . . . carries out the task of landscape by other means” (Mitchell 20) without (human) nature’s quirky “pied beauty”: these postmodern constructions could be anywhere cities (a gleaming Hong Kong apartment building is slipped into the Shanghai sequence), or to borrow from Italo Calvino, they are invisible cities, cities of invisibility and conformity, whose forms “say everything you must think, make you repeat her discourse” (13). The intricate wheeling of superhighways both here and (74) there would likewise signify the “triumph of reason in concrete form” but for their frenzied driving of oil consumption past its peak. (75) With their ingenious technological complication, the Three Gorges Dam, the overhead conveyor belts at the Cankun Factory trekking endless household irons, and the muscular orange lifts filmed from below hefting containers up into the sky represent the triumph of the technological sublime. But magnificent mechanism testifying to what Roland Marchand calls “[man’s] power to . . . manufacture”[brackets] sublimity (qtd, in Nye xv) here dwarfs humanity in “the manufactured world as a total environment” (Nye 76, 106).

(77) Factory workers “marshaled into an ideal order,” “suggest[ing] endless production” (Nye 115), (78) their outputs precisely computed, their labored repetitions doubling the machinery, are subjected to both the geometrical and the technological sublime. (79) In the film’s signature image, yellow-jacketed hands at Cankun’s “Factory of the World” assemble before work in regiments, their color-matched dormitories stretching back to the horizon’s morning mist. Baichwal’s insertion of interviews (80) with people at other sites who talk about the pay and what the job means to them ‘spoils’ the grandeur of epic scenes (81) (cf. Mitchell 15). The film camera brings us in close to watch faces intent on tiny tasks, and lightning fingers assembling gadgets, paradoxically revealing distinctive individuals instrumentalized by their mechanized environments. And Shanghai’s nightclub dancers (82) under pulsating lights, an “electrical sublime” (Nye 143-95) fueled by coal, are mechanized by the culture of the machine.

(83) In helping us imagine the scale of technology’s relentless takeover of water, air, land, underground earth, habitat, and people, not just in China, Manufactured Landscapes fills the mind with the fearful totality of the global industrial sublime. It also aims to provoke an undefined dread of our complicity by thematizing excessive personal consumption; and Burtynsky admits that his photographic work too exploits extracted resources. (84) The film cannot invite nostalgia for “the delicate and persuasive complex of nature” that Ansel Adams taught people to love because virtually no unspoiled nature is visible in environments manufactured to suppress the awareness that earth is an endangered species. (85) Baichwal’s last live images drive these signifying absences home.

(86) Dark has fallen in Shanghai. (87) The electrical sublime has gone frenetic. Recalling the nightclub’s black light pulsations, undulating multi-colored neon framed by the heavy black curve of a walkway above and by vague dark shapes like coal heaps in the foreground dazzles the eye for some moments; then just before blackout, lights flash red. (88) (89) Despite Burtynsky’s refusal of the “campaign-stop crisis rhetoric” of Inconvenient Truth (Smith), Baichwal effects closure for this somewhat equivocal film by pressing an unequivocal alarm on the spectator’s retinal pulses. The impact of this final landscape is notbuffered by the viewer’s position outside the cinematic frame doubled by the wide black frame inside it. Watching this last unpeopled shot of mechanism seeming to operate on its own, the great wonder of early factories (Nye 122-23), you feel like the only human left.
Baichwal believes experiential “witnessing” is “consciousness-changing” (qtd. in Smith 8), but her film does far more precisely because of its element of time. For 90 minutes nonstop your eye has been riveted by stunning images in motion of beauty and fear. They become brain implants. Consciousness isn’t just ‘raised,’ it’s deepened as global conditions get internalized through images: they are now ‘attached’ to you. If the film’s motif of freezing outdoor shots into gallery stills risks endowing the photographs with a certain detachment, the mystique of timeless art, they exercise the power of that mystique while being mobilized by the moving camera’s eye to attach you to ravaged environments and faraway people who live, work, and die in them.

Baichwal’s film (like its motif of wide black mats) screens off the motive forces of global industrialization, from the geopolitics of national policies and insatiable military demand for oil, to the “shadow capital” of the world’s hyper-rich investors, trans-national corporations distant in their unaccountability, and the capitalist mantra of the “consumer-driven economy”; nor do we see the Chinese coal workers (unfortunately off-limits to tape recorder and camera) or hear about miners country-wide who die from countless accidents every year. Although Burtynsky’s voice-overs provide some textbook facts about consequences, with no information about how these territories became incognito we cannot historicize what we see in this visual flow of the present, picture to picture, frame to frame, sequence to sequence.

We obviously need more information and analysis about its subjects than Baichwal’s film can provide without compromising its aesthetic; reality’s lenses are wider, its field deeper. But we won’t seek to know more until we give up the false privileges of detachment and become attached. As attending a gallery showing of Burtynsky’s photographs could not do, the hard spectatorial work required by Manufactured Landscapes seals that discomfiting attachment.

NOTES

1. Bold numbers in parentheses in the text refer to the PowerPoint slides. See numbered list after References below.
3. Manufactured Landscapes (Zeitgeist Films 2006): Dir., Jennifer Baichwal; Dir. of Photography and Creative Consultant, Peter Mettler; Producers for Mercury Films and Foundry Films, Nick de Pencier, Daniel Iron, and Jennifer Baichwal; Co-producers for the National Film Board of Canada, Peter Starr and Gerry Flahive. Score, Dan Driscoll. Premiering at the Toronto Film Festival, where it won best Canadian Feature, it garnered top prizes from the Toronto Film Critics Association, the Genie Awards (Best Documentary), and in other competitions. See http://www.zeitgeistfilms.com.

REFERENCES

------. “Landscape and Power,” in Mitchell 5-34.


**SLIDES**


60. Nickel Tailings #30, Sudbury ONT, 1996.

61. Cankun Factory #18b, Xiamen City, Fujian Prov., 2005.  
62. Dupes of this shot x 9.  
63. Dupes x 16.  
64. Three Gorges Dam #2, Yangtze River, 2002.  
67. Ansel Adams, Snake River.  
69. Bao Steel #8, Shanghai. (up close).  
70. Bao Steel #8, Shanghai.  
73. Highway #1 and #2, Los Angeles, 2003; Ansel Adams, freeways.  
75. Three Gorges Dam #6.  
78. No title available (China factory).  
82. Electrical sublime: neon collage, Google Images.  
83. Soccar Oil Fields #6, Baku, Azerbaijan, 2006.  
84. Ansel Adams text and portrait photo.  
86. Black screen.  
88. Red color closeup of Nickel Tailings #34, Sudbury ONT, 1996.  
89. Black screen.

Obiora N. Anekwe,
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INTRODUCTION

In the spirit of using earth’s resources responsibly, learning key design and architectural principles and fostering an understanding of Dr. Booker T. Washington’s theories on education, students work in campus woodshop to transform a tree into a writer’s desk. Students were exposed to recycling, woodworking techniques, drama, architectural history, art and design.

BACKGROUND

The conceptual idea for the Booker T. Washington Writer’s Desk was formulated by Dr. Obiora N. Anekwe, who directed and produced the first-year students’ theatrical production, entitled, The Chronicles of Up From Slavery, which documented the legacy of Tuskegee University through oral history video and student narrative interpretations. During the Spring academic semester of 2010, Sodexo Maintenance Services cut down an original oak tree on the grounds of Tuskegee University near the Chappie James Center in order to make the wood for the Booker T. Washington Writer’s Desk. The desk was made at the University Physical Plant for the set of the first-year students’ theatrical production held on Friday, April 9, 2010 in the Tuskegee University Chapel, Tuskegee, Alabama.

During the Intermission Ceremony at the theatrical production, the Booker T. Washington Writer’s Desk was presented to the administration for Dr. Benjamin F. Payton, the fifth president of Tuskegee University, in recognition of his retirement and dedicated service to the university. The first-year students in the Robert R. Taylor School of Architecture designed and built the Booker T. Washington Writer’s Desk under the leadership of Daya Irene Taylor, AIA, NOMA, Associate Professor of Architecture, Dr. Obiora N. Anekwe, Coordinator of Educational Enhancement and Technology, Office of the Provost, and Arthur Strum, Sodexo Facilities Management. The first-year students who made and designed the desk were Franca Bennett, Megan Brightharp, Perry Couch, Ryan Gholston, Taneisha Gordan, Taylor Guinn, Theresia Lewis, Antonio Minifield, Tori Mohammad, Benjamin Patterson, Jacarrie Perry, Iesha Roberson, Barry Robinson, and Angela Smith.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to propel the discussion of practical education, the discussion will be divided into three main points to highlight Washington’s perspective on practical education. The discussion points are Theory of Value, Theory of Knowledge, and Theory of Learning. These various points will provide the historical background and understanding of the desk making process.
conducted by the first-year architecture students at Tuskegee University.

THEORY OF VALUE

The educational philosophy of Booker T. Washington evolved and transformed over the years as he developed from a child to an educator. In his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, Washington wrote, “I determined, when quite a small child, that, if I accomplished nothing else in life, I would in some way get enough education to enable me to read common books and newspapers” (Washington, 1968, p. 34). From early on, Washington’s desire to read was what led him in his ambition to gain an education. Once he began his formal schooling, Washington observed that beyond the literally skills that lacked among freed blacks, material possessions also lacked. He noticed that “while their (blacks) wants had increased, their ability to supply their wants had not increased in the same degree” (Washington, 1968, p. 94). In his opinion, education, especially industrial education, would provide freed blacks after slavery the capacity to fulfill their dreams of also having material possessions such as land.

While a student at Hampton Institute, Washington learned to value education beyond book knowledge and gaining material possessions. He began to learn the value of hard work, etiquette, and manners in educational training. Washington expounded in his writings that “the matter of having meals at regular hours, of eating on a tablecloth, using a napkin, the use of the bathtub and of the tooth-brush, as well as the use of sheets upon the bed, were all new to me” (Washington, 1968, p. 63). Of all the skills he learned at Hampton Institute, he relayed that “I sometimes feel that almost the most valuable lesson I got at the Hampton Institute was in the use and value of the bath” (Washington, 1968, p. 63). When Washington became principal at Tuskegee Institute, basic hygiene such as students carrying a toothbrush were basic necessities in the curriculum (Washington, 1969, p. 39).

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Some critics of industrial education viewed Washington’s philosophy as narrow or unsophisticated, but he recognized the potential of using something simple as a means for pushing higher levels of knowledge (Stocker, 2007). “By viewing the things of life as the source for developing the habits of critical thinking rather than the classic literary courses, Washington was practicing a method of education that came to be recognized as foundational to progressive educational thought” (Generals, 2000, p. 224).

The ultimate goal and value in Washington’s educational belief was to teach his students to be self-sustaining in order to take care of themselves. As Washington wrote, “It was my aim to teach the students who came to Tuskegee to live a life and to make a living, to the end that they might return to their homes after graduation, and find profit and satisfaction in building up the communities from which they had come, and in developing the latent possibilities of the soil and the people” (Thornbrough, 1969, p. 39). Washington believed that the greatest value in gaining knowledge was to pass that knowledge to another person, especially to the poor, in order to uplift other people from their current plight (Stocker, 2007).

Washington’s belief system regarding the acquisition of knowledge was based on its value to both his race and his students. As he noted: “I do not care to venture here an opinion about the nature of knowledge in general; but it will be pretty clear to anyone who reflects upon the matter that the only kind of knowledge that has any sort of value for a race that is trying to get
on its feet is knowledge that has some definite relation to the daily lives of the men and women who are seeking it” (Thornbrough, 1969, p. 39).

Despite how some of Washington’s critics may have viewed his advocacy for industrial education, he saw it as a necessary means, a descriptive stepping-stone, to uplifting his race of people. His insistence on the significance of an industrial education did not mean that he felt African-Americans were incapable of mastering scholarly subjects, rather he believed that there were far more useful or relevant subjects to teach than those his critics were encouraging. As Washington pointed out, “One man may go into a community prepared to supply the people there an analysis of Greek sentences. The community may or may not at that time be prepared for, or feel the need of, Greek analysis, but it may feel the need of bricks and houses and wagons” (Washington, 1968, p. 156-157). During the early twentieth century, industrial education was supplying the African-American population with the skills and knowledge Washington felt were needed.

Washington’s education program was a reflection of the society in which he lived. During the Reconstruction, many African-Americans lacked the basic skills and knowledge to advance themselves in the economy. For example in the Black Belt of Alabama, where Tuskegee Institute was located, a large population of African-Americans had fallen into a cycle of debt through the farming practice of sharecropping. Industrial education offered people in the South the opportunity to acquire a trade and learn the tools necessary to function in society.

Washington’s educational and theoretical practices were able to reach the poorest of people.

THEORY OF LEARNING

Washington’s theory of learning in education developed as a result of the path he pursued in acquiring his own education. He contended, “…what our people most needed was to get a foundation in education, industry, and property…” (Washington, 1968, p. 97). In attempting to understand Washington’s perspective, one must also understand his educational background. The ideals that Washington encouraged were ones that he learned from his days as a student at Hampton Institute, such as the importance of hygiene. Washington was less concerned with the acquisition of book knowledge than he was with how such knowledge would help one function and succeed in society. As he noted, “in the present condition of the negro race in this country there is a need of something more” (Thornbrough, 1969, p. 41).

At times, Washington had to counter his own students’ prejudices against practical and industrial based education. The students at Tuskegee Institute initially saw education as the means for gaining freedom from physical labor, but Washington stressed to his students, “…the dignity of labor, the essential affinity of mental and physical activity, and how happiness comes from the common things in life” (Bullock, 1967, p. 83). According to Harlan, Washington further believed that “both industrial school graduates and college graduates had obligations to the unskilled masses” (1983, p. 175). In Washington’s symbolic notion of lifting the veil of ignorance, he insisted that what was taught at Tuskegee Institute should be passed on to others who lacked practical skills and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The Booker T. Washington Writer’s Desk was designed and made by the students at Tuskegee University in the Spring Semester of 2010 as a testament to the practical and industrial skills
that Dr. Booker T. Washington espoused in his educational philosophy. Although the desk was made due to the necessity of having a center piece for a theatrical production in honor of Tuskegee University, the result of the desk making process became a living tribute and testament to the belief that the possession of practically based skills in any field is an asset to learning. As Washington once stated, “My plan was not to teach them to work in the old way but to show them how to make the forces of nature—air, water, steam, electricity, horse-power—assist them in their labour” (Washington, 1968, p. 150). In teaching his students to function and succeed in society, Washington sought to show them how to be self-reliant. In the same manner, in this twenty-first century, students at Tuskegee University are continuing to re-live and re-tell his story with the insistence that learning through practice and labor is both dignified and essential to a holistic and sound education.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


STUDENT DEMAND: AN ENVIRONMENTAL ART CURRICULUM

Alison Barnes
Skidmore College

By the spring of 2008, a growing number of students at Skidmore College were asking for opportunities to learn about Environmental Art. Several students had already developed independent studies and thesis projects exploring this subject. That spring I agreed to design and teach a course in Environmental Art. As I began to conceptualize the course, I discovered that the course would not fit in the Studio Art department curriculum, which is largely categorized by medium. I was not interested in positioning the course in the Art History department because it was clear that students wanted to focus on making Environmental Art. That left me with my final option: I would place the course in Skidmore’s interdisciplinary Environmental Studies program.

Because of the Environmental Studies designation, a significant number of the students in the course would have a background in science with little or no experience with art. A few students in the course would be art majors with little science background and nestled in between would be students with experience in both. As I thought about this situation and began to reflect on the wide scope of work I could categorize as Environmental Art, I wondered how my students defined this term. Would my course meet their expectations and push their understanding of Environmental Art in a useful direction?

Throughout the three years I have taught this course, I have asked these questions and developed curricular strategies in response to them. My first strategy was to begin the course with several current museum exhibitions. We studied Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet, organized by the UC Berkley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego, and the international conservation group Rare. This exhibition explores the relationship between art and conservation by placing artists in residencies at UNESCO designated world heritage sites. In response to their experiences on these residencies, the artists created works for the exhibition. We also studied the exhibition Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art, organized by Stephanie Smith from the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago. This exhibition highlights contemporary art that draws on sustainable design. It emphasizes nomadic works constructed primarily for urban areas.

I asked students to think about the role museums and other institutions play in shaping and categorizing Environmental Art or in the case of Beyond Green, Sustainable Art. In many of these exhibitions, the artists are not interested in being categorized in this way, and when we use these terms, we are stepping into the work of museums and scholars. These exhibitions also served as a foundation for a set of assignments that directed students to create and present comparisons based on works in the exhibitions. This emphasis on comparisons required that students develop a vocabulary for talking about Environmental Art. Words like collaboration, participation, and action, along with phrases such as relationship to place, the process is part of the product, and the blurring of disciplines and forms were heard again and again in our classroom. As students participated in this dialogue, they began to notice that these words and phrases were relevant in many of their other classes.
We moved from the study of museum exhibitions to discussions of Earthworks by artists such as Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer. We compared these Earthworks to works by the artists Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy, and Chris Drury. We also looked at works by Agnes Denes and Mel Chin to think more broadly about collaboration, environmental activism, and the blurring of science and art. In these discussions, students broadened their vocabularies as they analyzed the different types of relationships these artists establish with their environments. At this point of the semester, students began to understand that Environmental Art does not prescribe one particular type of relationship with nature and the environment.

This understanding of Environmental Art became especially relevant as students began the process of making an Environmental Art project of their own. Working collaboratively on these projects, students were asked to craft a work that creates what they feel is a meaningful relationship with the environment. They were given one additional directive to guide the content of these projects. This directive stated that the projects must support the ongoing climate change initiative on campus called Focus Skidmore. This initiative is broadly defined, and students quickly realized that most of their ideas for Environmental Art projects supported the initiative in some way.

As students selected their groups and began to develop ideas for their projects, two distinct types of conversations filled the classroom. The first type of conversation centered on the students’ interest in making projects that would allow them to deepen their own personal relationships with nature and the environment. Often inspired by Andy Goldsworthy and Chris Drury, these students wanted to connect with nature in an individual and sometimes spiritual way. They wanted to generate a hopeful feeling towards the environment, and many chose to use natural materials that would not harm the environment. These students argued that by creating artwork that encourages viewers to respect the environment, they were offering support for green practices and initiatives like Focus Skidmore.

An example of this type of student project is Stop, Look, Listen: Land Revelations. For this project, students selected a small grassy area between several campus roads and sidewalks. The students studied the light, the trees, and the hilly ground of this area at different times of day. As they did this, they watched the people passing in cars and on foot. To capture the attention of these people, the students used natural materials such as sticks, stones, and dried grasses to construct sculptures. Many of the people noticed the sculptures, and when they walked up close to view them, they discovered that the sculptures created a meditative space constructed for people to reflect on their relationship with nature and the environment.

Another project that explored the importance of constructing a meditative place on campus was For Mothers, made by an art major and a religion major. Using corn husks, pine cones, and bark, along with sticks and wire, these students created goddess sculptures based on their study of representations of Mother Nature in different religions. Located on campus in a quiet area beside the pond, the placement of these sculptures created a meditative space where people could contemplate spiritual relationships with nature and the environment.

The second type of conversation focused on educational approaches to Environmental Art. Often inspired by artists in Human/Nature and Beyond Green, these students wanted to inform the community and teach them to better understand nature and current environmental issues. Many projects with this focus highlighted issues about consumption. For example, for Running The Numbers, a project inspired by the works of Chris Jordan, students researched the
consumption of popular items on campus such as bottled water, cigarettes, and coffee in paper cups. They used pictures of these objects in digital collages hung outside of the campus Student Center. The bold designs and bright colors of these collages grabbed people’s attention and directed them to read the project’s findings about Skidmore’s consumption practices.

Other projects with this educational focus aimed to teach viewers about green technologies or systems for everyday life. For example, for the project, *Bright Notes*, three students with science backgrounds researched how to make a solar powered charging system for an iPod. They built this system and then set up a learning station outside on a busy part of campus. At this learning station, they displayed their charging system and demonstrated their research and construction process.

While the student projects in this course were varied, most of them fit comfortably into one of these types of conversations. I see this as an indication of what is driving the growing demand to learn about Environmental Art at Skidmore. There is a need for my students to build individual connections with the natural world based on respect and often spirituality. My students also need opportunities to teach people about nature, environmental issues, and green approaches to our environment. Most of my students will not become Environmental Artists after they leave Skidmore, but their need to foster personal connections with nature and find ways to build awareness about environmental issues and green practices will follow my students in their lives after college. These needs will likely find opportunities for expression in many of their future professions and lifestyle choices.

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THE TRAVELED LANDSCAPE: CONNECTING ART, NATURE AND DESIGN

Susan Fecho
Barton College

INTRODUCTION

With the widespread technological developments of the 21st century, we as humans have unconscious ambivalent human responses. Industrialized technology changed the culture of the design world and reduced regional standards. As design students study nature’s iconology, opportunities to explore concepts of social and cultural value increase. To study nature’s patterning and textures requires focused attention and awareness on universally attractive forms; thus focusing and developing sensual awareness of abstract structural design. Can texture and design found in nature contribute or acknowledge the context of a culture?

Within the traveled landscape, the study of pictorial theology is necessary to extend design vocabulary. Using intentional and chance methods, nature’s textures and patterning can be recorded. The “breath” of nature does not transcend culture. What does congestion of popular design teach us about human’s tolerance for congested texture?

ESSAY

Our global technology has changed the culture of the design world. As design students study nature’s iconology, opportunities to explore concepts of social and cultural value increase. This essay aims to provide an overview of how designers, while studying the traveled landscape can develop a transcendental approach to the discipline of design.

What can help designers connect to the unique nature and/or geographical landscape of a culture? With the widespread technological developments of the 21st century, we as humans have unconscious ambivalent human responses.

“TO EXPERIENCE IS TO LEARN”, YI-FU TUAN

My favorite method is to intentionally collect and record the patterned surfaces of a “place.” Patterning indicative of a culture’s constructed spaces provides visual correlation to unique information.

To study nature’s patterning and textures requires focused attention and awareness on universally attractive forms; thus focusing and developing sensual awareness of abstract structural design. Can texture and design found in nature contribute or acknowledge the context of a culture?

Yet, be aware, to record information about a culture, and then disconnect (recorded without context) opens the door for loss of meaning. The popular grade school art assignment of collecting rubbings can help design students study “the traveled landscape”—thus learning to design work with stronger ties to a specific cultural environment. In an effort to work with young designers on location, I began utilizing Kenneth J. Hiebert’s approach, “Travel Notations...
and Utilization”, as listed in *Graphic Design Processes* (published 1992). The theoretical probing and questioning Hiebert including in his study trip assignment were of interest.

- Does the texture elicit an emotional response and a pattern a more intellectual one—or are both by their decorative tendencies on the emotional side?
- Should refined design have less texture, controlled contrast and controlled mark marking?
- Is there a correlation between texture/patterning and intimacy?
- Can recorded surfaces be used to “warm” a design?

What other questioning and probing would assist in build effective designs that connect to “a sense of place”. Hiebert maintains that designers must make value judgments and explore intelligently as they utilize his theory to produce computer-generated designs.

Notational research should include written descriptions and analysis of the culture.

My continuing research on methods to connect art, nature and design, extends to other writers. Newfoundland poet Agnes Walsh “looks for the traces—the echos” of man within the land that marks the cultivated geography. Walsh’s poetry sets to words the voices that live on constructed landscapes—spaces transformed by man. Author of West Moon, Al Pittman, feels that a traveler (visitor) has a difficult time capturing place—capturing the experiences and the memories of the people who built and lived in the communities. “And it is culture, convention and cognition that makes that design....” Historian Simon Schama covers the myths of environment in his book *Landscape and Memory*. Yi-Fu Tuan’s *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* discusses “in what way do humans attach meaning to space and place...since space is more abstract than place, there is a need to experience a culture through the senses and a need to develop a means to record a place ... touch, vision, taste, smell and hearing” (p. 6). Tuan breaks down the sensory experience to explain that as muscles record textures, other senses are activated, such as sight and touch.

“The fundamental ordering of space becomes the crucial issues in understanding life today.” *A Place to Belong*, by Pocius.

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Pocius, A Place to Belong. McGill Queen’s University Press.
In 1946, Kenneth Clark, the newly appointed Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford, delivered a series of lectures concerning the “idea of nature.” The war was over; but in post-war England, living conditions remained grim. The audience, Clark noted, “...endured with much patience, extremes of heat and cold.” Throughout the world in 1946, totalitarian governments were in the ascendancy. Then, as now, the Middle East and the subcontinent of India were loci of “insurgencies,” places of “terrorism.”

The Oxford lectures were published under the title Landscape into Art in 1949. For this publication, Kenneth Clark added an epilogue. We have arrived, he wrote, at another apocalyptic period—a fearful time—of the sort that “... seems to take possession of Western man every five hundred years.” How are we to understand nature, the scholar asks, in this “terrible new universe,” this time of “new wars of religion?” Clark makes no predictions, but he does conclude his essay with a credo, a statement of faith, writing:

“...I believe that all the science and bureaucracy in the world, all the atom bombs and concentration camps, will not entirely destroy the human spirit; and the spirit will always succeed in giving itself a visible shape.”

As a graduate student, I first read Landscape into Art more than 35 years ago. My battered copy of Kenneth Clark’s lectures has withstood a number of re-readings since those years. Nonetheless, in 2007 when I accepted an invitation to lecture at a Pakistani university in Lahore, I could not have imagined the circumstances in which I would be re-reading Kenneth Clark once more.

The epilogue Kenneth Clark added to his 1946 lectures is one boldly linking art to religion, particularly earth-centered mysticism. The credo statement, quoted above, alludes to art as “human spirit” in a “visible shape,” as a force that cannot be destroyed. Clark writes of art as faith made visible. In Lahore, I began to sense the possibility implicit in his argument. Because art has the ability to shift points-of-view, the artist as well as the viewer may connect across time, space, and terror. Wherever there is possibility, there is life. In hard times, those possibilities make art a medium of hope. In hard times, art is a life preserver as more than a few artists have claimed.

Early in 2008, not long after my arrival in Pakistan, Tanya Sohail, director of the Lahore Arts Council’s Alhamra Gallery, the oldest public art gallery in Pakistan, asked if I would curate an exhibition of Canadian contemporary art for the gallery? I agreed readily. We arranged an exhibition date two years hence.

The Alhamra exhibition project became more than usually complicated when I learned the
gallery had no budget for artist’s exhibition fees, nor any budget line to cover brokerage fees and the transportation of artwork. Moreover, the gallery carried no insurance coverage for loss or damage to artwork. Without insurance, the medium would have to be photography. The director and I spent the next year looking for exhibition sponsors in both the private and public sectors. We found none.

Six artists were invited to participate in the exhibition. They included: Hans Joerg Mettler, Sandra Hawkins; Cecile Boucher, Sylvia Klein, Norman Takeuchi, and Lucy Arai. All of the work chosen for the exhibition was photo-based and included three short films, digital prints, screen prints, and photo-montages—in all, 45 works of art. All of the artists generously agreed to forego their exhibition fees as did the curator her curatorial fee. Two of the artists—Sandra Hawkins and Cecile Boucher—underscored their support of the exhibition by donating their work to the Lahore Arts Council’s permanent collection.

The Lahore Arts Council covered all costs related to mounting the exhibition and publicizing the artists’ work. All of the photographs were framed and mounted under glass, no small undertaking. Cecile Boucher’s work, for example, consisted of 14 panels, each 2m tall. One of Lucy Arai’s photo-reproductions of her paintings measured 9m x 9m; others were at least 2m in length. The catalogue, designed by M. Imran Khan of Topical Graphics, was published in a hard-cover, full-colour edition of 500. The catalogue’s introduction was written by Michael Schreier, one of Canada’s foremost art photographers. Posters and billboards announcing the exhibition were installed throughout Lahore’s several university campuses as well as inside and outside the cultural complex in downtown Lahore.

AVAILABLE LIGHT—the title of the exhibition—stated the curatorial thesis plainly: light, everywhere there is light. The title had three further levels of interpretation as evidenced by the work selected for the exhibition.

1. All of the exposures incorporated in the photographic work displayed in the exhibition were ones taken in available light. None of the photographers had used other than ambient light when making the initial exposures.

2. Whatever the medium, when artists make art, artists see. Artists are visionaries.

3. Lastly, light itself in the traditions and history of Islam is a unifying symbol. As a Westerner working in beleaguered Lahore, once one of Akbar’s great cities, I wanted to acknowledge the importance of light cross-culturally.

The six artists whose work was selected for AVAILABLE LIGHT are artists whose practice derives from the artists’ lived post-WWII histories of immigration, dislocation, relocation, displacement, and the labels of citizenship. All six artists, as well as the curator, are of mixed heritage—Japanese, European, Canadian, and American. Two are children of the Shoah.

Biography, however, was not the reason for the art or the exhibition, although personal experience and personal relationships certainly influenced the willingness of each artist to allow the curator to show the artist’s work in Lahore. In the stories of their own lives and those of their families, the artists know art matters, matters critically in hard times.

In Lahore today most terrorist attacks are minor events, disruptions created by local Taliban.
“wannabe’s” with limited losses of life. There was only one death, for example, the day a small shop was blown to smithereens near a local school. Someone had taken offence at the numbers of unsupervised male and female students buying fresh fruit drinks there.¹⁶

In this climate of minor violence, the popular arts struggle. Sufi music performances are rare events. Movie theatres are dark. Shop owners stage public burnings of their stock of CDs and DVDs. The once-promising Lollywood film industry of Lahore is dead. In 2009, the justly famed Rafi Peer Performing Arts Festival was cancelled when sponsorships disappeared. The previous year, unexploded “low-intensity bombs”—i.e., pipe bombs—were found at the festival site although there were no deaths. Nonetheless, students continue to show up at the Lahore Arts Council’s complex for music lessons.

Big attacks with larger losses of life rate intense coverage nationally, sometimes internationally. In 2009, the most important attacks of this sort included the suicide bombings at Islamabad University, the hostage takings at the National Military Academy, and, in Lahore, the assault on the Sri Lanka cricket team, as well as the offices of the emergency services, the internal security offices, and an attack on the police academy school. Warnings are passed along informally. Sometimes they are gleanings from the Urdu press or the English press, or just commonsense: “Don’t go down Mall Road this weekend; there’s going to be protests.” “Stay away from Anarkali, you never know.”

Two days before we were to open the exhibition, there was an attack on the highway connecting Islamabad to Lahore. A car packed with explosives had blown up at a police checkpoint. The diplomats we had invited to attend from the Canadian High Commission called from Islamabad. They would not be coming; the security risks were too high. Within the hour, I walked into the gallery’s offices just as Tanya Sohail was putting down the telephone. She said, “We have to cancel. The Ministry has just called. No foreign cultural performances.”

“So?” I replied. “We have nobody doing performance art. None of the artists are here. The work ... ? Hey, they can blow it up. It’s O.K. All the art is replaceable. We can print. We have the discs ... .”

“Let’s go,” Tanya said abruptly. “We need to see the Minister.”
She called her driver and off we went. Outcome? AVAILABLE LIGHT opened as scheduled November 5, 2009.

The opening was a success. Our guests parked their cars and walked in through the assigned gate, one reinforced with sandbags and manned as usual by a heavily armed police unit. The press came with all their paraphernalia and crew. The only excitement that evening was art. No one in Lahore had seen an exhibition installed with so much white space surrounding the artwork. Both floors of the gallery had been freshly painted, everything was as clean as possible. The story line was subtle, but measured. The last display room was particularly quiet, even contemplative.

Entering the gallery, visitors saw first a set of suspended banners Norman Takeuchi had designed for the City of Vancouver in 2007, as well as photographs of them in situ. In Vancouver the banners had been hung from lampposts throughout the City. The commission was intended to recognize the artist’s lifetime achievement as a Canadian artist and, in Takeuchi’s case, an artist born of Japanese heritage.
The kimonos’ designs included archival photographs collected from a painful time. In 1942 by Order of Parliament, 22,000 people were put in railway cars and shipped off to the interior of Canada. Most of the internally displaced were Canadian citizens. Even so, all were given new identity cards to carry which identified them as “enemy aliens.” Among those displaced were artist Norman Takeuchi and his mother, father, grandparents. To the everlasting credit of Canada, the injustice of those years was admitted, but not right away. In 1981, Joy Kogawa wrote Obasan, a memoir of her grandmother’s life, a woman who had been one of those internally displaced. The memoir became a best-seller. It opened the door on this chapter of dark history; and in came light.

Walking up the stairs to the second floor and down a hallway, the visitors entered into the first of three rooms, each opening one onto the other as in a megaron. From the doorway entering, the first image the visitor saw on the wall facing the doorway was a quote by Pascal: “The eternal silence of those unbounded spaces frightens me.” One wall to the left displayed Sandra Hawkins’ photo-montages; the remaining two walls of the first room were used to display the work of Cecile Boucher.

Sandra Hawkins’ ten photo-montages are derived from three sets of images: her photographs of Inuit settlements in the High Arctic; photographs of pages from the artist’s journals; and the artist’s photographs of Times Square and midtown Manhattan in New York City. The combination of all three enables the viewer to ponder the effect and sources of light over time. However bleak the Inuit settlements, the light of the High Arctic is beautiful; however bustling the activity of midtown Manhattan, its light, natural and artificial, derives ultimately from the same source, the sun. Art students, particularly, from among our visitors, were intrigued by Hawkins’ use of Photoshop—a technique they themselves often favour in their studiowork.

Cecile Boucher’s fourteen, large photo-montages were also much admired, albeit more difficult for many visitors to interpret. Each of the 2m panels showed one figure from the back, a person wearing a hat or some sort of headgear. The backgrounds were, in one sequence, maps of the Ottawa Valley; in another sequence the backgrounds were comprised of images of the landscape of the Ottawa region as seen by someone in a small boat. A number of our visitors in Lahore thought the figures’ hats and scarves denoted both sex, tribal status, and ethnicity because that is the meaning of headgear in the Punjab.

In the second room of three on the gallery’s second floor, our visitors entered into the work of Hans Joerg Mettler. The room was small—more of a passageway connecting two larger rooms. Onto one wall, using one projector, we projected a 12-minute loop from Mettler’s “Blue Sky Train” project.

Hans Mettler spent two years travelling the world, filming and recording groups of people riding elevated trains, “sky trains.” Everywhere he saw similar patterns of behaviour. People are generally more courteous, engaged, friendly than those sitting in traffic or riding trains underground. In the gallery setting, our visitors’ voices folded into the languages heard on the Mettler soundtrack; and, as more and more people crowded into the viewing area, the little passageway itself took on the look and ambit of an elevated rail car. People seen in the “Blue Sky Train” projection were, in fact, seen to be the same size as those who stood watching them. For a few moments, perhaps, our visitors travelled the world by sky train. No visas or passports needed.
Leaving the Mettler installation, the visitors entered the last exhibition room. Sylvia Klein’s ten small framed photographs were hung on the left wall. Klein’s photographs are of anonymous corners noted by the artist in her travels to famous places—museums and palaces in France and the Netherlands. Three, for example, were photographs taken in the Rembrandt Huis in Amsterdam—pictures of a bucket; a pile of old books, a water spigot. Three others were corners and hallways seen within the Musee Picasso in Paris. One was simply Klein’s own front door in Ottawa seen in winter light. In the artist’s imagery, light informs, light reveals. Sylvia Klein’s quiet work was well received by our visitors, several of whom expressed interest in purchasing them.21

Along the other three walls were photo-reproductions of Lucy Arai’s paintings.22 Lucy Arai’s sweeps of colour and sashiko stitching come from her practice of Buddhism, of seeking the stillpoint, in silence. Her practice as artist and Buddhist are coeval disciplines.

Lucy Arai begins her work by wetting sheets of handmade paper, splashing sumi inks and colours onto the paper, drying the paper in the sun, then stitching, and stitching for months on end. The artist uses a small running stitch which she works into perfect circles and loops, seen first in her mind. There are no preliminary drawings or patterns. All must be visualized first in her mind, then stitched into place onto paper. The process may take months of discipline before the work is done. For many years, Arai used no colour but black and white in her work. Then, one sunny morning, from her apartment window, from her apartment window in Washington, D.C., Lucy Arai watched an airplane dive-bomb the Pentagon. Her work changed. Finding silence and its stillpoint has not been easy, but she has. Our visitors’ conversations hushed in this room.

Exiting the exhibition, the very last image people saw was a quote excerpted from Leonard Cohen’s poem, “Anthem”: “There is a crack in everything, that is how the light gets in.”

IN CONCLUSION

Canadian photographer Michael Schreier contributed a short essay to the exhibition catalogue. In his text, he used the word “terpsichore” to describe what it is to look through the camera’s viewfinder and see, really see, the picture. That moment is a moment of balance, Schreier argues. Imagine. The artist is en point. In a moment of light and silence, she experiences balance, she sees. If the work of an artist is that of saving lives, as some have argued, then that work arises from the artist’s ability to see, to see in a moment of clarity, what others must see. The tough part remains: the artist must find a way to open the viewfinder to others.

For the four weeks of the Lahore exhibition, visitors to AVAILABLE LIGHT returned again and again to the gallery. All month long, the national press wrote stories and begged interviews. BBC Pakistan did a feature on the work. At odd hours of the night, a local radio station owned by the Jang Publishing Group, began to play covers of “Anthem” (the poem has been widely recorded as a song lyric by Leonard Cohen and many others). The National Gallery of Pakistan invited the exhibition to Islamabad,23 as well as a gallery in Kathmandu, Nepal. The curator was invited to address the faculties of art and architecture and their students at the University of the Punjab, Lahore.

One newspaper headline caught the tone of the hoopla well: Available Light at the end of the
tunnel.24 The article’s subheading stated further: “The work echoes the artists’ call to the world to ‘change the world & save lives.’”25 Kenneth Clark would have been pleased. Light is everywhere.

NOTES

3. Clark, 1972, p.130.
4. Ibid., p.142.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 143.
7. Maureen Korp, “Earthworks: Shamanism in the Religious Experience of Contemporary Artists in North America,” University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada, 1991. Ph.D. dissertation study. More than once artists have told me the purpose of their work was “to save lives,” the lives of others; moreover, some artists claimed in our conversations, art is as important as any religion, or even more important. These claims puzzled me and became the jumping-off point for my dissertation research. There were 120 artists who participated in the primary research via interviews and questionnaires.
8. The writer held an academic appointment as Associate Professor, History of Art, Architecture, Design, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, 2008-2010.
9. Personal communication, Tanya Sohail, 2008: According to Sohail, the Alhamra gallery director, in some quarters, property insurance is considered “un-Islamic,” thus, no public gallery in Pakistan carries insurance on its artwork.
10. Digital photography permits the reproduction of the artist’s work as needed in whatever materials and scale the artist authorizes. Most of the artists’ work for the exhibition arrived as code on discs. The printing and framing of the artwork was accomplished in Lahore at the Arts Council’s expense.
12. Akbar, one of the great Mughal emperors, ruled from 1542-1605. His reign is characterised by historians today as a period notable for its religious tolerance. Akbar’s cities were centres of scholarship, science, and the arts.
14. Ibid.
15. “Taliban” is a collective term used to label a great many local terrorist groups and their sympathizers as well as dangerously radicalized religious conservatives who may be unaffiliated with any group.
16. Dawn and The News International are daily newspapers published in English nationally and via the internet internationally. Both are well indexed. The juice shop attack occurred in Lahore sometime during 2008 or 2009.
17. The Punjab Ministry of Culture has oversight regarding all cultural events sponsored by the Lahore Arts Council.
18. As Cecile Boucher’s work depicts: in the Ottawa Valley, we wear a lot of head gear. In winter it is cold; hats are needed. In summer we cover up because there is a hole in the ozone layer.
19. Conversations with gallery visitors admiring Cecile Boucher’s work were fascinating. They were surprised to learn I could not identify definitively who was male or who was female in Boucher’s head-and-shoulders photographs. Every image was of someone wearing headgear seen from the back. Viewers were also surprised I could not tell a person’s ethnicity from the photographs either. In the Ottawa Valley, language is the primary identifier.
20. “Blue Sky Train” in its entirety is a twelve-projector, twelve-hour extravaganza. The twelve-hour projection has been shown, thus far, only once, and that was in Dusseldorf, Germany.
21. Unhappily, although the artist’s price was very low, the two would-be collectors were broke.
The security situation did not permit our showing Lucy Arai’s large, mixed-media paintings on handmade paper. When I told the artist I must delete her work and why, Lucy Arai quickly replied and asked would I be willing to show reproductions in place of originals? If so, and if her work could be reproduced in the same scale as the originals, the artist was willing to give permission for this use of her work and her copyright. The Lahore Arts Council was willing to underwrite the cost of reproduction. Lahore has excellent printing capabilities. Digital photographs the artist forwarded were used to print images on a sturdy, heavy, plastic-impregnated material. Colour fidelity was quite good. To protect the artist’s copyright, the gallery agreed to cut the panels to ribbons when they were no longer needed for exhibition purposes. In 2011 the artist and curator donated the Arai reproductions for recycling and use as building materials in the Pakistan flood relief effort.

Available Light, National Art Gallery of Pakistan, Islamabad: 11 February to 23 March 2010.

Aziz, ibid..

Ibid.
GREEN ART EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

Randall Rhodes
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Since Alexander’s defeat of Darius III, Armenia has functioned as a buffer between the Classical-Mediterranean and the Persian, Byzantine and Seljuk, Russian and Ottoman. As a result of millennia of wars, few victories and many losses, Armenia today occupies only 20% of the historic land mass of Greater Armenia. Gone is access to the Black and Mediterranean Seas, profitable natural resources, the Biblical land of Eden, and Noah’s Mt. Ararat. Victimized by historic patterns of natural disaster, massacres and migrations, decades of Soviet decrepitude, and economic mandates that have trumped ecological considerations, the environment has suffered overexploitation, deforestation, and desertification. Additionally, the current global recession has further weakened the social safety net resulting in 50% of the population living below the poverty line. As a result, Armenian national discourse is permeated by declensionist and progressive plots that underlie a metanarrative of recovery.

Armenia enjoyed ecclesiastical autonomy from the period of St. Gregory the Illuminator, early 4th century, to the Arab invasions of the mid 7th century. Penned during this period, the Epic Histories, a compilation of varied materials bearing on the events, institutions, customs, and beliefs of fourth-century Armenia, narrate the complexities and contradictions of a society in transition from a still surviving Persian-Sassanian past to fervent Christianity. Through its compilation of tales of Oriental royal glory, unworthy rulers, unrewarded valor, and growing tensions among crown, church and magnates, the narrative’s recurring tropes of renewal and healing evidence a sympathy with a primordial earth and the hope for deliverance of its people, creatures, and land.

And St. Nersēs [the 4th century hero] sat on the patriarchal throne, and there was great peace in the realm during his pastoral care... He truly found fatherly perfection...and showed the same care to preserve [his flock] safe from visible and invisible foes. He most resembled the first trees, [for] he bore fruit of spiritual-teaching ... from the beginning of his supervision and pastoral care he dispensed abundantly [to his flock] all that was profitable, feeding [it] in spiritual pastures.

However, here the Edenic narrative ended. Human nature and the Promised Land were lost through a succession of culpable human acts that resulted in moral jeopardy and environmental degradation. The recovery of access to the lost garden became the sole path to a freedom in which people can recover the true selves that has been lost to the corrupting influences of their artificial lives. In other words, the Armenian story is “about the nature of natural national existence”, “the nature of the human community”. Aware of the clear relation between the character of physical nature and the natural, national discourse reflects personal and culturally specific values: the essence of who a people think they are, how and where they should live, what they believe to be good and beautiful. It is now the role of the new generation as “restoration ecologists” to marshal human labor to restore an already degraded nature to an earlier, pristine state, and thusly, heal the nation.
Armenia lies at the convergence of three bio-geographic regions: the arid Central Anatolian and Iranian regions and the temperately damp Caucasian region, as well as containing seven of the world’s nine climate zones due to diversity of elevations. In respect to the diversity of flora and fauna, half of the 3,500 plant species are at risk of extinction, and 300 of the 500 vertebrate species are rare or declining and 18 are at risk of extinction. Armenia’s forest cover was 25% at the turn of the 20th century and now stands at less than 8%. According to the Armenia Tree Project (ATP) founded in 1994, the lack of alternative fuel sources, poverty and unemployment are the leading causes of deforestation. The promotion of stewardship through environmental education and advocacy, reforestation, and poverty reduction have the potential to reverse the plot of the declensionist narrative by identifying nature as the victim of both human hubris and social changes that overcome “the necessities of nature” through domestication, cultivation, and commodification.

As the theme of this conference is “Romancing Nature Again,” it is important to turn this discussion towards the role of the artist, artistic practice, and art education in supporting and securing the recovery narrative. As condemned by Suzi Gablik, radical autonomy has been the built-in assumption of artistic practice for so long.

Autonomy, however, soon condemns art to social impotence. The question of whether or not art will ever change the world is not a relevant question anymore: the world is changing already, in inescapable ways. We can no longer deny the evidence at hand. The need to transform the egocentric vision that is encoded in our entire world view is the crucial task that lies ahead for our culture. The issue is whether art will rise to the occasion and make itself useful to all that is going on.

At center is the act of ego-deconstruction, “in which the self experiences directly the deep connection between the human world, the plant world and the animal world. When we experience the world as our own body, illusions of duality dissolve, and with them, old assumptions about a distinct and separate ego-self codified by our culture.”

The Tufenkian Foundation, established by Armenian-American venture philanthropists, supports protection programs that strike at the heart of the social, economic, and environmental problems facing Armenia. The Foundation is dedicated to modeling new approaches to long-standing problems and to pioneering projects that overcome new and long-ignored challenges. It has completed more than 50 projects in Armenia to combat poverty, promote education, protect the natural environment and renew national, civic, cultural and religious values. The chief areas of focus are assisting marginalized and vulnerable families, rebuilding civil society, rejuvenating cultural and spiritual life, advocating for environmental protection and rehabilitation, and developing the strategic borderlands of Nagorno-Karabagh. The Tufenkian Foundation founded the Zangakatun Social Services NGO in 2000 to implement a new model of how to combat extreme poverty, addressing the country’s most marginalized and vulnerable families and providing the support they need to break their cycles of poverty and neglect.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, many children’s clubs, educational centers, and hobby groups were closed and many children were deprived of opportunities to develop their skills and abilities. The centers funded by the Tufenkian Foundation provide their educational services for free, ensuring that the rising generation of public voices will speak for the larger
society. The mission includes environmental education and advocacy to promote stewardship, actively engaging youth in a process to understand and appreciate the value of a healthy and sustainable environment.

In respect to pedagogy, here children develop a capacity for interpersonal reasoning, are enlisted in the healing and recovery, and motivated in the actual activities of care. The world,” writes Jungian psychoanalyst James Hillman “does not ask for belief. It asks for noticing, attention, appreciation, and care.” Pivotal is the understanding that all living beings exist in ecosystems, in webs of related, interacting, dynamic energy systems.

Children have an innate need and positive desire to create in order to learn and know. Their love of nature as process and love of knowledge as process are here combined as a unitary action, the mind as body interacting with the universe. Converting the self into a “theater of perception” in which he is at once producer, dramatist, and star, the child appreciates the harmony of his body, the power of standing, moving, playing, modeling, or just being in the world around him as a part of a universal aesthetic logic in nature’s formative process. Children’s process of creativity reduces itself to mapping and traveling, picture and explanation, the gestalt-making process and thematic apperception. Thought processes are mobilized into constellations or psychological landscapes, for journeying with the exploratory mind. Thus, the act of mapping becomes a strategy for gaining awareness about the meanings contained in the environment. Some maps remain relatively invariant between people, describing the location of roads, hills, and rivers, for example. But others may give radically different representations of what we commonly suppose to be “the same place”: identifying favorite “landmarks,” safety and danger zones, areas of higher and lower density and crowding, work places, or sites of family significance.

The city of Vanadzor was hard hit by the 1988 earthquake, leaving hundreds of families without homes or the means to support themselves. A generation has grown up under these conditions, children born to parents who came of age and living in rubble. In 2004, the Tufenkian Foundation brought the Zangakatun program to Vanadzor, where it serves scores of families each year. This location features classrooms, performance spaces, a computer lab, an enclosed courtyard and a cafeteria.

Students arrive at the Center after completing their day of Soviet-style education in STEM disciplines. First, they receive hot meals in the cafeteria. Then, they elect instruction in theater, dance, music, computer programs, and art. Class projects are built upon a core of ethical values (social and ecological) that extend beyond media instruction. Each week students attend group sessions conducted by psychologists in order to address the social issues related to poverty. Social workers are present to serve as liaisons with families. When the classes in the creative arts are complete, parents arrive for instruction in technology skills to improve their employment prospects.

As outlined by Hicks and King, within this reconceptualized, community-based orientation to art education, the first complex of questions, tasks, and concerns is “foundational.” To engage in artistic investigations of the relationship between human beings and the environment, students acquire the necessary background, context, and motivation to care about what is taking place—the need for care that emphasizes active and public characteristics rather than the subjective state of mind of the individual. The second complex is the “situational.” Students create works that draw attention to specific environmental problems and situations. Students
are encouraged to explore, direct attention to specific sites, and/or reflect on problems as they exist. The third complex is the ‘sustainable’ as students critically assess how art can contribute to a reevaluation of the environment and how human beings live in the world. Art becomes the site for a critical reaction with a community of viewers.

Since 2003, the Tufenkian and Paros Foundations have sponsored the Manana Children’s Education and Art Center in Yerevan. The school aims to provide art education for children from 6 to 18 years old, preparing them to become leading journalists, photographers, designers, and filmmakers. The curriculum employed at the Manana Center begins with teachers inviting environmentalists, social workers, journalists, and political activists. Master classes featuring diasporan and international filmmakers and animators give the youth a chance to express themselves and to meet their role models while identifying contemporary media-related issues. After group discussions lead by psychologists, students adopt a problem-centered approach simulating a real-life enterprise of processes and solutions identical to those employed by responsible citizenry. This participatory pedagogy continues as students working in groups identify goals and values as starting point for conflict resolution and problem solving. Mandatory classes in creative writing aid in the students’ conceptualization of narratives and production of storyboards, drawings, photographs, or other visual formats for aesthetic problem solving. After the final product is completed, in case a body of photographs or a short documentary film, it is presented to the collective student body for critical evaluation. Further dialogue and action take place locally and globally as the photographs and films are entered into international competitions, win awards, and publicize Armenian social issues.

Contextualized art education aims to empower teachers and students for a more engaged relation to place, their piece of the environment that has been colored by their feelings. Using narratives honors experience and importance is placed upon non-objective, non-hierarchical modes of teaching as well as serves as the basis for exploring, questioning, and challenging existing paradigms. As outcome, students develop the ability to reflect carefully and self-consciously on the social meanings embedded in their local environment by their preparation to participate in sustaining or reconstructing those embodied meanings.

Once the educator helps the child find meaning, the dialogue opens, meanings are negotiated, and there is the possibility for a springboard for ethical actions. Instruction and student products at the Tufenkian Centers have demonstrated that the current social and environmental crises can be addressed through a shift in the way students think about and interact with their environment within this “art education of place.” Understanding ‘place’ demands a high degree of self-investment and reflection from students. As Lopez states, “a sense of place must include, at the very least, knowledge of what is inviolate about the relationship between a people and the place they occupy.”

Functioning within the public and political structures of the social body, if narrative becomes the site of power struggles and manipulations as stated by Roland Barthes, then it retains the potential to be a medium of individual and social empowerment and a vehicle for change. Narratives are found in many ways in our built environments: the way we physically move through a building or a garden; the memory or history evoked through particular materials, shapes, and forms in our built worlds; the personal experience or story employed by the architect in the design of a space; the relationship of individual buildings to the growth of our neighborhoods, communities, cultures, etc. They enable us, in Cynthia Ozick’s words, to “leap into the other,” imagining the experience and the feelings of the other, and develop the
capacity for attentive love. This particular kind of subjective “engrossment” in the object of care has been termed “an ecofeminist environmental ethics of care in art education… that offers a fruitful theoretical foundation for reflecting on the place of care for nature both in art education and in artistic practice”. For only by nurturing this ethos of care can the recovery narrative succeed and Armenia be healed.

NOTES

1 For background discussion on relations of Armenian history to the national metanarrative see N.G. Garsoian, Armenia between Byzantium and the Sassanians, (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985); Garsoian, Church and Culture in Early Medieval Armenia (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).
3 Ibid., 112.
10 Ibid., 54-5.
11 For background on the Tufenkjian Foundation, its history and initiatives, and narrative on the country’s needs, see www.tufenkianfoundation.org.
13 Gablik, 142-3, for more on ethics of care.
14 For childhood development in respect to environmental awareness and creative imagination, see Edith Cobb, The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1993), 22.
16. Ibid., 46.
19 Ibid., 93.
20 David Sobel, “A Place in the World: Adults’ Memories of Childhood’s Special Places”, in Guilfoil, Built Environment Education in Art Education, 146.
22 King and Hicks, “Mapping a Sense of Place”, 12.
24 Guinan, 60.
26 Hicks and King, “Ecofeminism, Care, and the Environment, 91.”
LANDSCAPE PAINTING AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

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As a painter, I began working with themes of landscape and natural environment during my first international artist residency in Dresden, Germany shortly after the country’s reunification. Since then, I’ve been fortunate to live and work in India, Nepal, Italy, Denmark, and San Francisco. The opportunity to explore a variety of environments as subject matter for painting led me to research not only what influences our perception of a local natural environment, but also how we assign aesthetic appreciation and value to it.

Examining the aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty is a widely discussed topic in the field of environmental aesthetics, a relatively new sub-field of philosophical aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics enlisted a renewed interest in the aesthetics of nature during the mid-to late-twentieth century, beginning with the formative writings of Ronald Hepburn. Hepburn argued that the investigations we conduct into the aesthetic appreciation of art can be applied to the aesthetic appreciation of environment. This idea raised more discussion of what we use to aesthetically evaluate and appreciate natural environments. Currently a variety of positions are debated. This paper will discuss and refer to two common theories: “cognitive” aesthetic approaches and “non-cognitive” aesthetic approaches.

Non-cognitive aesthetic approaches, often referred to as the “aesthetics of engagement,” involves a less intellectual, more visceral experience, and does not require any knowledge gained from science or elsewhere, giving center stage to the imagination and emotions. Non-cognitive environmental aesthetics assumes that there are natural environments that we perceive and aesthetically appreciate on an intuitive level. No amount of external knowledge is needed to appreciate a place aesthetically because we are arrested and intrigued by a personal emotive or imaginative connection.

By contrast, cognitive aesthetic approaches are based on the use of external knowledge, such as scientific knowledge, and knowledge of cultural traditions, folklore, regional narratives, and even mythological stories about nature. Supporters of the cognitive aesthetic approaches contend that such knowledge can reveal aesthetic qualities of natural environments and species which might otherwise go unnoticed.

While these approaches often seem in opposition to one another, I discovered there is a definite advantage in applying both cognitive and non-cognitive aesthetic approaches to the contemporary practice of painting landscape environments and teaching landscape painting. The examples that follow, come from my own experience as an artist working with the genre of “landscape” and a teacher of college students in a service-learning art class.

LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Initially, landscape painting helped me understand and appreciate natural phenomena on a visceral level through exposure, imagination, memory and graphic recording. This exploration
has grown from an inner, intuitive experience to one that is directed and enhanced by external information.

In earlier series, the paintings recorded daily walks in a neighboring park or along the Northern California coastline. I walked at dawn, when day light glows dimly and silence supports contemplation. As a ritual, these walks call upon sustained attention and mindfulness. Reflecting on my practice in the context of environmental aesthetics, I recognize an alignment with the non-cognitive approach to aesthetic appreciation defined by Emily Brady as revelatory imagination. “Revelatory imagination is imagination which leads one to a heightened aesthetic awareness and reveals an aesthetic truth, which in turn gives way to a kind of truth or knowledge about the world.”

By immersing myself in a daily practice of walking along the same path in the same area, I deepened my aesthetic awareness by stimulating imaginative thinking. Imagination plays an important role in visual discovery. When a landscape is perceived for the first time, the experience can seem captivating. After a while, that fresh perspective wears off. In this series, I was challenged to discover inspiring experiences in common circumstance and familiar environments. Over time, I became attuned to the acute physical and ephemeral elements particular to the Bay Area coastal region. The frequency of the walks lead to a familiarity that helped make smaller, subtle changes and transient conditions—such as sunlight, fog and wind—more noticeable. Through this immersion, I imagined new ways to spot aesthetic potential in a familiar landscape.

After this series, I became curious and inspired to work within a new and unfamiliar landscape. According to Dr. Marcia Meulder Eaton, there are different stages in the examination of unfamiliar landscapes. There is the initial decision: to explore or move on. If one choses to explore, then one can gather information and choose to either stay longer or continue on, again. In Eaton’s view, we place value on and appreciate things holistically. Consequently, the role of the intellect used in a cognitive aesthetic approach enriches and grounds the imagination employed through a non-cognitive aesthetic approach. Combining both approaches to aesthetic appreciation opened up a new phase for my professional work, and broadened and deepened the scope of landscape painting for me.

In the summer of 2008 I was awarded a fellowship to work in Otranto, Italy. The summer residency program at Otranto provided a prime opportunity for me to explore these ideas. My main focus was to supplement my intuitive perception and interpretation of the landscape with external knowledge such as historical and community narratives.

Situated along the southern Adriatic coastline, Otranto, like San Francisco, is a city endowed with the physical characteristics of a coastal environment. The landscape provides a horizon line formed by water and sky. When contemplating a view structured by the sky and water horizon line, I thought of transience, potential, receiving, and embarking. I knew that geographically, Greece was due east and just an eight hour boat ride away from where I stood. I also learned that during the Roman Empire, the Otranto port received Greek scholars to educate the noble classes. Because I was exploring the role of the intellect in aesthetic appreciation, I appreciated Otranto’s history as a “Port of Knowledge.” In response to this, I made a series of paintings based on my walks along this coast each morning at sunrise,
traveling north and south on alternate days. The paintings recorded the eastward view towards Greece.

For my next series, wanting to satisfy my curiosity of how information gathered from local culture could influence my work, I interviewed a resident historian. He recommended I walk along the outside wall of the city. Otranto has a medieval castle in the center, and the walls of the castle circumvent the most of the town. One can follow a path alongside the wall through a large deep moat-like area. At first, I was not inspired in the least to create work based on this plain and minimal structure. However, when I took the prescribed walk, the visual affect was clear. The encompassing architecture, with its long, tall, sheer walls and small windows, has a formidable appearance from this angle—a perspective and appearance meant to deter the approaching enemy. Using combined influences, imagination and historical data, I began a series of drawings referring to the walk around the moat, emphasizing the vantage point from below looking upward. I felt satisfied, inspired, and ready for the next location.

The following summer, I attended an artist’s residency on a nature reserve in Hirsholmene, Denmark. Hirsholmene is an island located off the northernmost shore of Denmark. This region is known by artists for its light, which reflects off the North Sea. The idea of being far north in the middle of summer was very exciting, and promised to be an inspiration for the series of paintings. My interests again were naturally drawn to the prospects of working with the natural phenomena of weather and seasonal patterns. However, I discovered there is something else unique to Hirsholmene. It is home to around 40,000 migrating sea birds. Several species use the island for spring and summer breeding. I was there in June, as the new chicks hatched and very protective parents hovered over the nests all day, each day. Their presence pervaded the island; the birds and landscape were one. Painting living and moving creatures was new to me, but I became so curious about these birds that I had to paint them. Fortunately an ornithologist stays on the island each year to count newly hatched chicks of the sand tern, and he provided helpful information regarding the bird’s habits, migration patterns, and physical characteristics. Without a doubt, my aesthetic appreciation for this landscape increased significantly with the help and guidance of scientific knowledge.

Over time, these series of paintings become archives revealing information about annual weather patterns and seasons, as well as geographic, cultural and historical characteristics specific to that place. When exposed to an audience, the art work can possibly promote positive perspectives such as cultivating care and concern for the environment.

TEACHING LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Beginning Watercolor is a course I have taught for over eight years at Dominican University of California. In this class, the learning objectives have focused mainly on making sure students acquire watercolor painting techniques as well as knowledge of formal elements of composing. As my interest and research in environmental aesthetics and painting evolved, I decided to alter the course by introducing landscape and environment as content while continuing to teach basic skills and knowledge of painting.

Dominican is known for its beautiful and scenic landscape environment. The grounds crew work all year round to shape and maintain it. Unfortunately, there is still a great deal of littering
and need for improved recycling habits. Together with the Director of Building and Grounds and another colleague from the Biology Department, I looked at ways to cultivate a greener Dominican and care for the campus grounds. I knew from my own creative scholarship that gathering internal and external information about a landscape environment for art-making can lead to a heightened aesthetic appreciation of that environment. Perhaps this approach could also be used to cultivate a sense of stewardship for the campus grounds. Having students use the campus landscape as their subject, seemed like a good way to explore the possibility.

While preparing for the course, I came across and inspiring article titled, “The Bronx as Art: Exploring the Urban Environment” by high school art teacher Rikki Asher. Asher writes about his experience teaching high school students to draw and paint their neighborhoods in the Bronx by asking them to concentrate on what they thought was beautiful. His tenth graders had a range of truancy and discipline issues, and there were challenges in directing their focus towards a positive view of their homes and everyday surroundings. Through carefully planned assignments and persistent guidance he inspired them to discover beauty in their surroundings. Over the course of the semester, the students’ heightened aesthetic awareness seemed to also reward them with greater self-respect and confidence. As Asher noted, “The high quality of the artwork revealed that students discovered beauty in parts of the world they inhabit and, even more importantly, within themselves.” The idea was simple: if students look and learn more, they develop a deeper connection to their everyday environment and themselves. This positive shift could help my students notice more aesthetically, and hopefully engender a commitment and caring for the beautiful grounds they experience on campus.

In their assignments students were asked to select different elements and areas from the campus landscape to draw and paint. Students were given a walking tour by the Director of Building and Grounds who explained the history, design, and maintenance of the campus landscaping. I was curious to see whether this additional information would influence their choice of subject or composition. For the first few assignments, as they honed their skills and gained confidence, their paintings depicted small plants and leaves. Towards the middle of the semester, students moved gradually towards more complex scenery, favoring the trees they had learned about or enclosed spaces that had previously gone unnoticed.

The course was also transformed by imbedding service-learning activities to help students reinforce their artistic skills and pursue ideas of landscape painting collaboratively with younger children. Our community partner was a third grade class at a neighboring elementary school. Bahia Vista Elementary School is a public school located in the Canal District, a predominantly low-income Latino community. A total of six visits were arranged during the semester, and each time, a Dominican student paired up with the same third grader. Their main objective was to give watercolor lessons based on skills and ideas learned in class. Through the hands on service-learning exchanges, students could strengthen their watercolor painting skills, and experience how making art with children influences their observations and approaches to painting. In the beginning, the students taught the third graders watercolor basics such as filling in shape and mixing color. This gave them time to become acquainted with one another, as well as get a feel for the third grader’s creative abilities and interests. Students were taught to draw and paint the trees planted around their elementary school. Due to rainy weather and time restrictions, the final landscape assignments were created from student’s imagination. While I was working with one of students on his Imagined Landscape, he turned to me and said he did not go outside. At first I didn’t believe it, but I realized his
sincerity and sensed it could be common among children in his class. This realization led me to develop new goals for future service-learning art classes; I will seek to increase ways of connecting children with their environments.

By the end of the semester, I discovered the college students did have a greater appreciation and awareness of the campus environment, as well as improved visual literacy and technical skills. Their written journal reflections revealed an enthusiasm for making art with the third graders. In particular, they enjoyed hearing the children’s ideas and witnessing their courage to express and create. Most important, they gained confidence their mentorship abilities and saw mentorship as a point of departure for community engagement. Going forward, I plan to place greater emphasis on environmental advocacy through landscape painting. The college students and third-grade students can interact more often and more specifically with assignments based on the beauty of nature in our surroundings and the challenges to maintain and sustain these environments.

**LANDSCAPE PAINTING AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY**

What I would like to assume, although have not tested empirically, is that landscape painting not only influences the artist’s aesthetic appreciation through research and creative activities, but can also influence the viewer’s aesthetic awareness and appreciation for the environment that the artist has depicted. By examining the various discourses within environmental aesthetics, I have discovered that art plays an instrumental role in the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments. For the artist, the process of creating art work about an environment deepens his or her aesthetic awareness and appreciation through cognitive and non-cognitive aesthetic approaches. For the viewer, the artwork calls attention to new ways of seeing an environment, which can in turn cultivate positive connections to an environment. Positive aesthetic values inspired through art and art making have the potential to alter public aesthetic preferences and generate new appreciation for natural environments needing environmental advocacy.

When nineteenth-century artists incorporated ideas of the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque, art shaped how natural landscapes were perceived and valued. Thoreau’s nature writing and Thomas Cole’s paintings, for example, led to more scientific views of natural environments. The monumental paintings of Yosemite Valley by Albert Bierstadt and John Muir’s writings inspired positive aesthetic appreciation for untouched wilderness that happen to include threatening weather and “ugly” creatures. Considering how these examples influenced common interpretations of scenic beauty, today’s landscape painting can continue to adjust the lens for viewing natural environments in support of what John Baird Callicott calls an ecological aesthetic. “With growing public concern over the degeneration of the environment, we can create an ecological aesthetic, linking the beauty of nature to ecological integrity and stability.”

Ideally natural environments that are vital to ecological health yet commonly considered “unscenic” could accrue positive aesthetic appreciation when portrayed and celebrated through artwork. By designing and increasing ways of promoting an ecological aesthetic through art education and artwork, we can encourage the public appreciation of and support the
sustainability and conservation of species and environments, especially those that are neglected and endangered.

NOTES


FAIR USE: A REGENERATIVE CONCEPT IN THE LAW

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As the theme of the conference was announced to be “Green, Greener, Greenest: Romancing Nature Again,” I asked myself how copyright law and artists’ rights fit the theme. “Fair use” came to mind. A constant question asked by students and artist clients is “what can I use (without getting sued)?” In legal parlance, what is fair use? The thrust of the question of late is whether the borrowing is “transformative”—whether it adds something new with a different character, different aesthetic, different understanding. This in turn evoked an image of not just recycled copyright—but regenerative copyright. This is as close as this art lawyer can get to this fascinating theme.

Fair use is the ability to use copyrighted work in a different format without liability. The underpinning of the concept is the attempt to strike a balance between society’s interest in protecting the rights of the copyright holder providing an incentive to create and society’s parallel interest in promoting free expression and the creation of new ideas in new forms.

The difficulty in answering students’ and clients’ question is that there is no easy answer. Courts apply a four-part test and lawyers must advise that each case has to be analyzed on its own—not an answer that is helpful to an artist in a studio. However, the case law of late has been focused on whether the use is “transformative”—i.e. whether the use of someone else’s copyrighted work produces something new, with a different character with new insights, new aesthetics, or new understandings. Thus, a possible connection to the theme—fair use jurisprudence that considers regeneration of copyrighted work.

In this paper, I will tell you about recent developments in the law, and particularly what is considered a “transformative use” so that you will have some guidance about what can be used. I will also describe proposals to provide a more straightforward answer and suggest how artists can effect this process (and thereby help themselves).

The latest issue of the School of Visual Arts’s Visual Arts Journal, a visual essay demonstrating various creative/artistic endeavors of SVA’s students and showcasing the best of the student community illustrates the legal question. Each creator, I surmise, wants to make a living as an artist and certainly does not want to be the recipient of a lawsuit. First, let’s look at The Essential Wonder Woman Encyclopedia by SVA alumnus and faculty member Phil Jimenez and John Wells. DC Comics, not the authors, holds the copyright to Wonder Woman. The guide purports to clarify the convoluted story lines and to illustrate and comment on her complex career. Is it copyright infringement or a transformative fair use? Later, we will discuss J.K. Rowling’s suit against the writer of a Harry Potter lexicon, which may shed light (or just reiterate the complexity of providing a simple guideline) on the question. Next, I notice Amazing Greek Myths of Wonder and Blunders, which “kiddifies” the old stories with contemporary references and illustrations. Has he re-tooled copyrighted images? If so, are the uses fair? The publisher and errors and insurance companies will want to be re-assured. Finally, Dominic Pappone’s silkscreen prints, inspired by a near death experience with his
uncle in Italy, also raise questions of fair use. If the sculpture in the image called “Reborn 2009” were protected by copyright, would his new use be considered transformative?

So, what is a transformative use? One judge put it simply—if you are too lazy to do your own work and you use just someone else’s, that is not transformative. Instead, if you add something new and creative with a different purpose, which is a benefit to society, that passes the test. Two recent literary battles, waged by J.D. Salinger and J.K. Rowling, illustrate where courts are going.

Frederick Colting, writing as John David California, wrote 60 Years Later: Coming Through the Rye. The work centers on a 76-year old Mr. C. Although the name Holden Caulfield does not appear in the book, Mr. C. is clearly Holden, one of the best-known adolescent figures in American fiction, aged 60 years. Pre-publication, Colting described his intention in writing the book, claiming that he was inspired to write the second half of the story and that his book was a “tribute” and “sequel” to the beloved Catcher in the Rye. Just like the first novel, the character leaves home, but this time he is not at prep school, but in a retirement home upstate. He’s still the Holden Caulfield character and has a particular view of things. He can be “just tired,” and he is disappointed in the whole goddamned world. He’s older and wiser in a sense, but in another sense he doesn’t have all the answers. Once the book became the subject of a copyright infringement lawsuit, Colting claimed a different intention. He claimed that the book provided parodic comment or criticism of Holden Caulfield, which would be a legitimate fair use.

The Court, however, in Salinger v. Colting² did not buy this argument. Judge Batts found a 76 year-old character with many of the same qualities as the 16 year-old hero—miserable and unconnected, as well as frequently absurd and ridiculous, referring to Colting’s description of the elderly version of the character. “In fact (Judge Batts writes—we haven’t read the book because publication has been temporarily enjoined in the U.S.), it was these very characteristics that led Caulfield to leave or be expelled from three boarding schools, to wander the streets of New York City alone for several days, to lack any close friends other than his younger sister Phoebe, and ultimately to become a patient in a psychiatric hospital.”³

Thus, the court did not find a transformative fair use. She analyzed the other fair use factors, as she must, and ruled that the book could not be published in the U.S. She found that Colting did not create something new, because he borrowed so much from Catcher, from Salinger’s copyrighted work. At this point in the litigation, it is Salinger (now his estate), the copyright holder, who has the right to write a sequel, called a derivative work, and to utilize his character and story as he sees fit. This is a temporary ruling, because the litigation continues. Should Colting be able to extend the life of a literary hero—or only the artist and artist’s estate?

In J.K. Rowling’s suit against RDR Books and Steve Vander Ark, Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc. and J.K. Rowling v. RDR Books,⁴ the court again did not find a transformative fair use, but provided a more nuanced approach. Vander Ark, a librarian from Michigan, created the Harry Potter Lexicon, an online encyclopedia of the Harry Potter book series that collected and reorganized “facts” from the novels into searchable form. The Lexicon was non-profit and was widely used by fans, including Rowling herself, who said she had been known to sneak into an internet café to check a fact, rather than buy another copy of Harry Potter from a bookstore (which she said would be very embarrassing). RDR Books wanted to publish the Lexicon and assured Vander Ark that doing so was a legitimate fair use. Nonetheless, Warner Brothers and
Rowling sued to block the book’s publication, and Rowling publicly stated that she had planned to publish a similar book on her own and give the proceeds to charity.

Once again the Court evaluated the fair use factors and focused on two of the factors—the nature of the work, including whether the use was transformative, and the amount/substantiality of the work taken. It found that the *Lexicon*’s use of the Harry Potter series was somewhat transformative, because unlike the books whose purpose was entertainment and aesthetic, its function was to provide information in a reference guide. However, the Court also found that the *Lexicon* copied much more of the novels than was necessary for its purpose. Thus, weighing all the fair use factors, the Court found copyright infringement. Judge Patterson decided the case in Rowling’s favor because the *Lexicon* appropriates too much of Rowling’s creative work for its purpose as a reference guide. He issued a permanent injunction to ensure that works like this do not “deplete the incentive for original authors to create new works.”

In a case involving the visual arts, *Gaylord v. United States,* the government claimed that its use of Frank Gaylord’s sculptures on a stamp was a “transformative fair use.” Gaylord, now 85, in 1990 won a government-sponsored contest to sculpt a Korean war memorial in Washington D.C. The memorial drew the attention of photographer John Alli, a retired U.S. marine, who took hundreds of shots of the sculptures on a snowy day. In 2002, the government paid the photographer, not the sculptor, $1,500 to use the photo on a 37-cent postage stamp. The government made 17 million dollars on the sale of the stamps, and another 5.4 million on sales to collectors. Gaylord, who had served as an Army paratrooper in World War II, got nothing. In 2006, he walked into a law office in Vermont and asked if he had a claim. The firm found a former classmate, Heidi Garvey, at a large intellectual property firm who agreed to look at the case. At first, Harvey was skeptical since the government usually demands that artists sign their rights away. When she discovered that Gaylord had retained his rights, she took the case *pro bono* (at no cost to the client). The government claimed that its use of the stamp was a transformative fair use. Gaylord lost in the lower court, then appealed. On appeal, the Court found that the stamp was *not* a transformative fair use. The Court stated that “although the stamp changed the appearance of the sculptures by adding snow and muting the color, the changes did not impart a different character to the work … . To the extent that the stamp has a surreal character, the work and the soldiers contribute to that character. The work on a cold, winter morning as opposed to a warm sunny day does not change the character of the work. Nature’s decision to snow cannot deprive Mr. Gaylord of an otherwise valid right to exclude.” Many artists hailed the decision; appropriation artists and the “copyleft” decried it.

Now let’s talk about a case where the court found a transformative use. You may recall that several years ago Jeff Koons lost a copyright infringement case when photographer Art Rogers sued him for illegally using his photograph of a couple with puppies to make a sculpture for a Banality show. Koons argued that his use was “fair.” The case was decided before the “transformative theory” had been established. Most likely, Koons lost because of bad faith. He had seen the post card of Art Rogers’ photograph, tore off the copyright notice, and told his Italian fabricator to “copy this.”

In *Blanch v. Koons,* Koons used Blanch’s photo from Allure magazine as part of a collage, which (according to Koons) commented on contemporary culture. For $750, Andrea Blanch
created an advertisement for Gucci’s silk sandals. The photo depicted a woman’s lower legs and feet wearing the silk sandals resting on a man’s lap in an airplane cabin and appeared in a six-page feature in Allure.

Koons was then commissioned by Deutsche Bank and the Guggenheim to create a series of seven paintings, which he later called “Easyfun-Ethereal.” One work, “Niagra,” was at issue. In “Niagra,” Koons (or more accurately his assistants) depicted several sets of women’s lower legs juxtaposed against food and landscapes. He intended to “comment on the ways in which some of our most basic appetites—for food, play, and sex—are mediated by popular images… By reconceptualizing these fragments as I do, I try to compel the viewer to break out of the conventional way of experiencing a particular appetite as mediated by mass media.” Koons made good money on the project; Blanch admitted that Koons’ use didn’t harm her career, upset any plans she had for her work, or decrease its value.

So, the court marched through the four factors and found unquestionably that the use was transformative. “Koons had a genuine creative rationale for borrowing Blanch’s image, rather than merely using it to get attention or to avoid the drudgery in working fresh up.” Therein is the guidance for artists. Although this advice does not provide a guarantee of fair use, it is the best we can do given the state of the law.

What is to be done? Students and artists will not read cases and evaluate four factors each time they consider “borrowing” someone else’s work. Compulsory licensing with set fees has been suggested. This means that anyone could use copyrighted images on condition that they pay a fee. Fees suggested may be appropriate for Jeff Koons and Richard Prince, but not for an academic or a student. Others have suggested panels to evaluate whether the use is fair and mediate disputes. Again, this would be time-consuming and impractical.

Pamela Samuelson, a law professor and director of the Berkeley Center for Law and Technology at UC Berkeley, convened a working group made up of academics and large companies, such as Microsoft and Disney, to draft reforms to the U.S. copyright law. Their concerns were spurred by the lawsuits against “regular people” for file sharing, one of which resulted in a 1.92 million dollar damage award against a Minnesota mom and the fact that copyright law touches the lives of ordinary people today in ways not contemplated by the 1976 copyright Act. Copyright law ostensibly protects every email and photograph.

The Copyright Principles Project: Directions for Reform explores principles for reform, including a heavy emphasis on commercial value when determining fair use and passage of Orphan Works legislation to enable libraries and other good faith users to use orphan works—copyrighted works whose owners can’t be found. Sadly absent from the group are working artist groups. This would be an appropriate forum for visual artists to insert themselves and to create a more workable fair use application.

The most effective solution thus far to the fair use conundrum is the “Best Practices in Fair Use.” Documentary filmmakers enacted the “Documentary Filmmakers Statement of Best Practices In Fair Use” to codify a reasonable and workable application of the “fair use” doctrine. Their purpose is to help filmmakers use their guidelines with confidence. It gives specific guidance with an explanation of what can be used, why, and the limitations on such use. The Best Practices was created by a group of professional associations, academics, and attorneys who are experts in the area and are knowledgeable about the law and practice. It is
recognized by insurance companies who provide errors and omissions insurance for films and is cited in attorney opinion letters as to whether particular borrowings in a film constitute fair use.

Recently, a filmmaker client asked me for an opinion letter advising that a clip could be “fairly used” in her film. Her film *No Dinosaurs in Heaven* examines the hijacking of science education by religious fundamentalists. It uses footage from *The Bible Explores Dinosaurs*, produced by Answers in Genesis for Creation Library, which sets forth the religious right’s point of view, which the film meant to critique. In the letter, I analyzed the use, utilizing the four factors described above and explained how the use conformed to the “Documentary Filmmakers Statement of Best Practices In Fair Use.” The beauty of this pamphlet is that insurance providers will accept an attorney letter advising that the use conforms to its principles.

Other copyright users are working on a similar set of “Best Practices in Fair Use.” The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard is working on such a project, as well as the research library community, and online video makers. There is even a Statement of Best Practices governing user-generated content.

I have repeatedly stated here at this conference over the years, in my classes, to my clients, and in various workshops I have given in New York City, on the east end and on the west coast that: first artists must have classes and learn about their legal rights. Copyright law, including fair use, is complicated and governs art-making during an entire career and artists must be equipped with this knowledge. Secondly, artists must join organizations, which can apprise them of their rights and of advocacy efforts to help them in their careers.

Visual artists and those of us who are charged with their education must insert ourselves into the ongoing process of making fair use understandable and workable. Next year, I hope to be able to report on a *Visual Artists Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use.*

NOTES

1. Four factor test for fair use: (1) purpose and character of use, including whether commercial or non-profit educational purposes; (2) nature of copyrighted work; (3) amount and substantiality of portion used; and (4) effect on marketplace value of original.
3. Id. at 258.
5. Id. at 549.
7. Id. at 1374.
8. Andrea Blanch v, Jeff Koons, the Solomon R. Guggenhiem Foundation, and Deutsche Bank AG (467 F. 3d 244 (2006).
9. Id. at 247.
10. people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~pam/.../Preliminary%20Thoughts%20utah.pdf

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NATURE AS AXIS: HMONG GREEN IS BLUE

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My research examines cross-cultural influences of war and immigration on Hmong textile language, gender roles in production, and transitions into new art forms including art quilts or wall hangings. In traditional Hmong life, women produced complex textiles as markers of clan identity and cultural values. Paj ntaub, (translated as flower cloth), is created by embroidery, appliqué, reverse appliqué, and indigo batik, and in traditional village life, served as primary transmitters of Hmong culture from one generation to the next over centuries. As an artist I am deeply inspired by the textiles and story of the Hmong. When living in Providence in 1982-86, I met Hmong women through a needlework cooperative where I volunteered, the Southeast Asia Co-op. Image of girls I was fascinated with the culture, previously unknown to me, especially since Hmong textiles were an agent of language in an oral society. There were also many rituals and protections connected to paj ntaub. A belief shared by one Hmong friend is that paj ntaub, especially baby carriers and hats, disguise the children as flowers so evil spirits will not pluck them from the earth. Who wouldn’t want to know more? Unfortunately, the story of how Hmong came to the United States is devastating and all too familiar.

When the CIA’s Secret War ended in Laos in 1975, many Hmong fled from political retaliation by the communists into refugee camps along the borders of Thailand. By 1983, nearly half of the pre-1975 Hmong population of Laos lived beyond its native borders. According to the 2009 US census, there are over 300,000 Hmong now living in the US. As political refugees who arrived in the United States, acculturated forms of paj ntaub became a source of income while also essential in preserving Hmong cultural identity and their shared story.

Even before Chinese attempts at cultural subjugation several centuries ago that precipitated a Hmong migration into Laos and other mountainous regions in Southeast Asia, traditional paj ntaub clothing signified Hmong ethnic independence. The significance of their dress is revealed in a legend that claims the Hmong used to have a written language but when the Chinese made it illegal to speak or write Hmong, the Hmong women hid the alphabet in the folds of the women’s skirts. With complex patterns of embroidery, appliqué and batik in skirts made of twenty-four feet of cloth compressed into tiny pleats, the legend gains currency when understood in context. While their designs are not an alphabet in the strict linguistic definition, they traditionally served as a visual language that was understood by fellow Hmong, were important in the ritual functions of paj ntaub, and assured continuity of a cosmology deeply shaped by nature.

The Hmong were vertically segregated in China beginning in the 13th C, and in traditional villages lived at the highest altitudes in southwest China, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar. The paj ntaub were almost exclusively costumes and clothing. As a semi-nomadic group practicing swidden (slash and burn) agriculture, the primary wealth was in elaborate costumes and silver jewelry, not architecture or land ownership. The significance of costumes and costume making in the past was for ritual purposes and cultural identity, and were made by the women in the family. The Hmong are a sub-group of the Miao ethnic minority in China—this image is of a Miao costume, about 75 years old from southwest China, and is stylistically
similar to the Laotian Hmong *paj ntaub* where my research is focused. According to Hmong refugee women informants quoted in the Kohler Art Center *paj ntaub* exhibition catalog (Wisconsin 1985), the three primary reasons for wearing traditional costumes were:

1. Identify oneself as Hmong.

2. Display the wealth of one’s family at celebrations, especially the Hmong New Year festival, and

3. Prepare oneself for the passage into the spiritual world after death—the costume pieces [hats, jackets, funeral pillows, etc.] afforded the wearer spiritual protection or assisted in claiming an individual’s spirit by the clan ancestors after death.

A young wife made the funerary textiles for her parents and her new in-laws, with great importance attached to the textiles and their presentation. They would show honor to the parents when used for their burial. Their use offered protection for the deceased on the long journey to the nether world, so the soul would prosper in the afterworld. (Mallinson, Donnelly, Hang, 1996; Lewis and Lewis, 1984; Symonds, 2004).

Extravagant costumes for a young woman’s dowry were also of great importance. Young women made many of her articles of clothing, but they were considered the property of her parents who had paid for the threads and cloth, and had allowed the young woman time away from childcare or agricultural work to produce the labor-intensive garments. (Mallinson, Donnelly, Hang, 1996: 33). Young Hmong girls began learning the cross-stitch embroidery when they were as young as five years old, and learned the more complex processes of hemp production and weaving, appliqué, indigo dyeing and garment construction as they grew older. It was widely reported by Hmong friends in Providence that a young woman’s industriousness and textile skills were among the most highly regarded attributes of a partner when a young man was searching for his future wife. A woman’s inventiveness in textile pattern design also was reported to be an indicator of her future fertility in childbirth. Widely shared patterns and design motifs did not preclude a high regard for design innovation. In Laos, creation of clothing for families by the women was most productive during the months after the harvest cycles of crops: rice, vegetables and opium as a cash crop for trading. (Yang, 2004). The Hmong New Year festival was when new garments were revealed and displayed on all members of the family, but most significant for young women of marriageable age.

In November 2009 I went to Laos for the Hmong New Year festival, with support from a University Small Research Grant from Kansas State, to research how much of traditional dress was still being worn. These images demonstrate that handwork, in particular counted cross-stitch on the women’s aprons (sev) is still valued for traditional dress for the Hmong New Year festival, but the reverse appliqué was seen very little and skirts are usually pleated polyester not hemp, although printed with traditional patterns. My young male guide and translator said that while the young men don’t care at all about wearing traditional Hmong clothing, they still care very much about whether a young woman is wearing *paj ntaub* when they are looking for a wife. He also said that he does not know what the traditional design motifs mean as images, but that it would be important that his wife did so that she could make the appropriate ritual funeral clothing for his parents. It appears most of this knowledge has been lost in a generation, as all of the Hmong refugee women in Providence I talked to knew the meaning of the motifs.
These traditional design motifs in Laos developed from a deeply held animist tradition were documented by anthropologists MacDowell and Dewhurst in the Detroit area Hmong-American community in the mid-1980’s. These illustrations demonstrate that each motif could have multiple references to nature. Context became important in their meaning. The illustrations include non-traditional motifs such as the church or temple (since the Hmong were neither Christian or Buddhist until the 1950’s) that were being incorporated into new forms of paj ntaub. The indigo dyed batik of the skirt of the Blue or Green Hmong also has designs developed from nature, shown in these patterns of cucumber seeds, etc.

Traditional forms of paj ntaub were already influenced by external sources from the mid-1950’s as it was the beginning of tourist trade in southeast Asia. Westerners visiting Laos wanted a souvenir of the fine stitching that appeared on Hmong costumes. Later there were efforts made by missionaries in the late 1960’s to market paj ntaub squares and coasters to buyers in the US/France to obtain financial assistance. Making/selling paj ntaub squares became a lucrative business for the less remote villages, and inspired the development of larger decorative hangings. While small squares of paj ntaub were exchanged by Hmong in Laos as a sign of friendship, and also enabled sharing ideas for new pattern designs, this was different than the “decorator squares” that began being produced as tourist export ware. (Cohen, 2000). These acculturated paj ntaub are removed from the ritual functions of Hmong identity and spiritual protection that marked the traditional forms and are not “activated” by the same belief systems, as they demonstrate a new color palette and design freedom that is aesthetically interesting but beyond the scope of this short essay. (Next on my research list).

While paj ntaub production had undergone these transitions prior to the conflict in Vietnam, the most dramatic visual shift occurred when the Hmong who fled into refugee camps in the 1970’s began making embroidered pictures or images, a dramatic turn from the patterned geometric cloth that had served as a shared visual language previously. As the culture was in significant upheaval, so did the textile language and the producers change. Paj ntaub was women’s work in the mountains of Laos, but the men in refugee camps also began to produce “story cloths” as wall hangings in the new pictorial language, a simplification from the abstract language to representational image. This emergence almost overnight of a pictorial or quasi-representational embroidered art from a geometric, highly stylized ornamental art has rarely, if ever, been documented in detail in anthropological literature (Cohen, 2000:138) and rarely documented in art historical literature either. Of course that doesn’t mean it didn’t happen—in the arena of traditional craft it very likely has—but rarely documented.

A current focus of my research has been to locate the genesis of this “dumbing down” of language (strictly this artist’s perspective), from symbolic abstraction to universal representation. There are numerous Hmong informants and anthropologists (Dewhurst, MacDowell, 1984) who report it was a relief worker in the refugee camps who suggested that Hmong make the embroidered pictures to sell. Anthropologist Erik Cohen suggests another possible source for this shift to pictorial imagery away from the geometric and ornamental designs. “In the wake of their displacement in Laos, flight and eventual internment in refugee camps in Thailand, the Hmong came increasingly into contact with selected elements of lowland Lao and modern Western culture. Among other things they came in touch with printed materials, which included various illustrated textbooks used for instruction in the English language—which they were taught in the camps as part of their preparation for eventual resettlement in a third country. In all probability, the idea of figurative representation
penetrated Hmong culture from the simple illustrations found in these textbooks and in Chinese pattern-books." (Cohen, 2000: 136).

My friend Ia Yang was introduced to story cloths in her year in the Ban Vinai refugee camp on the Thai border, but did not embroider this beautiful story cloth of refugees coming to America (Untitled) until she was resettled in Providence, Rhode Island in the late 1970’s. She did not see picture books in the camps although many Hmong men did. She says that they were not encouraged to produce the embroideries by relief workers, but the men had nothing to do in the camps and the story cloths were a possible source of income for their families. Ia believes, first and foremost, that the primary reason Hmong made the story cloths was to document their story, including the incorporation of English text. (Yang, 2009). “The Hmong may well have been assisted in the composition of the English texts by foreigners working in the camps as aid personnel or by missionaries. It should be emphasized, however, that the Hmong refugees were not asked, advised, or encouraged by the relief organizations marketing their crafts to produce figurative designs. Indeed, these organizations concentrated on purely ornamental designs, and marketed the figurative ones only rarely and in negligible quantities. Figurative designs were thus an essentially spontaneous, though heterogenetic, development in Hmong art.” (Cohen, 2000: 138).

In the previous political work, Ia interspersed violent scenes of escape from Laos across the Mekong River with scenes of farming and peacetime activities within geo-political borders, represented by dashed lines, but the political works didn’t sell. Ia turned to less charged subject matter when she made Kingdom of the Animals, this embroidery with a title from a western art source that portrays an idyllic pastoral of rural Hmong life in Laos. The physical organization of images in more ordered columns and rows is similar to the geometric order of the traditional pandau reverse appliqué. These details show the same meticulous attention to craftsmanship. People and animals are coupled, demonstrating an important Hmong cosmological belief in the balance of male and female, and it includes many of the same auspicious animals that were the genesis of traditional geometric abstract patterns - snails, tigers, and elephants. However, even these finely crafted and designed works, among the finest produced by Hmong refugees in the United States, have not proven to be useful commodities. Americans have not purchased story cloths in significant numbers regardless of subject. Ia returned to making geometric abstract quilts-sized works about five years ago, until her passing in August 2010. Artists like Ia who maintain the skills to make traditional clothing and story cloths continue to diminish without replacement, as the Hmong raised in the United States assimilate to a different life. The rich and complex story of Hmong refugee experience as told in the unique visual language of story cloths is an artistic dialect that may be relegated to history already in the first generation of production.

The situation in Asia is not so very different. My few short weeks in Laos and northern Thailand in late 2009 also indicated that story cloths are made increasing less for the tourist market in southeast Asia, and are significantly smaller to accommodate the average tourist price point. This last work I’ll show is a tiger story cloth bought in Doi Pui, a Hmong village about 20 km from Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, on the same mountain as Doi Suthep Buddhist temple, an important tourist destination for Thai nationals. Since Doi Pui has been a tourist destination for several decades, the village has created a museum, tourist-only accommodations and many other amenities including a highly commercial market that includes gemstones and imported, cheap machine-made textiles from China. Hmong textiles for sale were principally repurposed hemp indigo batik skirts taken apart and unpleated to make bedspreads and bags,
and some reverse appliqué products for the home. Only two vendors had story cloths, and all seemed to be animal folktales such as this, set in a landscape, with English and not Hmong words.

Over time, the meaning of the events told in the story cloths and the traditional design motifs as a shared language will be increasingly lost, but of course the Hmong have never been part of a fixed cultural tableau. Culture changes. The slippery nature of language within culture is demonstrated by my sub-title, Hmong Green is Blue. I was suggesting that the Hmong cosmology and way of life so intricately bound up in nature (green) is diminishing (brings on melancholy blue), but also it is a direct translation of what a Hmong friend told me about why the two words seem to be interchanged in so much writing on the Hmong. As a Blue Hmong, he said that it was the White Hmong who called his group Green Hmong, but they called themselves Blue Hmong. (The visual language and designs within the textiles seem a form of communication no more abstract or subject to error than all human attempts at understanding!)

To close, this pigeon house in Ban Nasala, Laos demonstrates Hmong invention and propensity for cultural adaptation – they prefer the bomb casings to logs for stilts as rodents cannot climb the steel – and a great image of integration. However, the relationship to nature will change as urban Hmong in the United States and Laos assimilate to a different life that is based on wage labor not self-sufficient agriculture. I believe the Hmong ability to maintain a cosmology with nature as axis that will connect them to their history can be sustained through the continuation of an artistic dialect stitched in cloth, artistic endeavor the permission to dream.

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BOOKENVIRON: ROMANCING THE RHYTHMS OF NATURE

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By concept and scale, BookEnvirons create immersion experiences for the viewer who enters and explores the space shaped by the pages of the artists’ book. Inspired by Nature, seeking the sublime, BookEnvirons are experienced as shelter, escape, epiphany; shaping our space, our thoughts, and our aspirations. We have always been inspired by nature. For us Nature, Creativity and Spirituality go hand in hand. Forms and rhythms of nature, whose beauties and mysteries resonate with all faith traditions, provide an interfaith language for the spiritual. (Figure 6)

As collaborative artists, we create large-scale viewer interactive installations of handmade paper for which we coined the term “BookEnviron” to call attention to their status as large artists’ books with a relationship to the environment. (Figure 7) The visual structures are inspired by the forms and rhythms of nature. The healing power of nature soothes and rejuvenates the soul. Our BookEnvirons celebrate this transformative relationship. (Figure 8)

We like to say that the first thing we learned was how to share… the second was to work together. So, collaboration with our artwork is natural for us. (Figure 9) Growing up on a farm in central Illinois, we experienced nature was a friend, teacher, companion, and healer. The pastures and the timber provided hours of enjoyment with worlds to explore and secret places to discover. And when the hard times came, bringing difficulties that we could not comprehend, nature provided an underlying consistency to recognize rhythms even in change. For us the sublime in nature and in art, that resonates the most, is that experience of being in the awesome presence of something great and mysterious that somehow also accommodates—the humble viewer. The romantic rhythms of nature intrigue and soothes us still. Spending time communing with nature is a vital part of our studio practice. (Figure 10-14)

As twins, we have always had a special bond, looking so much alike . . . thinking alike . . . finishing each other’s sentences. Having once been one and now two, we identify with the saying: One is not half of two; it is two that are halves of one. Though distinctly individuals, there is something of our essential essence that will always remain one. (Figure 15)

Much of our artwork has evolved from thoughts expressed in the following poem.
There is a place within
   Central to my being
   Invisible
   Yet profoundly real. (Figure 16)

This place is
   Calm, quiet, harmonious
   An important connection
To things not easily understood. (Figure 17)

An intangible space
- Unseen boundaries
- Stretching to encompass
- Immeasurable distances and time. (Figure 18)

A personal space
- Vitally important
- Impossible to describe. (Figure 19)

This place houses my soul—
- My spiritual essence
- Here we find peace. (Figure 20)

The inadequacies of mere words to communicate the experiences of this intangible inner space lead to the search of a visual format that could be shared with others. We began to seek a way to make that connection. (Figure 21)

Far too often, in our society, our spiritual natures are neglected. The noise, crowding, and fast pace of our society interfere with activity on the spiritual plane. Popular culture does not seem to place a high value on spiritual growth or even awareness. Similarly, all too often nature has been exploited and neglected. Yet there seems to be a basic human desire to connect to something greater than ourselves. The current Green consciousness is encouraging for individuals to reconnect to the larger pulse of the universe. To grow spiritually, the soul (one’s spiritual essence) needs attention. Time is required to become acquainted with one’s soul—to make that connection. (Figure 22) A commitment, much the same as that of a friendship which needs interaction to develop or like a musician who needs hours of practice to refine a raw natural talent into a skillfully harmonious collaboration between musician and instrument, time is necessary to accomplish growth spiritually. And time with nature deepens that relationship. (Figure 23)

There is an Indian proverb that expresses a need for balance in our lives. (Figure 24)

> Everyone is a house with four rooms, a physical, a mental, an emotional and a spiritual. Most of us tend to live in one room most of the time, but unless we go into every room, every day, even if only to keep it aired, we are not a complete person.

> —Indian Proverb

Our large installations, the metaphorical environments, are intended to call attention to the need in our daily lives for a place of quiet reflection. Some of them are like a room or sheltered space; others are more like a labyrinth. (Figure 25) Labyrinths have a long history and connection with the spiritual. One of the most famous labyrinths dates from 13th century and is found in Chartres Cathedral in France. The act of walking the labyrinth is thought to have symbolized a pilgrimage. Labyrinths, unlike mazes, have a clear path to the center-point. (Figure 26)
Artistically, we grew out of traditions of printmaking and fibers including lithography, letterpress, and papermaking. This image shows us at the lithography press at Normal Editions Workshop, Illinois State University, where I [Veda] am Associate Director. (Figure 27) Early works include [Meda’s] Autumn Sunset, (Figure 28) where the landscape supports saturated colors that are used to express emotions. Spring Spirit and Between Freeze and Thaw, (Figure 29) are part of my [Meda’s] Landshapes series, which broke away from the rectangular “window” concept of a landscape. [Veda’s] Free Spirit II and For Lucile, (Figure 30) includes one of our first ceiling suspended / free hanging works, exploring spiritual ideas. For Sherry, (Figure 31) is part of a series of works about people who inspired me [Veda] and mentors. Follow Me and Spirit Dancers, (Figure 32) explore relationships between two figures, for example: generational and among peers.

Book Arts, that is artwork that is expressed as a book, was a natural progression for us to be able to incorporate all of our media interests together. A to Z, (Figure 33) is an early artist’s book exploring sequencing of the pages, the progression throughout the book, and the shaping of the page’s positive and negative shapes. A Golden Glaze, (Figure 34) was inspired by the progression of elevation experienced in a drive across Kansas, which is evident in the shaping of the book. The Artists’ Book format has an intimacy and quiet introspection, as well as an avenue for the sharing of complex ideas outside oneself.

The sculptural presence of this work, Restless Night, (Figure 35) and how the viewers would interact with it in the exhibit, sparked a curiosity about how the viewer moves through the gallery in response to our books. The works for which we coined the term “BookEnviron” grew out of a brainstorming session that raised the question, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful to create an artists’ book that is large enough to walk into?” A Higher Plane, (Figure 36) is an early installation exploring this concept. Each page is 10’ tall. Together, it is a 21’ wide x 8’deep semicircle. Garden Archway, (Figure 37) is two semicircles with a passage between them, creating a partially enclosed area.

As though released from their bindings, the handmade paper pages of our BookEnvirons shape the space of the gallery enveloping the viewer. Magnolia BookEnviron, (Figure 38) was installed in Iowa City for the inaugural conference of the College Book Art Association. It created an alcove, a sheltered oasis, an escape from the everyday. The pages are suspended sequentially from threads that are embedded in the paper. The pages move rhythmically in response to air currents, which are often created by the motion of the viewer. Light and shadow plays an important role in shaping the space of the gallery, (Figure 39) revealing dimension in the paper, (Figure 40) and creating a dabbled light for the viewer to experience. (Figure 41) Light also increases the visibility of the layers of shapes and details of expressive threads. (Figure 42)

Each of the BookEnvirons defines actual spaces; pathways, arches, doors, windows, etc.; which are metaphors for personal inner spaces that have no tangible structure. (Figure 43) Twin Path was installed at the Quincy Art Center. It traces two intertwining paths. (Figure 44) The ethereal qualities of the artwork are enhanced by the contrast between the delicate appearance of the handmade paper and the mass of the forms. (Figure 45) Spire: A Spiritual Journey is a large spiraling 4 foot wide pathway, with a footprint of 40’ by 36’ and is 12’ tall. Each of the 160 pages is 3’ by 3’ and raises higher as the spiral turns towards the center, creating an enclosure into which the viewer is invited to walk. (Figure 46) The spiral structure is repeated everywhere in nature, from DNA to nautilus shells to solar systems. The spiral pattern is also
found in all liquids and gasses that flow. (Figure 47) The blood coursing in our veins, the water flowing in a river, and the air currents of the atmosphere, all follow a spiraling course in their movement from one place to another. (Figure 48) Spire: A Spiritual Journey brought a mountain top experience to the prairie. The purpose in creating a metaphor for a spiritual journey is to define an actual journey by which the viewer may engage in a metaphorical journey, possibly even an epiphany experience. It is intended that the viewer will feel encouraged to engage in their own intangible inner journeys that only they can access, to open the door to a place within themselves where the physical senses give way to the spiritual essence, where self meets soul and each can learn and grow from the other. (Figure 49) We thought it would be nice to share a little about how we make the paper. Although we have made paper from many different fibers including cotton, flax, cornstalk, iris, and kozo; abaca fiber is by far our favorite fiber to use for our BookEnvironments. Not only because of the beauty, strength, and versatility of this fiber, but also because abaca is an eco-friendly, renewable material. Abaca is related to the banana, grown for its fiber, which is ranked as the strongest natural fiber. Every part of the plant is utilized by industries as diverse as automobile, cosmetics, and medical. Abaca enriches the soil and can be harvested in about 18 months, making it far superior to harvesting trees which takes 20 years. In addition, the amount of abaca fiber produced on one acre is equivalent to four acres of trees. A mold and deckle is dipped into the vat of pulp. (Figure 50) The mold carries the su where the paper fibers collect. The mold includes a stencil of three leaves that we drew and cut so that the paper will form in those shapes on the su as the water drains away. (Figure 51) Here lily shapes are transferred from the su to the paper panel by a method called couching. (Figure 52) Paper shapes, along with thread & yarn additives, are built up in layers in a process called wet-into-wet lamination. (Figure 53) The drying process begins with sponging to remove excess water. The pressing action also encourages the fibers to bond. (Figure 54) After the paper is thoroughly dry, the finished paper page is removed from the working surface and ready to be displayed in the installation. (Figure 55) With back lighting, the thread and additives are illuminated—adding dimension. (Figure 56)

Organic materials can easily be added to the fiber in the vat. The Chamber includes tea leaves, hair, saw dust, milk weed seeds and fluff, as well as iridescent pigments and threads to express connections to the rhythms of the natural life cycle of birth, growth, decline, and death. The direction of the leaf motif reinforces the transitional connections in this cycle. (Figure 57) The installation process can be lengthy. Installing Dual Pathway shows a typical approach with Meda securing the pages at the ceiling. (Figure 58) This is a view from above, how it appears from the scaffolding. (Figure 59) This is a view from below, where Veda typically coordinates all of the logistics. (Figure 60) The two spiraling pathways of Dual Pathway converge toward the center and release in opposite directions. The two pathways merge, but never quite touch. (Figure 61) Dual Pathway is installed at 6 feet above the floor, above the height of most viewers. (Figure 62)

Magnolia Series, (Figure 63) as installed at The Center for Book Arts in New York, starts in the foyer and creates a meandering “S” shaped path (Figure 64) leading into another area of the exhibition. (Figure 65) It engages a space that might otherwise be overlooked by the viewer. The textural detail of the handmade paper of the Magnolia Series has flower shapes in various stages of blooming. (Figure 66) These flower shapes are intended to prompt thoughts of the physical or earthly life cycle. Nature is our great original and sustaining material resource. (Figure 67)
We are inspired by the forms and rhythms of nature and always do extensive research, sketching and photographing the subjects of the motifs for our artists’ books. (Figure 68) Each page of a BookEnviron can be seen as a love note, celebrating, strengthening, and deepening our relationship with nature. (Figure 69) Collectively, the pages embrace the viewer as they bear witness to our seeking, through nature, the immaterial universal truths that paradoxically validate our individuality and unite us into a harmonious whole. Each page is a milepost, celebrating progress.

The flowing motif (Figure 70) speaks of the eternal rhythms of the spiritual life and of nature. Flowing substances (Figure 71) can respond to multiple activating forces. Whereas only one solid object can occupy a given space, more than one movement can occur within the same space of a fluid substance—like complex ripples on the surface of water. Likewise, a flowing substance can maintain its integrity even when moving through a similar substance—like the Gulf Stream that flows from the Gulf of Mexico to Northern Europe through the Atlantic Ocean. (Figure 72) We like to think of our souls as having the same properties as a flowing substance. They can retain their own identities even when moving through others. A soul can simultaneously sustain many rhythms and movements from multiple activating forces. (Figure 73) When envisioning the soul as a flowing substance on a spiritual plane with other similar moving substances, it is easier to resolve the paradoxes of feeling very small and very large at the same time and of feeling connected to my own unique identity and yet connected to other identities in the universe. (Figure 74) The wave motif—the flowing forms—references the influence of fluid materials in our lives and in our world. This intermingling, flowing phenomenon is used as a metaphor for the influence of one soul on another.

_Eureka Magnolia BookEnviron_ (Figure 75) traces a rising spiral. The pages ascend, reminding us of the goal of a spiritual life that is growing—reaching for a higher better place or state of being. (Figure 76) _Eureka Magnolia BookEnviron_ has been installed at Eureka College, a private Christian college, and the 2010 Liturgical and Sacred Art Juried Exhibition in Springfield, Illinois. Both venues emphasized sacred spaces with interfaith experiences. (Figure 77) The Eureka College Chaplain stated, “Modern labyrinths are metaphorical journeys, inviting a prayerful passage, both inward and toward the Holy. The Rives’ work of art implies a path, movement, drawing the observer forward and upward. It resembles a labyrinth, yet not one grounded in the earth. Rather, this one artfully reaches upward, inviting a prayerful transcendence.” Viewer responses include, “Sublime, serene, awesome, moving, and fascinating.” “Captivating it takes me to another world.” “A moment’s retreat from the tyranny of the urgent.” “What a blessing!” “The spiritual essence is palpable.” (Figure 78)

Artists are bringing new life to the book format. In an age when many people think that the book is almost extinct—set aside in favor of electronic devices, artists are pushing the boundaries of what a book can be. We are investigating the area where nature, artist book, and architecture intersect, where the shaping of the space impacts the viewer. Not just presenting an object to be looked at, but an artwork that changes the viewer’s relationship with the space of the gallery. We believe that the pages of our books which invoke a sense of nature, and the arrangement of those pages to create an environment, can impact the viewers beyond how they move through the space to affecting their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual awareness. (Figure 79)

In the last century, when many people felt photography threatened the validity of painting, Picasso felt liberated, “Now we know at least everything that painting isn’t!” He created images
beyond the capacity of a camera. We feel that current technologies are freeing the book from the burden of being a vehicle of information. Artists are freely exploring the book format for expression. We are most excited about pursuing artists’ books that are large enough to share aspects with architecture and yet communicate elements of the sublime in nature. This is a rich area to explore beyond the capacity of e-books. Consider the Water (Figure 80) continues our interest in the flowing motif while more specifically prompting the viewer to contemplate their relationship with water. We are working on expanding this study piece into a larger BookEnvirons.

Our BookEnvirons, inspired by the forms and rhythms of nature, (Figure 81) are intended to bring physical and spiritual experiences closer together. To encourage viewers along mental and spiritual journeys, contemplating aspects of their own individual existence, beliefs, and destinations. Creating an oasis (Figure 82) for quiet reflection, places with entryways for the soul. (Figure 83) Reminding us that there is a greater essence, a greater presence, a greater force. (Figure 84) We don’t presume to try to tell you a specific message from that essence. (Figure 85) With our art we hope to encourage a spiritual connection…we trust that greater power to speak directly to your hearts. We simply want our artworks to remind us to listen. Nature making connections.

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ROMANCING THE PLOW: GRANT WOOD'S SURREAL SPRING TURNING

Barry Maine
Wake Forest University

Grant Wood was born in 1891 and raised on a farm near Anamosa, Iowa until his father died and his mother moved the family to Cedar Rapids. So the farm life Wood commemorates in his art is usually referred to and understood as the farm life of his childhood. Wood became virtually an overnight success and “star” of the American Art world after submitting his American Gothic to the Art Institute of Chicago’s annual exhibition of American Painting and Sculpture in 1930. Before 1930 he had been experimenting with post-impressionist approaches to painting derived from his studies in Paris. But after the success of American Gothic he continued painting in a style of his own—with local rural imagery, local detail reduced to decorative forms, human subjects reduced to farming types, landscape expressed in abstract patterns, and more often than not some narrative component—a style which eventually came to be labeled as Regionalism. He painted his best known works during this period. In 1935 he married, accepted a position as professor of art at the University of Iowa, left Cedar Rapids, moved to Iowa City, and bought a house. During the next three years he completed only one major painting, Spring Turning.

It has become a commonplace among critics and scholars of Wood’s work that he had to move away from the farm to appreciate its mesmerizing beauty and enduring power over his and the American imagination and psyche, and that he had to acquire the sophistication of modernism before he could express that power. While teaching art at the University of Iowa he became a spokesperson for regional art and even published a treatise entitled Revolt Against the City that championed the virtues and values of regional art in such a way as to echo what Allen Tate and the Agrarians were writing in I’ll Take My Stand in the 1930’s, confronting the widespread effects of modernity and urbanization and industrialism on American culture and tradition.

The lush green fertile landscape of Spring Turning is squarely and directly at odds with the dustbowl images in photographs and films that came to define the American farm in the popular mind during the Great Depression. In the face of a swelling documentary record of arid weather, dust storms, farm failures and foreclosures, and gaunt and impoverished and destitute farm families in the American Midwest, Wood painted this. What was he up to in painting such a scene, a scene that denied not only the documentary record that had taken hold of the public mind (and which has held its place until this day) but a scene that depicted a way of life and a method of farming the land that was rapidly disappearing in the wake of rural electrification and mechanized farm equipment?

It would appear, at first glance, that what Wood has given us in Spring Turning is a nostalgic vision of the past, a vision at odds with depression-era economic and environmental realities. It is a vision that rejects machine age commercial farming in favor of the Jeffersonian yeoman behind the plow. The Old Farm Style Water Pumping Windmill finds a place in virtually every one of Wood’s rural landscapes, including this one. They function as a kind of signature (Wanda Corn, “Grant Wood: Uneasy Modern” in Grant Wood’s Studio, 129). Spring Turning offers a pastoral vision of the enduring fecundity of Nature despite the dust-bowl Depression, a vision of surplus, not scarcity. Nature appears, on the one hand, to be fertile and prevailing and
ceaseless and timeless, and impervious to the puny, insignificant figure of the farmer at his plow and, on the other hand, dependent upon and governed by his implied efforts at conservation in the form of crop rotation and crop management, the farmer leaving wide margins of land untilled. Like Thomas Jefferson and like the Southern Agrarians, Wood believed that farming was good for the soul (which may be easier to say for a painter than for a farmer!). And the kind of farming commemorated in the painting was good for the land as well, a natural balance struck between man and nature, in which the beauty of the land is preserved and its fertility is not placed at risk or sacrificed to commercialism, a balance which encroaching electrification, mechanization, modernity, and especially the profit motive severely threatened.

One of the odd but intriguing aspects of this painting is its exaggerated, even distorted scale. The perspective seems Olympian, the scene viewed as if from the clouds, resulting in an extravagant assertion of limitless physical space that directs the viewer’s eye toward the horizon, and a boundless and inexhaustible natural resource. The birds-eye view of the farmer and his plow enhances the viewer’s wonder and awe over the farmer’s efforts to mark off and circumscribe and cultivate a little patch of infinitude. Indeed this depiction of an iconic farming activity in a composition that unites large and small scale farming may seem possible only in the realm of myth. How can one farmer with a plow “turn” so much soil, maintain such a close relationship to the soil he tills, and convert the gentle, rolling verdant hills, singlehandedly, into the nation’s breadbasket?

But a closer look at the painting reveals that it is not one farmer, but rather a farmer for every field. Although we only see one farm house, that may be by design as well, a substitution of a shared communal life and stewardship of the land in place of individualism and competition and personal aggrandizement at the expense of the land. The painting, in other words, may offer a vision of an imagined future rather than a nostalgic look back at the past—a future for the American farm in the form of a regionally organized, collectivist farm economy. Grant Wood would not have had to look very far for such a vision; politically radical visions of the American Dream were very popular in the 1930’s. One didn’t have to read Karl Marx or Thorsten Veblen, or even look overseas to the Soviet experiment. All one had to do was open any issue of *The New Republic* or read Lewis Mumford’s popular *Technics of Civilization*, published several years before *Spring Turning* was painted, in which Mumford argues that the transformation of America’s farm economy by industrial capitalism has cost the farmer not only his livelihood but his connection to the land.

Nevertheless, it may seem a bit of a stretch to find a leftist political agenda in *Spring Turning*—it’s hard enough to find the windmill or the farmers! It doesn’t appear to be a work of social realism. Its abstract compositional form could hardly be said to be referential. It is not an image that can pass the text of rigorous topographical, geographic, historical or even rational analysis. It doesn’t even look that much like Iowa.

So I see it instead as a surrealist composition full of spatial illusions and a seductive power derived from its vivid green color and sensuous mounds of earth. At its home in the permanent collection of Reynold a House Museum of American Art, Grant Wood’s *Spring Turning* it is widely regarded as the sexiest painting in the collection. That may say something about the relative tameness or even prudery of other pieces in the collection but it really speaks to how visitors and viewers routinely respond to the sensuality of the painting, its curving mounds of fertile land mimicking thighs, or hips, or buttocks or breasts—the precise anatomy is
undeclared, though R. Tripp Evans’ “outing” of Wood in his recent *Grant Wood: A Life* (2010), might suggest the possibility of male buttocks in place of a more traditional iconography. There is something soft and dream-like about the colors—the green fields, the brown soil, the white clouds. The composition seems to be ordered by emotion rather than logic. It virtually invites the viewer to project his or her own desire upon it. And I believe its surrealism converts and transforms the American landscape into a fantasy of sexual play or harmony, the focal point of which is the all but invisible but powerfully potent plow that generally has its way with the female body of nature while at the same time being utterly dwarfed by it.

The surrealist movement in the arts in America was not as organized as it was in France, although surrealist ideas had begun to enter the New York City art scene by the mid-1930’s. But Wood’s exposure to surrealism probably occurred in Paris, where he studied in the 1920’s. Unlike the nihilism of Dadaism, surrealism was essentially optimistic and even romantic, suggesting emancipation from past constraints through the breakdown of aesthetic hierarchies, and through the release of powerful and pent up feelings and desires. In his 1924 “Manifesto of Surrealism,” Andre Breton proclaimed that surrealism displayed “the absence of any control exercised by reason” and “was exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern,” that its works in any medium were rooted in “the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought” that alone has the power to “solve the principal problems of life” (“Manifesto,” quoted in Hugh Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, 2008, 58). These “principal problems of life” in Breton’s manifesto may seem far removed from the problems of running a farm or making a living by it, but they are actually closer than one might think to Wood’s purpose in painting *Spring Turning*.

Like the Southern Agrarians John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, Grant Wood found in Nature a mysterious and sometimes terrifying power. But he expressed that power in a surrealistic style because he must have sensed that the unconscious is deeply involved in Nature’s powerful hold upon us. In *Spring Turning* Wood used abstract forms, iconic images, and a seductive color scheme to take the viewer beyond referential fact to an expression of deep longing and desire—but not necessarily longing or desire for the past, because the past had led the country to the Great Depression of the present. The longing is, I think, for something different and better in the future, an ecological balance, and a sexual accord and harmony that somewhere in his mind and heart and desire was allied to it.

Although Wood was hired by the art department at the University of Iowa as a modernist because of his Parisian training and post-impressionist orientation toward art, he was eventually regarded by art critics and by colleagues in his own department as a reactionary conservative, his art labeled provincial and hostile to the avant-garde. Wood himself claimed in response to such criticism that his interest in the regional was neither provincial nor narrow-minded. He rather doggedly adhered to the Regionalist style and his Regionalist principles even as the art world, dominated increasingly by urban inspired themes and soon enough abstract expressionism, eventually passed him by. His paintings of idyllic farmlands and busy farm workers, surrealist or not, had little staying power in a period of cultural upheaval.

A contemporary of Grant Wood, and another “romancer of the plow,” was James Agee, whose large and complex book (a joint endeavor with iconic depression era photographer Walker Evans) on Alabama tenant farmers in the 1930’s, also drew heavily for its “form” upon the surrealist avant-garde that both Agee and Evans knew well. Agee, like Wood, came from farming stock, moved away to an academic setting (in his case, Harvard), became immersed in
the aesthetic currents of his time as a magazine writer and editor in New York City and returned “home” so to speak, to create a powerful and moving hymn to the rhythms of American pastoral life, while at the same time acknowledging how cut off he was from that life by his education and by modern urban culture. I don’t have time here to talk about *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, but suffice it to say that the romance of the plow, with all its attendant paradoxes—economic, political, sexual, and otherwise—were not lost upon Agee either, and that he too like Wood found in surrealism an opportunity to plumb his own unconscious in expressing his vision of rural American life and his deep desire for some connection to it.

So, to conclude is Grant Wood’s *Spring Turning* (1936) escapist, nostalgic, reactionary, conservative, and anti-modern? Or is it surrealist, anti-rational, embracing the anti-logic of dreams to effect a reconciliation of contradictory drives and desires, “allowing the imagination to assert itself against reason” (Davis, 58), and in so doing, offering not a nostalgic escape into the past but a vision of a greener and more harmonious future. You be the judge.
Humans have the ability to recognize suffering. With all we know about the earth and those who inhabit it, we still have great disregard for anything sentient except ourselves. Animals, for example, in situations beyond their control and without their consent, and those who depend on us completely, such as animals in laboratories, factory farms, puppy mills and entertainment, experience horrific pain and suffering daily. A sense of well-being for any creature depends on what one feels, not only on what one knows. The ethical decision is not to make an animal’s life worse by making ours better. Animals respond to a sense of well-being and to their own culture and surroundings.

Being “Green” in order to save the world requires mindful compassion and the conscious avoidance of cruel choices. Saving the world has no hope of success if we make the effort only when it is convenient. Courage, a sense of selflessness and the abandonment of speciesism, are necessary to make changes. Being silent or remaining in denial are options that we cannot afford. As we are only part of the interconnectivity of the earth, destroying any of it destroys ourselves.

“Go Green” must go way beyond a message on a t-shirt or a reusable grocery bag. It must become a way of life and, for many; it is a call for mercy. Artists as activists are engaged in social and political issues by invoking Nature, thereby creating new aesthetic models that emphasize interconnectedness. Many have long abandoned the subjective individualism of modernity and expanded to speaking about the whole. Conceptual work in the 70’s by Christo, Robert Smithson, Ana Mendieta, Judy Chicago and Sue Coe for example, represented the artists’ attempts to break out of the confinements of the studio and gallery spaces with its limited audiences and instead, connect to the earth.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude have created spectacular art connected to the environment for decades. Various Wrapped projects, “Valley Curtain,” “Running Fence,” “Surrounded Islands,” “The Umbrellas,” and “The Gates” are some of the works that all required years of planning, lobbying, and innate fortitude in order to present art that represents the fleeting moment. Their partnership as intellectuals, artists, visionaries and husband and wife was fueled by the drive to be free artists. Jeanne-Claude called each of their daunting projects “a scream for freedom.” The Christos have used sunlight, moonlight, the seasons, time, rain, fog, clouds and the earth itself as actors in the staging of the works. Their preparatory drawings are executed by the partners acting as magicians to lure the viewer into anticipating the experience of viewing long before completion of the ephemeral work. Their vision and execution was always to restore the land to its original condition.

Robert Smithson dealt with the earth and its attribute of temporality. Smithson, who once referred to museums as “tombs,” created work that was a part of Nature rather than bound by gallery space. His masterpiece earthwork dealing with landscape displacement, “Spiral Jetty” is composed of rock, salt crystals and earth and was inspired by the subject of entropy. “The
ecology thing represents moral confusion, and a need to continue. [ . . . ] People always thought that nature is self-sufficient, and that it was going to continue. Now nature itself is threatened."

Like Smithson, Anna Mendieta worked with the subject of displacement using the earth as a studio. Mendieta made a conscious effort to address the female body and use it as a literal and symbolic connection to Nature. From 1972-1985 she created her mystical and primordial “Silueta Series.” Using her body or her shape to press and form its life-sized image into the mud, soil, leaves, water, grass, flowers, stone, tree trunks and paper, she addressed female identity with a conviction that although Nature is nurturing, it is also a humbling force that deserves respect.

Judy Chicago is an artist who tries to reconnect us and re-spiritualize us. “The Dinner Party’s” (1974-1979) shape is the primordial symbol for womanhood, the triangle. Each plate has painted and sculpted motifs based on female genitalia. “The Primordial Goddess” begins Chicago’s table. She is meant to represent the female creative energy symbolizing the first feminine being from whom all life emerged. Chicago purposely chose the dinner plate to use as her visual analogy to women. She said, “At some point I decided that I would like the plate images to physically rise up as a symbol of women’s struggle for freedom from containment.”

Sue Coe’s web site is appropriately called “Graphic Witness.” Coe has researched and illustrated subjects such as slaughterhouses, factory farming, the subject of containment, the cruelty towards animals in entertainment, AIDS, prisons, apartheid and war.

In an email to me, Coe described the experience of her trying to record by drawing, factory-farmed birds pecking another bird to death as they were contained in a small cage without any natural surroundings:

One young bird had got a tiny speck of dark blood on the white wing—the result of a peck, or getting caught on the wire—but this speck triggered the pecking instinct of the other birds, who, if they were born into freedom as wild turkeys, would be pecking at the ground, at bark, at grasses, looking for any seed or insect. The birds in confinement were compelled to make that speck larger—the victim bird would give a high pitched (sic) cry—a cry for a mother, the parent bird would have heard this cry, through the woods and come to the rescue. The bird would cry out, and run to the side of the cage—and stand against the bars, and there would be brief respite. [. . .] The victim could never rest [. . .] eventually the speck would be a large ragged wound, and the wound infected and the bird would die. Had my sketchbook, and was drawing and drawing—and spent an hour drawing [. . .]

What drawing reveals, is the intimacy of shared time—my drawing of chicks in a cage, became witnessing the start of a tragic end—I did look at how to unlock the cage (could not) and went into plans of rescuing the bird. This scene is taking place a billion times, inside cages, inside sheds packed with chickens or turkeys. I know that by observing the real life and dying of this bird, it’s not about the many words and pieces of information about the history of the meat industry, all the facts and data, the different perspectives that either justify the industry’s existence as providing food, or reversely justify ending animal
production, because of the cruelty and destruction of the environment. It’s about identifying this one little helpless victim, who had no voice that was ever heard.

Artists, writers, scientists and philosophers are incorporating these issues into their work because they realize that it is our reconnecting to Nature that is critical to all species’ survival on our fragile planet. As an artist, my focus has been on how our blatant disconnect with Nature manifests itself in our relationship to animals. This great disconnect with Nature, and therefore with our selves, is demonstrated very clearly when one examines the subject of containment. Philosophers, biologists, writers and scientists are screaming to be heard in regards to this subject.

We often measure the degree of suffering by our perception of intelligence; according to our own rules and concepts. A species’ intelligence may be indigenous to that species. Our speciesist decision-making concerning who is smart and who is not, can easily lead to a misunderstanding of who is suffering. Although a lobster’s nervous system is not the same as ours, the fact that it cannot pull itself out of a boiling pot of water does not mean that it does not suffer from being tortured in order to be eaten. It certainly does not mean that the lobster doesn’t mind being eaten, not to mention being boiled alive. Pain not like our pain does not mean there is no pain not to mention a lack of awareness. What about the animals’ point of view—their emotions?

19th century philosopher Jeremy Bentham said, “It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being of the same fate … question is not, Can they reason? nor, can they talk? but can they suffer?

In a more recent example, in 1998, the British government banned the use of any animal belonging to the Hominidae family that includes gorillas, orangutans and chimpanzees for medical research. This decision was based on their cognitive abilities to use language, to be self-conscious, to reason and to make moral judgments. Carl Sagan’s words are reflected; “How smart does a chimpanzee have to be before killing him constitutes murder?” Additionally, research has shown that spindle cells exist in humpback whales, killer whales, sperm whales and fin whales. Once thought to only be present in the human brain, spindle cells are responsible for processing emotion, the ability to feel empathy, speech, social interactivity, intuition and “gut” reactions.

The poster child for containment, animal abuse and one being who truly represents our disconnect to Nature, is Tilikum, the orca imprisoned in Sea World, Florida. He has led an impoverished and compromised life of capture, containment and deprivation. His fate was sealed when he was kidnapped from his pod at two years of age. His world that was once a predominately acoustic one of the sounds of the ocean and his family’s dialect, became a cemented, metal, mechanical world with loud music, human applause, human feedings and medical attention that he would not require, were he not in captivity.

Since then, he has served a twenty-eight year sentence deprived of natural socialization and his critical acoustical world. Instead he has entertained humans in marine parks as a clown: no matter how he feels that day or even understands what he is doing or why. He has been bullied by his own kind and been part of the scenario of “wrong place at the wrong time.” He has been
an accomplice with two other whales in a human drowning, contributed to the drowning of an ex-convict who decided to swim with the whales one night after the closing of the marine park and in February of 2010, contributed to the drowning of a SeaWorld trainer who was familiar to him, or at least he seemed familiar to her. He has become a thirty-year-old, 12,000-pound criminal who never asked to be part of the human criminal world.

As he is a tremendous financial asset to Sea World as a stud, it is unlikely that his captors will release him back into the wild. What is likely is that he will live out his life in even more isolation eating and swimming in circles in SeaWorld’s cement bathtubs. Tilikum is a victim of a system that he never subscribed to, and unless he is returned to his pod, he has little or no future except a life of aloneness and degradation as a circus act for human amusement, spending his time swimming in circles, floating and eating the food provided for him by his captors. His life as a mighty, self-sufficient hunter, a good son, and pacifist was never begun, yet it is we that dare to label him “killer.”

SeaWorld’s head trainer, Flaherty Clark, takes a more gregarious approach describing the 6 ton, 22 foot Tilikum as “a crowd-pleasing, show stopping, wonderful, wonderful wild animal.”10 His size and power were used for banal “tricks” like creating surprise tidal waves that were deposited on the audience. Tilikum joined the ranks of drafted circus animals. He has remained a slave; a piece of property and has nothing to do with his natural world except his black and white costume.

Is a wild animal still wild when out of its own environment and contained? Because we can capture, contain and label, we do. Philosopher Paul W. Taylor said in regards to interrupting a wild animal’s destiny as a wild animal, “We are only required to respect their wild freedom by letting them alone. In this way, we allow them, as it were, to fulfill their own destinies. [. . .] as far as our proper role as moral agents is concerned, we must keep ‘hands off.’ ”11 And philosopher L.E. Johnson remarked; “Certainly it seems like a dirty double-cross to enter into a relationship of trust and affection with any creature that can enter into such a relationship, and then to be a party to its premeditated and premature destruction” (qtd. in Bekoff Animals Matter, 74).

These parks, in San Diego, Orlando and San Antonio, which promote themselves as conservationists and educators, are visited by 12 million people annually at $78 a head. SeaWorld owns 26 of the 42 parks that contain killer whales worldwide. The parks are undeniably big money makers as Anheuser-Busch InBev sold SeaWorld’s marine parks to the Blackstone Group for reportedly $2.7 billion in 2009.

Richard Ellis, artist, writer and Research Associate at the American Museum of Natural History, New York has strong feelings against the public display industry:

Insofar as cetaceans are concerned, I think all the rationalizations are faulty. Dolphins—including killer whales—are kept in captivity specifically as money machines. The idea that people can “learn” about them by watching them jump through hoops or walk on their tails is ridiculous. In the past, that is, before “nature” TV shows, DVDs, and YouTube videos, aquariums were the only place you could see dolphins, and therefore, you could see how they swim, how they breathe, how they eat. But when you can see videos of the animals in
action—think of killer whales coming up onto the beach in Patagonia to catch baby sea lions—you got a real idea of how the animals live. Nothing in an aquarium or oceanarium performance could ever convey the real life of dolphins.\(^{12}\)

According to WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals) and the Humane Society of the United States, less than 5-10 percent of aquaria and dolphinaria are involved in conservation programs although they claim otherwise.\(^ {13}\) Marine parks also have an issue with space for the animals as even in a "generous" space allocation for a marine park pool, a dolphin has access to less than \textit{one ten-thousandth of one percent} (my emphasis) of their normal habitat size.\(^ {14}\)

Even the enclosures are designed for the ease of human viewing, not for the animals’ comfort. Restricting a wild animal inhibits its behavioral needs, which in turn, presents an inaccurate picture as to who this animal really is. Additionally, the live capture of an animal not only affects that animal, but the group that animal is removed from. The live capture method is invasive, traumatic and often lethal to the animal. This industry depletes existing groups and affects the future of all generations of cetaceans plus shortens the lives of those captured. The risks and trauma to the cetaceans when captured and then what is forced upon them in an unnatural world of captivity make the argument presented by marine parks that reintroduction into the wild as a dangerous and threatening act hypocritical. The argument by marine parks and zoos that they are educating the public is absurd. In fact, they are \textit{desensitizing} humans in regards to the real needs of any animal in captivity plus placing us in a category as observers of nature rather than as a part of it.

The death of a captive animal is part of the process. Since 1961, 151 (or 78\%) of the 193 captive orcas have died.\(^ {15}\) Less than 20 orcas in captivity have survived past 20 years. The infant mortality rate is 51.8 percent.\(^ {16}\) Calves kidnapped or born in captivity have none of their natural privileges made available to them. In the past 24 years 25 of SeaWorld’s’ orcas have died.\(^ {17}\)

In the wild, orcas live in pods of 20 to 50 in a complex and highly social family managed by the females. The oldest is usually the matriarch who can live to over 80 years. The males can live to 60 years and never leave the mother. Separation is not an option. They communicate as to where the food is and share willingly. They will help an injured or sick family member stay on the surface to breathe. They have their own dialects and songs and make up new songs. Aggression is not common. In some populations of orcas, families stay within a four-kilometer radius of each other at all times.\(^ {18}\) Dialects contribute to survival in the wild. What is learned and passed down generation to generation is silenced by captivity.

Self imposed starvation from stress or starvation due to improper diet is not uncommon for animals in marine parks. Dolphins have been blinded after being captured because they are often transported in crates full of their own urine.\(^ {19}\) Tiger sharks refuse to live in captivity. Richard O’Barry, the former trainer of “Flipper,” the television series, is now a conservationist with Earth Island Institute, and co-creator of “The Cove,” a film that exposed the annual dolphin drive hunting in Taiji, Japan. He said:

\textbf{When we say that people have lost their will to live, it means that they have given up. They turn gray, their breathing becomes shallow, and they sigh a lot.}
They can’t eat. Nothing interests them. In captivity, tiger sharks are like that. They look droopy and confused, as if in shock.20

One man began the brutalization of marine mammals. In 1965 the owner of the Seattle Marine Aquarium, Ted Griffin, brought the killer whale into prisons called aquariums. He paid $8000 for an 8,000-pound 22-foot killer whale who had become entangled in a fisherman’s net off Namu, British Columbia. He towed “Namu” 450 miles to Seattle. Namu’s family pod of around 25 orcas followed. He soon began shows with the whale, was featured in National Geographic and in 1966, “Namu, the Killer Whale” the movie, was released. Namu continually called to the other orcas from his pen and died within a year from an intestinal infection. Sewage outflow was thought to be the cause.

Griffin’s partner was Don Goldsberry. Together, they started capturing orcas in Puget Sound and selling them to other parks. After locating pods from the air, driving them into coves with boats and the underwater explosives used by fishermen to keep seals away (seal bombs), they would throw nets across any escape path of what witnesses described as “screaming whales”. In 1965 they trapped 15 killer whales near Tacoma. One of the females they named “Shamu” (a female version of “Namu”) and sold to SeaWorld, San Diego for $70,000.

Goldsberry eventually moved his hunt to the Icelandic coast and made his first capture in 1976. In 1983, he captured two young males and a female. They were transported to the Hafnarfjördur Marine Zoo, near Reykjavik and placed in a concrete holding tank. The 2 year old, 11.5-foot smaller male would be in that tank for a year. His options were to lie still on the surface or swim slowly in circles. There were no familiar ocean sounds or family. The sounds he heard were now mechanical. His natural vocalizations did him no good. This new world was unresponsive to any of his natural needs. Instead, he would become part of an act performing clown duties. His dorsal fin would collapse, as all captive adult male orcas’ and some females’ do. This occurs in only five percent of those in the wild and those collapsed dorsal fins have been attributed to poor health or stress (qtd. in Rose et al, The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity, 3). He would from that point on, forever be denied his natural hunt for food, his pod’s own domination system, maternal care and the natural mating ritual.

Tilikum was eventually shipped out in 1984 to Sealand of the Pacific outside Victoria, on British Columbia’s Vancouver Island, a marine park which had killed seven orcas in the fourteen years prior to his arrival. For an orca, survival time in captivity would be about three and one-half years. There, he was named Tilikum (which means “friend” in Chinook). His new enclosure was 100 feet by 50 feet and 35 feet deep. Oil and sewage from boaters flowed into Tilikum’s new “home”. He would never again hear the sounds of the ocean, but instead those of marina traffic, and motors. In addition, Tilikum had two female killer whales sharing his space. Although one had established herself as dominant (as the orca society is dominated by females), there was conflict and bullying by the two females (Haida and Nootka), towards the young orca. Robert Wright, the owner, worried that the orcas may chew through the nets that contained them or that they might be set free. That fear moved the three orcas to a smaller metal pool that was twenty-six feet in diameter and less than twenty feet deep. Every night at 5:30 after the show, they stayed there for fourteen and one-half hours. The orcas’ work schedule was seven days a week, every day for eight hours.21 They would often resist or refuse going in to that night tank.

Even after Tilikum’s move to SeaWorld in 1991, Tilikum continued his habit begun at Sealand:

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the grinding of his teeth against metal pool gates. Therefore, his teeth have since been drilled so they can be irrigated with antiseptic solution. He also continued his life in a hostile environment being beaten up by females. One former trainer, Jeffrey Ventre, said, “Tili was a good guy that got beat down by the women,” says Ventre, “So there are a lot of reasons he might be unhappy.”

The first trainer ever killed by orcas in a marine park was Keltie Byrne, a marine biology student who accidentally fell into the pool at Sealand on February 20, 1991. Nootka, Haida and Tilikum had never had such a plaything and they were not giving it up. Another trainer, Bruce Stephens said, “If you fail to provide your animals with the excitement they need, you may be certain they will create the excitement themselves.”

Tilikum, Nootka and Haida were sold to SeaWorld in 1991 and Sealand closed in 1992. On July 5, 1991, Daniel Dukes, recently released from jail, decided to swim in the orca pool at SeaWorld after hiding there after hours. It is not clear if hypothermia or drowning came first for Dukes, but the abrasions and contusions were attributed to Tilikum’s play as he was also in the pool that night.

SeaWorld was no better for Tilikum as sometimes he would sometimes suffer abuse by other orcas that was serious enough to cause his skin to bleed. In fact Tilikum’s injuries were sometimes so bad that he would be held out of performances in order to heal. He would demonstrate his stress by acting out; swimming at high speeds, ignoring the trainer, opening his eyes wide and vocalizing distress sounds if forced to get into a vulnerable position during practices. John Jett, one of his team leaders said that, “It’s extremely sad if you think about being in Tili’s situation. The poor guy just has no place to run.”

The director of OrcaLab, (which studies orcas in the wild) in British Columbia is Paul Spong. He said, “If you pen killer whales in a small steel tank, you are imposing an extreme level of sensory deprivation on them. Humans who are subjected to those same conditions become mentally disturbed.”

Another once wild whale, Keiko, the orca made famous in the film, “Free Willy,” was removed from his family in Iceland at one to two yrs of age. His new “family” in captivity were bottlenosed dolphins. Scientists noted that Keiko adopted dolphin vocalizations and the sounds of pool machinery. When his release was finally granted, he needed to not only learn how to forage for food, but to speak his natural orca language. He had lost his own culture, vital to his survival (qtd. in Rose et al, The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity, 11).

“Free Willy’s,” Keiko was never returned to his family, just released in Iceland. A year later, he swam to Norway and died of pneumonia. However, in regards to Tilikum, Balcomb said, “Tilikum is basically psychotic. He has been maintained in a situation where I think he is psychologically unrecoverable in terms of being a wild whale.”

Although ulcerated, confined, abused by other captive orcas, and no doubt just plain bored, Tilikum has never been regarded as aggressive. The day Dawn Brancheau drowned at SeaWorld last February, she had made herself vulnerable by leaning over Tilikum to touch his head. This was not a new demonstration for either of them. What was new was her long ponytail floating in the water, which Tilikum grabbed and continued to pull when Dawn pulled away. The alarm sounding and the emergency net procedure that ensued once Dawn’s spotter...
hit the alarm, only added to his excitement of a new experience in his now very unusual day. Having a human in the pool was too irresistible to not take advantage of in some way.

Former trainer Jonathan Smith said, “He got her down and that was it—she wasn’t getting out. I truly believe that they are smart enough to detect and know what they are doing. He’s going to know she is trying to get to the surface.” And former Orlando trainer Jeffrey Ventre who was at SeaWorld for eight years notes: “If they let you out, it’s because they decide to.”

Many authorities on cetaceans came forward after Dawn Brancheau’s drowning. I corresponded via email with Richard Ellis, who commented:

I have no idea why Tilicum (sic) dragged Dawn underwater, tossed her around, and drowned her. Until I read eyewitness accounts of the actual event, I was inclined to think that the killer whale wanted to play some more with Dawn, and when she tried to leave, he got upset and grabbed her. But he may have acted much more aggressively than that, which takes us into the mind of the orca, a place we are no closer to understanding than the moment Ted Griffin rode on Namu’s back in 1965. And maybe the lesson to be learned from the Dawn Brancheau attack is that we cannot really understand what animals are thinking, even our dogs and cats, and perhaps we ought to treat them not as performing monkeys, talking parrots, or dancing bears, but with the respect we afford other human beings—whose motivations we don’t always understand either.

Jacque Cousteau’s son, Jean-Michel Cousteau, president of the Ocean Futures Society, released a statement after the death of Brancheau. “Maybe we as a species have outgrown the need to keep such wild, enormous, complex, intelligent, and free-ranging animals in captivity, where their behavior is not only unnatural; it can become pathological. Maybe we have learned all we can from keeping them captive.”

At thirty years old, Tilikum is now even more isolated with no direct human contact. He is hosed down instead of hand massaged and has his teeth cleaned with an extension pole. As Tilikum has sired numerous calves, his life in show business has become incidental since the Brancheau death. He is far more valuable as a sire than a showman. The Humane Society of the United States has proposed a sea-pen retirement. Marine-mammal scientist, Naomi Rose said, “Tilikum needs more space, more stimulation to distract him. Living as he is, with minimum human contact in a small concrete tank, is untenable.”

Scientist Ken Balcomb, the executive director of the Center for Whale Research, has been documenting the population and behavior of orcas in Puget Sound since 1976. “When you get born into the family, you are always in the family. You don’t have a house or a home that is your location,” says Balcomb. “The group is your home, and your whole identity is with your group.” Balcomb believes that most marine-park orcas can be taught enough to return to the wild if they are returned to their original family.

Philosopher Peter Singer in his manifesto, Animal Liberation said, “If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering-in so far as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being.”
I corresponded with Singer and questioned him regarding Tilikum’s fate. He responded, "If you are familiar with my work you will know my thoughts regarding all animals. Tilikum should not be in captivity, but nor should hundreds of millions of pigs, chickens, cattle, etc."

Since the death of Dawn Brancheau in February, several captive orcas in Sea World’s prisons have died inexplicably, at least according to SeaWorld. On October 4, 2010 Kalina, born in 1985, the first captive-born orca to survive infancy, died in Orlando. In June, Taima, a 21 year old captive-born whale, died in Orlando while giving birth to a dead calf. In September, Sumar, a 12 year old captive-born male orca, died in San Diego.

Richard O’Barry believes dolphins can choose to end their lives. “Kathy” was one of the dolphins used for the “Flipper” series and was amongst other various dolphins, like interchangeable, genderless “Lassies.” O’Barry had broken one of the big industry rules with Kathy; he had bonded with her and she with him. After the “Flipper” series had ended, the actor dolphins were dispersed and ignored. O’Barry was eventually called to observe Kathy, who had been thrown away at Miami’s Seaquarium in 1970. She had become a very different, and very ill animal living in a tank than the one O’Barry remembered. O’Barry believes she died of a broken heart.

Kathy committed suicide a couple of days before Earth Day, which was April 22nd, 1970, the first Earth Day. I know that’s a very strong word, but it is accurate. Dolphins are not automatic air breathers like we are. If you think about that for a moment, they can end their life any time they want to by simply not taking the next breath. And I have seen that since, many times, in the cove especially, in Japan, when the captures are taking place and the slaughters are underway. Some of them just stop breathing. They just give up—take a breath, sink to the bottom, and that’s it.

Kathy committed suicide in my arms at the Miami Seaquarium. [. . . ] You know, there’s (sic) only three things killing dolphins: our pollution, our fishing nets and our captivity. Captivity kills. These are sonic creatures. They live in a world of sound. Their primary sense is sound. They’re sound-oriented. We’re light-oriented, visually oriented. That’s our primary sense. So, to place a free-ranging sonic creature in a concrete box for casual amusement is simply wrong. I mean, there is no connection between dolphin tricks and conservation. It’s the big lie.

Within in a week of Kathy’s death, O’Barry was in Bimini, trying to free “Charlie Brown” at the Lerner Marine Lab. Seven years earlier O’Barry had been part of a team who had traded four dolphins captured in Biscayne Bay to the Lab in exchange for electronic equipment. Charlie Brown was the last dolphin “survivor” of that trade. Although O’Barry tried all night, Charlie Brown would not leave the enclosure for the open sea. Charlie Brown died two years later of malnutrition.

After years of profiting from using dolphins in entertainment, Rick O’Barry ended up releasing many dolphins back into the wild by opening their gates of wire, or net. Some, like Charlie Brown would stay, too afraid to venture from their human made prisons. Others would zoom past him without a glance back.
Our dangerous and irresponsible choice, to adopt aloofness toward animal suffering and to live in a toxic culture devoid of spirituality, has inevitably placed us on a suicide trajectory. The physical, emotional and spiritual parts of our being must be engaged in order to reconnect to Nature and therefore ourselves. Our exalted ego expressed through self-expression and individualism must die in order to transform and be able to redefine our priorities. The existing paradigm with its foundation of compulsiveness, greed, and waste must be dismantled. Intoxicated by the power to exploit, we have raped the earth and its creatures yet maintain an attitude that the idea of dominion, i.e. domination, was conveniently handed to us since we walk upright. We are part of not a part. A call to mercy! A plea for forgiveness!

Until we recognize and most importantly, believe, that all creatures of the Earth’s natural ecosystem have inherent worth, our efforts to connect to Nature will continue to be aborted by our own inherent desires and constant interferences. It is time to ask forgiveness of our fellow creatures. It is time to open the gates.

NOTES

15. Rose et al 42.
16. Rose et al 43.
20. O’Barry 123.
22. Ibid.
27. Zimmerman 110.
28. Ibid.
31. Zimmerman 111.
32. Zimmerman 103.
34. Peter Singer, “Re: Tilikum,” Email to Patricia Denys, 30 August 2010.

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TRANSLATING THE REGIONALIST ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE

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Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind.
Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock

—Simon Schama, Landscape and Memory

Schama’s words have a particularly strong relationship to our understanding of the landscape in painting. At the same time human consciousness is projected onto the land, human civilization harnesses and exploits the elements of nature for a variety of resources and ideologies. In looking specifically at the American landscape painting tradition, from Thomas Cole to Grant Wood and beyond, we see how painting the land shapes the next iterations of historical memory and conceptions of the land. In exploring my own relationship to the land and landscape painting tradition, I attempt to turn Schama’s idea into a process of questioning.
From one question comes another question: is it possible to reverse this relationship— for the landscape to offer humans a different concept of mind? Does this question necessarily assume an intellect for nature and the land?

I worked for many years in the urban-suburban scene of Detroit. My work at that point had been based entirely on the cerebral—anchored in objects and narratives. In a painting such as Random Intelligence, from 2002, a visual vocabulary and written narrative percolated up from my own internal experience and was exclusive to my domesticated dreams.

As this work evolved, for example in The Blitz of London In Connection with Marcel Duchamp from 2003, the use of narrative texts embedded into the paintings had evolved into a new visual schematic language. These are original, unconventional visual diagrams that often use “found” schematics and diagrams as models.

In moving from the Detroit area to the Flint Hills of Kansas in 2008, I was taken by a vastly different landscape, people, and culture and it has inspired a whole new working process for me. This experience has shown me how contact with challenging new environmental and cultural perspectives can open me and stimulate ideas and methods. My interest in the land was, at first, intuitive. I was not sure how to incorporate this new environment into my work.

I became interested in a southwestern regionalist painter, Alexandre Hogue, upon receiving an invitation to exhibit my work in a gallery that carries his name at the University of Tulsa. Hogue is most famous for his depression-era works depicting drought-stricken Kansas in the dust bowl. In works such as Dust Bowl, from 1933, Hogue uses the paint to advocate his ideas for the human relationship with the land. I saw this as an opportunity to immerse myself in the work and methods of a true landscape painter. Hogue’s Lava Capped Mesa Big Bend, from 1976 is an example of how, in the post World War II era, he shifted away from his politically motivated work, determined to separate himself from the Regionalism Movement. He began painting, exclusively, the mountains of Big Bend in Texas. Key to these later works is his idea of “exposing the forces beneath the surface of nature.” I attempted to figure out what those forces meant to me in a piece like my Distorted By Distance, from 2008, based on Hogue’s
The American landscape painting tradition goes back to its founding years. With history painting losing popularity in the last decades of the eighteenth century, artists turned to the landscape as a metaphor for America’s potential. Thomas Cole’s *Falls of Kaaterskill*, of 1826, is an example of early American landscape tradition. In this era, Romanticism and Nationalism were linked to landscape in Europe where many painters in the United States were still training. Writers such as James Fenimore Cooper, Thoreau, Emerson, and William Cullen Bryant were suggesting links between nature and spirituality. Painters such as Cole and later, Frederick Church, and Albert Bierstadt, were depicting the new American wilderness as nationally and spiritually divine. Coupled with this romantic and spiritual view, was the ongoing industrialization and manipulation of the land for commerce. Robert Hughes, in his book, *American Visions*, describes Cole as the one who “… introduced in painting the terms of the great debate over natural resources which has preoccupied Americans ever since. On the one hand, the landscape is an immense cornucopia, created by a providential God for men to use as they please…. In the opposite view…. God had inscribed his being in the wilderness and to destroy it was sacrilege.” Later, in the early twentieth century, a group of Regionalists like Grant Wood emerged with a similar concept of the landscape.

Wood, along with Thomas Hart Benton and John Stewart Curry, came into the Depression-era hoping the now-tamed wilderness will bring national unity or what Peter Schjeldahl calls “the distillate of a national self-preoccupation.” On the occasion of a Grant Wood retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1983, Schjeldahl writes of Wood’s painting as responding to a political mood—”full of longing for values hazy in every respect except that they are absent. It is a mood, perhaps, of wanting to miss something in preference to feeling empty.” Finding myself in Kansas, interested in the landscape, and in the potential lineage of these Regionalists, I was curious about Alexandre Hogue’s relationship to this group of artists. Following the reception for my exhibition in Tulsa, I was able to speak with Alexandre Hogue’s daughter Olivia. She stated, quite emphatically, that he had rejected the nationalism and political underpinnings that permeated these Regionalist painters. The *Big Bend* series is his answer to the Regionalists and their romantic predecessors. Perhaps his interpretation of the landscape is not imposing anything on the land but questions. My investigation of Alexandre Hogue has led me to question all assumptions about landscape and nature.

The umbrella title I have used for this project is *Land as Language*. For example, my painting from the series, *Serendipitous Rotating Embrace* from 2008, is based on Hogue’s *Eroded Lava Badlands Big Bend* from 1982.

In my *Land as Language* series, the intent is to dissect the original paintings of Hogue and translate that which he saw as a “force” of nature into my schematic system. I began by tracing the composition, editing the elements to the most essential marks. Certain areas or pools of movement or of negative space became evident, and as a result of my process, become articulated. The schematic drawing gets edited again as it is translated to a vector drawing program.
Simultaneous with creating the schematic drawing, I research other aspects of the landforms, geologic, and historical. In addition, other non-literal associations that emerge in creating the schematics are explored through web and library research. As I moved toward this landscape-based work, alternatives to the surfaces of canvas or hardboard were explored. This resulted in an interest in the grains in birch plywood. Computer imaging is used to explore how these elements find their way into the work. An exploration of objects is ongoing in my studio. I am open to chance connections between the work developing in the schematic drawings and the object vocabulary. For the Hogue series, I was interested in shoes. The shoes become human-like and gendered characters in the composition while also having a connection to ground or land—the surfaces of sole that meets the ground. I create many composition possibilities with an expanded vocabulary of object imagery and then superimpose the two compositions on each other seeking connection. *Serendipitous Rotating Embrace*, for example, is a title that evolved through the perceived connections in uniting the object and schematic compositions. In addition to six Hogue-based pieces, I have applied this process to the landscape work of Birger Sandzen and my own drawings and photographs of the Flint Hills of Kansas.

In the age of always looming environmental disaster, it is interesting to look back on the American landscape tradition, while developing my own methodologies for working with the landscape. In my work, the literal land formations are barely evident but can be viewed as an intellect driving new form. It is my sensibility—and in the remix works, the sensibilities of Hogue and Sandzen—that provide a voice for the land. I would assert that in spite of that, there is still something that transcends our “translation” or interference. The work with Alexandre Hogue provided me with a method for my studies of the Kansas Flint Hills—like the piece titled, *Polite Vertical Emission Adjustment*, from 2009. In Thomas Cole, and the romantic nationalists or Grant Wood and the Regionalists, the landscape is used to impose an ideology, political stance, or even a melancholy national “mood.” I am attempting to expose the poetry and physical intelligence of the land.

Returning to the quote from Simon Schama that began this presentation, if landscape is of the mind, perhaps a way to reconceive our relationship with the landscape, and reconceive our concept of sustainability (or “green”), is to transform our sensitivity to the land, and our historic exploitation. This can allow memory the chance to re-align. Alexandre Hogue saw forces at work in the landscape that transcended the human ideologies imposed by others onto the land. Perhaps it is the artist’s role in our time to read the land as particular intellect and translate its narrative as a companion to our parallel mental landscape.

NOTES

4. Schjeldahl, pg 161

Images of Nelson Smith’s paintings can be viewed at www.nelsonsmithart.com
A persistent problem in western philosophy has been the exact relationship between matter and spirit. For Plato, the world was divided into the realm of Forms or Ideas while the physical world was believed to be a pale time-bound imitation of the eternal Forms. Christian theology, following Plato, divided the world into spirit and matter, and this essential divide remained through Cartesian dualism, and into Kant who divided the noumenal from the phenomenal realms, the former eternally unknowable except from what we could gather from observing phenomena.

Once western philosophy had established that there was a divide between the material and non-material realm, the problem became to describe exactly what the relationship between the realms was. Largely, it became a matter of prepositions. Was the spirit world “above,” “below,” “in,” “beside,” “connected to,” “contiguous with” the material world? Did it “subsist,” “exist,” or “insist”?

In Christian theology, this division focused on the relationship between the eternal, spiritual creator, God, and his creation. How is he related to the creation, as an imminent spiritual presence within material creation or as a clockwork universe maker, removed from the natural workings of the physical universe, which operates on its own principles, described by Newtonian physics? Augustine, in his Confessions, opted for “above” as his preposition of choice: “I have questioned the sea . . . and the depths . . . and they answered, Look above us . . . He made us.” The 18th century Deists opted for the mechanical universe, conceiving of God as a presence remote in space and time, one who, ab origine, set the gears in motion, then withdrew from the physical world.

By the late 1700’s, European Enlightenment thought had, by and large, marginalized theological discussion in favor of scientific inquiry. The thinkers of the Age of Reason may have been nominally religious, but their true faith was in science and human reason, guided by logic. But dry rationalism, however intellectually compelling, was spiritually unfulfilling. Enter Romanticism. Beginning in the mid-1700’s, in English literature, we see a new character emerge, the man of sentiment, whose intellectual keenness is complemented by his ability to feel deeply and to be sensitive to nature in an emotionally responsive way. After the French Revolution, this gives way to full-blown Romanticism.

The great British Romantic poets, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron by and large rejected the theologically orthodox notion of a personal God. Though in their later works, Coleridge and Wordsworth turned to a tepid orthodoxy, their early revolutionary experiments in poetry found divine power in Nature, now often capitalized to indicate its sacred status. Shelley was an avowed atheist, but we find, nonetheless, a spiritual yearning in poems like “Ode to the West Wind,” “Ode to Intellectual Beauty,” “and “Mont Blanc.”

The intellectual problem for them, as well as for their early Romantic predecessor William Blake, was that the established church in England—and therefore its God—was implicated in the
wrong side of the revolutions that were taking place in that era in politics, economics and art. And yet, even after the rejection of the Christian notion of God, the spiritual impulse remained in the man of feeling. The issue was often what language to use to speak of the divine, or the divine in Nature. Wordsworth and Shelley often use the word Power (often capitalized) when speaking of it.

An interesting insight into this theologicolinguistic problem was presented by Adam Potkay in his article “Wordsworth and the Ethic of Things.” Potkay analyzes the way in which the otherwise unremarkable word things is used by Wordsworth at key moments in his poetry to mean something more than simply a physical object. Faced with the same problem Christian theologians had when trying to nail down the exact relationship between God and his creation, the Romantics now faced the issue of how, exactly, the Power they could feel in Nature related to the world of physical objects they could see and experience through the senses.

Thing is a polysemous word in English. It is something of a catch-all word, whose original Old English sense was of a trial or judicial process. One brought a thing before a tribunal. Eventually, the judicial sense of process (equivalent to the still used Latin res) was superseded by the sense that the word meant the thing or object argued about, and finally that meaning was generalized to mean any physical object. Its opposite is “no-thing,” or nothing. In general usage, it can even become a filler word when we can’t think of an object’s proper name. “Bring me that thing over there.” So it is odd to find this word thing, which usually disappears into the verbal wallpaper, occupying a key position in some of English Romanticism’s most philosophical poetry.

The climax of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” for example, makes pointed use of it. After setting his scene and the importance of the place he is observing from a hillside, he speaks of the metaphysical power of Nature viewing:

While with an eye made quiet
With the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the heart of things. (lines 47-49, emphasis mine)

The word returns a few lines later as he expands on his original insight that one can see, feel and experience the power within things and receive from things spiritual elevation and consolation:

And I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the blue sky and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.” (l. 93-102, emphasis mine)

One is hard pressed to imagine what a “thinking thing” is, unless Wordsworth means a human being, conceived as an amalgam of soul and body, spirit and flesh, an immaterial and material being at the same time. External Nature is composed in the same way as the human being, in
terms of how its spiritual nature is related to its physical nature. As the power of imagination interacts with the material world, it can see “into the heart” of the things it looks at. In Romanticism, the semi-divine power of human imagination is the means by which we can obtain direct experience of the divinity which is lodged within the material world. It is a dynamic and energetic power, rolling through things, impelling them, giving them life. For Coleridge, what he called the primary imagination was one and the same power in humans that also was the primary creative power of the universe. Shelley, the avowed atheist, felt it too in gazing in rapture at “Mont Blanc”:

The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves . . . (lines 1-2).

This notion of the spiritual energy within natural things takes root in the Romantic ideology, becoming what Myer Abrams dubbed “Natural Supernaturalism” in his book of the same name. It is not surprising to find this sort of pantheistic notion among the poets who, at the point in their careers when they wrote of things this way had either rejected or found empty traditional religion. But what of a later poet who was also a Jesuit priest? Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in 1844, a full generation or more after Wordsworth’s earliest poetry. Educated at Oxford, he was familiar with Romanticism, and in his journals shows a keen eye for observation of nature. His observations are detailed, semi-scientific (in that amateur Victorian scientist way), and yet he cannot help in them reacting to Nature in an emotional Romantic way.

In an entry in Spring, 1871, he writes of the “inscape” and ‘instress” of things, that is, their inner shape which reveals a divine, almost animate energy: “What you look hard at seems to look hard at you, hence the true and false instress of nature” (Journal 204), and “Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape in things is” (Journal 205). These pages also provide a vivid image of how the inscape is related to the objects outer-scape, or surface, “End of March and beginning of April—This is the time to study inscape in the spraying [i.e. blooming] of trees, for the swelling buds carry them to a pitch which the eye could not else gather” (Journal 205-06). As the flower is contained in the bud, tightly compressed and waiting to unfurl, so the inner-shape of the objects of the physical world waits only to be released.

Hopkins, like Browning, Tennyson and other Victorian poets was at heart a Romantic, but he could not, doctrinally, accept the implications of the Romantic view of Nature. Christian orthodoxy demands a separation of the Creator from the created. How was he to both express his romantic nature and at the same time maintain his Christian orthodoxy? The answer comes, in large part, from John Henry Newman, whose conversion from Church of England to Roman Catholicism greatly influenced Hopkins’s own decision to come to Rome and eventually enter the priesthood.

In his Grammar of Assent, Newman puts the forth the rather Romantic argument that faith in God does not come from reason alone. One cannot simply think one’s way to belief. Rather belief depends upon both reason and personal experience. The leap of faith, the assent, demands that Romantic virtue imagination. Imagination allows the believer to bridge the chasm between Creator and creator and to see the “deep structure” of Nature which, according to Newman, is variously identified with “God,” “Christ,” and “logos.”
This was the constellation of ideas that freed Hopkins’ poetic imagination. In his journals had articulated his idea of “inscape,” a coined word meant to signify the “inner shape” of natural things. Each object had its own inner-shape below its surface which was held in, as it were, by its outer shape or covering. This tension between the inner (divine) energy and the outer shape created an “instress” which would, from time to time, burst forth in a sort of epiphany, under the influence of a poetic imagination.

It had already been established in Christian theology that Jesus, God incarnated in human flesh, was identified with what the Greek philosophers had called logos,” a word which means both “word” and a kind of intelligence or cosmic force which flows through all things. That was the sense of the word as used by Stoic philosophers like Marcus Aurelius. Like God’s will for the Christian, the logos, for the pagan philosopher, was to be a guide to the good life.

Hopkins takes this constellation of ideas and incarnates them in his poetry. With its odd “sprung” rhythm and word choices— which include original coinages, obscure Anglo-Saxon rooted words and unusual grammatical twists (e.g. using “unleaving” as a verb to mean the shedding of leaves by trees in autumn), Hopkins’ poetry achieves its own kind of instress which struggles to be released by the engaged imagination of a hearer or reader.

As Rebecca Boggs pointed out in her article, “Poetic Genesis, the Self, and Nature’s Things in Hopkins,” the poem itself then becomes a kind of thing which, like other things, may reveal the operation of the logos within it. For Hopkins, the Catholic priest, this is identified with the Christ inherent in all things. Whether this verges on the pantheistic heresy is not the purpose of this essay; rather I wish to call attention to the way that Hopkins uses the often overlooked word things in his poetry. Like his romantic predecessors, Hopkins inserts this apparently ordinary word in extraordinary places in his major poems. Because it is such a common word, its importance is often overlooked, but it is a word that Hopkins used frequently in his poetry. A quick check of the Hopkins Concordance shows that he used the words thing or things a total of 56 times in his works, more often than almost any other word in his wide vocabulary. Close study of key usages of the word shows that Hopkins, the consummate wordsmith, was not being casual with his word choices. For him, things was never a shortcut or catch-all word. He used it deliberately to express his notion of the Christos/logos that was immanent in the physical world, waiting only to be released in moments of recognition.

In his short poem “God’s Grandeur,” Hopkins sets up a dominant image of an electrical charge in the first line: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” Like a build up of static of electricity, this charge can be discharged into the world in a moment of contact which is enabled by imaginative engagement with the natural object, or thing. Yet, Hopkins lived in Victorian England and had served in one of its worst industrial slums in Liverpool, so he knew that moments of Romantic engagement with Nature were few and far between. What nature could be had was smeared and bleared with human toil, and modern people lived cut off from contact with Nature. “Nor can foot feel, being shod” (l. 8). And yet, in his extraordinary moment of insight, the poet says,

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things (l. 9-10, emphasis mine.)
There is the word. Beneath the surface of even the most industrially begrimed thing, the freshness of the Christ/logos energy lives, and it lives, the final lines tell us, “because” the Holy Spirit broods over the earth with wings outspread, like a mother hen or dove nesting above an egg.

In “The Windhover,” dedicated “To Christ Our Lord,” Hopkins shows us yet another thing of Nature, a magnificent dawn-treading kestrel. The sweeping opening line—with its alliteration, sprung rhythm and piled-up adjectives (“dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon”)—paints a picture of the bird soaring into a headwind, motionless but for the gentle rise and fall of its body as it rides the wind; then, suddenly, the bird turns and releases itself to the wind which bears it away “As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend” (l. 6). Here the poet sees the divinity within the bird and it leads him outside himself into an ecstasy:

. . . My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing! (l. 8.)

Here the word thing serves as the climax of the ecstatic experience and ends the octet of the sonnet. The sestet develops the “thingness” of the thing in two tercets that explore how divinity inheres in natural objects.

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! and the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold vermillion. (l. 9-14)

Here we see how not just magnificent works of nature and nature’s God, like the falcon, can reveal the divinity within them, but even a turned over furrow can show how the dry crust of the earth’s surface, when broken open by the plow, can reveal the rich life and energy of the Christos/logos below the surface. Like the ash-covered ember, there is in a glowing inner and divine energy (inscape) waiting to reveal itself to the attentive eye and heart.

In “Pied Beauty,” Hopkins explores how the dappled surface of things can both conceal and reveal divinity within. The opening line, “Glory be to God for dappled things,” leads to a catalog of animals, objects, human trades and “All things counter, original, spare, strange” (l. 7). It is one thing for a Wordsworth to see divinity in the ravishing Romantic landscape along the sylvan River Wye, but Hopkins’ Christian vision sees the Christ even “Whatever is fickle, freckled” and even, at first glance, ugly. All of these things are products of the Christ/logos who “fathers-forth” all of them from his eternal beauty.

Perhaps the fullest expression of Hopkins Christian Romantic understanding of things comes in “Hurrahing in the Harvest” in which he makes it clear that it is not in the thing alone, nor in the viewer alone that the spiritual energy resides, but in the imaginative interaction between the human perceiver and the divine-bearing object. In the octet, he sets up his mood of Romantic rapture as he walks at summer’s end through a landscape of hay “stacks” beneath “silk-sack clouds” in a kind of dreamy ecstasy. The closeness of observation hearkens back to
his nature journals and his early articulations of inscape. Then, in the sestet, in an insight that is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s similar insight in Book VI of The Prelude, he articulates the role of the imaginative observer in bringing forth the divine inner-shape of the physical world. The things themselves would exist without the human observer, but the sensitive eye of the imaginative observer is required to fully bring forth the majesty of things:

These things, these things were here and but the beholder
Wanting; which two when they once meet,
The heart rears wings bold and bolder
And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet. (l. 11-14)

Like Wordsworth, transported by joy, Hopkins, the Christian Romantic sees into the heart of things. In Hopkins’ rich and challenging word-hoard, it is easy to overlook the simple word things, and yet, as was true of his Romantic predecessors, it is a word charged with significance for him.

NOTE


BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANITY AND WETLANDS

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It is estimated that wetlands cover nearly 6% of the terrestrial surface of Earth, approximately 8.6 million square kilometers. Through history, human attitudes toward these places have varied. Early cultures lived among and depended on wetlands for survival. However, a negative shift in perception occurred, where wetlands became seen as useless, unattractive, breeding places for insects and vermin and perhaps most damning, undevelopable. Along with this change in attitude came widespread destruction of wetlands. For example, approximately half of Florida’s wetlands were lost due to human activities prior to statehood in 1845. Despite this shift, we will see areas are vital for existence and can be very inspiring.

But I may have a bias. I am trained as a systems ecologist, I specialize in estuarine wetlands and have worked and researched in a variety of swamps, marshes, bayheads, bogs, cypress domes, strands, sloughs, and wet prairies on all levels of the food chain: from algae to invert to fish to snakes. But don’t take my word for it. We can start the discussion looking back several millennia.

Many suggest that civilization was birthed in the fertile crescent of the modern Middle East. This area was nourished by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and associated wetlands. In addition, the Nile people, Sumerians, Indus all formed their civilizations along the fertile soils of riverine wetland systems. The rich sediments provided the basis for agriculture—and thus the raw materials for the beginnings of modern society.

The aesthetics of wetlands have inspired countless artists; certainly the Water Lilies of Monet comes to mind. The beauty of the floating and emergent vegetation (including those resembling the genera Nymphaea & Nuphar) was captured in his timeless paintings. Wetlands have played important roles in literature, such as the marsh in Dickens’ Great Expectations and the bog in Sir Author Conan Doyle Hound of Baskervilles.

Often in literature, wetlands are depicted as bleak and sinister. In Dante’s Divine Comedy, a marsh of Styx in the Upper Hell is described as the final resting place for the wrathful— he writes “Thus we pursued our path round a wide arc of that ghost pool, between the soggy marsh and the arid shore, still eyeing those who gulp the marsh foul.” This sinister trend persists in modern film, comics, and graphic novels, for example The Creature from the Black Lagoon, Anaconda and The Swamp Thing.¹

Negative attitudes were reinforced in the historical record, especially in the context of when wetlands were approached as a barrier to progress or development. For example, an 18th century Englishman, Col William Byrd II who surveyed and named the Great Dismal Swamp of Virginia-North Carolina border described the place as “a horrible desert, the foul damps ascend without ceasing, corrupt the air and render it unfit for respiration…. Never was rum, the cordial of life, found more necessary than in this dirty place.”
One historian wrote that Byrd and his party were “almost devoured by yellow flies, chiggers and ticks. They got lost and ran out of food.” Other historians suggest that Byrd’s team of surveyors struggled as it worked its way westward from the coast through the worst of the thick swamp, but without the leadership of Byrd. Some suggest that he did not even go through the swamp, but that he went around it and met his crew on the other side.2

In 1764, the Virginia Assembly chartered the Dismal Swamp Company to drain 40,000 acres to cut timber within. George Washington was a member of the company and namesake of the Washington Ditch, a canal cut into the swamp. While today’s protected refuge stretches over more than 110,000 acres in parts of Suffolk, Chesapeake and northeastern North Carolina, the Great Dismal was historically more than 1 million acres in area.

Another example involves Florida’s 19th Governor, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, who won the 1905 gubernatorial race with the slogan “Drain the Everglades”. He was very ambitious about this goal and successful. Aiding the cause, railroad interests had tremendous political sway during this period. Railroad tycoon Henry Plant considered building a railroad from Tampa to Miami (which would cut through the Everglades). Accounts say that the surveying crew responsible for the project encountered a Native American woman at the edge of the sawgrass glade east of Ft. Meyers. She told them that an Indian could reach Miami in four days, a white man, ten. It took this crew eighteen.

One of the surveyors, Alonzo Church, wrote … “My advice is to let every discontented man make a trip through the Everglades; if it doesn’t kill him, it will certainly cure him…. A day’s journey in slimy, decaying vegetable matter which coats and permeates everything it touches, and no water with which to wash it off will be good for him, but his chief medicine will be his morning toilet. He must rise with the sun when the grass and leaves are wet with dew and put his shrinking body clothes heavy and wet with slime and scrape out of each shoe a capful of black and odorous mud; it’s enough to make a man swear to be contented forever afterwards with a board for a bed and a clean shirt once a week.”3

The English language is filled with words that suggest negative images on wetlands: ‘bogged down”, “swamped”, even the “bogeyman.”4 Yet, buried in these negative connotations is the fact these systems embody numerous values, many vital to life itself. For example, wetlands have been described as “biological supermarkets” due to the extensive food chains found there as well as supporting rich biodiversity. Others have used the euphemism of “kidneys of landscape” because of their role in hydrologic and chemical cycling functions, filtration and improving water quality. Wetlands also play important roles in mitigating droughts and floods. Yet these values typically will not show up on an economic ledger. These services are provided relatively free of charge and are usually not recognized until the wetland (and service) is gone. The paradox is that wetlands do not have a direct economic value in real estate, and owners cannot profit from sale unless filled.

For example, the New York City drinking water system is enhanced and supplied by a system of wetlands. The Catskill aqueduct, along with the Croton reservoir and the Delaware River are the sources of this water. This system has a storage capacity of 550 billion gallons and provides over a billion gallons per day of water to more than eight million city residents and another one million users in four upstate counties bordering on the water supply system.
In the early 1900’s, the city and state of New York designated thousands of acres of land in the eastern Catskill Mountains to build two reservoirs that increased the city’s capacity. Because the watershed is in one of the largest protected wilderness areas in the United States, the natural water filtration process mediated by wetland processes maintained the high quality of the water in this system. However, if the land use and wetlands are compromised, the water quality will be compromised, as well.

This was detected in the 1990’s. At this time, drinking standards put forth by the Environmental Protection Agency were not met due to increasing loads of sewage, fertilizer, pesticides, and pollution in the system caused by changes in land use. To remedy this problem, it was decided that it was cheaper buy land around catchment ($1.5 billion) rather than build a new treatment facility ($6-8 billion). Since then, through the Land Acquisition Program, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection has purchased or protected over 70,000 acres since 1997.

The underlying issue is that it is difficult to find a balance between needs of a growing population and a healthy ecosystem. In southern Florida the urban, agricultural, and flood control needs of an increasing population are juxtaposed with the needs for proper volumes, flows, qualities, and timings of water needed by the ecological systems, including the Everglades. This balance in southern Florida is maintained by an extensive canal system; many suggest it is in fact an imbalance, at the ultimate cost of the ecosystems integrity. In addition there are numerous non-human (but often human-assisted) threats to the integrity of the wetlands- exotic species such as the Burmese python and the Old World climbing fern.

Needless to say, wetlands are important systems in need of conservation. It is understood that awareness is an important step in spreading a conservation ethic. Part of this process is facilitated through artists who use their talents to raise awareness and make a difference on behalf of wetland systems. Below are few examples of artists doing just that.

From the smallest specimen to the expanse of a landscape, Clyde Butcher has been capturing wetlands on film for over 30 years. A statement from his website: “Wilderness, to me, is a spiritual necessity. When my son was killed by a drunk driver it was to the wilderness that I fled in hopes of regaining my serenity and equilibrium. The mysterious spiritual experience of being close to nature helped restore my soul. It was during that time, I discovered the intimate beauty of the environment. My experience reinforced my sense of dedication to use my art form of photography as an inspiration for others to work together to save nature’s places of spiritual sanctuary for future generations.”

South Florida artist Judith Berk King also captures the essence of wetlands in her paintings and sculptures. From her website:

My sculptures are a narrative based on past and possible ‘future’ memories. The destruction of any part of our fragile ecological web may result in our recalling natural forms only through our own constructions. I imagine a time where we remember and venerate those creatures and places that are gone forever. We revert to forms we cobble together from bits of wood, making them simultaneously more intimate and more remote, as the real creatures and places exist only in memory.”
“11 years old and willing to help”, is how Olivia Bouler described herself to Audubon when she contacted them about the Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, a place where she spent many vacations with family. Knowing birds will be impacted during migration and nesting season, she contacted Audubon, hoping to sell illustrations of wading birds to raise money for clean-up costs. Eventually Olivia decided simply to give bird drawings to those who donated to wildlife recovery efforts. Since then she has raised thousands of dollars and spread awareness through numerous media outlets. She is proof that regardless of age, one can make a difference if dedicated to a cause.⁹

From my experience in education, an appreciation for wetlands is not innate. It is absolutely vital to get students into the field to experience nature first hand. Everyone has preconceptions. For example, Nick (a transfer student from Montana) and a student in my Natural History of the Everglades class remarked to me that his prior knowledge of the ‘glades came from the television program CSI:Miami—he told me that he expected the Everglades to have “deeper water and dead models.” After his field experience in my class, he now knows that wetlands are more than places for villains to dispose of a body.

It is obviously important for biology majors, but those in all disciplines and majors (such as art, business, education, theology, etc.) should have some directed experience in nature. It will influence decisions, deepen appreciation, inspire work, and provide a connection to the natural world that sustains us all.

NOTES

1. See William Mitsch and James Gosselink’s text Wetlands. The chapter focusing on wetland history, science and management, provides many fascinating examples of human interactions with wetlands in various contexts and is the primary source for many of the aforementioned historical examples in this presentation.


3. His journal, A Dash through the Everglades, is available in the Everglades Digital Library http://cwis.fcla.edu/edl

4. Again, see Mitsch and Gosselink

5. For more information see the EPA resource at: http://www.epa.gov/region2/water/nyzych/protprs.htm

6. For example, see Holbrook and Chesnes, An effect of Burmese pythons (Python molurus bivittatus) on mammal populations in southern Florida, Florida Scientist 2011.

7. www.ClydeButcher.com

8. www.JudithKingArtist.com

WHAT DOES GREEN MEAN—BIOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

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The word “green” has come to symbolize environmentalism in general as well as a particular political viewpoint. Green also refers to the plant kingdom, and that is the meaning I want to explore in this presentation. Actually, the color green isn’t at all important to plants. They look green because they reflect wavelengths we interpret as green. Rather, it is red wavelengths that are used in photosynthesis. So what we are looking at is really the light that plants reject. Just a little information like this can, I think, help us to understand what “green” really means in terms of the biology of plants (Raven, Evert & Eichhorn, 2005).

First of all, plants look green because of the presence of the pigment chlorophyll. This is a rather complex organic molecule with a magnesium atom at its center. The rest of the molecule is surprisingly similar to the heme molecule found in hemoglobin in the blood of vertebrates. Nature tends to be economical, and to reuse good design in a variety of ways. This porphyrin structure is a excellent example of such retooling. In both cases, a metal atom is essential to the molecules function: iron for heme and magnesium for chlorophyll. In each case, it is the metal which gives the molecule its color. While hemoglobin carries oxygen in the blood, the function of the chlorophyll is to absorb light energy and transfer it to a molecule which, when activated, can set in motion the process we call photosynthesis.

In terms of organization, chlorophyll is found within plant cells in structures called chloroplasts which are themselves filled with more structure: stacks called grana that are composed of discs called thylacoids which is where photosynthesis actually occurs. Photosynthesis involves the conversion of the small molecules, water and carbon dioxide, into oxygen and the larger molecule glucose: 6CO2 + 6H2O → C6H12O6 + 6O2

In other words, some of the energy that was in the absorbed light has been used to form the chemical bonds in glucose, so this molecule becomes an energy storage device. The plant cell can bond many glucose molecules together to form starch for long-term energy storage, as in the potato tuber or in the rice grain. Glucose molecules can also be bonded together in a different way to form structural molecules such as cellulose and lignin that are found in plant cell walls. These can ultimately become roughage or fiber as in celery or spinach, or in long-lived plants it can be organized into wood.

The last possibility is that the glucose isn’t stored at all, but rather is broken down and its energy released to fuel the plant’s life processes such as growth, reproduction, and respiration. Plants may not seem very active since they don’t run around as animals do, but they are living things and therefore require energy just to maintain life processes. Photosynthesis is the way they get that energy, and ultimately, it is the way almost all living things get energy: animals eat plants or they eat other animals that have eaten plants. This is why green is so important: it is a sign that plants are at work storing energy which we then tap into when we eat plants or the animals that have eaten plants.

I have made photosynthesis and the other reactions related to it seem fairly straightforward and relatively simple. They are not. It took decades to discover the basics, and this research merited
a Nobel Prize. Nor is the job done; many intricacies of the processes have yet to be worked out, including how all these processes are ultimately controlled. For example, how is chlorophyll synthesis tied to photosynthesis? It definitely is. Just look at a plant that isn’t getting enough sun. Not only is its growth slowed, but its leaves turn pale as well. Like all molecules in living things, chlorophyll is continually being broken down and new molecules formed. If the plant isn’t getting enough sun, there isn’t sufficient energy available for the synthesis of chlorophyll, so it isn’t replaced. This is another example of the economy of nature: why bother making a molecule that isn’t going to be used. If the illumination level increases again, the process will reverse itself. This situation brings up the fact that chlorophyll is a relatively unstable molecule which breaks down more easily than some other plant pigments. This is one reason leaves change color in the fall. It is not that they begin making orange and red pigments, but rather that the chlorophyll is degrading and not being replaced. Those other pigments were in the leaves all along; the loss of chlorophyll just makes them apparent.

I have a friend who argues that plants have behaviors, as animals do. This might seem like an untenable position, but think again—and look again. If you have ever tried to draw tulips, you will know that they just won’t sit still. Within even a few minutes they’ve twisted their heads around or changed the angles of their stems. Turning pale is also a behavior: you do it if you are shocked, a plant does it when it doesn’t get enough sun. The difference is simply in the time frame involved. So green doesn’t just mean providing energy for life on earth, but it also means response to the environment, and shaping that environment.

Plants are responsible for the atmosphere that made animal life possible. Remember, oxygen is the by-product of photosynthesis. Over eons, plants kept contributing oxygen until the levels rose to the point that there was enough to fuel the energy-demanding life of animals. The early atmosphere was almost completely devoid of molecular oxygen, so this took some time, a couple of billion years in fact. And some paleontologists argue that the Cambrian explosion, when multicellular animal life first becomes plenteous, was the result of high and stable oxygen levels. The Cambrian explosion occurred about 545 million years ago (Mayr, 2001). At that time, organisms dwelled in a watery environment. The land was devoid of life, except for bacteria and other one-celled organisms, which could survive in moist terrestrial nooks. The first plants to occur on dry land were related to algae and made the move over 450 million years ago, until then most photosynthesis was occurring in an aquatic environment. So green meant wet and the land was not yet the green world we are so familiar with today. It took land plants to do that.

These early plants were much simpler structurally than the plants which surround us today. The flowering plants that comprise the bulk of the green we see now didn’t arise until about 150 million years ago. This is when the earth became so much more colorful as flowers evolved and attracted animal pollinators. Many biologists do not think it is a coincidence that insect diversity exploded at about the same time as did flowering plant species. They see this as a giant case of coevolution: adaptation to pollinate particular plants was advantageous to insects as attracting specific pollinators was to plants. So in a sense plants and insects drove each others’ evolution.

TEACHING GREEN

I teach biology to nonmajors, and what I have given you here is just about the same introduction to green that I would give my students. But as we know, green means a lot more
than just photosynthesis. It has come to signify a political movement, particularly in Europe, an approach to the environment, and even a way of life. “Green” has connotations of being environmentally responsible, being for sustainability and against waste of resources, being frugal with energy use and for organic farming—among many other things, many of which have very little to do with plants. I think it is good to examine some of these uses of the word, and figure out what the word green really means—at least in biology. Then we can go on to explore how green—photosynthesis and its products—can be used in art.

There are some artists who use the process quite directly in their work. For example, the husband and wife team of Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey create “grass paintings” by shining bright light through a photographic negative lain down on a grass plot (Kemp, 2000). The dark areas of the negative block the light, thus preventing photosynthesis and causing the grass in these spots to turn yellow, as the chlorophyll is broken down and not replaced. This is using a photographic negative to create a positive image. Achroyd and Harvey usually do this on a relatively large scale, since a small negative would not give distinct contours. Humans are their usual subjects. They create images that are reminiscent of ordinary photographs, but they have a distinctive blurriness, to say nothing of a greenish-yellow color palette. These images represent human life as plant life, forming a visual connection between the two, directing our attention to a part of the living world we often overlook. They make us think green by making us look green, and at least visually, we become part of the grass.

In 1998, two biologists, James Wandersee and Elizabeth Schussler coined the term “plant blindness” to describe most people’s sense of plants: we just don’t really see them or think about them. Sure, we see trees well enough to avoid bumping into them when we are walking or driving, but do we ever really look at the grass as we walk across a lawn or do more than glance at the flowers in people’s gardens. We encounter literally thousands of plants every day and yet we can easily go through a day without thinking about plants, beyond making a salad for dinner. Yes, we eat plants, water them, and decorate our homes with them, but do we ever really appreciate them as the source of life on earth? That’s Wandersee and Schussler’s central message: because we don’t think about plants, we don’t consider how we are decimating the very organisms that underpin life on earth. Plants provide us not only with energy in the form of glucose and its relatives, but also with the oxygen we need to break down glucose and use the energy stored there.

Because we are blind to plants, we are not fully cognizant of the havoc we are wrecking to this foundation of life. Yes, we are aware that the destruction of the rain forests is bad, but do we consider just how bad? We are more likely to contribute to funds that save whales, pandas, or songbirds, than to save trees. Yet pandas live on bamboo and songbirds live in trees, and even some whales depend on seaweed for food, to say nothing of our own food needs. And plants don’t just feed us and provide us with oxygen, they also clothe us—with cotton and linen—and shelter us—with wood and bamboo. In addition, half of the medicines we take are either plant chemicals or derived from them, and I have just scratched the surface of plants’ uses. I haven’t even mentioned the fact that oil and coal were formed from plant materials of the past.

So Ackroyd and Harvey’s grass portraits are, in a very real way, tree representations of who we are and what we are dependent upon. We really do come out of the grass. Their work is also reminiscent of the work of the anonymous English artists who centuries ago created the green man representations found in medieval cathedrals (Anderson, 1991). They, in turn, are related to the more ancient Druid tree worship. Though I am not suggesting that we return to Druidic
practices, I do think that we would do well to incorporate some of this spirit into our present-day response to the plant world as an expression of a greater connectedness with the green among us.

OTHER ARTISTS

There are many artists who are using plants in other ways to make us more aware of what plants are doing for us and what we are doing to them. Binh Danh uses plants in two different ways as he comments on the remnants of the Vietnamese War. He “paints” with chlorophyll on leaves, but since the leaves are dried and the chlorophyll has somewhat degraded, the result is not a green-on-green image but an eerie brown-on-tan one. In one work, called Military Foliage, he has created a camouflage pattern on a leaf, thus commenting on the absurdity of trying to protect plants from the ravishes of the defoliants used in Vietnam. While Ackroyd and Harvey are reminding us how green we really are, Danh is saying that we are also very destructive of that green while at the same time literally using greenness, in a degraded form, to create his images.

Natalie Jeremijenko is trying to get us to overcome our plant blindness by growing trees in places where we are almost forced to see them: on the sidewalk, as well as in parks and other public spaces. Her OneTrees project involved planting a thousand young trees in the San Francisco area, often in pairs, so people could compare how the trees grew relative to each other, and as a larger project, how all the trees fared over time as they dealt with different environments (Edwards, 2010). All thousand trees are clones of each other, meaning that they are genetically identical, so how they become different as they grow and age depends solely on environment. Jeremijenko’s work comments on conformity, environmental degradation, and our efforts to sustain the green world in the face of that degradation.

In an older project, George Gessert (1993) grew flowers, using selective breeding to create irises with particular characteristics, especially in terms of flower color and patterning. He was mimicking the work of plant breeders which has been going on for millennia: shaping the characters of plants by consciously selecting certain individuals to survive and be used to create the next generation, while others were relegated to the compost heap. Gessert isn’t directly interested in green, but rather the blue, purple, and yellow of irises. He is doing what Darwin (1859) described in the opening chapter of *On the Origin of Species*, though Darwin used pigeons rather than plants to make his point that humans have long shaped the genetic makeup of a variety of species, and that over a human lifetime, significant changes in a species can be observed. Gessert sees his work as an aesthetic process, since he is selecting not on the basis of plants that are hardier or grow faster or bloom earlier, but solely on the basis of how attractive he finds the iris flowers. He is reminding us of the aesthetic sense that drives many of our choices, and something that we are often as blind of as we are of plants.

In this brief presentation, I’ve managed to pack in everything from the chemical formula for photosynthesis to the dangers of plant blindness, to the aesthetic drive that motivates a great deal of what we do. I see a link among these three. We need photosynthesis though we often choose to ignore it, but perhaps more attention to the beauty of plants may be a way into valuing them more on a number of levels—including the environmental and the photochemical. Edward O. Wilson (1984) argues that humans have an innate urge to associate with other species, and this includes plants. While we may ignore them on one level, we like to have them around, even if they are considered as little more than furniture. Artists like those I’ve
mentioned here aid us in seeing plants and thinking about them in new ways, perhaps in ways that will cure our blindness and help us to be more environmentally conscious as well.

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TELL ME AND I WILL FORGET. SHOW ME AND I MAY REMEMBER. INVOLVE ME AND I WILL UNDERSTAND. ~Chinese Proverb

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This proverb lies at the heart of what may be defined as ‘experiential education.’ According to the Association for Experiential Education, “experiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values” (Association for Experiential Education, 2007-2010). This teaching philosophy is one which I adhere to and have been actively seeking opportunities to utilize. A year ago, a colleague and I proposed an interdisciplinary class, combining art and biology, which would culminate in a first-hand immersive experience. While a study-away or hands-on class is not necessarily a unique idea, it was a first in many ways for a small group of Appalachian liberal arts college students. Most environmental science programs focus on just that –science. However, art can be an important, even necessary, part of a global environmental education. This paper will outline the development of such a class and give a narration of the value of the experiential trip abroad.

Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) is located approximately 55 miles north of Knoxville, Tennessee in Harrogate, Tennessee, where Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia merge at the Cumberland Gap. The university has about 1700 undergraduate students, who are mostly from the region. However, this small liberal arts college has made a significant connection in Central America. In April of 2009, LMU’s Cumberland Mountain Research Center (CMRC) reached an agreement with the Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education (BFREE). The memorandum of understanding brought about the construction of an onsite research laboratory in the Bladen Reserve. “This new lab will foster collaborations among LMU faculty and students, resident BFREE scientists, and visiting scientists from institutions world-wide” (Caldwell, 2009).

During the summer of 2009, Jessica Rasmussen, a biology instructor, and I, went to Belize to investigate the potential of employing the BFREE connection in our own work. The Foundation supports and manages a private research and educational facility, located on 1,153 acres of tropical rainforest in the foothills of the Maya Mountains in southern Belize along the Bladen River. Four protected reserves adjoin the BFREE reserve. Ancient Maya archeological sites are found at BFREE, including ancient house mounds and a terraced hillside. The modern Maya of today still live in the region and often guide BFREE students and researchers into “the bush” to teach them about natural history and medicinal plants. (Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education, 2010)

When Ms. Rasmussen and I were in Belize we observed true intersections between our two disciplines. Belize is a country that reveres and makes the most of its natural resources. While we were at BFREE and traveling throughout Belize, we discovered the amazing potential to
create a course which would highlight the ecological and environmental activities happening there. Since Belize exhibits how culture and the environment can coexist, Ms. Rasmussen and I realized we could capitalize on LMU’s relationship with BFREE and offer a course that combined art and ecology, giving our students a rare interdisciplinary view of a critical issue in their world.

In November of 2009, we put together a course proposal outlining our ideas. The following is the introduction to our plan, which included a draft itinerary as well as our syllabus:

We would like to propose a three-credit hour, cross-discipline course for spring 2010. Students will dual enroll in BIO 395: Introduction to Tropical Ecology and ART 395: Maya Art & Culture. Class structure will begin with weekly meetings where students will be educated about tropical ecology and Mayan art and crafts. During spring break we will bring the 6-10 students to Belize in order to apply the information that they learned in class. Following the field experience, students will compile their knowledge, notes, and sketches to create a small portfolio and written reflection. By partnering a biology class and an art class, it is our hope that we can demonstrate the importance of the interconnected environment and culture in Belize. (Graff, 2009)

Shortly after receiving approval, we held an information meeting, and were overwhelmed by the student interest. Twenty students came to hear about the class. We explained that this would be an educational experience and not just a tourist excursion. We emphasized the physical rigors, the cost, and the practical aspects of immunizations, passports, specific clothing, and insect repellants. Our main focus was the fact that both courses required a field journal (the biology component was for species identification while the art component was for cultural engagement reflections.) The biology syllabus explained that:

Students will be evaluated on a class trip journal. Students will need to make daily entries noting the date, location, time of activities, activities, flora and fauna identified, as well as an end of the day reflection. Students will be required to record a minimum of 50 species of either plant or animal in their journal. Along with the common name and scientific name of an organism, students will be required to draw the organism, describe notable characteristics, identify the habitat the organism is found in, as well as any additional fact that may be of interest. (Rasmussen, Biology 395, 2010)

Both of our syllabi stated the class was operating as a seminar, which was a first for the freshman participants. In keeping with the principles of experiential education practice, the journal would be a means of recording daily events, lectures, and presentations. In addition, the ongoing reflections allowed the students to be accountable for “posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning” throughout the experiential learning process (Association for Experiential Education, 2007-2010).

Once the spring semester began, we met weekly with the thirteen students who officially enrolled in the class. We began with fundraising plans and passport materials. Only half of our group had a passport, so the others were given a March first deadline. Everyone had to get shots and we all received malaria prescriptions. After these details were covered, Ms.
Rasmussen and I gave a series of lectures. She covered the various habitats we would be encountering—rainforest, savannah, pine forest, and coral reef. She also gave an overview of the species the students would need to be recording—not just mammals and reptiles, but also marine life, birds, and a variety of plants and trees. I covered a bit of Maya history, specifically in reference to the sites our trip would include. I also discussed the recent resurgence of Maya craft in the culture and how this is improving the local economies. These lectures oriented the students and provided them with a background for determining their final art projects. The research component was deliberately left open for the students to self-design based on either their individual strengths or interests. For example, the more artistic student might gather information for the creation of a painting while a wildlife studies student might create a photographic essay on the preservation of the Ceiba tree.

Each location we visited in Belize was selected based on the rich learning opportunities for both disciplines. Judy Dourson, BFREE’s Community Educator, coordinated many of the destinations to meet our needs. A short drive from Belize City we arranged for the students’ first meeting with native Belizean animals as well as information “about the creative and effective community-based conservation efforts of the Community Baboon Sanctuary” (Dourson, 2010). A local Belizean led us on a walk in the area and described the local flora, explaining many of the medicinal values of the plants. This was the students’ first encounter with something they would see repeatedly: a native person with more knowledge of his environment, pride in his country, and concern for his local resources than the college-educated student knew about his or her own hometown. Probably the most exciting part of the first day’s experience for the students was when they were able to come face to face with howler monkeys. While these monkeys are suffering from habitat loss, at the CBS, local landowners have volunteered to donate their land in order to protect the monkey. The students were able to see firsthand how protecting the habitat leads to the protection of the monkey, which can lead to ecotourism and a source of money for the landowners (Rasmussen, Edited trip itinerary, 2010).

After experiencing the CBS, we continued with the conservation theme. We traveled to the Tropical Education Center at the Belize Zoo where we received a night tour of the wildlife rescue center. The Belize Zoo, founded by Sharon Matola, subject of the book The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw, is unique because it only contains animals native to Belize. We headed there late in the evening to view many of the nocturnal creatures so that students were able to see jaguars, tapirs, crocodiles, and many other Belizean animals.

Next, the group traveled to Xunantunich, the Stone Goddess, which is one of Belize’s most ornate Mayan Ruins. Elaborate friezes (glyphs carved into linear stones on the side of the ruin) enhanced the artistic side of the course. Though this day was mostly dedicated to art and culture, students were also educated by our guide on the local fauna of the area. This helped reiterate some of the plants they had learned the day before. Edgar, our tour guide who was the same age as the students, captivated the class with his stories, and again, his knowledge of both nature and history thoroughly impressed them. They especially enjoyed his interpretation of the Maya calendar and what will transpire in 2012. His explanation differed greatly from the Hollywood movie version, and he stressed that point to the students. He convinced them that the future will depend upon the attitudes of the present, encouraging all to think only good thoughts so that only positive energy is generated. The group then reboarded the bus and headed south on the stunning Hummingbird Highway that winds through the Maya Mountains. We arrived at Maya Center, a Mopan Mayan community located at the entrance to the Cockscomb Basin Jaguar Reserve. That evening, students were given the opportunity to go on a
voluntary night hike up the road toward the Jaguar Reserve. Most of the students opted to go, and were rewarded with seeing a kinkajou, coffee snake, and a bat who caught its dinner mid-flight.

The class then traveled to a market in Belmopan, the capital of Belize, where the students were all given money to buy fresh produce—and encountered some fruits and vegetables that they had never heard of before. This experience helped the students pay more attention to the plants found around them. That evening’s dinner was spaghetti sauce enhanced with several of the vegetables purchased at the Belmopan market. We met our Creole boat captains at Mango Creek where we boarded three small boats for the trip to the Sapodilla Cayes located at the southern end of Belize’s famous Barrier Reef, the second longest in the world. We headed out to Hunting Caye, a tiny tropical island right on the reef, and part of the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve. After we settled into rooms at the University of Belize’s Field Station, students were given an introduction to the island and the research being conducted from the research station there. They learned about the structure of a reef system, as well as how humans are affecting this sensitive ecosystem, then they went snorkeling to identify different kinds of coral and reef topography. We saw large stingrays (over an aquatic habitat consisting mostly of sea grass), and snorkeled over corals and sea fans. We saw several different fish species, including the lion fish, which the students had learned earlier in the day is an invasive species in the Caribbean. After returning to the research station, students were able to use the resources found at the station in order to look up and identify some of the many species they had seen earlier that day. After dinner, I had the students draw an interpretation of what they saw underwater. This was their first guided art activity. They started with a sketch in their journals and then watercolor paper, markers, and paints were passed around and shared. The students actively participated in recreating the most vivid coral or fish or scene they remembered. This was significant as an exercise in recall as well as self-expression and served to further bond the group over shared resources and memories.

For the second day of marine ecosystem study most of the group returned again to the water and examined some of the organisms that live on the reef such as sponges and other sessile forms, crustaceans, and the fish populations. The students again experienced how Belizean wildlife supplies food as they ate barracuda caught by the boat captains. After dinner, Victor Jacobs, the station manager and Fish & Wildlife officer spoke to the group about his role in protecting the reef. In addition to educating students, he is constantly patrolling and marking areas of concern. Then, our boat captains talked about the environment and the overfishing of the waters near their home. That is the reason that they are all now tour guides—to supplement their fishing income. All are from Monkey River, a town which used to house 3000 but now is a village of 250. They free dive for lobster but also work hard to keep the lobster from failing by only picking big ones, allowing the smaller ones to grow. In addition, they keep an eye out for illegal nets which can harm the mangroves and the fishes that rely on a strong root system. One of the captains introduced the noni plant and had everyone try a drink made from it. One of the students was given a bottle to take on a daily basis for a stomach ailment.

A crucial aspect of this trip was a home stay on a cacao farm run by Juan and Abelina Cho. Abilene and Juan run both the farm and an ecotourism business. The family farm was started by Juan’s father who planted the first trees. “The Chos have found a way to connect ancient cacao farming with the modern craze for quality, fair-trade products” (Berman, 2008). Juan’s farm used to sell to the Toledo Cacao Growers Association, a nonprofit coalition of about a thousand small farms that sells cacao seeds to Green & Black’s, however, today, thanks in a
large part to a Peace Corps volunteer, the Chos have developed their own small chocolate business. Abelina and her mother-in-law, Cyrila, now make their own chocolate bars and cocoa powder and even some cacao wine. Their products are marketed under the label Cyrila’s Chocolate. The students learned the basics of making chocolate. The beans had already been roasted, so the students helped to crack the shells. Then, several tried the traditional method of sifting (via tossing and catching) in order to remove any remaining shell bits. Shells are ground into compost for the farm as nothing is wasted at the organic farm. Abilene placed the clean beans on a matate, which is a large polished stone surface similar to a mortar and pestle, along with pure cane sugar, vanilla, and allspice, and demonstrated the correct grinding technique.

Students received a botany lesson about the cacao plant, and how every part of it can be used— as a fertilizer, to make wine, and of course, to make chocolate. They saw the natural insecticides growing alongside the cacao plants and how this relationship is cultivated. The students also learned about native insects and saw how termites and ants play a vital role in protecting the cacao trees.

As the group traveled into the actual rainforest to reach the Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education, the resident botanist gave a short lecture about the different habitats that they would walk through. Students learned the difference between the savannah and the tropical rainforest. Ms. Rasmussen also gave lessons on ornithology and sighted various local birds. During the first evening the students went on a night hike and heard kinkajous, saw leaf cutter ants, and may have heard a jaguar.

The next day Jacob Marlin, BFREE founder, showed the students a fer de lance. The students were able to examine the snake up close as one of “the more than 180 species of reptiles and amphibians” found around BFREE (Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education, 2010). The afternoon was dedicated to an art project with natural items. The BFREE bus driver and leather artisan demonstrated collecting and stripping vines for weaving. He also showed us how to cut through cohune nuts in order to make jewelry. Students were given access to a vise and saw. Files and sand paper were passed around for modification and polishing of the nut pieces. The end results were a variety of baskets, rings, bracelets, necklaces, and key chains. This hands-on experience and lesson on art and environment really left an impression on the students. Most were familiar with drawing, painting, or even ceramics, but gathering vegetation and making something usable or wearable was a revelation.

The following morning a presentation was given on Tropical Rainforests, then we began a hike to Firetail Waterfall. The hike included noting several trees that are valuable to the Maya, seeing the national flower of Belize, the black orchid, and hearing a family of spider monkeys. Several students jumped off a cliff, called Holy Rock, and had fun playing with the small fish found in the water hole (relatives of the piranha.) We regrouped later at the BFREE dining room and engaged the students in a biology activity. We separated the students along the paths surrounding the dining hall and had them sit by themselves and observe their surroundings. They were to record what they saw or heard in their journals. As we were at the end of our trip, this was an interesting exercise to see how much the students had retained. Discussion at the conclusion of the exercise proved a real growth in knowledge. Many students drew and identified trees, leaves, and flowers, noted specific bird calls, watched leaf cutter ants or other small insect activity. The final learning experience at BFREE was a bat demonstration. The Copperhead Environmental Consulting group was in the Bladen banding bats and set up a net for us. They caught several different species which they showed the students, having some help
weigh and measure for their own records and research. The students were impressed to learn that many of the bat species were also found in the Eastern United States (as is Copperhead, whose headquarters is less than two hours from our university.) We received another lesson in international environmental concerns through a discussion of white nose syndrome, which is devastating the bat population throughout North America (Copperhead Consulting, 2010).

After leaving BFREE, we returned to Maya Center and met Aurora Garcia Saqui, herbalist and artist and founder of Maya Center. As one of the Garcia sisters, she helped to revitalize art in Belize. The Garcia sisters are especially well-known for re-developing “the art of Maya slate carving” (Nu’uk Che’il Cottages, 2010). In addition, the Garcia sisters’ families live “on a self sustaining farm where they plant and harvest everything they consume” (The Garcia Sisters, 1999-2010). After telling us her family history, Aurora talked about her work with herbs. Her studies using of herbal remedies have led beyond healing. She is tying together her crafts and showed us some of her recent painted works. She then gave the students a choice of polishing slate carvings or creating their own small paintings. Aurora had prepared cloth for us and gave an Art presentation using her naturally produced dyes made from her locally-collected herbs.

After lunch, we drove out to our final destination, Gales Point, a Creole village. Jill Young, a local painter, had a variety of objects for the group to paint including maracas, paddles, rain sticks and small boats. Everyone tried to capture a portion of the trip in their painting—from landscapes to specific birds, fish, or mammals. The students worked very hard during this activity, referring to their journals and digital cameras for visual inspiration.

Once we returned to the states, our students were given time to complete the class requirements. Ms. Rasmussen gave the class two weeks to organize their field notes, and many students rewrote their journals completely. The art component concluded with a final presentation of all projects. This was held in our campus auditorium and open to the public. Many parents, fellow faculty, and administrators attended. This was also a reunion as the group was so diverse that even on a campus as small as ours, they do not all encounter each other. We had freshman to seniors, art majors, biology majors, criminal justice, athletic training, pre-med and pre-dental students. The two hour symposium included PowerPoint presentations, movies, artwork explanations, a song, and awards (such as “most likely to be found in the river” or “most likely to move to a Caye.”) All of the students addressed the most valuable lessons they had learned. Over and over, we heard how impressed they were with the people of Belize’s knowledge of their country, respect for their environment, happiness in light of what Western society perceives as having so little, and advocacy for the preservation of their natural resources. Nearly the entire group has since joined LMU’s Earth Club, with two students of our class now serving as president and vice-president.

In closing, I know that our students benefitted from the interdisciplinary experience. All the journals proved that, as students wrote about a greater global awareness of the art and environment encountered, as well as to interpersonal relations. These connections were also exhibited in their artwork and oral presentations. The combination of art and biology for experiential learning was a success in Belize as it is a country that closely links ecology and culture. Aristotle said, “The things we have to learn before we do them, we learn by doing them” (Neill, 2006). By having students work in and with the environment, in a country that so values its natural resources, a life-altering lesson was achieved.
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The relationship between art and nature is one of the critical subjects both in art history and in the philosophy of art, in the arts of the Western world as well as in the arts of non-Western cultures. My paper is an attempt to “naturalize” the understanding of art and the aesthetics, although with some caveats and warnings. Maybe, more than naturalizing the aesthetics, it invites to a reflection on the contributions that non artistic, not even humanistic disciplines, can bring to the understanding of the artistic phenomenon in human history.

Thinking about the theme of the conference, “Romancing Nature,” I was struck by the active engagement with its object that the verb romancing denotes, and by the fact that art, or artists, or all of us, as subjects of the romancing of nature, are in fact constantly engaged in an active process of ascribing to nature a large variety of attributes and qualities (even unjustified) and often forget that nature is not only external to us, out there, the environment in which we live and act, but that we, as human beings, are also “nature,” our bodies, senses, and brains, and the “nature” that we are might play an important role in the way we make and perceive art.

Since Plato’s description of art as the “mirror of nature,” Western philosophy has variously engaged with the question regarding the relationship between art and nature. But what is “nature?” From the Greek physis and the Latin natura, nature for philosophers has always referred to the physical, tangible reality, the world out there, the object of inquiry, existing independently from the subjective I. Natura is what is given, as opposed to what is made (datum as opposed to factum), and nature has in fact been traditionally defined in oppositional relationship with culture, where nature refers to the hard facts of our physical, genetic, inherited make up, whereas culture refers to the human made world of acquired abilities and social practices.

Here lies the paradox of art. Works of art are human made artifacts, cultural products embedded in their cultural and historical contexts, through which they are ascribed their meanings and assigned their values. And yet, without the human “natural”, innate tendency toward the pleasure of making and representing, and without a similarly natural tendency toward the enjoyment of artifice and beauty, there would be no art.

THE RECURRENCE OF NATURE

But what is “natural” in the artistic phenomenon? Is it the seeing, hearing, touching, smelling? Is it all the sense perceptions that are involved in the process of experiencing reality, in the pleasure of making, creating, imitating it? Is making art and enjoying the experience of art triggered by some inborn instinct of the human species, or is it an acquired, learned, cultural aspect of human behavior?

The historicity of the artistic phenomenon, not only of works of art, but of all artistic practices, has strongly and convincingly been argued in the past two centuries (let’s say) from Hegel to Foucault. Even the concept of “human nature” has been successfully questioned, deconstructed
and, in fact, shown to be another cultural construct. How then can we still speak of the “natural” in the experience of art?

And yet the “natural” constantly comes back to lay its claims, to reassert its rights. Even when accepting the fact of the complete historicity of the human experience, of its being culturally embedded since its inception, we have to make room for nature. Maybe, instead of using the concept of “human nature,” we should speak instead of the nature that is part of the human, the human that is nature and culture joined together, intertwined since the beginning of the life of the species, since the emergence of human consciousness.

This paper will introduce some of the claims put forward by a recent field of research which falls under the loose label of “evolutionary aesthetics.” It will outline both what I consider to be the main shortcomings of its approach along with its important and valuable contributions to our understanding of the artistic phenomenon.

EVOLUTIONARY AESTHETICS

Evolutionary aesthetics, broadly defined, is the attempt to explain the artistic phenomenon in the light of Darwin’s evolutionary theory. The broad claim is that aesthetic preferences, likes and dislikes, for landscapes and habitat, for food, “for naturally occurring sensations like smell and sounds, as well as for the broad array of cultural artifacts” (Voland, Grammer 2003) and not last, for sexual companions, must have developed in the course of human evolution as a result of the adaptation to the environment, favoring the choices and preferences that guaranteed better chances for survival. Our ancestors adapted to their environments developing certain preferences, whose success in the struggle for survival guaranteed their selection and reproduction.

A recent volume, aptly titled Evolutionary Aesthetics (Voland, Grammer, 2003) has collected several essays by both American and European scholars in this field. Biologists, archeologists, and psychologists explore these basic hypotheses, revisiting some of the traditional questions of aesthetics within a Darwinian framework, appealing in particular to Darwin’s Descent of Man, where he observed and collected data on the presence of aesthetic preferences in animal behavior, and further suggested that aesthetic preferences in humans must be the outcome of our evolutionary history.

They explore topics as diverse as the attraction to beauty and the origin of a “sense of beauty” (Darwin 1998, Beidebach 2003.) the human preferences for certain environments and landscapes (Thornhill 2003.) behavioural and psychological reactions to the environments (Ruso, Renninger, Atzwanger 2003.) the aesthetics of handaxes from a million years ago (Mithen 2003,) the role of the perception of physical attractiveness in mate selection (Cunningham & Schamblen 2003,) the evolution of perceptual biases (Coss 2003,) how visual perception developed primarily in response to survival (Sutterlin 2003,) how aesthetic experiences promoted adaptation in human evolution. From several fields of inquiry, they are probing related hypotheses concerning the evolutionary advantages of certain aesthetic preferences.

Several papers presented in the last few years at conferences and symposiums of the American Society for Aesthetics (Lintatt, Saidel, 2003) and of the International Aesthetic Association
(Welsch, 2004) are also evidence of a strong interest in exploring similar hypotheses in animal aesthetics.

Another recent text that deserves to be mentioned here is *The Art Instinct* by Dennis Dutton (2006). Dutton is a philosopher who in the past several years has written extensively on the subject of the evolutionary origins of art. Provocatively using the title *The Art Instinct*, after the linguist Steven Pinker’s *The Language Instinct*, and drawing an analogy between the origin of language and the origin of art, he writes

“The universality of art and artistic behaviors, their spontaneous appearance everywhere across the globe and through recorded human history, and the fact that in most cases they can be easily recognized as artistic across cultures, suggest that they derive from a natural, innate source: a universal human psychology. In this respect, the universality of art resembles another persistent human proclivity: language use.” (Dutton, 2009, 30)

Dutton argues that our attraction to beauty is inborn, as are our preferences and tastes in the appreciation of works of art, psychological traits that, during the course of evolution, have been shaped by natural selection.

All these efforts are the sign of a genuine interdisciplinary interest in the subject, and they bring to it welcomed and significant contributions.

**SHORTCOMINGS OF THE EVOLUTIONARY AESTHETICS APPROACH**

What are the shortcomings of these approaches?

A. They tend to bring to a humanistic discipline, that is, to the study of a cultural phenomenon, the methodologies and intellectual frameworks of the natural sciences. Understanding a phenomenon, in the natural sciences, means to be able to explain it in terms of cause and effect, to show evidence of the causal link between the two. This often leads to an oversimplification and mechanistic explanations of phenomena that are instead extremely complex.

B. “Naturalizing” aesthetics for most natural scientists means to reduce the aesthetic phenomenon to its more basic components (psychological and neuronal activities in the brain,) and then further reduce them to ultimately biological explanations.

C. In doing so, they are inclined to explain all aesthetic phenomena using the triad “adaptation, fitness, selection,” trying to find causal explanations for every behavioral trait, ruling out the possibility that instead of having an adaptive value on their own, artistic behaviors might have been the byproducts of other adaptations that had survival advantages, and they might have developed without serving specific evolutionary purposes. We don’t know if artistic behaviors necessarily had adaptive advantages, maybe some did, and other did not, but certainly they required a high order of mental processes. These might have developed to enable early humans to plan a hunt, for example, or building shelters, and cave paintings might have been the byproducts of the high development of those same mental processes. The simplistic perspective that searches for causal explanations for every behavioral trait in early humans has in fact been challenged by neo-
Darwinian evolutionary theorists, like Gould and Lewontin, who strongly claim that “not everything in evolution is adaptive.” (Gould, Lewontin, 1979)

CONTRIBUTIONS OF EVOLUTIONARY AESTHETICS

And yet these approaches have significant contributions to offer to the understanding of the artistic phenomenon:

A. The insight that art, in a way analogous to language, or tool making, even religion and morality, has emerged during the course of human evolution. As such, it is deeply rooted in our biological make up, and cannot be separated from it.

B. Thinking in terms of evolution, of the early humans who inhabited the earth, focuses the attention on the origins of the artistic phenomenon, on questions regarding when, and why our ancestors began to make artifacts that, although responding to useful purposes, exhibited features that were not limited to the immediate useful purpose at hand.

C. They have shown that there are constancies and commonalities in the way humans interact with their environments, there are commonalities in the tendency to behave and engage in activities whose purpose is not limited to utility; there are commonalities in the tendency to make things appealing, be it for religious rituals, for adornment, for food preparation utensils, even for hunting.

Cultural anthropologists, who, by training and span of interests, move more freely between the cultural and the biological, have quite demonstrated this point. They have explored the arts and crafts of many early societies, and brought evidence to the fact that virtually all human societies exhibit forms of artistic activities, even those which do not conceptualize it as “art,” and don’t have a special word in their languages to designate such activities. Comparing large arrays of cultural productions, they showed that most rituals and celebrations were accompanied by some form of artistic expressions, be it music, singing, dancing, elaborate customs and jewelry, carvings and paintings.

In Calliope’s Sisters: A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art, Richard Anderson claims that in spite of strong differences between artistic expressions in different cultures, especially when comparing small-scale to large-scale societies, with highly different degrees of complexities, there exist some commonly shared, “pan-human,” to use his expression, cross cultural recurrent features in the productions of early societies to which we would attribute aesthetic value. “Enhancing life,” in Anderson’s view, is ultimately the common purpose of all artistic activities and practices, which can be observed in virtually all human cultures.

Ellen Dissanayake, on the other hand, in her seminal work Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why, speaks of “making special” as the defining feature of artistic expressions in the diverse cultures that she has observed.

“In my view, the biological core of art, the stain that is deeply dyed in the behavioral marrow of humans everywhere, is something that I have… called ‘making special’.” (Dissanayake, 1994, 42)
The need to act ritually and the ritual acts themselves, are related, I suggested, to the human penchant for making special, which I believe arose in turn from the ability to differentiate ordinary from extraordinary. (ibidem, 71)

D. Looking at the artistic phenomenon from an evolutionary point of view has fostered much interdisciplinary dialogue and communication. Biologists have started to talk to anthropologists, evolutionary theorists to philosophers and literary critics. In spite of the different languages and jargons, and in spite of different intellectual frameworks, they are fostering a welcome, constructive communication between the sciences and the humanities. Given the walls often erected between disciplines, and given the interdisciplinary character of the artistic phenomenon, and the need to an interdisciplinary approach to it, this is a very encouraging sign.

E. Finally all these efforts have been instrumental to the “naturalization” of the artistic phenomenon, bringing forward the “nature” element, too often neglected, of the dichotomy between nature and culture, and reestablishing the dynamic, dialectic tension between the two.

**BIOLOGY AND CULTURE**

It is this dialectic tension between biology and culture, in the context of the aesthetics, that we need to explore more deeply, their interplay, the junctures at which they meet, the figurative spaces where they intersect, where our biology, our sense apparati with all their physiological determinations, intersect with the cultural influences on those same sense apparati, where our “nature” becomes enculturated, along with where our neuronal responses to stimuli are culturally affected.

It is obvious that our biology makes certain things possible and other things impossible, our biology shaped the “forms of life” of our ancestors, and then those same forms of life, that we refer to as “culture,” acquired a high degree of autonomy from the biological, developed quite independently, even though the biology continued to set the limits of the possibilities. Not only they acquired a high degree of autonomy; they also affected the biology, they encouraged or stimulated certain types of development instead of others, certain ways of seeing, for example, or of hearing.

We can confidently say that the making and the enjoyment of art is a response to a natural impulse, but we cannot separate the two (nature and culture) after hundreds of thousands of years of human culture. The tendency to separate ourselves from nature is rooted in the whole Western philosophical tradition, as well as in our scientific tradition, and it has produced an enormous amount of knowledge, it has made modern science possible. It is tempting, therefore, to perpetuate this separation. But it doesn’t have to be the case. We separate, analyze, simplify, in order to better understand, but this cannot be at the price of losing sight of some of the parts that compose the whole.

We don’t really now what “nature” is in and on itself. Our perception of nature is mediated though our brains’ neurological structure (Kantian categories) and through our cultural, historical a prioris (Foucault.) The evolutionary view of the aesthetics does not have to be reductionist or essentialist, it does not presuppose the existence of a fixed “human nature,” and most of all, it is not incompatible with the historicist, cultural view. The opposition between
naturalistic and historicist accounts of the human experience in the world is dangerous and misleading. As in the case of artistic phenomena, we need both to make sense of this experience. We are “things in nature,” as Hegel put it, and we are also immediately cultural and historical. It is this “hybrid” nature of the human, and the continuity between animal nature and human culture, that has made art possible.

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Comparing historical periods is a precarious enterprise, but I shall begin with some rough comparisons between England in the 19th century and the United States in the 20th and early 21st centuries. In the 19th century England reached the height of the Industrial Revolution with all of its disruptions, maladies, and destruction of the environment. England’s vast empire had not yet reached its zenith—this would occur in the early 20th century—but already showed signs of distress—war with Maori in New Zealand, the beginnings of an independence movement in Canada, occasional uprisings in India, and the Boer War in South Africa. The U.S. in the late 20th century began to become aware of the dark side of unbridled industrialization, the intransigence of poverty and unemployment, the increasing polarization of classes and political agendas, and the fraying of the United State’s vast empire.

I will survey some of the ideas and experiments of two prominent 19th century Englishmen—Robert Owen and William Morris—who were aware of the ills of their age and who offered alternative visions of a new future. Owen had little to no interest in the aesthetics of his experiment. By contrast, for Morris, the aesthetic dimension was central. They may provide some rough lessons for today, including lessons about the environment.

ROBERT OWEN

Robert Owen (1771-1858) went as a young man to the city of Manchester, the center of the Industrial Revolution, to learn the cotton-spinning trade. Shortly, he became a partner with a manufacturer of cotton-spinning machines. Although the partnership was short-lived, Owen took three of the machines and set himself up as a manufacturer of cotton yarn. A bit later he was offered and accepted the position of manager of one of the largest spinning mills in Lancashire. Eventually, he formed another partnership with two other investors and started a new company. Owen’s reputation for his knowledge of the cotton-spinning business grew and, at the age of 28, he accepted the position of manager and also took part ownership of the New Lanark mills in Scotland (1799). When Owen arrived at New Lanark in 1800 (he remained until 1824), the village contained circa 2500 mill-workers and their families. About 500 of the workers were children recruited from the charitable institutions of Edinburgh. The children lived in barracks, began work at the age of 6 and worked 13 hours a day. Most residents of the town were in debt to local merchants and tavern-keepers.

Arthur Bestor suggests that it was at New Lanark that Owen arrived at one of the central themes of all of his philosophizing, that the character of persons is form by their environment. The residents of New Lanark were caught in circumstances beyond their control. Their vices were the consequence of the life they were obliged to lead. In his “New Lanark Address” of 1816, he declared that “character is universally formed for and not by the individual.”

And it was at New Lanark that Owen began to seriously attempt to improve factory conditions. He recounted later that he visited many factories and became vividly alive to the deteriorating condition of the young children and others who were made the slaves of these new mechanical
powers. And whatever may be said to the contrary, bad and unwise as American slavery is and must continue to be, the white slavery in the manufactories of England was at this unrestricted period far worse than the house slaves whom I afterwards saw in the West Indies and in the United States, and in my respects, especially as regards health, food, and clothing, the latter were much better provided for than were these oppressed and degraded children and working people in the home manufactories of Great Britain.\(^7\)

The British Parliament did pass a law regulating factory labor in 1802, but it was directed primarily at protecting children taken from Poor Houses. The law restricted labor to 12 hours per day and forbade nighttime work, segregated girls and boys dormitories, and required that children have two sets of clothes.\(^8\)

By 1815, Owen at the age of 44 realized that the law had little effect, especially because most mills no longer employed children from Poor Houses, now used steam power rather than water, and had moved to large cities to take advantage of masses of cheap labor. Owen began calling for a new reforms: that children under twelve should not be employed; that the work days should be restricted to 12 hours; and that no children should be employed without passing an educational test. The Bill was later amended to prohibit the employment of children under ten, and that children between the ages of 10 and 18 were restricted to 10 and \(\frac{1}{2}\) hours of work per day. The debates went on for another year.\(^9\)

In lobbying for the bill, Owen for the first time suggested that there are useless products, “trifling baubles and luxuries which . . . were of no intrinsic value whatever,” and that these are usually produced cheaply by child labor.

No real advantage has occurred from enabling our fashionable females to purchase fine lace and muslins at one-fourth of the former prices; but, to produce them at this price, many thousands of our population have existed amidst disease and wretchedness, and have been carried prematurely to their graves.\(^10\)

But Owen, at least at this stage in his life, did not challenge the fundamental system of market capitalism. After several years of speeches and lobbying, a very weak bill finally passed in 1819. The bill, called Peel’s Act, applied only to cotton mills. It set the minimum age for child labor at 9 and limited children under 16 to 12 hours of daily labor.\(^11\) After 1819, Owen lost interest in factory reform and turned to his short-lived utopian scheme in North America, New Harmony. The first effective Factory Act was not passed until 1833. In that same year, Owen returned to Factory Reform, and began lobbying for a universal 8 hour working days for the same wages currently being paid for 10 to 12 hours of work.\(^12\)

Owen’s shortcomings in attempting child labor reform—political naiveté and lack of organization—would occur again in 1825 when he attempted his New Harmony experiment in the United States. In that experiment, he spent more time giving speeches on the east coast than setting up the community, and when he did arrive, he continued to devote most of his time to theorizing and failed to organize the community. The experiment lasted two and one-half years. Ward concludes that “unionism and factory agitation were to rise again . . . [and become] more successful, partly as a result of reacting against Owenism.”\(^13\) But by the summer of 1834, Owenism was in ruins.
Owen’s reforms at New Lanark might be called, following Karl Popper, an experiment in “piecemeal reform.” Popper makes a distinction between “utopian rationalism” and “piecemeal reform.”

Utopian rationalism is the attempt to transform a society for the sake of achieving ultimate ends. Popper argues that this is dangerous and pernicious because it is impossible to decide on ultimate goals and values rationally, and because if citizens cannot be convinced rationally to accept a blueprint, the leaders will have a tendency to resort to violence. Thus Utopian rationalism inevitably leads to tyranny. The alternative is piecemeal reform, the aim to eliminate concrete evils and not the realization of abstract goals. Owen in his experiments at New Lanark was a piecemeal reformer. Morris, as we shall see, was a utopian rationalist.

WILLIAM MORRIS

Seventy years after Owen’s experiment at New Lanark, and 63 years after the collapse of New Harmony, William Morris wrote *News from Nowhere* (1890, serialized in *The Commonwealth*), a utopian vision of an England in which small workshops have replaced large factories, large cities have mostly disappeared, all making is art-making, and the environment is filled with meadows, clean rivers and air, and beautiful buildings.

THE OLD SYSTEM OF PRODUCTION

Whereas Owen embraced the new uses of steam power and its application to running cotton mills in the new factory system, Morris was appalled by this new system of labor and production. In his 1883 lecture, “Art Under Plutocracy,” Morris proposes that the ideal system of production and art reached its high point in the Middle Ages. Apprentices learned their craft from “end to end,” and felt responsible for every stage of its progress. Production occurred in a leisurely and thoughtful way. “Such work was slow, but it was always intelligent work; there was a man’s mind in it always, and abundant tokens of human hopes and fears, the sum of which makes life for all of us.” The whole man—mind, body, and creative spirit—was involved in production. On Morris’ reading of history, this “craft-system of labour” remained relatively unchanged from “Pliny to the time of Sir Thomas More.” But, all of this began to change toward the end of the Renaissance (which Morris extends to the end of the 1600s). The “workshop-system of labour” began to be replaced by the “world-Market” (another of Morris’s many terms for a market economy). “Workmen are collected in huge factories, in which labour is divided and subdivided, till a workman is perfectly helpless in his craft if he finds himself without those above to feed his work, and those below to be fed by it.” Workers have no sense of the whole, no leisurely contemplation of the project, no use of intelligence, no creativity. “Under this system, all the romance of the arts died out . . . .” The worker is “but part of a machine, and has but one unvarying set of tasks to do; and when he has once learned these, the more regularly and with the less thought he does them, the more valuable he is.” The worker has become part of the machine, eventually to be replaced by machines.

WORK, ART & CRAFT IN THE NEW SYSTEM

In Morris’s vision of the new order in *News from Nowhere*, “all work is now pleasurable.” For Morris, this is a return to the condition of work which existed for most of human history. Like the natural state of humankind before the fall in the Genesis stories, humans willingly engaged in labor, and labor was for the most part pleasurable. For Morris the fall is the rise of the modern “competitive system” combined with the Industrial Revolution. In “Art, Wealth and Riches,” he asserts that “the art or work-pleasure, as one ought to call it . . . spring up almost
spontaneously from a kind of instinct amongst people, . . . to do the best they could with the work in hand—to make it excellent of its kind.” supra From the first dawn of history till quite modern times, Art, which Nature meant to solace all, fulfilled its purpose: all men shared in it. . . .” supra There was a time in the past, he asserts, “when art was abundant and healthy, [when] all men were more or less artists; that is to say, the instinct for beauty which is inborn in every complete man has such force that the whole body of craftsmen habitually and without conscious effort made beautiful things . . . .” supra In this natural state, projects were conceived from beginning and seen through to the end, the work was creative, and it was pleasurable. This state of nature can be revived, but only in the “absence of artificial coercion . . . .” supra And the coercion here is caused by the “workshop-system of labour” and the “world-Market.” supra

But when this coercive system is lifted, work will be creative and there will be “the freedom for every man to do what he can do best, joined to the knowledge of what productions of labour we really want.” supra For Morris, people want to work, regardless of compensation. But today only a small elite few—namely, artists, produce freely, Morris’ position is that work is naturally like the work of the artist, and it ought to return to this state. However, with the revolution in production, this natural and by that fact artistic way of producing things has gone “asleep or [is] sick.” supra

A central part of Morris’s argument here is the distinction between useful and useless objects. Work under the old system, the “world-Market,” was driven by the need to produce more and more, whether the products were needed or not. This created “a never-ending series of sham or artificial necessaries . . .” so that these wares became “of equal importance to . . . ‘the real necessaries which supported life.” supra All of this led to “a prodigious mass of work merely for the sake of keeping their wretched system going.” supra The producers were driven “to expend the least possible amount of labour on any article made, and yet at the same time to make as many articles as possible,” All was sacrificed to this “cheapening of production”; “the happiness of workman at his work, . . . his elementary comfort and bare health, his food, his clothes, his dwelling, his leisure, his amusement, his education – his life, in short – did not weigh a grain of sand in the balance against this dire necessity of ‘cheap production’ of things, a great part of which were not worth producing at all.” supra What about labor-saving machines? They saved labor but with the consequence that other, “probably useless” things could be produced. supra They simply fed the appetite of the “world-Market.” And when these products were exported to traditional societies, they destroyed their cultures and the leisure and pleasure of their lives. The system is [was] driven by the need to continually create “new wants.” supra

By contrast, in the new order, only things which are needed are produced; “nothing can be made except for genuine use.” supra Work in the new society is useful work. The only work done by machines is burdensome work. And all work which is pleasurable is done by hand. supra

Morris, then, proposes to expand the notion of art to cover most work. In News from Nowhere, he asserts that most work “can be treated as works of art . . . .” supra In Morris’s vision of the new order, art is everywhere. supra But he does not describe an environment filled with paintings and sculpture. So what does he mean when he states that art is everywhere? First, he proposes collapsing the distinction between art and craft. The decoration of everyday objects counts as art. In a lecture which Morris gave at Oxford in 1883, “Art Under Plutocracy,” he elaborates:

I . . . ask you to extend the word art beyond those matters which are consciously works of art, to take in not only painting and sculpture, and
architecture, but the shapes and colours of all household goods, nay, even the arrangement of the fields for tillage and pasture, the management of towns and of our highways of all kinds; in a word, to extend it to the aspect of all the externals of our life.\textsuperscript{47}

Second, for Morris all making can be and should be a type of art-making. He objected strongly to the restriction of Art to what today we would call high art or the fine arts. And like Tolstoy, he noted that this high art is class-bound; the only persons who “care for it” and “in a very languid way” are the upper classes.\textsuperscript{48} But in the new system, everyone is an artist.\textsuperscript{49} In the new order, without the constant drive to produce useless objects, this is possible. Workers lifted from the oppression of competitive capitalism, will once again awaken to a “craving for beauty.” They will “ornament the ware which they made; and when they had once set to work on that, it [the craving for beauty] soon began to grow. All this was helped by the abolition of squalor . . . and by the leisurely, but not stupid, country-life which now grew . . . to be common amongst us.”\textsuperscript{50} The contemporary critic would argue that Morris has a very romantic notion of the artist. He assumes that artists create because they want to create and that they find joy and a sense of accomplishment in their creations.

Morris’s idealization of the Middle Ages and his alarm over the decline of craft in the Industrial Revolution may be rather over-simplified history, but I believe he offers an important historical insight. Larry Shiner in The Invention of Art (2001) documents the “great division” between art and craft in a more workmanship like manner. He dates the formal break to 1746 with the publication of Charles Batteux’s Les Beaux arts reduit à un meme principe as the first work to lay out the modern system of the arts. Batteux divided the arts into mechanical, beaux-arts, and a combination of mechanical and beaux. Beaux-arts aim at pleasure, what we today would call disinterested contemplation, whereas the mechanical aim to minister to our needs. And the Beaux-arts involve intellectual work (“genius”); the mechanical arts only manual labor.\textsuperscript{51} Shiner notes that once this division was established, the status of the craftsman was reduced to someone who merely masters a technique and imitates models. Craft no longer involves creativity and imagination. The separation of craft from art remains to this day, although it has been challenged in the past two decades.\textsuperscript{52}

**MORRIS’S ENVIRONMENTALISM**

Perhaps to the surprise of the contemporary reader, William Morris, in contrast to Owen, by the late 1800s was acutely aware of the degradation to the environment caused by the Industrial Revolution. In his 1883 essay, “Art Under Plutocracy,” Morris laments the ugliness of the cities and towns of England. “Civilization is passing like a blight, daily growing heavier and more poisonous, over the whole face of the country . . .”\textsuperscript{53} The main character in his utopian novel, presumably Morris’s alter-ego, goes into a deep sleep and awakens in a transformed society. In his vision of a society of the 21st century, the Thames has been cleaned, salmon have returned, and the dirty factories are gone. The England of “huge and foul workshops and fouler gambling-dens, surrounded by an ill-kept, poverty-stricken farm[s]” has been replaced by small villages.\textsuperscript{54} There are “no marks of the grimy sootiness which I was used to on every London building more than a year old.” Slums have been replaced by houses “mostly built of red brick and roofed with tiles.”\textsuperscript{55} The houses, “solid,” “but countrified in appearance . . . some of them of red brick . . . but more of timber and plaster,” are “surrounded by . . . teeming garden[s].”\textsuperscript{56} The architecture reflects Morris’ taste—a combination of the “best qualities of Gothic of northern Europe with those of Saracenic and Byzantine . . .”\textsuperscript{57} “[England] . . . is now a garden,
where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty.”

But this new care for the environment has been possible because the society was willing to give up the mass production of useless objects. News from Nowhere is not a technologically progressive society. It is not filled with new gadgets or futurist forms of transportation. Indeed, the main character in the novel, William Guest, receives a grand tour of the country and travels primarily and quite slowly by river boat. While travelling the Thames, the visitor is surprised that the river transport system uses old-fashioned locks. His guide responds that while waiting, one can enjoy scenery and birds and engage in conversation. The visitor’s guide states that “this is not an age of inventions.” He goes on to explain that after the Revolution, many machines were gradually discarded. “Machines could not produce works of art, and . . . works of art were more and more called for.” Workers relearned crafts and “have added their utmost refinement of workmanship to the freedom of fancy and imagination.”

Morris’s generous definition of art is also part of his environmentalism. In “Art Under Plutocracy,” Morris includes as art “the beauty of the earth,” and laments that his generation has so abused this beauty. As noted above, for Morris this love for the beauty of the earth is natural to humans and has only recently been destroyed, or covered up, by the Industrial Revolution. Now that this has been unveiled, there is “delight in the life of the world; intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells, . . .”

“This . . . was to be the new spirit of the time”; the new order has renewed a “passionate love of the earth.” He begs the current generation “to keep the air pure and the rivers clean, to take some pains to keep the meadows and tillage as pleasant as reasonable use will allow them to be; to allow peaceable citizens freedom to wander where they will, so they do not hurt to garden or cornfield . . .”

The beauty of the environment extends to human dress. Several times in News from Nowhere, Morris describes the clothes of the residents of the new England as covered with embroidery and as made not only for comfort and utility but for beauty.

Concluding reflections

Morris combines in a very clever way art, economics, and concern for the environment. The economic system of capitalism, he argues, with its drive for the production of mostly useless objects, which is necessary to keep the system going, tramples over the environment. His nostalgic and utopian solution is to return to what most historians would regard as a highly mythical version of life in the Middle Ages—most production is done in small craft shops, even utilitarian objects are filled with ornament, and the environment is filled with beautiful buildings and gardens. For Morris, “passionate love of the earth” is a sentiment which cannot be separated from the socio-economic system. He blames most of the abuse of the environment on capitalism and the drive for ever expanding markets, which in turn has resulted in the factory system and the mass production of useless objects. It is this mixture of an economic system and the new forms of production which is the cause of social and environmental maladies.

It may seem too fantastical to expect a dramatic change in the socio-economic system of the U.S. and of much of the world in order to make work once again humane and to return to a system in which all work involved craft and by that fact was a form of art-making. After all, even the most ardent critic of the current economic system and defender of the environment does not wish to give up quick flights to Europe, mobile phones, and iPads. But Morris is on
the right track in suggesting that growth cannot continue indefinitely. We will probably sooner or later have to move toward a no-growth society and economic system, and when we do, Morris’s plea for a return to the craft tradition may seem more plausible.

Tony Judt, a year before his recent untimely death, gave a lecture at New York University in which he asks: “Why is it that here in the United States we have such difficulty even imagining a different sort of society from the one whose dysfunctions and inequalities trouble us so?” He continues that “we appear to have lost the capacity to question the present, much less offer alternatives to it. Why is it so beyond us to conceive of a different set of arrangements to our common advantage?” He observes that in current debates over public policy, the first question we ask is not whether it is good or bad, but whether it is efficient, productive, whether it will contribute to economic growth.

The lack of imagination in the U.S. today is evident in the calls by some to a return to the Gilded Age in the U.S. and the era of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Both of these periods were filled with social ills—gross inequality, rampant abuse of the environment, ugliness, abuse of workers, and grinding poverty of the masses. The kind of utopian thinking which Morris engaged in has the value of stretching our imaginations. After all, utopian thinking is really nothing more than social and environmental planning, but with the addition of rethinking the fundamentals.

NOTES

2. Ibid., 170-172.
5. “New Lanark Address,” 1816, quoted in Bestor, 63.
8. Ibid., 100-102.
9. Ibid., 102-103.
10. Ibid., 114.
11. Ibid., 112-114.
12. Ibid., 123.
13. Ibid., 130.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 361.
Morris, ”Art Under Plutocracy,” 176.

22. Ibid., 178.

23. Ibid., 177.

24. Ibid.


29. Morris, News from Nowhere, 78.


33. Morris, News from Nowhere, 79.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Morris, ”The Beauty of Life,” 56.

37. Morris, News from Nowhere, 79.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 79-80.

41. Ibid., 80.

42. Ibid., 81.

43. Ibid., 82.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 83.

46. Ibid., 87.

47. Morris, ”Art under Plutocracy,” 164-65.


49. Ibid., 154.

50. Morris, News from Nowhere, 115.


52. Ibid., 112-115.


54. Morris, News from Nowhere, 61.

55. Ibid., 6.

56. Ibid., 19.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 61.

59. Ibid., 146.

60. Ibid., 155.

61. Morris, ”Art under Plutocracy,” 165. Morris draws a distinction between ”Intellectual Art” and ”Decorative art.” Intellectual Art has as its sole purpose to ”feed the mind.” Decorative Art is for the ”service of the body.” Morris makes the historical claim that all human cultures at all times have had decorative art, but not all have had Intellectual Art. And when both are present in a culture, if the culture is healthy, the two are intimately connected. But Morris proposes that in contemporary England they are not closely connected. ”Art under Plutocracy,” 165-66.


63. Ibid.

64. Ibid., 179.

65. Morris, ”Art under Plutocracy,” 170.

67. The lecture was given on October 19, 2009. It was reprinted as, “What is Living and What is Dead in Social Democracy,” *New York Review of Books*, 17 December 2009, 86.

68. Ibid.
The last ten to fifteen years have seen an explosion of interest and research into what now is most commonly called sustainable design. In an article called “The Greening of the Humanities,” David Orr, Professor of Environmental Studies, says, “…One of our main interests is design: how to live in ways that are ecologically sound as well as aesthetically pleasing… Environmentalism,” he concludes, “is ultimately, a question of design—of ethical design.” But the article doesn’t discuss what is meant by design or what form this ethical design might take in the art classes where design is usually taught. In recent years, great strides have been made in understanding the nature of sustainable design, green building, ecological arts and the many other like descriptors used to characterize the diverse efforts to build an environment which, in all its manifold forms, creates an aesthetically pleasing and sustainable culture. Yet to this day, little attention has been given to developing visual arts pedagogy based on principles of sustainability. If sustainability is, as all indications seems to suggest, a major and growing issue of our time and the future yet to come, then what would an education in the visual arts look like that would meet these emerging needs?

This paper will explore principles of biophilic design and Christopher Alexander’s pattern language theories and suggest they could form the basis of an ecological aesthetic useful in the education of artists. I will argue that above all else, an ecological pedagogy will require a shift in consciousness in which art’s relationship to nature is thoroughly woven into the fabric of art education. This doesn’t mean that art students and art teachers become land, environmental or eco-artists. It is not a matter of style or subject matter (though for some this may be the case), but rather a way of thinking, a habit of mind deeply rooted in the creative process. It is a kind of consciousness that understands and appreciates what William McDonough, the renowned green architect, advocates in his Hanover Principles. Pre-eminent among them is the insistence “on the rights of humanity and nature to co-exist” and “recognizes interdependence; the elements of human design interact with and depend upon the natural world, with broad and diverse implications at every scale.”

Since the mid 1990’s, some have articulated and put into practice principles of art and design that effectively address the rich, infinitely complex ways in which art and nature are or can be intertwined. In essence, they argue that humans, as biological organisms whose very existence is dependent upon nature, need to understand that nature’s systems offers profound, unlimited opportunities for solving some of our most pressing problems. Janine Benyus coined the term Bio-mimicry to describe how biology’s designs can and should serve as a template for human designs. In 1998 Leeds certification was instituted and has since grown to play a major role not only in questions of energy efficiency but also in design. William McDonough’s cradle to cradle ideas advocate designs that produce energy rather than consume it. These initiatives, though very important, focus primarily on questions of energy efficiency, waste management, sustainable materials and other low environmental impact issues more appropriate for the scientist or the engineer than the artist. It’s not that artists cannot learn much from these ideas, but they don’t specifically address the aesthetic dimension of sustainability or ecological design. As the architect James Wines has said, “If it isn’t beautiful, it’s not sustainable.” Architect Stephen Kieren in his critique of LEED certification amplifies this view.
LEED certification with all its enormous influence and benefits, sanctions architecture by addition, giving us points for good behavior, but no points for beauty… LEED “bling” is here among us and threatens the very soul of what environmental design is attempting to accomplish, because it is not yet aesthetic… The aim here is to speculate on the notion of an aesthetic derived from an integral, not an additive, relationship with the natural world. Nothing of beauty has ever been made by addition or by counting points.¹

Yale University social ecologist Stephen Kellert is among those who understand the vital role of aesthetics in ecological design. Kellert coined the term biophilic design which he defines as “the deliberate attempt to translate an understanding of the inherent human affinity with natural systems and processes—known as biophilia—in the design of the built environment.”² He claims that,

Biophilia nonetheless is a “weak” biological tendency that is reliant on adequate learning, experience and socio-cultural support for it to become functionally robust. As a weak biological tendency, biophilic values can be highly variable and subject to human choice and free will, but the adaptive value of these choices is ultimately bound by biology. Thus, if our biophilic tendencies are insufficiently stimulated and nurtured, they will remain latent, atrophied, and dysfunctional…. Thus, our creative constructions of the human built environment can be either a positive facilitator or a harmful impediment to the biophilic need for ongoing contact with natural systems and processes … Unfortunately, the prevailing approach to design of the modern built environment has encouraged the massive transformation and degradation of natural systems and increasing human separation from the natural world.³

Kellert argues that this situation is not an inevitable by-product of modern urban life, but rather a fundamental design flaw. He claims that if we have designed ourselves into this problem we can design ourselves out of it with a new paradigm for development of the modern built environment. Kellert outlines two basic features of biophilic design,

1. The organic or naturalistic dimension defined as shapes and forms in the built environment that directly, indirectly, or symbolically reflect the inherent human affinity for nature. Direct experience refers to relatively unstructured contact with self-sustaining features of the natural environment such as daylight, plants, animals, natural habitats, and ecosystems. Indirect experience involves contact with nature that requires ongoing human input to survive such as a potted plant, water fountain, or aquarium. Symbolic or vicarious experience involves no actual contact with real nature, but rather the representation of the natural world through image, picture, video, metaphor, and more.⁴

2. Place-based or vernacular design “defined as buildings and landscapes that connect to the culture and ecology of a locality or geographic area. This dimension includes what has been called a sense or, better spirit of place, underscoring how buildings and landscapes of meaning to people become integral to their individual and collective identities. Metaphorically
transforming inanimate matter into something that feels lifelike and often sustains life.”

Although artists may include direct and indirect uses of nature in their work, they are, according to Kellert’s ideas, primarily concerned with symbolic representations of nature. He says, “Like other aspects of experience rooted in human genetics, these symbolic forms elusively reflect our affinity for nature. We take them for granted, often recognizing and appreciating their virtue when they are threatened or have been destroyed.” If these forms are elusive, taken for granted, and are often appreciated when threatened or destroyed, then it seems that we don’t have a very strong conscious sense of what they are or the ability to re-create them in cultural contexts often detached from the natural processes that made them possible in the first place. “Have we become so disconnected from the natural world,” says Kiernan, “that we have to develop an environmental culture before we appreciate the beauty of an integral “natural solution?” What role then can studio art education play in forming an environmental culture necessary to “appreciate the beauty of an integral design solution?” Kellert suggests a possible direction such an inquiry might follow. “This symbolic expression,” he says, “is an important aspect of the “pattern language” of timeless, celebrated creation that is described by architect Christopher Alexander in his seminal work on the subject.”

Christopher Alexander and his colleagues,” according to Van der Ryn and Cowan in their book Ecological Design, “presented a powerful new theory of design with important ecological ramifications.” But these authors never say what these ramifications might be. Alexander’s ideas about patterns and centers may help articulate a dimension of ecological design that has not to date been fully explored, especially in regard to art education at the most fundamental levels.

Christopher Alexander is a professor emeritus at UC Berkeley. He is the author of numerous books, the most important of which is A Pattern Language, the number one best selling architecture book listed on Amazon.com. He has built private residences, a university, public housing and commercial buildings on four continents.

“I am interested,” says Alexander, “in one question above all—how to make beautiful buildings.” “The beauty of a building,” he says, “its life, and its capacity to support life, all come from the fact that it is working as a whole.” Viewing an object as a whole means that it is part of an extended continuum in which the “behavior, character, and structure of the local parts are determined by the larger whole in which they exist and which they create.” Within the context of the whole there are entities or sub-wholes, the totality of which are created by and contribute to the wholeness of a thing. Alexander calls these local entities, or parts, centers. The term center is more appropriate than whole to describe these entities because the word whole implies a fixed boundary distinguishing where the whole begins and ends. A center suggests a more permeable, inter-connection with other centers that help delineate the wholeness bounding its edge. In a living system all entities such as a door, window, wall or building are centers or exist in relation to centers in the portion of the space they inhabit. For instance, to call a kitchen sink a whole implies that it is an isolated object. To call it a center suggests that the sink is part of a larger pattern of things. It makes the sink feel more like a thing which radiates out beyond its borders and takes its place in relation to the kitchen as a whole, just as the kitchen takes its place in relation to the house and the house in relation to the street and so on.
The strength of any given center is not only its internal shape but also the influence of other shapes or entities with which it interacts. Centers do not exist independently, but appear as elements generated within and gaining meaning from the configuration of the whole. The wholeness of a thing, therefore, is fluid and subject to small or large changes as the configurations within and around it are modified. As one develops a drawing, for instance, each additional line, if accurately placed, modifies the relationship among centers and changes the whole, however slightly. A center is made from interrelated parts that are constantly adapting to the many modifications in the context of the whole as it changes over time. The leaves of a tree, for instance, are never identical but are slightly different because of the multitude of environmental factors attendant to their growth. The tree’s growth and ever changing form, however, is partly determined by the inherent structural/genetic code particular to its species. The parts of the tree are shaped by the life of the tree as a whole and the tree as a whole retains its character despite its ever-changing parts. Some spaces have richer and denser configurations of centers and some spaces have very few. The greater intensity of nested, interlocked centers, the greater the degree of life and the more beautiful the entity or whole will be.

Alexander’s notion of wholeness is strikingly different from notions of wholeness presented art foundations textbooks. One leading textbook, Launching the Imagination by Mary Stewart, defines design as the organization “of disparate parts into a coherent whole, as in composing a brochure.” Yet no distinction is made between brochures that are coherent and those that are not. It also defines design as “an arrangement of lines, shapes, colors and textures into an artistic whole, as in the composition of a painting or sculpture.” This notion of the whole gives very little indication of what a whole is except that it is coherent and composed of various formal elements. Another leading foundations textbook, Art Fundamentals, uses the term organic unity to describe the process of creating wholeness. “...The artist,” according the text, “attempts to make all parts of the work mutually interactive and interrelated—as they are in a living organism.” It then goes on to argue that,

A television set might be used as an illustration of organic unity because it has a complex of parts intended to function as do the organs in a living body. A television set contains the minimum of parts necessary to function, and these parts work only when properly assembled with respect to each other. When all are activated they become organically unified in the same way as the parts of the human body. Surely Dr. Frankenstein would appreciate this analogy! As in the case of sophisticated engineering, this case of sophisticated “wholeness,” is what is sought in art.

Any thought of associating the “sophisticated engineering” of a television set with the “organic unity” and “wholeness” of the human body fails to understand that a human life is far more complex and mysterious than the assemblage of the physical parts that go into making it. It is this kind of mechanistic thinking about the processes of natural and artistic creation which have resulted in so much confusion. Although recent advances in nanotechnology and DNA manipulation, among other advanced technologies, have profoundly muddled the distinctions between the mechanical and the organically alive, the reference to Dr. Frankenstein suggests that the mechanistic model of replicating wholeness in nature produces living forms more akin to monsters than beautiful objects.
In general these books, like most studio foundations textbooks, are organized like an encyclopedia. They describe, for instance, various properties of line: actual lines, contour lines, gesture drawing, calligraphic lines, organizational lines, implied lines and then describes various uses of lines such as to define, enclose, connect and dissect. The same procedure is then followed for shape, texture, value and color. As with any encyclopedic catalog these brief definitions of the component parts of form provide a very valuable reference, but do nothing to foster a meaningful sense of a living whole. It is an additive process wherein one learns the uses of each property in and of themselves and then adds them together to create more complex forms. Mary Stewart does reference Gestalt theory by saying “visual information is understood holistically before it is examined separately.” She goes on to explain, “When presented with a collection of separate visual units, we immediately try to create order.” But even here the holistic order she mentions is focused primarily on the internal organization of the work’s form independent of any reference to the world beyond the object depicted. It is a self-contained unit.

In contrast, Alexander argues that the living quality of a form is dependent upon it being thoroughly woven into a dense inter-related web of centers, the generation of which results from active human interaction with and understanding of the infinitely complex web of centers in nature itself. The morphological structures of nature become—whether consciously or not—the model for the artist’s creation. But what specific characteristics do such living wholes possess? Identifying such characteristics and articulating their structure is necessary if one hopes to teach them to young artists. Alexander’s research led him to identify fifteen properties he believes naturally arise in both human made and natural forms that possess life. They are:

• Levels of Scale. Differentiation of scale within the constituent parts of an object should include jumps in levels of scale that are not too great or too little, yet include some kind of variety. The gradations of scale should formulate humanly meaningful transitions from one part to the next wherein small centers contribute to intensifying the larger ones.

• Strong Centers. Means that objects possess a center of attention, a focal point wherein the power of the center is created by a sequence of nearby centers leading up to it. In general, there is a principle structure or form with other structures or forms subsidiary to it.

• Boundaries. Helps define and focus attention on the center. Boundaries help to produce centers while also uniting them with larger fields of centers adjoining the bounded space. Boundaries at once interlock, connect and facilitate transitions from one center to another while also differentiate and separate.

• Alternating Repetition. Centers intensify other centers by their repetition. The repetition, however, isn’t banal or uniformly exact, but is a subtle variation of interlocking and alternating rhythms throughout the whole.

• Positive Space. In this context positive space means the integration of positive and negative space wherein no part of the whole, whether solid or void, is superfluous.
• **Good Shape.** Is an attribute of the whole configuration in which the parts are composed of multiple coherent centers. Small or minor centers create potential for a much more complex system of cross-relationships in space.

• **Local Symmetries.** In any complex whole there are nearly always complex local or asymmetrical forces at work. The Alhambra, for example, has no overall symmetry, but countless local symmetries that adapt to the irregularities of the site and different stages of construction. Neo-classical buildings, in contrast, have perfectly rigid overall symmetry in which the numbing uniform repetition throughout the whole results in a lifeless structure.

• **Deep Interlock and Ambiguity.** Meaning an ambiguous zone between the center and its surroundings that intensifies the whole while also making it difficult to disentangle the center from surroundings. The center and its surroundings interpenetrate each other. A good example would be a gallery or arcade surrounding a building.

• **Contrast.** Emphasizes the differentiation of properties such as light and shadow or void and solid essential for distinguishing centers within the whole. Unity can only be created in relation to distinguishing and clarifying discernable opposites within the configuration of centers.

• **Gradients.** Describes slow gradual changes or transitions in size and character of objects in response to unique and ever changing conditions in the built and natural environment. Most standardized, mass produced objects, being uniform in character, discourage the presence of gradients in the built environment.

• **Roughness.** Objects possess a quality of being unfinished yet seem to be complete and unified. Design includes subtle variations and irregularities.

• **Echoes.** This property implies family resemblances among all the constituent parts. Each part or center contains an echo of other centers in the whole. Each part is different yet certain characteristics are shared among them.

• **The Void.** The most profound centers possess a void at their heart or center. At the center of the center is a void. Alters of churches, for instance, or the empty space at the church crossing creates a kind of stillness at the center. It is a psychological rather than a structural requirement of the form.

• **Simplicity and Inner Calm.** This property results when everything unnecessary is eliminated. Shaker furniture is a perfect example. The superfluous is removed, only the essential remains.

• **Not-Separateness.** Implies living whole at one with the world. Cannot tell where one thing breaks off and another begins. Although objects are well defined and self-sufficient they are seamlessly integrated into the space surrounding them.

Alexander claims that these fifteen principles are rooted to natural systems inherent to the way nature operates. These properties, therefore, are perhaps fundamental to all physical structures.
and would therefore appear in nature at many scales as well as in successful objects produced by artists. For example, the property levels of scale is present in countless natural systems. In a cell, tree, mountain or river there are recognizable hierarchies of scale in the organization of these functional systems. “The presence of a continuous range of structures at different scales, with one level never too far from the next level above or below, is common both in organic or inorganic nature.” The roots, trunk, branches, limbs and leaves of a tree form a coherent hierarchy of scale in its physical structure necessary to successfully carry the weight and nutrients vital to its existence. The pervasiveness of levels of scale in natural systems may demonstrate that natural and human made objects can share much in common. Alexander suggests that the formation of centers in human artifacts is analogous to the organic processes inherent to the generation of centers in natural systems. Putting together objects according to these principles in a mechanical, cookbook like fashion, however, won’t necessarily result in art works possessing strong centers.

In regard to the formation of an ecological aesthetic for the visual arts, Alexander’s theory of centers and the fifteen properties related to them offers a holistic approach to creating and articulating design principles consonant with the processes of nature. They may be of great help in creating a coherent language for describing specific characteristics of organic form in the built environment as they are related to and generated from natural systems. As such they are a means to identify, critically evaluate and establish standards by which to determine the ecological dimension of creating art at the most fundamental levels. From evaluating a simple drawing to creating a complex installation, Alexander’s notion of centers and the fifteen properties generated from them could be used in designing the initial stages of the project as well as critiquing the finished product.

Some educators devote time to demonstrating the relationship between the formal elements and the processes of nature, but the textbooks usually don’t. If biophilic or ecological design is important and necessary for re-establishing a healthy contact with nature and creating places and objects worthy of veneration, then establishing principles of design consonant with the ways nature operates will be necessary to ensure that biophilic design becomes a habit of mind and a natural part of the design process. We won’t have a meaningful greening of art pedagogy until the way we think about the formal elements is informed with an understanding of the processes of nature from which they originate.

In her article, “The Ecological Imperative,” Suzi Gablik argues that “restoring an awareness of our symbiotic relationship with nature becomes the most pressing spiritual and political need of our time.” She concludes by saying, “As we move towards an environment of limits... The self that sees beyond merely personal existence to inter-subjective coexistence and community is the ecological self.” This is precisely what biophilic design seeks to do. The designer from this perspective has a responsibility to create forms that enrich the community by creating places worth preserving while establishing a healthy sustainable relationship to nature. The artist’s freedom therefore is bound up with working within the limits of nature laws. To transgress these limits means to violate the natural systems of nature, thus resulting in human made forms degrading the environment and violating our relationship to it. Foundations courses in studio art and even art history are the places to begin the process of teaching an awareness of and appreciation for sustainable design.
NOTES

4. Ibid, 244.
7. Ibid, 5
8. Ibid, 6.
15. Ibid, 80.
17. Ibid, xix.
19. Stewart, Launching the Imagination, 68
20. Ibid, 68
FOR THE BIRDS

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When I was a boy in school our teachers and textbooks poked fun at the Native American belief that the Creator could be found in every pebble, mountain and star. Some Native Americans, along with other cultures, believe our souls enter birds before leaving the earth.

We have a religious connection with birds. Noah sent a raven out over the flood but it went to and fro, back and forth, round and round. Then on the seventh day he released a dove and by evening it returned and as Scripture says, “(L)o, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.” A dove supposedly appeared over Jesus’ head after his cousin John baptized him. The dove still represents peace.

We see in birds things we admire, teach us and even sometimes fear. Emily Dickinson wrote, “Hope is the thing with feathers.” Albert Camus said, “Great ideas come into the world as gently as doves.” Merlin turned Arthur into a bird to make him see from the sky that there are no boundary lines between peoples and nations. Yet we also have Winston Churchill saying, at the start of the nuclear era, “Doomsday will come on the glittery wings of science.”

In Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird, the last name of Atticus and his two children is “Finch”—a species of bird. At one point in the novel Atticus tells his children “it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” because for him it was akin to killing that which is innocent—like Tom Robinson—the black man accused of raping a white woman. A more disturbing example of how birds figure into our psyche comes with the character Clarice Starling, the FBI agent in Silence of the Lambs. Starlings like most birds find and devour insects. The serial killer in the movie skins women and puts insects in the mouths of his victims.

Birds evoke emotions in us. Do the robins bring spring or does spring bring robins? Its moot, of course, the sense of a new beginning comes with the arrival of both. So hopeful a time it is a friend used to make a wish at the first sight of a Robin. Yet, according to the English poet, writer and critic A. Alvarez,1 the suicide rate is higher in spring than at any other time of the year. When you are sliding backward into the abyss is it all the more painful to see the world bursting with new life?

Whose heart in the Northeast hasn’t sunk, even a little, when at autumn’s end the geese go honking by overhead? They are, Hal Borland wrote, the “voice of freedom and adventure … the epitome of wanderlust, limitless horizons, and distant travel.”2 They make us understand such adventure is closed to us, at least for a while, as we hole up for winter.

My uncle was an upholsterer and when I was young I sometimes helped him pick up and deliver furniture. We went to this one older man’s house once. He was deaf and my uncle and him wrote notes to each other regarding the work he had done. Not wanting to be in the way I wandered to a back window. There I saw numerous birdhouses dotting his lawn. I didn’t
understand it then. But now, as my hearing fades more, I find myself putting up birdhouses and
the interior of my house contains images of birds and select birdhouses.

I even have one faux bird in a cage but I leave the door open. It reminds me of Michelangelo’s
statue “Night,” where the male figure is half in the stone of which he is made. The bird doesn’t
leave because it’s inanimate and we do not leave the stone because as Michelangelo wrote, in
whatever mood he was in, “Not to see, not to hear [or feel] is for me the best fortune. So do not
wake me! Speak softly.”

Leonardo DaVinci is credited with having first thought of a machine capable of vertical flight—
today’s helicopter. Nobody knows why he came up with the idea but I think birds must have
inspired him.

Yet despite hundreds of research years and billions of dollars, we still haven’t come up with a
helicopter that can fly with the agility and multi-range ability as a single sparrow. Or sing while
doing it! Or even mate while flying—as some birds are capable of doing! (Take that you
helicopter planners!)

There are mating calls, territorial calls, warning calls, alarm calls, rally calls and it’s lovely that
we call all these and more—singing. Who else among earth’s creatures, including ourselves, sing
their days away? Who else among earth’s creatures are around us on such a constant basis and
yet we tend to go about our business and not really acknowledge them on a conscious level.

We attribute special qualities to birds, like the Owl’s wisdom. We say somebody is crazy as a
Lune. We call people “love birds” when caught up in the first sweet, trance-like throes of
romance. If you’re not brave you’re a “chicken.” From the 1880s into the 1960s the majority of
American states enforced segregation through “Jim Crow” laws—so-called after a black
character in minstrel shows.

I’m not sure if birds are like us in that way in their own way? But maybe so—we have
mockingbirds after all! So, do you suppose it’s possible they might comment when they see a
not-so-bright bird, “Doesn’t he remind you of Dan Quayle?” Or if a bird is playing tricks they
might say, “He’s such a Nixon.” And when they spot a Blue Jay kill a baby bird do they draw
references to Josef Mengele, the German SS officer and physician at Auschwitz, the so-called
the Angel of Death?

We talk about birds in unseemly ways. For example we casually and without thinking comment
about killing two birds with one stone. We also strategize about getting our ducks in a row as if
easier to kill or to win an argument. When we say so-and-so is “for the birds” it isn’t a positive
thing (except in this essay!) And I still haven’t been able to find the origin of the phrase
“flipping the bird.”

In the old days canaries were carried into coalmines each morning. If they keeled over, miners
got out as quickly as they could. Methane gas was leaking and explosions would surely follow.
But I don’t recall anybody ever thanking canaries for their help in saving human lives or
expressing gratitude to them with a dignified burial.

Today we become rightly horrified when birds get sucked into jet engines, and there have been
nearly 60,000 such incidents reported since the year 2000. Yet what about the garbage
disposal-like grinding up of the birds themselves? Does that evoke a tear or two? And do we figure them into our equations about what is happening or what is to be done?

What has increasingly saddened me most over the years is the phrase “road kill.” I was at a restaurant once where the entire menu was a joking satire on dead animals, including birds.

How lovely. Through urbanization, deforestation, mining, logging and numerous other kinds of human activity we are destroying the natural habitat of wildlife, including birds, at an increasingly accelerated rate. In fact, habitat destruction is currently ranked as the most important cause of species extinction worldwide. Add to this the Federal Highway Administration report that there are some four million miles of roads in the United States and 250 million registered cars and trucks.

Can there be anything more repugnant than destroying the habitat of birds and animals and then joking about their death on our roadways as “road kill”? Yes there can. Not only do squirrels and birds lie dead in the road, we drive over them over and over again. We smash and mash them until they literally disappear.

I carry a shovel in the trunk of my car to bury the bird and animal dead. “What you do to the least of my creatures,” the holy man pleaded.

Over the years I have begun to wonder about birds and whether they are trying to break through the wall that separates us from them? I wonder if they are trying to tell us things only we aren’t paying attention, or we can’t hear them because they don’t talk like we do.

Recent research contends that modern birds originated a hundred million years ago, long before the disappearance of dinosaurs. They are our single connection to an ancient past and I wonder if they carry some kind of molecular memory of the once empty world? Because they know this are they trying to warn us about what we are doing to our world?

Could it be that because they are more sensitive to, and threatened by, our poisoning of the water and air that they are developing a heightened consciousness of their own survival? Because they are on the front lines of climate change, which some see as irreversible, are they developing extraordinary powers of expression? Maybe the veil between their world and ours is increasingly thin.

I do not want you to think I indulge in fantastical thinking when I tell you some of my personal experiences with birds, and the possibility they are trying to show us our common bond. I have a skeptical intellect and a religious heart. I did my PhD dissertation on Walter Lippmann, a philosopher-journalist who believed in and dedicated his life to irrationality. (One critic charged he had an irrational faith in rationality). But I also have a religious—or more accurately—a spiritual heart. I was in the seminary. A skeptical intellect and spiritual heart has caused many an internal debate—if not consternation.

One of the earliest experiences I can remember in regards to my awareness of the thin veil between birds and us was the summer I spent with my maternal grandmother. I was in my mid-twenties. She was dying and my parents stayed with her at the hospital during the day, and I would relieve them and stay at night.
Some nights before going to the hospital, I’d stop by my Irish friend John’s house. He loved poetry—loved the way words sounded—and on this one particular night he recited Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven.” I made a mental note that I didn’t really know what a raven looked like. Was it like a crow—a very big crow?

John and I said good-bye to each other and I went to the hospital. I sat by my grandmother’s bed. She was unconscious most of the time then, but once in awhile would roll her head from side to side and groan. I couldn’t tell if it was from the pain or that she didn’t want any more drugs. She loved the living world and maybe wanted to be lucid at the end. My mother would tell me later that she tried to get up earlier that day. Did she want to touch the earth one last time?

I got up around ten the following morning and as I sat on the couch reading the morning paper, I heard this caw, caw cawing outside. It seemed to be coming from the front steps. Still in pajamas and bathrobe I went to the door. My dog, which barked at almost anything, remained silent—and stayed very close to me as I went to the door. She seemed, like me, afraid or at least uncertain.

I reached the door and looked out and on the steps was this very big black bird. It looked back at me with green, murky eyes that sent a shiver through me. I told it to go. “Go away,” I said loudly, gesturing with my hand. A sense away of foreboding began to come over me. “Go away,” I said again, but it did not move. Finally, on its own accord, it flew away, unusually slow and close to the ground. My Grandmother died later that day.

Probably the most poignant experiences I’ve had with birds came awhile back, during the Cold War, when the world seemed on the brink of a nuclear holocaust. The esteemed psychologist Robert Jay Lifton had put forth the theory that we were “psychically numb” to the possibility of a nuclear war. That is, we couldn’t bring to the surface and consciously grasp our own or the planet’s extinction.¹ This wasn’t true for me and I wanted to find out if it was true for others.

As such, I recorded interviews with more than 500 people of all ages in 38 states over the course of four summers. One of my core questions, apropos here, was what they would miss most about the world after a nuclear war. I was surprised at how many said they would miss birds. Not, mind you, their children, loved ones, parents, and friends. They said birds, often quickly, and without equivocation. Sometimes tears would suddenly spill from their eyes as they heard their own answer.

Jonathan Schell had written a powerful, widely read book at the time titled The Fate of the Earth. In it he talked about the insects we hate most, such as cockroaches and mosquitoes, being able to tolerate high doses of radiation. They would multiple even more quickly than they do now and grow larger, said Schell. They would come to dominate the earth and skies because birds—their natural predators—who are much more sensitive to radiation, would have all died.² Schell named this part of his book “A Republic of Insects and Grass.”

With questions such as “What would you do if the missiles were on their way?” or “What would you say to a loved one at the end?”—it felt as though the people I interviewed had revealed secrets unknown even to themselves before.
Our conversation had been emotionally intimate, and many seemed wounded. Because of this I often lingered afterward to make our separation more gradual. During this stretch of time, I gently asked to those who said they would miss birds after a nuclear war, if they had read Schell’s book. None had.

On three different occasions on my trips around America, I accidentally killed two birds. Once was on a road late at night, the other on a four-lane highway. Both times I thought the birds might have been barn swallow. I had not seen many since my youth and missed them. I still don’t know if I am like them or want to be like them.

Hal Borland describes the bird, which he calls a “Swift” bird, improvising moment by moment when flying, as if “too exuberant to be confined by patterns. They make up their flight-songs as they go along, exultant, practically jubilant at being alive...”

After killing the second bird, I vowed that if I hit another bird again I would stop to bury it. If we would miss birds so much after a nuclear war, shouldn’t we care more about them now? On a back road in Missouri, I hit a third bird. It bumped against the top of the windshield of my van too quickly for me to hit the brakes or to know for sure what kind of bird it was. My brief glimpse, however, made me think it was a barn swallow.

I immediately pulled over to the side of road. I got out and looked everywhere for the bird but couldn’t find it. It was then I knelt in the tall grass under the wide-open, cloudless, sky and uttered my first prayer for the birds. I don’t remember what I said; the experience was too new and raw for me. But I’m sure I said that I was sorry and had asked to be forgiven.

I drove further on the same road and a short while later the sky above me was thick with male and female Cardinals. Sunflower farms extended for miles and miles around. I had never seen a flock of Cardinals before, let alone the immensity of what covered the sky. You hardly ever see more than one male and female Cardinal together. They are territorial and almost always occupy a small tract of land.

Was there a connection between the praying and this extraordinary sight? Probably not, I thought. But then, later in the same afternoon, exhausted from driving in the excruciating heat and somewhat emotionally drained, I spread out a blanket in a very large Kansas City park and fell into a deep sleep.

I awakened to a strange sound. I rubbed my eyes awake and looked up to see where the sound was coming from. I smiled, groggy though I was, because in the distance I saw two barn swallows playing merrily, as if they were best friends or lovers. Then they suddenly turned back, as if having forgotten something, and sailed back around a large clump of tall trees. It was silent for a few moments but then I heard this happy, chaotic squawking. A whole flock of barn swallows appeared, sailing by in the distance and then disappearing. Had they heard about my prayer? Had they come, like the Cardinals, to thank me for being concerned about them? I could not know.

But what I did come to know was that a sky covered in Cardinals never happened to me again. Nor did I ever again see such a happy flock of barn swallows, the birds I had loved as a boy.
There were other moments since then, like the time a Mourning Dove flew into the glass door of my house and broke its neck. That’s mourning “m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g” and not “m-o-r-n-i-n-g.” There was a party going on in my house at the time and I put the bird into a shoebox for later burial.

The party ended and later that night I got a phone call that a mutual friend of ours had committed suicide. Chris liked bourbon and smoked cigarettes. I buried the bird, and sat before its freshly dug grave. I toasted Chris with a shot of bourbon and took a few drags from a cigarette. And then I visited with him for a while, remembering his intensity, his humor, and the experiences we had had doing documentary work together. Some cultures believe our souls enter birds before after a person dies.

I wrote a book about a 12-year-old girl who died of a brain tumor. The book ends with the third year of a camp in northern New York State for children with cancer. It was an unforgettable experience, topped off with another connection with birds.

When the buses loaded with children with cancer are about to arrive at the campgrounds, the Olympic theme blares over a static-ridden loudspeaker and counselors, nurses, doctors and volunteers of all ages and sizes emerge from cabins, campground, dining hall and lake. They race, sometimes tripping and falling to get to the buses before they arrived. It reminded me of the opening scene of MASH when the nurses and doctors race to the helicopter or trucks bring the wounded.

The children with cancer are greeted with enthusiastic and wild cheering. The goal was to make them forget what they had been through and were enduring. Some of the counselors even got on the bus before the campers had a chance to get off just to say, “Hi,” or “Welcome” or say nothing at all but begin hugging anybody they could get their hands on.

When the children finally started to get off the bus it still seemed like MASH: Who was bald from chemotherapy, or missing an arm or a leg. Who hobbled from too much pain.

It’s difficult to see a child or even two in this condition, but when there are 90 or more the sight can’t help but shake you to your core. I noticed an older woman, a volunteer, get up from her seat on the front row of the bleachers and move behind them. She began having dry heaves and one of the counselors noticed. Going up to her I heard him say, “You stop that right now. These kids are here to have fun and we’re going to give it to them.”

Equally devastating, though for a different reason, was the end of camp, when the children were to return to the relative isolation of home—or go back to the hospital or a school that was reluctant to take them. We don’t like to be reminded of sickness and death. The fact that they are children makes it even more unavoidable.

For two weeks children with cancer sang, laughed, shouted, cheered, and told secrets, and now it was at an end. Children and adults were hugging and weeping in saying their good-byes. A TV anchorman lowered his microphone and collapsed on a bench. His cameraman wandered away, unable to do his job. When children and staff say good-bye to each other at other camps they’re sad because they may not see each other for another year. At a camp for children with cancer when they say good-bye it could be forever.
The buses left—one slowly after the other, and running out in front of each was a clown aptly named “Crossroads.” He pretended to lead the buses, as if humor could do the trick in these young lives. But each time he also pretended to collide with a tree, arms flailing and falling down. It was funny in an absurd sort of way, and perhaps fitting. There are few things as absurd as the death of children.

The counselors went back to their cabins, arms draped over each other, or alone, and suddenly it was quiet. I was writing in my notebook what was to become the book’s ending:

High above the trees came a hawk from the direction of the departing buses. It soared and circled, as if wondering why this great silence had settled over the land. The Native Americans who lived in these mountains, the Adirondack Mountains, believe it meant good luck for a hawk to fly overhead before a difficult journey.¹¹

Later that same year there was a memorial service for the little girl I had written about, the one who had died of a brain tumor. A woman came up to me afterward. “Are you the writer,” she asked. That’s what everyone, including the children, called me.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see her husband begin to drift away. I would soon realize that he probably wouldn’t be able to again hear what his wife was going to tell me.

The woman and I were walked away from the others and she told me she had finished my book one afternoon. She said it had been a difficult for her because her own daughter had died of a brain tumor. While she sat with the book on her lap weeping her little boy burst into the room. He begged her to come outside with him, that he had something to show her. So consumed with excitement was he that he did not notice his mother’s tears.

The five-year-old would not take no for an answer and she reluctantly took his hand. He led her to the sandbox where he had been playing with his toy cars and trucks. Behind the sandbox was a thick, wooded area. He pointed and said excitedly, “Look! Look Mommy!”

At first she didn’t see anything. She kept staring. But then, blending in with the brown wooded thicket, she finally saw a huge hawk sitting on a branch looking back at her. After what seemed like an eternity, it finally flew slowly away.

She stopped, took a deep breath and my hands, “I had no doubt why it had come. It came to tell me that my little girl was going to be all right.”

Me, brave me, couldn’t raise my head to look into her eyes.

I’ve been working on a biography of Pat Hingle. He was a character actor and therefore not very well known. But he starred in Pulitzer Prize winning plays on Broadway, and appeared in hundreds of television movies and films. You probably remember him as Commissioner Gordon in a few of the Batman movies.
But I did something biographers aren’t supposed to do. I came to love this crusty, straight-talking guy. I also failed to realize, as well, that I was also going to have to watch him die. He had leukemia.

Here’s what I said in my eulogy about Pat Hingle:

Because Pat was such a strong, spiritual and yes—stubborn—man, who earnestly believed that his spirit would linger in this world to help others, and to look after (his wife) Julie, I opened my heart up to the possibility that I would see him again, in some form, in this world.

Then early one very cold morning after he died, I was taking a walk when I heard some birds chirping. I stopped and tried to find them with my eyes and at last they fully came into view.

The birds were in a brown, dormant bush, barren of leaves or buds even. It was then I saw—amidst a handful of sparrows—a single Blue Bird. It was looking at me, singing away unafraid. The bird’s feathers were a vivid blue, exactly the color of Pat’s eyes.

I should explain that such coloring is uncommon in winter, when Blue Birds grow dull feathers to protect them from predators. The males are a bright blue again in spring.

But not this particular Blue Bird! He stubbornly held onto his color. It was still January but he was all about spring.

I never saw the Bluebird again but have wondered since if Pat had found a way to tell us that all is well, that he’s happy, and that he wanted us to celebrate spring even in the midst of winter—even in the midst of our great loss, even when we would give just about anything to hear from him one more single out loud word.

But birds are happy creatures, too, or why else would they sing? So birds must have a sense of humor. Lest I end all this with another poignant story, I want to tell you of a time when they made me laugh out loud and in front of strangers.

I was travelling in Scotland this past summer and was making my way to an Abby on the northern coast that dated back centuries. It was a silly day in certain ways. Let me tell you of two such instances.

Though it is an English speaking country I had difficulty making out the Scottish accent. We had to take a ferry across a bay and as we were docking, the skipper’s voice came over the loudspeaker explaining which bus was for which journey. For the life of me I couldn’t make out what he said. Worried that I would miss my connection I stopped to ask one of the deck hands.

“Sir,” I said, too loudly and slowly, “where should I get off to make my connection?”
He stared at me for a few minutes and then smiled, answering in his best English; “I’d get off on the side where there is no water!”

There was a second ferry ride to reach the Abby and it was chilly. I found a small space on the boat where there was little wind. A woman was also standing there and we struck up a conversation. Her son had been to the states and we talked about that. I asked her some things about Scotland and we joked about the accent and Haggis, the national dish, consisting of a sheep’s stomach, liver, heart and tongue.

She and I were having such a grand time talking we didn’t notice that the ferry had landed. People had already disembarked. “Oh, my husband will be worried,” she said in that gorgeous Scottish accent, and dashed off.

I called after her, “Don’t tell him you were with a Yank!”

As I strolled off the ferry I could see her up ahead talking to her husband, and pointing animatedly back at me.

Don’t ask me why, but I blew her kisses. The two laughed and laughed, shaking their heads.

After visiting the Abby I stopped at a lovely little teashop. I took my cup out into a garden adjacent to the shop and found an empty chair to sit in near the bushes and trees. I thought about what the deck hand said to me about getting off on the side where there was no water, and blowing kisses to the Scottish woman.

Just then I heard a bird sound I could not recognize. I kept trying to place it from memory. What began as just a bird or two, now seemed to be a chorus. It was so unusual that others looked up from their conversations, curious no doubt like me, as to what all the chatter was about.

It finally came to me. Because I had heard the sound only mechanically before I had failed to realize that they were Cookoo birds! “Cookoo” they kept singing, louder and louder it seemed. I laughed wondering if they were talking about me.

After these and many more experiences, I wonder when such incidents or coincidences start to look like a pattern that points to “yes”—yes there is something recognizable in the inexplicable? Though probably far-fetched to many, I believe the birds may be able to reach us. I believe it with all the uncertainty that comes with the word “faith.”

I opened with something from Emily Dickinson and let me close with something else by her. She was a rebel both in her poetry style and her convictions. She stopped going to church, something scandalous in her small Amherst, Massachusetts’s village. But she found a spiritual home in Nature.

To paraphrase her blessing: “In the name of birds, butterflies, and breezes. Amen.”
NOTES

5. www.artba.org/about/faqs-transportation--general-public/faqs/
6. www.artba.org/about/faqs-transportation--general-public/faqs/
NOTICING, NATURE, AND AWE

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What is the beauty of nature but our elemental awe at being able to perceive it? When spring blossoms with butterflies or nighttime summer fields sparkle with moonlight—would nature “be there” without our freshly perceiving it?

The tree falls in the forest so it can be perceived.

We often ignore our need to return to the beginning, to the most elemental insight, to awe, and to that which makes it and us possible, our perception of the world—or our noticing.

Our noticing, or our consciousness of existence, is the first “miracle”, the first enigma. As we return to the beginning, to what the Greeks called “poesies” or making, that is creativity in art as in life, we are recalled to the origins of dilated perception. Awe is to perceive the origin of one’s self, and the world, with gratitude that one can perceive.

But we are often alienated from awe. We forget or supposedly surpass this fundamental gratitude, we “grow up”, and gauze, and lose or replace awe just as we begin to rent or lease our minds (and bodies)—to make a living—as we respond, in our one time on earth, to an ephemeral economy.

Awe opens our noticing from the origins of consciousness to a gift greater than utility. For if one notices only when an object, or an Other can be used, one’s noticing is determined by that use, not by beauty, novelty, truth—nor by anything—which appears only with perceptive freedom. A human without awe screens full sensual fields to extract back his or her self-interest, and any other self so defined, as a locus of consumption. Without awe we and Others become objects, fit within a thin band of extractability. Since there is much, even within this band, to be noticed, more consumable objects and consumers-as-objects to exploit, one must be a ‘technical wizard’ to keep up with the number of noticers who pursue the same reduction. We even call the fame and influence so exercised and respected: Reality. And its chronologic record: History. But this is a confined, narrow, ultimately shallow matter of numbers, the force of countless exchanges and facts that do become a reality of sorts to confront us daily while alive.

Awe honors the gift of consciousness without reducing it to a use-object, or cramming it into the minutiae of devising products or acquiring them. While awe does not provide a ready-made ethics, our leased noticing may neglect or even negate ethical noticing, when a consciousness serves what it produces as greater in value than itself. Without an immediate experience of gratitude, we simply match self-interests, collect around a common trough, then make sure we anticipate what might deny us our perceived share.

Restricted noticing makes a sorry witness to our single existence.

We exist, then, to pursue pleasure through delayed gratification, denying our creativity. We keep reaching like addicts for an escape from our truest gift, the stunning enigma of our
noticing, which when freed, aspires to the reaches of the known universe, and to love, to thank another soul simply for being alive.

This fallen noticing worships applied greed. We serve the economy or state, or a private master, to feed our appetites.

Given our alienation from awe, and from our leased then fatigued noticing, we are objectified as things, negated by lies, we respond to and in part become fabricators. We lease our noticing while we lose our awe.

Perhaps this is why we love children or even have them—to remind us of our lost awe: to share fresh wonder at the stamen of a tulip, to recall being stunned by a swirl of clouds. This may also be why we seek solace in nature.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his first discourse called the arts and sciences—when they serve or disguise addictions added by civilization, our corrosive self-infinitizing appetites: “garlands on the chains of man”. Need we engage in Rousseauan reverie or recall Thoreau’s scorn for economically determined perception—again wherein we rent our minds—for money—then seek nature to revive our innocence? Alienated from awe, from other consciousnesses, from their nature, from nature itself, and ultimately from whom they and we are—we will seek solitude.

The awe before another’s consciousness in its nature—and not as a sentiment—reveals a being who can perceive what is natural in themselves, and in us. We need not construe nature as a cameo appearance of an essence revealed by an imaginary: “Ah that’s who we really are!” as a biologic instinct; nor a romantic staring into another’s eyes.

The nature of each person is their consciousness.

Yet every consciousness is mortally unique. This is the paradox of human “nature.” We are each a “one-for” and nothing exceeds nature except another unique perceiver (if their soul be dilated) who can notice us too, if they so wish, in awe.

Is our awe of nature the same as that of other consciousnesses? No. Every human origin is ineffable—but the unnamable named is noticing.

To avoid the cliché of nature as somehow the origin of consciousness (just how “natural” is consciousness, anyway?) nature does restore us from the necessity of work or reacting to an economy, The haunting one feels in real wilderness when one’s civilized identity is dwarfed by the breath of the primeval, or inside a virgin forest, by a river, ocean, on a mountaintop, can evoke awe—and terror—for: one encounters the absence of consciousness. None of real nature is human-made. Settled “nature”, with picket fences, soccer fields, churches, banks, sofas, paper doilies, the grinding domesticity of cars and commerce is boring, because, alienated from awe by commodified land-speculation and bourgeois arrangements, we bind nature with decoration to own it.

Real innocence stems directly from awe. If not the overlay of self-conscious sentiment that transforms the bucolic into a bore, for sentiment-as-awe gauzes direct perception of nature while we extract its value: we destroy life to consume it.
Yet let us not forget the horrors of the natural world: imagine being eaten alive, which is also natural. (The terrors of predation—reveal another species of innocence, altogether …) The purely biologic world is astonishingly cruel by any comparison to the compassion too seldom engendered by humanity; and again any loveliness of the inorganic world is due to our noticing it.

Even hermits, who dance with their own negation, pining—in the graphite shadow of nihilism—can be, well—unsettling.

Nature is not conscious of itself.

Like a canvas on which we paint our incarnation, or a page upon which we sketch a story, it offers us an absence, a space in which to breathe, freed from our economic and social woe.

The world of objects made for exchange—the economy of objects—reflect human behavior as an opaque surface. But when released from leasing our minds (and bodies), from ephemeral utility, we may recr...eate, but not yet create. Nature refreshes but to be free to create we must evoke the origins of who we are in relation to others as well, and not only negate other souls’ alienated presence in a world sullied by exchange. It is not the nature of consciousness but our consciousness in nature when we create from nothing that we may experience the world and others afresh.

What keeps us from experiencing our one life? Why mimic each other’s boredom then blame our memory? Our experience on earth need not be stunted, our virtues punished, ensnared by ancestral instinct, dread or nullification—smoldering with resentment, silhouettes trapped in our insights’ after-glow.

It’s intriguing to ponder those of us deprived of one of our senses and how other senses sharpen to compensate the loss. The man or woman whose absence of sight seems to result in a seeming “amplified” hearing wherein the fabric of a voice reveals whole pointillistic testaments of nuance, or the deaf (or hearing-impaired) who not only read lips but faces with the intensity of a Michelangelo, wherein, neglected tics or subtle motives go unnoticed by us “seers.” This profoundly challenges our notion of perception—as to how much we allow ourselves to notice. When one of our senses is temporarily lost, we begin to notice more with our other senses. So what does this say of the lost potential of how much and how accurately we perceive? The blind or deaf may tell us they have worked on their other senses from necessity, but more often it came naturally, and that their compensation does not seem magical nor superhuman to them at all, nor does it seem a compensation. When wine devotees can discern nuances for which they invent a poetic but accurate vocabulary, denoting subtle differences in taste, when farmers foretell the crop quality by minute (invisible to us) colorations in, say, a corn stalk—is this compensation? If “impaired” senses can “grow”, if every expert from necessity or talent for applied noticing can amplify, bring out rich, telling variations, if we can always see, hear, smell, taste, and feel more—why don’t we? Why do we screen what we notice?

The senses do not “grow” unless we use devices like telescopes or microphones, but our consciousness of them can, or we can neglect what we experience, allow our senses, our perception, to cloud, to atrophy. We do not see nor hear all that which we vaguely see, or hear,
nor taste, touch nor smell, say, the violet we buy. If noticing little or nothing destroys the quality and intensity of life, why blame our senses?

In noticing, we want the forest and the trees. We wish to notice the bark, branches and leaves, the roots, but also smaller, cells, atoms—"quantum foam". We wish to survey whole forests, grasslands and lakes. We wish, from space—all rusted continents, cloud-systems and restless oceans. Why not earth seen from another planet ...

Why not, potentially, perceive it all?

Suppose that philosophy accounts for our noticing by lending coherence to all the arts and sciences, or descriptive modes. Philosophy would be the one inquiry to unify and describe each mode to every other and to the whole of our collective noticing. This spectrum of expressibility (all arts and sciences as descriptive modes) would span from discrete delimitation in physics wherein one sign points to another ever smaller referent—across, to the other, or far end of the spectrum, wherein a sign yields a metaphoric ‘spray of nuance’, or evokes a number of referents, as in poetry. At one end of the spectrum of expressibility each sign would denote the most accurate possible referent, as it brings out the smallest possible feature until, aspiring ever smaller, vanishes. At the other end each sign would connote, pry open, reveal as much as possible to eventually reach the edge of the effable, and also disappear.

The task of philosophy may be to make the entire spectrum of expressibility coherent in and to least one natural language—to the whole of human discourse—All the arts and sciences often need translating from their specialized diction, jargon, but just as often require a respectful total effort to draw without erasing or altering original feature back to what can be spoken and understood, or spoken-understanding.

We amplify our noticing, refining, broadening anything we perceive, for our noticing is not a self-conscious or passive acceptance of a fixed number or series of inherited facts. Noticing is in constant flux, constant becoming. It is in Whitehead’s phrase, the “organ of novelty” as long as we live.

At once pure perception of what is or suchness discloses what has been, and what may be. Our noticing, amplified by each descriptive mode becomes, grows, encourages earthly exploration to inspire all inquiries, to spur what more we may discover with myriad insights into the feature of phenomena. We magnify our knowledge from physics to poetry, from scientific accuracy to pure metaphoric evocation. From music, dance, painting, film, photography, architecture to history, psychology, sociology, across, to the hard sciences: biology, chemistry, astronomy, physics — we benefit, remain open to entire the spectrum of expressibility.

(Optional): But I do not suggest that one should not focus. We often ignore to specifically direct our perception. It’s not as if one’s noticing need be blown like confetti out of a cannon into the ionosphere. Or that we ought to perceive everything at once as Job did—when placing his hand over his mouth in awe—when Yahweh reveals the entire universe in its infinite process of appearing and disappearing. Or, as one encounters in the Bhagavad Gita when karma obliges Arjuna to wage war within his own family—Krishna reveals to him the universe
—in what we may call—the kaleidoscope of simultaneity. But … that if alienated from awe with leased noticing we will not directly perceive either with precision, or breadth.

Philosophers, without being killjoys, remind us not to reify nor disconnect our art or science from spoken-understanding, nor to exile either to an imagined eternity, nor encrypt our discoveries.

As Wittgenstein reminds us, there are no private languages, to reach natural or spoken-understanding, we need demystify our fields. Descriptive modes also magnify our time-consciousness, since even in the field, say, of anthropological archeology, each bone or skull excavated creates a new way of understanding human evolution in the future and would not have been noticed without science developed in the past, so that our concept of the evolutionary chain(s) grow both back and forward in time. Historical sciences, then, also enjoy the creative sensation of novelty, even when they involve the past.

Unearthed feature from one art or science may seem isolated, but never really is, from the career of our noticing. If open to the origin of consciousness itself each celebrates the noticing of all feature. Each practitioner may argue ‘til blue in the face’ that theirs is the most important or essential. But these fields make sense to each other only when listening-in to the entire spectrum of expressibility. Each, if cohered by spoken-understanding, will resist encryption, the betrayal of solipsism, to reach the frontier of the effable, to what Rimbaud described in his voyant letters—visionary experience.

We offer every field freedom to explore with the proviso that it must someday return to the origin of human consciousnesses in natural language. Humans are beings who notice, as we allow others to dilate their souls—to Experience.

We are all laymen pursuing this life. Despite mishap, tragedy, death, we reinvent our essence from nothing with others. Some of us wish to risk a dilated soul, a radical openness to experience. Our “search” for meaning need not involve a pilgrimage to another place nor time for we need not replace our immediate discoveries of native suchness with a projective copy. We need no paradises, Valhallas, Golden Ages, “States of Nature” or Eves—either to dispatch meaning of what falls from or into value—if we no longer split our experience prior to engaging it.

As the full draft of being discloses our origins we receive energy back. When we combine both noticing and awe, there is an energy-kick—or—radiance. Our time-perception, without being annexed to the ancient or eternal future, to mythic nature, draws us forward to immediate meaning. It may seem as if the dead are waiting for us, but we are waiting for us. Our primordial or ancestral existence, before dawn, before Time—is really our lost awe.

We often seem to passively receive awe. Yet it our making, our creating within any given moment by which we may leap to any constructed future, or back, to Trakl’s Unborn, when we replace experience with belief. Our futural time-projection originates from our present time-making. How decadent, then, our needless conformism, boredom, our escapes. If we consider intellect as the edge of our intuition, we can keenly focus the full draft of our being on earth into precise expression. Noticing, divorced from awe, serves another master. The intellect
severed from intuition can be abused by a bully or a boss. The intellect need not reduce others to ashes but focus—the incept-flame of novelty.

Awe offers us an unmade future. We return to engage time, anticipate freedom and—perhaps new love. Why paraphrase with mediations? We hold the key to the uncanny. As we investigate feature, not to exploit, say, botanical expertise for pharmaceutical concerns, but to watch new worlds proliferate in full cellular or molecular resplendence, exploring the foundations of biologic life, we engage the earth.

Innocence is secondary to awe in that the spring of innocence owes its first light to awe. And as the petals of the past dissolve—this future blooms.

Through the darkness of our alienation from awe we may search for radiance without: the luminous: ocean floor anemones, fireflies in moonlit fields, iridescent kindness, phosphoric beauty, auras of Eros—to leave behind the violence and confusion. We leave the lurid gleam of cruelty to search for creation—but far better for us to pass from the passivity of a merely receptive awe, to act-in-awe, with full noticing—to evoke each other’s radiance, and to create, before our souls surrender themselves unto earth.

Awe is the first noticing of the universe, whether it be a distant galaxy or the tip of one’s nose, or the inner sensations of self; or the verbatim monologue of mind called thought
Imagine a radiance which is not ideal but earthly in which there is nothing “heavy” in our speaking, nor rare to our clarity—
If we kneel before noticing it is to engage the world as that from which authentic novelty springs—
Indeed we read love lyrics writ by those who incarnate radiance in language to defy that, which, divides us from what we notice, from each other, yet then …

*Love is the noticing of each other in awe*

The perception of the whole, noticing
The energy released by “having” both full noticing *and* awe, radiance.

Shall we fill the void of nature with awe? We can … but why not travel farther? Let us pass from receptive awe before creation to our creativity. Shall we frivolously call it: “The Genius Trampoline”? In this music of firsts, the notes we strike from the void—echo with the becoming of our creation—as art is created to reflect back to the origins of consciousness. From creation to creativity—if and when we are radiant, that is, when we notice with awe.

**NATURE, NOTICING AND AWE**

What is the beauty of nature but our elemental awe at being able to perceive it? If awe is our first moment, a wider noticing may yield real pleasure in the splendor of what is right before our eyes. As we are all mortally unique, the artist retrieves from the manufacture of objects
direct (natural) perception as a protest against our break with it and each other, to de-screen perception, to overcome the urge to destroy life so as to create it.

POSTLUDES

1. If music preceded language could it have spawned consciousness—our waking eyes of awareness?
2. If nature rose with music* to anticipate the birth of language before the advent of consciousness …
3. And if poetry preceded prose in its progress … (re: Vico)
4. Did birds melodize before us? Did music precede us? Primeval forest melodists?
ON THE WINGS OF A BUTTERFLY AND THE TAIL OF A MOUSE: THE SYMBIOSIS OF NATURE AND ART AS DESIGN

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What I’ve been trying to do is dissolve the hierarchies, and get everything on the same level—the art, the people, the plants, the soil, the water.

--Patricia Johanson

The Kantian notion of “disinterestedness” claimed that true aesthetic appreciation must be free and clear of any personal motifs, gratifications, or feelings, and be based solely on the object as a separate entity isolated from all surroundings. Art then was artifice whose rules were grounded in composition, design, color, facture and medium, all of which set the ground rules for Greenberg’s 1960’s formalism. Within these restrictions, landscapes and land/earth art projects were thus exempt from being considered art, as a bountried completeness was impossible for appreciating either form. Refuting this is Arnold Berleant’s recent essay “The Aesthetics of Art and Nature” which contends that the criteria for one is the same as for the other, and that in fact, the aesthetic experience of a natural environment sets the model for the aesthetic experience of art. Berleant further argues that what humans feel and witness within nature and in front of art are inseparable. I would argue that Berleant’s theory is substantiated in our world and that in fact, when placed into a work of art, aesthetic recognition is evoked first by a somatic engagement with that environment.

As the working paradigm for this belief, I offer the art of Patricia Johanson, with her earliest and latest public sites, Fair Park Lagoon in Dallas, Texas and The Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility/Wild Life Habitat in Petaluma, California. My response to Johanson’s hybrid art of ecological restoration, aesthetic design and technological implementation, is based on a first hand account of a trip that began at the lagoon and ended at the recycling facility from May 2 through 6, 2009. I would suggest that the experience at both sites yielded a cerebral response that grew out of a highly sensual one. I witnessed beauty and I felt awed, but both experiences were preceded by a physical connection that engaged on the visceral level. An explanation for this can be found in Johanson’s early essay, “Architecture as Landscape”. When we move through a landscape, our first response engages from the back of our brain, where the archaic reptilian core is located and which deals with the intuitive, instinctive and unconscious. The neo-cortex (front brain) then kicks in where rational thought lives and aesthetic assessment is possible. This is the science.

I spent hours subsumed in these spaces, walking, watching, feeling, sensing and simply being, which left me with the unshakable belief that more of these spaces of reconciliation between human beings and their world is critical. To make this case, I have used Johanson’s oldest and newest sites as the frame-work for exploring how the evolution from a small contained environ to a massively scaled site changes our experience, and in what ways the artist has expanded her vision from a simple one of natural water cleansing mixed with eco-friendly sculptures to an over five hundred acre complex which she co-designed with a major engineering company, wetlands biologists and coastal conservationists.
The heart of this paper is positioned then in the interstices between art, science and technology. Its space lives in the aesthetic blending of a seamless melding of art and structure to reclaim and recreate swamp lands that are simultaneously breath-taking and pragmatic.

Ironically, what appears most fragile in nature can hold the key to what is most resilient. What appears as aesthetically exquisite can be what is most utilitarian. Witness the wings of a butterfly. The colors and patterns of its wings are intricate, elaborate designs that are easily crushed by the slightest pressure of the finger tips. Yet these patterns have inspired the artist for over forty years, providing her with endless visions wrought into reclamation sites that are visually stunning, functional and sustainable. As early as 1969 her butterfly drawings in colored pencil, pastel and ink reveal how its wing patterns offer blueprints for designing tidal pools and water gardens. These have been thoroughly documented most recently in Xin Wu’s book: Patricia Johanson’s House Garden Commission: Reconstruction of Modernity, Vol. 11 (2007). By the time the Fair Park commission came along, the idea of studying the minutiae of nature, arcing between microcosmic designs and their macrocosmic implications was an integral part of the artist’s process. Her philosophy grounds her process. Believing that “nothing in nature is frivolous,” every organism becomes an intense object of study from which to learn how to build sustainable structures and frame the landscape so that people may have intimate access to all of its form and flux. Her hope is always that an immersed experience will initiate a primal response, cluing us into how we are all part of life’s continuum- all of us a piece, integral to the living chain.

The idea of food chains provides the foundation upon which each of the artist’s projects is built. Nostoc II, her 1975 sculpture at Storm King Art Center, is an early prototype for understanding linkage and chains, as rocks and boulders placed near plants, trees and terrain, guide us through the complexity of nature’s processes. Every one of her projects is built from the ground up, recreating food chains that are historically linked to their site. The realization of how the design of a place sustains itself from one tiny piece of matter depending upon another is a humbling moment.

The most basic way that everything is connected is that we are all matter. The same atoms that are out there in the tree, the flower, and the rock are also a part of us.\(^2\)

Johanson’s calls this combination of ecological restoration, aesthetic design and technological implementation her hybrid art and is the vision behind all her projects. But, while the 80’s lagoon and 2009 wild life habitat share the same melding art and structure, the scope and scale has changed dramatically through time, from a small contained third of a mile long pond in the midst of a Texas fairgrounds, to an over five hundred acre wild life park that works symbiotically with its on-site partner, a cutting edge water recycling facility in the midst of the Sonoma Wine Valley. Because of my intense immersion in both places, I offer a personal and authentic account of that experience, first at the pond and then at the park.

In 1981 the Texas Lagoon was a polluted eyesore, a dangerous mud hole, where in the same year two children drowned. The original commission asked for natural water cleansing, an aesthetically pleasing waterscape and peripheral landscape, displaying sculpture, historical markers and exhibits documenting indigenous flora and fauna, pre-pollution. Instead, Johanson countered with a holistic project that involved the reintroduction of two indigenous
aquatic plants, Sagittaria platyphylla and Pteris multifida, that have shallow but dense rooting systems that would simultaneously prevent erosion and create hundreds of micro-habitats for bugs, fish and birds that are linked to the original life of the pond. Microbes that live on the stems and roots of these plants also help to cleanse the water. The plants then provide the model for the giant pink gunite sculptures that echo their shapes and blur the lines between art and reality. Art becomes infrastructure, as sculptures become bridges, walkways and crossovers that allow people to move into the pond and witness an ever evolving lifecycle. More artistry appears as bright terra cotta sculptures/structures share their reflected color with the pink, white and yellow water lilies, the myriad greens and browns of leaves of the flowers and the cypress trees that have taken root on the north tip of the pond and are growing tall after almost thirty years.

Gleaning from nineteenth century color theory, the artist invited natural sunlight to blend blue sky with green tinted plant water and reddish sculptures to produce mauve and lavender reflections dancing on the water’s surface. On a bright day, maximum color vibrancy is achieved, while on a foggy grey day, the scape is enveloped in a muted palette, evoking contemplation, as it did the day I was there. No reproduced image could prepare me for the experience that took place when I actually stood there, in the middle of the lagoon. Birds circled above, flash diving seconds later to break the water’s surface in a fury to catch gliding fish. Overhanging bee hives provided riotous buzzing and the odor of cedar and cypress trees mixed with the smell of fish, turtles and plants emanating from the pond coalesced into a moment of humble revelation. A Burkian notion of the sublime would have it that one needs to witness something hugely cataclysmic, or earth shattering to feel life’s pulse, to feel overwhelmed by the grandness of nature. Rather, I would offer my experience in which a sense of the sublime came upon me through a gradual process, initiating itself through a slow, sensual, instinctive awareness of my place in this place, of my connection to all things here, and to my place in time, time as it affects all of life.

Flowers in the midst of blooming have a different scent than those wilting and rotting. Both smells are here. Three decades old, Johanson’s lagoon testifies daily to the cycles of life, its fish, fowl, plants and trees. The gunite frames are aging as well. Once bright terracotta has oxidized and mixed with ground-in dirt from being constantly walked on, darkening in places to a rusty brown patina which in turn has changed the mix of a still blue sky and green plant tinged water. The resulting canvas is actually richer, with a more layered range of tones, as complex and intricate as the over growth of bulrushes and root systems that are filtering detritus out of the water, while choking out some of the more delicate plants. What remains are the important elements initially put in place; a slew of microhabitats for hundreds of species of fish and birds and a still solid, graceful network of gunite passages crisscrossing the pond. All of this reacts in the sunlight with old and new growth, creating an interactive form.

This is art constantly in the making, constantly in flux. More limiting is a painting that remains static, no matter how vibrant its colors and energized its brushstrokes. The pond changes daily, framed by plantings and sculpture that invite endless participation. Here, each day the visual changes, where season and climate play a major role in the fluctuating scape. This is a place where beauty finds expression in the ordinary observance of life. On this day, I watched two young boys run into the shallow end of the pond and then sprawl out on the tip of a gunite fern so that their faces just grazed the water’s surface. They were totally enthralled by a whole world lying just inches below. Their quarry was a giant snapping turtle, one of a family that lives in this end of the lagoon. They informed me that the turtle was over sixty years old and that they
have a long standing relationship with it. Their father drives three hours every Sunday from Montgomery to Dallas to bring his sons and daughter, to teach them about lagoon life in a safe and idyllic space, one that barely exists anymore.

Ironically, the aquarium that abuts the lagoon and is a major tourist attraction of the fair grounds, gives all its history. But the lagoon offers that same story in spectacular living form, erasing human distancing and offering instead a total mind and body experience. This is a cautionary experience as well, providing the lesson of having to watch one’s step. Pond scum and slime spread over the bank’s edges and shallow shelves and are constantly washed by overflow from rain accumulation that never completely drains off from the one weir positioned at the north side. Few people realize that the lagoon is also a functional municipal flood basin.

In comparison to the Dallas lagoon, the Petaluma complex, bounded by Ellis Creek, the Petaluma River and the Sheraton Hotel in California’s Sonoma Valley is massive. Opening July, 2009, it was ten years in the making. This latest site combines the most cutting edge technology in the field of water recycling with a giant wetlands garden. Both are built on the ancient site of a Miwok Village, already eight thousand years old when Francis Drake arrived in 1597. What would seem an incongruous juxtaposition of engineering, archeological siting and landscape art is a successful partnership between natural processes and state-of-the-art technology. The buildings are on a slight hill that fronts the wetlands, both facing west to the Petaluma River. Closest to the building and ringing the first recycling ponds are mounds that echo the undulating hills beyond the river, immediately orienting everything west. An elaborate system of oxidation ditches churns and splashes the water, supplying oxygen to aerobic microbes that eat our wastes. Other bodies of water, oxidation ponds, treatment wetlands and polishing ponds filter and remove detritus and heavy metal and in turn become natural habitats for birds and fish that have historically made their homes here. The facility cleans over eight million gallons of waste water daily, returning much to the Petaluma River and recycling the rest for irrigation use to local farmers, wineries and public works through an elaborate underground network of pipelines. Ducks, geese, swans, and at least a hundred other species find healthy water homes in the midst of ponds shaped into morning glories and butterfly wings, both designs folded into the master imprint of a mouse, the tiny, Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse. From the air, the outline of the mouse stands out triumphantly, a reinstated species that before this project was on the endangered species list. This mouse had been a major presence here for thousands of years. It fed off the pickle weed plant. Because of the artist, the pickle weed abounds again, and the mouse thrives.

The idea of stamping a site with the design of a creature historically linked to a place has become the artist’s signature. Not intended as kitsch or gimmick, Johanson chooses this as a way to acknowledge and honor the past. It is about heritage, respect and preservation. The mouse image is used metaphorically. The idea of embedding the landscape with memory further shapes her design. While the overall shape of the mouse is “intuited,” seen only from the air, the mouse’s ear has an amphitheater for school groups and the mouse eyes are used by a myriad of birds as nesting islands are visible on ground level. The mouse’s tail is a trail that moves through an agricultural crop of oat hay ultimately moving up onto the polishing pond berms seen in the middle ground. To the north is a bank of eucalyptus trees lying just beyond Ellis Creek and framing the woods, home to a variety of deer and elk. The stamping is also about memory. Accompanying the mouse are morning glories from the artist’s childhood memories. They are flowers she remembers pushing through the rubble of concrete and broken glass in an urban park she cut through on her way to school every day, an inexplicable spot of
colored life amidst the garbage. The analogy to clean water made from waste water is an obvious one, invested as so much of her art is in the idea of using everything, trashing nothing. Morning glories are unstoppable plants. They need almost no water to grow. In fact, the berms surrounding the water filtration ponds closest to the Recycling Facility are planted entirely with morning glories in a “Zero Scape Garden, where watering is unnecessary. As at Fair Park, actual plants and animals continue to provide the model for aesthetic design. Looking south from the berms are ponds shaped as morning glories, each petal a separate pool engaged in the cleansing process. Their shapes only appear when the water level allows. Much of the time they are submerged in their work. Beauty and utility revisited.

A final entry from a journal I kept while on site describes a revelatory experience that came during a seven am walk on the Petaluma Marsh, following the Olman Trail. A huge bank of bright yellow mustard flowers bordered both sides of the path that led out three miles into the marsh. For a while nothing but yellow was visible and I was completely swallowed up in the landscape. Around a bend, the scape finally opened to heathers and deep purples, pointing me toward the Sonoma Hills and the Petaluma River. Riparian birds flew overhead, while a pond directly in front of me revealed a Snowy Egret and a Great Blue Heron. Moments later, I spotted a large California Buckeye turning into the trail toward Ellis Creek and a Bittern, nearly camouflaged by oat grass met me at eye level. A rustling in the grass immediately raised the fear of foraging snakes on the look-out for small mammals. At this moment, Dorothy’s journey to Oz did not seem an outrageous thought. Fearing the snakes and whatever else might present itself around the next curve, it took all my courage to brave the rest of the trail, refocusing on the array of life around me- watching it unfold in extraordinary ways. The murmurs of the Texas lagoon were distant here. There, as much as I was made aware of life’s spectrum, I was always standing atop it- grounded, with people moving in my peripheral vision. Here, I was invisible through lots of the trail, yet at eye level with much of its life. This is Johanson’s mature and deliberate design, meant to put us on the same level as the rest of the food chain.

The revelation was in the surprise of it all. My mind was recalling connections to paintings, to Transcendental philosophy, to universal inquiry as a result of my visceral engagement. My senses awakened and my thoughts followed. In that order I am absolutely sure. Stepping back onto the access road, I left the marsh to the bittern, the clapper rail and the Great Blue Heron.

NOTES
2. Patricia Johanson, *Art and Survival: Creative Solutions to Environmental Problems*, Gallerie Publications, North Vancouver, BC, Canada, 1992, p. 11. Patricia Johanson discusses her early inspirations and projects, interwoven with memories of her mentors and her inspirational friends, such as Tony Smith, Helen Frankenthaler and Georgia O’Keefe.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
*Most of this paper is based on both personal experience and endless conversations with the artist Patricia Johanson as we travelled together across the United States in May of 2009.*