

Local Culture

Winter 2009-10

...and so, finally, the local culture will carry the knowledge of how the place may be well and lovingly used, and also the implicit command to use it only well and lovingly.

—Wendell Berry

Local Culture is based at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois.

Published by and for undergraduates with an interest in sustainable human practices, *Local Culture* is intended to encourage students to think and act locally. We understand a “local” culture to be the means by which a community built to human scale preserves itself and its place. Members of a local culture care for themselves and one another, for their land and air and water, not only by local knowledge and skill but also by restraint and virtue, by justice and mercy, and by the principles of economic cooperation.

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MOW JOBS, MONOCULTURES AND MARKING TURF: THE GENDERED AND ECOLOGICALLY FRAGMENTED AMERICAN SUBURBAN LAWN

Hannah Rivenburgh
Macalester College

Within the culture of American suburbia and the broader popular imagination, the lawn is imbued with incredible cultural meaning. In the words of O.M. Scott, founder of Scotts Lawn Care, “merely because you trample it underfoot does not lessen the importance of the part it plays in your daily life” (Mills 8). I agree. But while O.M. Scott is selling lawn products, I am working to divulge the gendered and ecologically fragmented “nature” of the lawn. In the twentieth century, the American suburban front lawn has become a gendered and ecologically fragmented space, particularly post-World War II; however, many cultural artifacts have retained their social meaning over the years up till today. The ubiquity and homogeneity of the suburban landscape, reproduced in restrictive house deeds and advertisements promoting the burgeoning lawn care industry, became embedded in postwar suburbia to the detriment of social and ecological relationships.

I will begin with a working definition of suburb, which I have gleaned from *The Suburb Reader* by Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese. For them, the suburbs are “a low-density, residential environment on the outskirts of larger cities, occupied primarily by families of similar class and race, with plenty of trees and grass” (7). In terms of land use, the suburb has become the continent’s most ubiquitous spatial form (Wilson 90). By 1970, almost forty percent of the US population lived in suburbs; the proportion is greater than fifty percent today (Wilson 90). It is no wonder so many live there: for more than a century, suburbia has existed as a “site of promises, dreams, and fantasies. It is a landscape of the imagination where Americans situate ambitions for upward mobility and economic security, ideals about freedom and private property, and longings for social harmony and spiritual uplift” (Hayden 3). It was also believed to some

extent that suburbia existed outside of class and that the 'burbs would be a place for fostering community (Hayden 5, 9). These were the suburbs' social and cultural connotations. The reality was more problematic, as class, race, and gender played crucial roles in how suburbs were designed and built¹. Rarely was the community so sought after by new suburbanites actually present. Instead, suburbs lacked meaningful gathering places such as schools, parks, or economic centers (Hayden 9). There were, however, individual, identical plots of land. Low density meant more permeable surfaces, assuming that they were not paved over with road, house foundation, driveway, patio, or pool. These permeable surfaces, it was believed, should be covered with something, preferably something that gave a hint of the upper class and a glimmer of nationalism. The answer was found in golf courses, the estates of the wealthy, and America's baseball diamonds: turfgrass.

"Unlike every other affluent civilization, Americans have idealized the house and yard rather than the model neighborhood or the ideal town" in the pursuit of the American Dream (Hayden 5-6). In 1921, an editorial writer for the *National Real Estate Journal* told readers that "the garden of Eden was the first subdivision" (Hayden 6). Locating the rise of suburbia in a Biblical, normalized past meant it was easy to say that "everyone admires a beautiful landscape of luxurious green grass. It has universal appeal" (Mills 5)—though of course this is not the case. It also segued directly into claims about the lawn as the very basis of the American political, spiritual, and cultural world as "collective, national, ritualized, and plain" (Pollan 61). "[O.M.] Scott [Company]...sought to elevate an unassuming patch of turfgrass into an institution of democracy; those who would dissent from

their plans were branded as 'selfish,' 'unneighborly,' 'unchristian,' and 'undemocratic'" (Pollan 59). In the cultural appropriation of the American front lawn from vegetable garden/hard-packed earth/chicken run to verdant green, the landscape was supposed to "serve as a vehicle of consensus, rather than as an area for self-expression" (Pollan 61). Yet often the very same restrictive house deeds that required a lawn for its visually and culturally unifying purposes in the next breath became exclusionary in terms of race, a vague Progressive-era morality, and class:

Restrictive Deed, East San Diego, California, 1911

...Provided always that this conveyance is made upon the following express conditions:

FIRST: This property shall not be sold, leased, rented to or occupied by any person other than one of the Caucasian race.

SECOND: No intoxicating liquors of any kind shall be manufactured or sold upon these premises.

THIRD: No dwelling house shall be erected upon said premises which shall cost less than \$1000.00.

FOURTH: No building shall be erected upon said premises which shall be located less than 20 feet from the line of Molino Avenue. (Nicolaides and Wiese 234)

To construct the homogenously built environment required by the proponents of the nationwide lawn, homeowners had to be taught (through free booklets dispensed by lawn care companies) to "incorporate the new lawn aesthetic into the landscape" (Jenkins 10). These discourses proved successful, judging by how much money, time, labor, and worry Americans spent on their front lawns. (In 1960, there were thirty-six hundred square miles of turf. The modest home lawn cost two hundred dollars in upkeep and one hundred and fifty hours of work per year [Jenkins 99].) The O.M. Scott Company itself is "proud to have made all America lawn-conscious" (Mills 6).

¹ For example, the common practice of categorizing suburban types "by commuters' choices—railroad suburb, streetcar suburb, auto suburb—led to a focus on middle- and upper-class white male breadwinners and their housing" (Hayden 5).

Lawns in the United States have always been the frontier of the household male, reinforcing in the suburban landscape nuclear households that were heteronormative and male owned and dominated. Mills, the CEO of O.M. Scott Company himself, spoke of the importance that the lawn carries for the reputation of the male homeowner: “along with the tremendous growth of suburban communities in America, more and more men are being judged by the kind of lawn which they maintain around their homes.” He goes on to extend the man’s realm of possessions to hobbies, work, and women: “I think it is only logical to assume that a man who takes good care of his lawn might be expected to take good care of other things—such as fishing tackle, his wife, and his business” (Mills 5).

The unblemished green front lawn signifies both a perfectly functional, normative family contained within and a psychological defense against that which is enclosed without. The flight to the suburbs meant “the seclusion of women and children in a green refuge from the world of commerce” (Nicolaides and Wiese 8), isolating and protecting them from “the dirt and harsh realities of the industrial city” into the beneficial nature that was offered by the suburbs (Jenkins 118). This protectionist and isolationist attitude is rooted in the ideology of female domesticity and attached to a cult of “male home ownership” (Hayden 6). The lawn surrounding the suburban home “reinvigorated ideologies of private property and the nuclear family,” thus reinforcing patriarchal patterns (Wilson 92). In essence, the lawn becomes a gendered space.

The pastoral vision of nature is anthropomorphized and feminized as Mother Earth. Together with the historical linkage of male with culture, technology, mastery, and power on the one hand, and the association of female with nature, naturalness, passivity, and docility on the other, nature was emphasized as a collection of resources to be “manipulated by human enterprise. Very often in this tradition, the image of nature presented is that

of a passive mother and bride to an active male spectator” (Wilson 95). This relationship with the natural world often means one of domination (Jenkins 118). Hence man (literally, men), with his (their) machines, technology, and more powerful bodies, were able to manage Mother Nature in a way that was entirely cultural. In the suburban dream, each front yard and each husband/father/homeowner—rather than wife/mother/home-maintainer—became a locus of mediation between culture and nature (Wilson 97). Science and technology became the primary tools in the subjugation of the local ecosystem, until men’s very bodies—when riding power lawn mowers like a miniature combine—became “integrated into a mechanistic view of nature” and gardening turned into turf management (Wilson 97). Men also enjoyed the expansion of their own private spaces into the workshop, the garage, and the yard (Wilson 99). Thus, “men wielded a lawnmower over the grass” while women nurtured the flowers at the border of the lawn and house (Wilson 99). Because of this, gender roles in house and family maintenance are managed and normative. Even today, “gendered work often remains the rule. Women lug groceries, push strollers, make meals, and serve as ‘taxi parents.’ Men do yard work” (Hayden 14). In essence, for men the suburban house is a retreat from the nonphysical job and a chance to commune with a particularly orderly and mastered version of nature. For women, on the other hand, “houses have been workplaces for millions of women of all classes and all ages—paid cooks, cleaning women, and nannies, as well as unpaid housewives and mothers” (Hayden 13). The dialectical purposes of the suburban home and lawn mean that the space remains gendered.

The prevalence of this gendered relationship to the patch of grass at one’s front door has long been exploited (and reinforced by) advertisers in the lawn care industry. Companies such as O.M. Scotts Lawn Care, Vigoro fertilizer, Toro machinery, and John Deere equipment “have noted those differences and used the

dichotomy between men and women since the nineteenth century” (Jenkins 118). These practices continue today. *Maxim*, a men’s magazine whose philosophy is (as best as I can tell) Girls—Sports—Videos—*Maxim*, wrote an article on lawn care in May of 2001. Called “Turf’s Up!: Get Ready for the Best Mow Job of Your Life,” its first sentence was this ringer: “Women haul in plants and decorate in leafy colors; men make the lawn look like a carpet” (Smith). In other words, women maintain and decorate the home and the foliage surrounding it, while men tinker in the lawn. Over the course of the twentieth century, lawn care ads continued to aim their appeals to a male audience. Both pre- and post-World War II, most lawn care ads were masculinized—because “the man of the house...has been assumed to be responsible for the care of the lawn”—even if they depicted women pushing a lawnmower, for example (Jenkins 118). The benefits of a good lawn were touted for men in terms of money, technology, and the social situation of the modern man. “The resulting copy glorified a combination of science, power, and fun in lawn care that was attractive to men, who were assured that they could exercise control over the environment through the use of machinery and chemicals” (Jenkins 121). Increases in real estate value and technological leaps in precision machinery and controlling chemicals resurfaced again and again in lawn care ads; so did the social meaning behind a lawn as signifier of good citizenship and as a healthful hobby away from the office. Ads aimed at attracting women to the care of the lawn during World War II (or aimed at encouraging women to pester their husbands to take better care of it) replicated and reinforced the importance of beauty and looks, the cult of domesticity, and a mother’s innate connection with children. Women were addressed as wives and mothers. A mid-50s-era O.M. Scotts product called Beauty Treatment invited women to “picture your home dressed up with a Scott lawn” while technologies were couched in terms of aesthetics and a beauty regimen: a “Fall Hair-Do for Your Lawn”

beckoned, as did new grass varieties that would “‘give you a landscape you love to touch,’ especially if the lawn is rolled, since ‘massage is good for the complexion of your lawn. It keeps out blotches, blackheads, and wild whiskers’” (Jenkins 125, 122, 121). Cooking and cleaning were other metaphors used to appeal to women in an attempt to liken them to the already normalized sphere of household appliances. In marketing to women, lawn mowers were likened to vacuum cleaners: “[T]hanks to the Coldwell Electric Lawn Mower, cutting grass is now fun rather than hard, monotonous labor, for the Coldwell Electric is as easy to handle as a vacuum cleaner. Women enjoy running it as much as do men” (Jenkins 120). A 1944 Scott advertisement offered a “Recipe for a Beautiful Lawn,” and likened a lawn to the frosting on a cake, something with which women would presumably be more familiar (Jenkins 122). Motifs of flowers and an insistence on childcare were also prevalent. Push mower ads aimed at women revealed that they could be pushed as “easy as a baby buggy” (Jenkins 124). Thus, while lawn care is generally gendered as male, in the cases in which it is addressed to females it does not leave the realm of wife and mother. In the end, the grass itself is gendered in the masculine; O.M. Scott’s *Lawn Care* magazine promises that “after reading *Lawn Care* you’ll discover why Summer’s warm sod, cool nights, and gentle fall rains hustle young grass plants into vigorous manhood” (Jenkins 128).

This was not merely a heavy dose of “Father Knows Best” 50s culture; rather, the male-gendered lawn has continued to reappear within the cultural sphere of lawn care. During the 70s and 80s, lawn-caring homeowners were still gendered male: a female author of a lawn mower industry article wrote in 1980 that “the homeowner isn’t in love with his mower, as he may be with his car” (Jenkins 131). By 1990, the trend toward both dissatisfaction and a continuation of a male-gendered homeowner and greens maintainer is seen: “[W]e hate to mow,” writes a disgruntled (male) homeowner: “we hate to dwell on the dismal

thought that it's an endless summer job. And yet we fertilize and water and weed and allow our lawns to turn us into male nurses and our wives into grass widows" (Jenkins 132). Fast-forward to the year 2000, when a highly touted lawn care book was published. Its title? *A Man's Turf: The Perfect Lawn*, connoting territory, possession, and private property in the use of the word "turf" and, of course, masculinity in that the possessor of the turf can only be a man. O.M. Scott Company sponsors a discussion forum on its website to facilitate the exchange of lawn care information. Most, if not all, of the regular posters are males (although they all display a high propensity for emoticons; perhaps the anonymity of message boards provides men with space for emotional expression). This is revealed most clearly in a discussion thread of November 2007 titled, "Do your wives know you're on this forum??" about marital issues that originate in disagreements over time usage and priorities concerning lawns. The immediate assumption inherent in this thread is that everyone—though they are known only through their avatars, screen names (such as "scgreendude"), and their posts—is assumed to be a) male and b) married. The heteronormative, male-controlled nuclear family persists.

In addition to the lawn being a gendered space, it is also one that is deeply fragmented in terms of ecology. Although the yard purports to be nature, it is rather "unnatural" in an ecological sense. It is "natural" for an ecosystem to have biodiversity (weeds), plants in different stages of growth and decay (the dreaded brown patches), and a food web (plants eaten by bugs). But this state of nature is completely denied, replaced as much as it can be by the growth of a culture of consumerism which naturalizes (in a completely different sense) buying hundreds of dollars worth of products on a little patch of turf. Grass, shorn each week, never goes to seed and therefore never reproduces; it is also never allowed to go dormant, so overfed on fertilizer that it always stays green. In Michel Pollan's words, it is a nature

without sex or death. He writes, "[L]awns, I am convinced, are a symptom of, and a metaphor for, our skewed relationship to the land" (63).

Man's/Men's war with nature on the battleground of the lawn, the tools of which include power machinery derived from agribusiness and chemical weapons originally designed for human warfare, "was the ultimate declaration of masculine ownership of the lawn" (Jenkins 134). In the lawn's referent as a masculine subject, it is an area to be controlled; it must have "sharp edges and strict boundaries. No weeds or animal life should mar the manicured and manufactured perfection of the grass" (Jenkins 118). In contrast to these commercial representations, this unsustainable monoculture of grass and the incredible amount of energy and resources that must be sunk into maintaining it ecologically fragment the ecosystem of which that space had been a part.

The desire to control wild nature and defeat it through human nature is a recurring one. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, cleared land is "the symbol of civilization" while "morality and social order seemed to stop at the edge of the clearing. Safety, happiness, and progress depended on rising out of a wilderness situation," and yet once this occurs, there is an immediate nostalgia and longing for untrammelled wilderness (Jenkins 117). Selecting elements of ecosystems which signify nature in this human imagination and encouraging their growth in vastly simplified systems creates a paradoxically artificial "natural" beauty (Jenkins 134). Yet the single tree, a few shrubs, and the ever-present lawn may indeed have seemed like the only option to capture a bit of nature for the front yard. Dreams to live amongst "unspoiled nature" in a suburban Eden die as "open land vanishes with increased development" (Hayden 8, 9). Clearing land to build subdivisions has tremendous effects on the land and the inhabitants of its ecosystems. But all life does not disappear from suburbs. After building the houses in a

development, “biological life is allowed to reassert itself, but it is always a life that corresponds to prevailing ideas about nature” (Wilson 91). Thus, a carpet of quick-growing grass is seeded or sodded to cover up disturbances left by bulldozers compacting the topsoil or debris from construction. This lends the terrain a semblance of naturalness while also allowing it to look civilized. This is the official position of O.M. Scott Company as well:

It has long been known that wherever bare places on the earth occur, Mother Nature has the habit of providing a covering of some type; all the way from sage brush to crabgrass. She has always abhorred bare places. You might therefore refer to the Scott Company as Mother Nature’s little helper. We have chosen to provide beauty in the form of luxuriant turf where weeds and other unwanted visitors would otherwise take up residence. (Mills 2)

This ubiquitous band-aid over the scar created by development has been rendered normalized, “naturalized” in the very root sense of the term. Thus, though a development may locate the pastoral in its namesake (along the lines of Quail Grove or Fox Run), “a suburban housing development cannot pretend to look like the farm, or marsh, or forest it has replaced” because it would not align with generic suburban ideal “based more on erasing a sense of locale than on working with it” (Wilson 91). The lawn is the balance struck. Its status as a plant “constantly say[s] ‘green’ and thus evoke[s] nature over and again” (Wilson 92). Yet only in color is this chemically dependent monocrop of a nonnative, genetically modified species of grass “natural.”

In the quest to subdue the lawn—owning a slice of nature without the unwanted “pests” associated with more complex ecosystems—humans turn to artificial chemical compounds which disrupt the life cycles of plants and animals as well as the food webs to which they are connected. Strategies of lawn

maintenance that include pesticides or growth inhibitors “deny change and the presence of life,” two of the arguably most “natural” attributes of an environment (Wilson 110). The changing social definition of “pests” shows how problematic a category it is. Before World War II, crabgrass and other bent grasses were cultivated as a lawn in their own right; they were touted for their ability to spread rapidly, quickly covering dirt with green. Clover was also considered beneficial, because as a legume it reintroduced nitrogen into the soil to replenish what the grass had used. Yet with the emergence onto the market of vastly more powerful pesticides and herbicides following the war, dandelions, crabgrass, clover, and other “weeds” became, according to *American Homes and Gardens*, “obstacles of a minor nature [which] must be watched day by day if one is really to make a lawn to be proud of” (Jenkins 82). This minor, inconsequential nature has receded before the social concerns of humanity. Human’s relationship to nature, and indeed “the lawn’s relationship to nature,” reveals the hegemony of humans over nature in the endless war of petrochemical products versus natural processes (Pollan 62).

It is sometimes hard to find nature within the lawn and its maintenance. As Wilson suggests:

The most prominent feature of the modern suburban aesthetic is the lawn, in which three or four species of exotic grasses are grown together as a monoculture. Native grasses and broadleaf plants are eradicated from the lawn with herbicides, and the whole is kept neatly cropped to further discourage ‘invasion’ by other species, a natural component of plant succession. Massive doses of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, and water are necessary to keep the turf green. (Wilson 93)

Michael Pollan believes that “lawn care ha[s] about as much to do with gardening as floor waxing, or road paving...A lawn is nature under culture’s boot” (62). Unlike plants existing within a complex ecosystem or even in a vegetable garden which constantly changes with cycles of weather and seasons, growth and flowering and seed and death, the grasses are homogeneous and static (62). Lawns are “nature purged of sex or death,” reflecting the morality-driven Progressive movement which first established the aesthetic (62). Lawns are also not place- and climate-specific, a situation which often leads to environmental degradation. Whereas gardens and forests work with local weather patterns, altitude, and organisms within the local biosphere, “lawns work on the opposite principle. They depend for their success [defined as homogeneity across both the lawn itself and in comparison to the rest of America’s lawns] on the *overcoming* of local conditions” (Pollan 63). Superimposing our lawns on the land necessitates vast inputs of energy, petrochemicals, labor, and water (Pollan 63). Such artificiality, introduced by synthetic lawn chemicals, “came to be valued over the natural because it was predictable and easily controlled” (Jenkins 133). In the extreme, grass-as-plant was abandoned in favor of plastic AstroTurf or green-painted asphalt. For the many who keep their lawn, however, there is a vast array of dangerous chemicals to be used in the defense of the lawn—often at the cost of songbirds, fish, pets, and even children. “Lately,” writes Michael Pollan, “we have begun to recognize that we are poisoning ourselves with our lawns” (63); in 1989, the National Academy of Sciences found that homeowners tend to use up to ten times more chemicals per acre on their lawns than farmers use on agricultural land (Jenkins 166).

Rachel Carson, in her 1964 book *Silent Spring*, spoke out against the use of DDT and other toxic chemicals in pest control, including in household lawn settings. Cautioning humans against overuse of “crabgrass killers,” she addresses how the cultural

conception that humans can bend nature to our will plays out in advertisements featuring the application of petrochemicals. “Marketed under trade names which give no hint of their nature, many of these preparations contain such poisons as mercury, arsenic, and chlordane. Application at the recommended rates leaves tremendous amounts of these chemicals on the lawn,” Carson warns (80). As Jenkins notes, Carson “was appalled by the depiction of chemical killers as toys...[S]he explained that ‘they give a giddy sense of power over nature to those who wield them’” (156). But the year after *Silent Spring* was published, *Better Homes and Gardens* ran a story on the importance of lawn chemicals in which “readers were advised that they ‘must use a variety of chemicals during different periods of the growing season to get the beautiful turf you want’” (Jenkins 156). It was still war against the weeds, as surely as it was the Cold War.

C.B. Mills, the CEO of O.M. Scott Company, wrote in 1961: “[We] recognized the costly toll that weeds were extracting...[W]eeds were the subversives [which] few people realize” (10). He also promises that in the event of “some major catastrophe, which might destroy vast areas of our population or lay waste our growing crops...there is stored away in vaults...seeds...so the survivors could start over again” (16). Mills obfuscates the threat of a nuclear winter with the survival of grass seed—hardly the most important plant to sequester in the event of such a disaster, unless humans mutated into ruminants. In the rhetoric of the Cold War, O.M. Scott sets up a false binary in which the choices are to remain a patriotic American and use petrochemicals on the front lawn or jeopardize one’s true-blue status with a shameful lawn. The front lawn as the “home front” to be defended for morale and against Communism was O.M. Scott’s most extant manifestation of this “concerted effort to keep the front-lawn aesthetic in the forefront of the national consciousness in the form of superpatriotism” (Jenkins 95). The hyper-alert, protectionist, “We will be ready; we are standing by,”

attitude which characterized one type of O.M. Scott Company's ads became a means for selling a lot of pesticides, the ecological "material to fight invaders such as crabgrass, weeds, insects, earth worms, and, ultimately, Mother Nature" (Jenkins 96, 133). The same discourse—and the same weapons, as it turned out—were used against national enemies and backyard ones (Jenkins 147). Let us look at the case study of crabgrass, which I have spoken of previously as being a socially constructed weed. When crabgrass was first identified as a noxious weed, there were no chemical ways of eliminating it. One source suggested trying to scorch "ripe crabgrass seed heads with a torch or flame gun," while a 1947 brochure recommended applications of sulfuric acid or gasoline (Jenkins 147). Then, the American Cyanamid Company, using research funded during World War II, began selling Weedone (2, 4-D) as nonpoisonous to humans and pets—the ad included a picture of a young child pouring the powder on a prone pet dog as a demonstration of its safety—while also trafficking in the metaphors of war and killing and enemies (Jenkins 149). And rightfully so—2, 4-D is the major ingredient in the defoliant Agent Orange, considered likely to cause cancer, associated with birth defects, reproductive problems, neurotoxicity, kidney, and liver damage, and a sensitizer and irritant (Jenkins 151). A National Cancer Institute study (1986) found that Kansas farmers who used 2, 4-D on their fields had eight times the higher risk of contracting non-Hodgkin's lymphomas than the general population; however, it is not banned and is instead used in more than 1,500 weed products (Jenkins 166). DDT, similarly, is known as the "atomic bomb of the insect world" yet *Lawn Care* magazine claims that it is "relatively non-toxic to humans, pets, and birds when used in diluted strengths...[so you can] enjoy outdoor living without annoyance from crawling, biting, stinging insects" (Jenkins 154).

And it is here that we return to culture. Issues of masculine dominance and control over the land, of the naturalization of a

highly built and aggressively managed environment, and the historical importance of land to Americans mean that the suburban front yard is an abundantly signified space. As Michael Pollan writes and I amend, "the land is too important to our identity as [patriarchal and consuming] Americans to simply allow everybody to have their own way with it" (Pollan 61). As each wetland, farm, or forest was bulldozed to clear new land for development, "the domestic front lawn was accepted as a necessary and usual landscape across the continent. Few people could conceive of the residential landscape without front lawns," even though they may have remembered a year ago there being a stand of trees in the same spot where tract homes and green lawns were today (Jenkins 115). According to Mills, in regard to advertising, "today...a bright package and an official analysis tells the complete story" (16). I would argue the complete opposite: issues of place, gender, class, and race, as well as assumptions underlying the naturalization of many Americans' daily lives (including "freeways, shopping malls, commutes, lawns, detached homes, soccer games, mortgage payments..." [Nicolaides and Wiese 1]), are subsumed beneath the verdant lawn, yet become inextricably connected to the construction of cultures of the United States.

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DESTROYING GROUND-LANDLORD SPIRITUALITY: IMPLICATIONS OF MODERNISM AND MOBILITY ON PLACE IN *HOWARDS END*

Dana Swanson
Augustana College (IL)

*Editors' Note: This is an essay of literary criticism. However, because the themes of E.M. Forster's work and of Ms. Swanson's essay are altogether relevant to the concerns of Local Culture, we encourage even readers who are unfamiliar with the novel *Howards End* to read the essay. For a brief plot summary of the novel, see Appendix A at the end of this essay.*

At the turn of the twentieth century, English society was undergoing a shift from an emphasis on fixed, rural values towards a cosmopolitan, industrial ideology. What was considered land under the agricultural society of years past becomes an issue of private property to modern, capitalist man. With the wave of industrialization washing over the country, E.M. Forster scrutinized the modern, capitalist creed's obsession with property that he perceived as a threat to the traditional sense of invested rootedness. When land is reduced to property, its sense of *place* is compromised. Under capitalism, as Karl Marx describes it, land becomes a commodity, no longer a source of connection to a geographical location. If a place is treated like a commodity, when it no longer satisfies human needs it is subject to disposal, just as Henry Wilcox discards Oniton when he no longer has a use for it in *Howards End*. In *Howards End*, Forster hints at the potential consequences of a capitalist, cosmopolitan population on the notion of place. Roaming over the earth, a nomadic horde interacting superficially through the tires of his motorcar, modern man is unable to establish a sense of place. The capitalist lifestyle of mobility and motorcars corrodes man's ability to connect with place, hindering other forms of human connection as well.

Ruth Wilcox resists the motor cars of the modern era that would take her away from where her roots branch out, Howards End. Immediately upon her arrival to Howards End, Aunt Juley realizes that Ruth “seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it” (18). Ruth does not perceive the land that belongs to her as a commodity; on the contrary, it appears as if she belongs to the land. Ruth retains what environmentalist Aldo Leopold considered a land-ethic, recognizing that “land is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals” (Leopold 216). The place exerts power over Ruth not merely because she was born there but because it has been residence to her family for generations. Heredity, as well as emotional connections, allow Ruth to “belong to the past” (18) and to retain the pre-modern rural ethos of the environmental reciprocity vital to connection with place. Ruth is just as much a part of Howards End as it is a part of her; she spent her years under the wych-elm, roaming amidst the fragrant poppies, holding wisps of hay and inhaling the earthly scent, engaging in an intimate relationship with Howards End. Ruth draws so much of her personal identity from Howards End that she admits that if it had been pulled down, it would have killed her (66).

Rural life allows for a qualitatively different existence, close to the earth rather than abstracted by the movement characteristic of the cosmopolitan lifestyle. Rural values were grounded in the land; generations were born and passed back into the earth within the same square acres. It is through the English farms’ connectedness with natural cycles that “one might see life steadily and see it whole” (212). To be removed from one’s place disrupts Ruth’s cyclical view of life; when one is rooted in a place, she is birthed upon the soil, matures in the sunlight, then returns to that same earth once her life cycle is complete. When man is always moving, he does not have the chance to stay in one spot long enough to realize the natural cycles taking place around him. Such

perpetual mobility isolates one from the natural cycles of the year—planting, ripening, harvest, and decay. Remaining in a place permits a deeper understanding of life, promoting one to “group in one vision [life’s] transitoriness and its eternal youth” (212). When man is not familiar with these cycles, he cannot draw the connection between the cycle of the seasons and the cyclical nature of his own life. Ruth knows the magnitude of the cycles and considers it “worse than dying” not to die in the room in which one was born (66).

Before her death, Ruth Wilcox wills monetary assets to her family, but she leaves Howards End to Margaret. She seeks a “spiritual heir” (79) to her family’s estate, acting with future generations in mind. By leaving Howards End to Margaret, Ruth is guided not by short-term impulse but by long-term concern for place over property. Cultural critic Wendell Berry comments that it is the obsession with immediate ends—which the Wilcoxes entertain—without regard for future effects that “drives us to our inflexible concentration upon number and price and size” (132). Ruth is concerned with the legacy of her place, which she recognizes cannot be properly continued by her modern family. The late Mrs. Wilcox’s behavior is considered “treacherous to the family,” primarily because it defied “the laws of property” (79). To the capitalist Wilcoxes, Howards End is a house, nothing more than a piece of property with a depreciating market value. The remaining Wilcoxes lack what critic of industrial economics David Orr considers the “deep concept of place as a repository of meaning, history, livelihood, healing, recreation, and sacred memory” (163). Deficient in the intimate knowledge of the place, the Wilcoxes are able to reduce Howards End to a piece of real estate, a commodity.

Neatly fitting the Wilcox mold, Ruth’s son Charles employs the modern, capitalist mindset; he values property over place, rendering him an inadequate spiritual heir. When Charles marries Dolly, he supposes he will “install himself” at their new home in

the Surrey suburbs (75). Any chance of achieving a stable sense of place is disrupted by Charles's constant movement. Changing homes does not disturb Charles, for he sees moving to a new house as an installation, a mechanical adjustment to his new surroundings. Unlike his mother, Charles likes to travel; "what he enjoys most is a motor tour in England" (57). When Charles travels, his experience is that of a modern traveler, experiencing "a succession of homogenized images and sounds moving through an engineered landscape" (Orr 54). But Charles does not mind and embraces mobility, preferring to engage in a superficial interaction with the landscape through the window of a motorcar.

Ruth connects to place organically; her roots branch deep into the earth. Lacking roots, Charles's relationship with a place is a business transaction. Forster exposes a flaw in mobility, for "ten square miles are not ten times as wonderful as one square mile" (159). Constant travel does not lead to fulfillment; glancing at ten miles whizzing by outside a motorcar is not the same as knowing that there are teeth in the wych-elm, when the poppies bloom, or the way blades of grass feel on a single acre of land. Even though luxuries of modernity such as the motorcar present seemingly easier alternatives to methods of the past, it does not mean constant movement must occur, for "a thousand square miles are not practically the same as heaven" (159). Just because someone, like Charles, has seen a higher quantity of land does not render him superior to someone like Ruth, who has passed her days getting to know one geographical location. If anything, Charles is disadvantaged when compared with Ruth, for he only has a superficial relationship with the many miles he has watched blur past. Quite eagerly accepting the "culture of luggage" (119) Charles is unable to stay in one location long enough to connect.

Cruising through the countryside on the way to Oniton Grange, one of the motorists in the Wilcox caravan runs over a cat. All are content offering the girl whose cat is killed money for the mistake without a second thought to the effect—all except

Margaret. To emphasize the insignificance of the encounter to the motorists, the girl is not given a name. The modern man's reaction to offer compensation and continue on his way confirms he operates within the capitalist realm. By ignoring the emotional attachment the girl may have with her cat, the men reinforce their membership in the modern world through an utter obliviousness to the inner-life of another human being. Just as land is commodified under the capitalist system, emotions become subject to purchase.

Margaret realizes the superficial emotional understanding of the modern motorists, for they lack connection and have "no part with the earth and its emotions" (169). Not only do the motorists overlook the impact the accident had upon the girl's emotional state, they also neglect any lasting effect they are causing on the countryside as they pass through. They prefer wheels to roots, flattening any hopes for connection between themselves and the planet. Rolling over the planet, never sufficiently interacting with a place, Margaret notices they are merely "dust and a stink, and cosmopolitan chatter, and the girl whose cat had been killed had lived more deeply than they" (169). The girl is rooted in a rural sense of place, but the cosmopolitans know not where they belong—they hurry along in their motorcars, leaving behind not sentiments, only pollution. Such modern mobility allows this encounter with the girl's cat to be forgotten by the Wilcox party, dissipating in the cloud of smoke puffing out the exhaust pipe.

The introduction of the motorcar dramatically changed the experience of place, asserts Andrew Thacker in "E.M. Forster and the Motor Car." Thacker considers the novel to be about "making connections between different forms of space," as well as an "exploration in the experience of moving between spaces in the process of making connections" (39). The motorcar presented unprecedented strains in human connections because of the way it promoted movement between geographical spaces

or locations. Thacker elaborates, “[T]he flux and change of the contemporary world produces inhabitants of a cosmopolitan hue rather than citizens who belong in any specific place” (39). In other words, Thacker believes that the modern lifestyle encourages a mobile population rather than one with ties to a single geographical location. When it comes to Oniton, “the Wilcoxes have no part in the place, nor in any place” and after they depart, it is mentioned that they “swept into the valley and swept out of it, leaving a little dust and a little money behind” (197). With modernity sweeping through England in the early twentieth century, people were being brushed away from places by industrialized bristles, leaving behind only the cloud of dust stirred up by their departing motorcars. The mobility of modernism causes permanent damage, Orr argues, as “velocity of modern travel has damaged our ability to be at home anywhere” (163). Therefore, modern men like Charles Wilcox wander from place to place, unable to recognize any place as home.

Where Charles prefers traveling by motor, Margaret Schlegel struggles to adjust to the mobility of the motorcar, receptive to a “sense of flux” from traveling at such an accelerated pace (162). While traveling to Howards End, “she lost the sense of space; once more trees, houses, people, animals, hills, merged and heaved into one dirtiness” (159). Charles embraces space, as the modernists do, speeding through it in his motorcar. Measured in what Orr considers “lapsed time,” Margaret’s flux resembles “the dull exhaustion that accompanies jet lag” (55). As her contact with the land is abstracted as she moves through spaces, Margaret suffers from a condition similar to jetlag. Passing over land, being unable to connect with the places disturbs Margaret because she invests so much in place.

Although Forster recognized the growing preference of spaces over places, in the post-modern world the spirit of mobility has escalated. In *Globalization of Nothing 2*, sociologist George Ritzer proposes that the world, once characterized by

places, is being replaced by *nonplaces* (36). The world, according to Ritzer, is increasingly dominated by nothing, which he defines as “a social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled, and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content” (36). Where the world was once brimming with places, the presence of nothing has reduced those places to *nonplaces*—dehumanized locations lacking complexity and lacking ties to a specific location or time period (36). Places that innately discourage connection, such as the suburban sprawl encroaching upon Howards End from London, would readily fall under the category of *nonplace*.

Not only does the mobility characteristic of modern society prevent people from developing adequate relationships with place, the Charles Wilcoxes flow about from *nonplace* to *nonplace*, unaware of any alternative. Characterized by what sociologist Manuel Castells considers “spaces of flows” rather than “spaces of places” (408), modern man can easily uproot himself to a new location without as much as a questioning glance at the blurring scenery out the motorcar window. Flowing in their motorcars from London to Oniton, then back to London, the Wilcoxes struggle to form attachment with any place. Although modern man considers himself advanced, largely due to certain technological advancements provided by industrialization, he is no better than a member of a nomadic horde, living a life of movement without any sense of permanence. Rather than be defined by a place, human beings are increasingly defined by their fluidity between places. Margaret suffers from the flux, subconsciously struggling with the fact that such accessible mobility discourages connection.

Once Margaret adjusts, she forgets the material goods—the luggage and the motorcars, as well as the “hurrying men who know so much and connect so little” (162)—and becomes immersed in Howards End. She senses the pulse of the place while Henry babbles on about the property; Henry sees no use for Howards End because it does not pay, for “the days for small

farms are over” (162). Impaired by his mass-produced industrial lenses, Henry sees Howards End as property, a product whose value depends upon how much it will fetch at market. As Mrs. Avery observes, “[T]he house lies too much on the land for [the Wilcoxes]” (216). Many of the abstract concepts responsible for shaping the modern world, such as this commodification of land, “have rendered the idea of place impotent and the idea of people being competent in their places an anachronism” (Orr 163).

Although representative of the minority, Margaret Schlegel attempts competency in her places due to her deep value for connection, which she exhibits through the attachments she forms with places like Oniton. On her first night there she climbs up a mound and declares, “I love this place. I love Shropshire. I hate London. I am glad that this will be my home” (171). Margaret rejects the modernism of London, choosing Shropshire’s rural sense of place instead. She tires of the modern sense of flux, leaving her willing to plant her roots in a single location, to develop a connection with a place. Unlike the Wilcoxes, who eagerly speed over the planet in their motorcars, Margaret feels at one with Oniton. Once Margaret believes she will make it her home, “coloring it and colored by it” (192), she recognizes the reciprocal relationship between herself and Oniton. She is not alone in her imperfections, suffering between things as they are and as they ought to be: “Oniton, like herself, was imperfect” (182). Drawing similarities between herself and the ruinous castle, Margaret demonstrates her deeper spatial understanding.

Unlike Margaret, Henry finds flaw in rather than appreciation for Oniton’s imperfections. He is in fact a Wilcox, having “no part in the place, nor in any place” (197), which leads him to let the property without consulting Margaret. Rather crossly, Margaret voices her objections, for she “loved that place extraordinarily” (205). Troubled by Henry’s constant mobility, Margaret probes, “don’t you believe in having a permanent home,

Henry?” (205). Henry responds with a weak explanation about how he finds Oniton too damp and no place to make a home. Through this statement, Henry reveals his belief that a home is something that can be made anywhere as soon as residents install themselves and their movables; his practical, capitalist approach allows for his ignorance of place. To Henry, Oniton is no more than a piece of property he purchased as a gift for Evie. Due to her recent engagement, Evie no longer has use for the property, so Henry rids himself of the place and continues moving.

Margaret’s sister Helen is reluctant to participate in modern culture, observing that the “modern ownership of movables is reducing us again to a nomadic horde” (119). Moving to a new town is simple, claims the modern man; all he has to do is pack his possessions into his motorcar, load up his family, and turn the key in the ignition. Upon arrival, all of his movables can easily be installed on his new property. The Wilcoxes repeatedly move houses, as they do from Oniton, emphasizing how modernity disrupts a stable sense of place.

Margaret struggles to accept Henry’s action in letting Oniton:

Margaret was silent...London was but a foretaste of this nomadic civilization which is altering human nature so profoundly, and throws upon personal relations a stress greater than they have ever borne before. Under cosmopolitanism, if it comes, we shall receive no help from the earth. (206)

Profoundly altering human nature by creating new degrees of disconnection, modern mobility is essentially unnatural. Flowing from place to place, lacking a sense of permanence, man will lack the ability to devote proper effort to personal relationships. Helen is sensitive to the modern trend of mobility, pegging modern society as a “civilization of luggage,” more obsessed with acquiring possessions than “taking root in the earth” (119). When humans fail to allow their roots a chance to sprout, “all

meaningful contact between ourselves and the earth is broken” (Berry 74). Detached from a sense of permanence, life is characterized by movement, flowing from one place to the next with little regard for consequence. But the earth will not save humankind from modernity—“we shall receive no help from the earth”—for man is disjointed not only from place but also from the planet. By disrupting natural connections, modernity disrupts the way humans interact. Man will not be able to lend his connection with the earth as an example for how to maintain lasting relationships with other human beings.

When a house is too damp, one moves. When a man accidentally runs over a cat in his motorcar, he offers monetary compensation and then drives away without remorse. When a woman finds out about an affair years ago between her fiancé and another woman, he expects her to break off the engagement. When place becomes subject to commodification, human relations are not far behind. Henry expects Margaret to treat their relationship as a commodity; when she finds out about his affair he imagines she will dismiss him. To his surprise, Margaret values the various forms of connection and does not dispose of their relationship as she would a commodity. However, she is the last of a dying breed, for her generation will be replaced by generations of nomadic modern motorists. In search of a home, cosmopolitans wander as a horde of polluting, careless, disconnected beasts over the earth, removed by the soles of their shoes from any meaningful connection with place. Destruction of place leaves man utterly homeless, wandering from *nonplace* to *nonplace*, searching, desperately searching for something, but unable to identify that what he lacks is connection.

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Appendix A

Plot Summary of the Novel *Howards End*

The novel's protagonist, Margaret Schlegel, is a cultured London bourgeois intellectual with an independent income. The beginning of the novel pits the sensibilities of Margaret and her sister Helen against those of the Wilcoxes—captains of industry and commerce. Margaret and Helen would have none of the greed and ugliness that comes with England's thriving economy; Henry Wilcox, on the other hand, along with his son Charles, embrace the world of "telegrams and anger" as an inescapable and welcome fact of modern life. When the Wilcoxes take a London flat opposite that of the Schlegels, a friendship blossoms between Margaret and the mysterious Mrs. Wilcox. Mrs. Wilcox is not like either camp of London bourgeois society: the daughter of an old farm family, she is neither intellectual nor does she have a head for business. And yet she seems to Margaret to possess a greater wisdom than all of London's high society, a wisdom which appears mysteriously to stem from her connection to her ancestral home, Howards End. Mrs. Wilcox dies shortly thereafter from a well-concealed terminal illness and, in a move that shocks her family, bequeaths Howards End to Margaret (a fact which Margaret discovers only later, as Henry Wilcox refuses to heed the request).

Some time after Mrs. Wilcox's death, a friendship begins to develop between Margaret and Henry. The Schlegels have also met Leonard Bast, a poor insurance clerk who futilely aspires to reach the same cultural echelon as the sophisticated Schlegels. Among the Schlegels' kind but misguided attempts to aid Leonard is a business suggestion that he leave his current employer and search for a new job. (The impetus for this suggestion comes from Henry Wilcox, who is certain that Leonard's company is doomed to crash). Henry surprises Margaret with a proposal of marriage, and she surprises herself by accepting. The two seem to be aimed

toward a tenuous but happy union, but shortly thereafter, things begin to unravel.

Leonard, who took Henry's suggestion, has been promptly let go from his new company—and furthermore, his old company is now faring better than ever. A furious Helen drags Leonard (with his wife Jacky in tow) out to the countryside (where Margaret and Henry are attending the wedding of Henry's daughter) to confront Henry and demand from him that he find a new position for the now utterly impoverished Leonard. Unfortunately, Henry recognizes Jacky as a prostitute with whom he had an affair ten years previous, and thus refuses to become further involved with Leonard. He offers to Margaret the option of nullifying their engagement, but she forgives him his past indiscretion. The tumult of the day leaves Helen and Leonard in altered states of mind, and after Jacky has fallen asleep, the two have an affair. Helen becomes pregnant from the incident, and Leonard is wracked with guilt.

Helen disappears for some time after this, and Margaret does not discover her pregnancy until months later. She wants Helen to stay with her for some time at Howards End, but Henry refuses to allow a fallen woman to sleep in his house. This hypocrisy on his part drives a wedge between him and Margaret, and it seems that their marriage is doomed to fail. Leonard, still overtaken with guilt at his role in Helen's fall from grace, comes to Howards End to confess. A self-righteous Charles Wilcox attacks him with the flat of a sword, which triggers a fatal heart failure. In a legal turn which surprises the rich Wilcoxes, Charles is actually convicted of responsibility for Leonard's death and sentenced to five years in prison. The crestfallen Henry turns to Margaret for comfort, and thus begins his moral reform. The end of the novel sees Henry and Margaret living together at Howards End along with Helen and her newborn son.

A CASE STUDY: THE IMPACTS OF THE JAMES BAY HYDROPOWER COMPLEX

Laurence Deschamps-Laporte
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The James Bay hydropower complex is the biggest hydropower project in North America. Its construction started 39 years ago and is still ongoing. Today, there is enough research published on the complex to use it as a case study on the impacts of hydropower. The James Bay hydropower complex gets most of its power from a river called La Grande. However, many other smaller rivers have been diverted to contribute to the power provided by La Grande. La Grande's length is 535 Miles, and it is relatively narrow. In comparison, the St. Lawrence River's length is 2,400 miles. La Grande was chosen as the most appropriate site for hydropower development because of its high hydroelectric potential. This hydropower complex is situated 836 miles from Montreal in the James Bay region, which is a mid-northern region of the province of Québec (see Appendix B). Hydro-Québec is the public society responsible for energy development in the province of Québec and is the main contractor for the James Bay hydropower complex. The James Bay hydropower complex consists today of a network of eleven dams (See Appendix A).

The James Bay project is an example of insufficient environmental impact assessment and of destructive development. Hydroelectricity does not need to be damaging for the river, the ecosystem, and local populations. Hydro-Québec could have exploited the power of the La Grande River without diverting it and creating basins. The province of Québec did not need an overly expensive and grand complex. This project was so large that it created surpluses of electricity. Hydro-Québec and the government of Québec had political motivations at the time of the development of the project. They wanted to become the biggest producer of hydroelectricity in the world and an economically independent province within Canada.

Consequently, they diverted rivers quickly before the end of Prime Minister Robert Bourassa's mandate. This mentality of destructive and fast development became the norm in the last decades of the expansion of the complex.

The mainstream perception of the rivers in Québec in the 1970s was repeated many times by Robert Bourassa, the prime minister of Québec at the time: "If water flow is unused, the economic benefits are gone forever...What a waste!" (ix). Opponents to the development of the James Bay project, such as Jacques Parizeau, chief of the Parti Québécois, said: "Québec has allowed the nuclear energy to pass it by. Diversifying our means of producing energy is essential. And harnessing small rivers [as done by Bourassa] is pure delirium" (Bourassa 28). For many political leaders in Québec, the development of the James Bay hydropower complex has a single facet: price. Professor Jean-Thomas Bernard from L'Université Laval, a specialist in the economics of energy in Canada, says the first phase of development of the James Bay Hydropower Complex in the 1970s and 1980s was a clear success from an economic point of view. It was a success, according to him, because it provided electricity at a cost of 0.03 C\$/kWh. Bernard, like most politicians in Québec, believes that hydroelectricity should be further developed, and that Québec still has a lot of unexploited rivers, or "wasted" potential. Today, as rivers further north of Québec are diverted, the cost of the electricity provided by the James Bay hydropower complex is between 0.07 C\$ and 0.10 C\$/kWh. However, Québécois are still charged 0.03 C\$/kWh. Citizens of Québec have the cheapest electricity in the world (Bernard). If the price of electricity were raised, local consumption would fall and citizens of Québec would save energy, reducing the need to build the dams such as the ones in the James Bay complex (Bernard). Even if the economic arguments that the media repeatedly mentions in regards to the James Bay hydropower complex are sound, other aspects of the

complex, such as its impacts on the fauna, flora, landscape, and local populations, should also be taken into consideration.

The James Bay hydropower complex has left a major footprint on the ecosystems of the region. It has particularly impacted the fauna. The James Bay region is rich in wildlife. Arctic foxes, caribou, and polar bears live north of La Grande River and black bears, wolves, minks, beavers, otters, red squirrels, muskrats, rabbits, and moose live south of the river (Bourassa 4). Professor Kenneth Hare deplores the lack of scientific research on wildlife in the region (Carlson 225). There have been, however, a few studies on the caribou herds. The caribou species living along the James Bay region is the Migratory Woodland caribou (MW caribou). The MW caribou is a critically endangered species in the United States and a threatened species in Canada. Two main herds of MW caribou exist: one in Labrador and one in the James Bay region. The migratory routes of the caribou have been disturbed by the construction of the dams (Laporte). The best example to demonstrate the impact of dams on wildlife and more precisely on caribou herds is the flooding of the Caniapiscou River, part of the James Bay hydropower complex, in September of 1984. MW caribou can normally swim up to 10 km without any problem, but the water in the Caniapiscou was abnormally high, and about 10,000 caribou drowned (Laporte). Their carcasses were transported by the waters to the nearest village of Kuujjuak. At that time, the number of lost caribou represented 10% of the herd (Laporte).

Scientists such as William Hamley claim that the James Bay project has a positive effect on aquatic ecosystems. They believe that fish can now reproduce more easily in the newly built reservoirs and that commercial fishing becomes more feasible (112). However, mostly touristic fishing now takes place in the reservoirs. A group of scientists who conducted research on fish in four of the main reservoirs of the James Bay project disagreed with Hamley's claim, saying that commercial fishers are not

interested in fish with mercury. The water flooding the land and creating the reservoir was enriched due to the decomposition of submerged organic matter (Verdon et al. 408). This enriched water stimulated the population of fish and contributed to a clear increase in fish density, but also in levels of mercury. Scientific research has shown that there is a strong relationship between the level of organic matter in the water and mercury levels (Verdon et al. 413). The greater the flooded area, the higher the level of mercury in the fish (Verdon et al. 414).

Aside from fish and caribou, other species are affected by the building of the dams. The Cree Trappers Association (CTA) stated in a trial in 1972 that beavers are attracted “to the edge of the LG 2 reservoir but are unable to maintain lodges if the water level fluctuation is large (as in 1982)” (Berkes 5). They have also noted that it became more difficult to hunt geese because of the development and construction. The CTA testified that the flooding of wetlands has also reduced the availability of grasses, willow, birch, and alder for animals that use the species found in wetlands as food and habitat. Consequently, beaver, muskrat, willow ptarmigan, snowshoe hare, otter, and mink populations, as well as red fox and lynx populations, have decreased since the building of the dam in 1971 (Berkes 210). These are only a few documented examples of the impacts of the James Bay hydropower complex on the fauna of the region.

Wildlife as a whole is impacted by these new constructions, fauna as well as flora. The flora of the James Bay region, south of the La Grande, consists of a dense forest of spruce, pine, fir, birch, and aspen (Bourassa 4). The north is taiga with black spruce, gray pine and a variety of species of lichen and moss (Bourassa 4). Carlson writes:

In the North [of Québec] there is only a very limited number of species; the northern vegetation and the northern fauna are made up of a limited number of different kinds of plants and different kinds of

animals. And most of them are highly specific. They have exact requirements and they are adapted to a specific environment. (225)

The flora of the region is rich and unique. Professor Hare also declared that our knowledge of the territory is so limited that it would be a mistake to build infrastructure in the regions and not be able to study them. He said: “Don’t disturb the northern environments if you cannot understand them” (226). Consequently, the general consensus is that science has not yet taken advantage of the laboratory that northern Québec offers. Therefore, it would be a mistake to destroy this pristine environment without having scientists study it. And Hydro-Québec made the mistake of flooding kilometers of lands, and destroying this virgin environment. Hamley also writes that the James Bay project has had a negative effect on the vegetated ecosystems and that it will take time for vegetative regeneration (112). At the beginning of the development of the James Bay hydropower complex in the 1970s, the taiga was flooded and plants decomposed and emitted large amounts of greenhouse gases. However, in the latest developments, forests and vegetation have been cut or buried to reduce the effects of decomposition (Laporte).

Aside from the fauna and flora, the landscape of the region has also been negatively impacted by the hydroelectric developments. The landscape of the James Bay region is the main factor explaining the high quality of hydropower available. Having water is not enough for hydroelectric potential; water must be in continuous flow and supply and the descent rate must allow turbines to function well. All of these conditions were fulfilled with La Grande River, which is why Hydro-Québec initially decided to build the complex on this river. The landscape was altered by the building of the James Bay project. Rivers are diverted and new beds are dug in the rocky soil. Some rivers that

have been diverted to be directed into the James Bay complex have been filled with stones. From 1971 to 1988, the “James Bay development caused some massive environmental perturbations such as the flooding of almost 4,000 square miles (10,000 km²) of land and changed the flow and temperature regimes of several river systems” (Berkes 217). Crees have also reported in different interviews a net increase in the erosion rates of the banks of La Grande, which became a threat to the new village where Hydro-Québec relocated them (Berkes 206). Following this, there has been bank stabilization work. The landscape changes in the region are clear: river beds are dry, new beds are dug, and reservoirs have appeared. A simple view of the area shows the major consequences of building hydropower plants.

In 1971, many Québécois and politicians thought of the James Bay region, this vast eastern sub-arctic part of Canada, as uninhabited Nordic desert. However, it was inhabited by 8,000 Crees and 5,000 Inuits (Berkes 3). The impact of hydropower projects on the lifestyle of the First Nations¹ is rarely addressed. The tribes’ main economic activities are fishing, hunting, and trapping, and most members of these groups spend at least four months a year “in the bush” (Berkes 4). The government of Québec often ignores the aboriginal people because they are legally under the responsibility of the federal government (Martin 65). There have been legal suits by the Crees and Inuits against Hydro-Québec. In 1975, Hydro-Québec and the First Nations reached an agreement called *The James Bay and Northern Québec agreement*. This agreement provides economic compensation and the creation of a small, protected hunting territory, provided that the groups will let go of their ancestral right to the land in the James Bay area (Berkes 4). In this time of disputes between the

Crees and Inuits and the provincial authorities, many analysts claim that Québec has taken the role of the colonial protector: the government tried to convince the First Nations to accept this project because it will bring modernity and end their “backwardness” (Martin 228). However, most First Nations leaders did not accept this argument. In a trial, Matthew Coon Come, who was the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said: “Crees are not against modernity; they admire progress and science, but is every structure, highway, dam, really ‘development’?” (Carlson 220).

In their lawsuits, the Crees and Inuits apprehended the construction of the hydropower complex. The concerns of the communities evolved over time as the hydropower complex expanded. The main concerns mentioned in the trials were: the reduction of wetland resources, the loss of hunting areas and the loss of the fishery at the First Rapids of La Grande, the relocation of Fort George village, the decrease in drinking water quality, the difficulty in harvesting areas flooded by reservoirs, a concern for travel safety in the lower La Grande, no access to the James Bay North Coast, and high mercury in fish in reservoir systems (Berkes 5). The Crees were also worried about the flooding of traditional burial sites, as well as disruption of their social order and hunting law with the arrival of workers and construction of a road. They also said that great discharges of relatively warm water from the reservoirs in winter and early spring melted the ice under the snow in the estuary area (Berkes 5). Hunters normally accessed hunting territory on the other side of La Grande by walking on the frozen estuary (Berkes 205). But it became impossible to access the other coast of the river.

The construction of the James Bay hydropower complex had important social impacts on the local populations. It totally disturbed the social networks and traditional lifestyles of these populations. The government failed to consult the tribal leaders before beginning the construction. The new road and the arrival

¹ The term First Nations has historically been used in the Canadian Constitution to refer to the native peoples of Canada. In the United-States, the term “Native Americans” is more common, but the terms can be used interchangeably.

of workers caused social stress and cultural change, and it contributed to problems such as drug and alcohol use in the communities (Berkes 206). There have also been arguments and disputes with the provincial government, and these disputes caused the interruption of social and medical services for the Crees and Inuits in 1980 and 1981 (Berkes 206). Since 1971, 20,000 people have been brought to the James Bay complex to work, while another 2,200 were scattered throughout the James Bay region. Hydro-Québec planned that when development stops, the complex will need 500 permanent employees on-site (Carlson 226). However, it is hard to predict if the development will ever end, since the government of Québec has diverted 63 rivers in Québec in the last two years (Francoeur). Also, the Crees have their own land-use system. In order to maintain sustainable harvests, they believe that there should be controlled access to the hunting-trapping areas as well as a monitoring of territorial use (Berkes 211). The development of road in the southern James Bay resulted in the “partial breakdown and overexploitation of resources” and disturbed their traditional land-use system (Berkes 211).

Aside from the tangible impact on the lives of the Crees and Inuits, these populations’ spiritual conception of nature has been violated by the construction of the hydropower complex. When interviewed for research, Crees said that the river La Grande is so powerful that it has provided cures for illnesses of their tribe for the past centuries (Niezen 21). They believe that one has to respect the power of the river, and it is now impossible for them to connect with man-made structures or the stagnant waters of a reservoir. Furthermore, human-animal relationships are central to the Cree conception of life and nature. For example, when a goose is killed, the esophagus of the goose is hung on a tree to pay respect to the animal. The windpipe is the source of its voice and this is why it is the most precious part (Niezen 18). Disrespect to an animal could mean a decline in the species’

population. A Cree hunter always speaks as if the animals are in control of the hunt. The success of the hunt depends on the animals and the hunter is successful if the animal decides to make itself available (Niezen 19). Crees and Inuits are resentful because new immigrants from the city working in the region have disrespectfully hunted their animals (Francoeur). And this is one of the reasons why they think that the dams and reservoirs, which greatly affect the habitats of animals, are not only dangerous for the survival of the species, but also disrupt their spiritual practices.

No comprehensive environmental impact assessment for the James Bay hydropower complex was done before beginning the construction (Berkes 4). All predictions on the project ended up being wrong. The complex itself cost ten times more than predicted (Laporte). Hydro-Québec claimed that the impact of the hydropower complex on the ecosystems and populations would be minimal (Bourassa 5), a claim which, in light of this case study, was completely false. Scientists call for a more comprehensive approach to ecosystems (Berkes 4). Understanding estuarine and wetlands ecosystems, for example, could lead to a better preservation of the Crees’ and Inuits’ fishing and hunting-trapping territories. The James Bay hydropower complex is still expanding today, and on the 8th of November in 2009, seventy five percent of the flow of the Rupert River was diverted to contribute to the complex. This shows that the impacts are also ongoing and cumulative. It is not too late to improve environmental practices in the new construction and to become more aware of the impacts of harnessing the power of the rivers. According to Berkes, the argument that the impact of hydropower is relatively benign compared to nuclear or fossil fuel must be questioned.

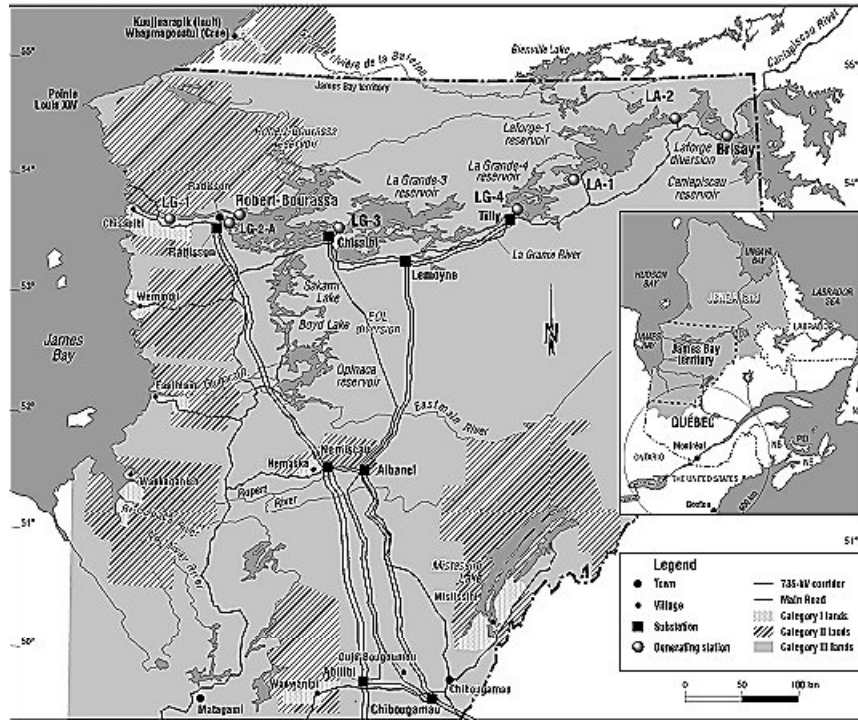
Hydro-Québec should be renamed “Energie-Québec” to mark a necessary transition to alternative and diversified sources of energy. Rivers are abundant in Québec, and technology is now

available to avoid diverting rivers and creating basins. It is necessary to harness the power of rivers without destroying a region. Furthermore, Hydro-Québec should diversify its sources of energy by investing both in wind and thermal power. A part of the budget of Hydro-Québec should be used to carry impact assessments and public consultations. Finally, there has been a moratorium on small-scale dams in Québec, which will fall in March 2010. At this date, any land owner will be allowed to build a small scale dam on a river and sell the power to Hydro-Québec. The end of this moratorium is a major threat to the sustainable development of hydropower in Québec. The moratorium should be extended until public consultation and impact assessment take place. Hydro-Québec should not be driven by political ambitions, but rather by studies and democratic participation of citizens. The James Bay hydropower complex is an obvious example of the consequences of damaging hydropower development which we should learn from and avoid reproducing the same mistakes.

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Appendix A The James Bay Territory



Reprinted from Pierre Senécal and Dominique Égré, "Human Impacts of the La Grande Hydroelectric Complex," 320.

Appendix B The James Bay Territory in Greater Québec



Reprinted from Walter Muma, "Travelling the James Bay Road."

REVOLUTIONS OF DESTRUCTION

Tim Faith
Augustana College (IL)

Despite the vast array of studies, documentation, and statistics produced in the last decade, it continues to be a startlingly inconsequential fact in our everyday lives that the ever-prevalent environmental concerns we are experiencing today are a product of human activity. Great difficulty arises when we must determine *which* problems are the result of *which* human activities. Obviously, fossil fuels are a major concern, and the same goes for human waste products and the melting of the ice caps, to name a few. But the interesting thing with these types of concerns, which may perhaps be the solution's downfall, is that these problems are a product of numerous factors relating to human activity. The analysis of the cross-connection between problem, product, and solution could be of endless proportion. We can question the extent of the damages, we can articulate ethical principles to guide us, or we can pinpoint a solution and work up from there. I suggest we start from the beginning and analyze human history in a sequence of stages. Through understanding the evolution of civilization, we may begin to conceptualize how to reverse the negative effects of human activity. I argue that it is not too late to utilize our unique ability to understand our interaction with our environment in order to strive for an ethical approach to living *with* our environment, as opposed to simply trying to control it.

The human species is about 200,000 years old, and during the earliest period, people lived in small hunter-gatherer communities relying on their immediate locality for survival. It wasn't until around 10,000 years ago that agriculture became a material part of human existence. Through the centuries, agricultural advancements led to exponential population growth and a problematic parasitic relationship with the land. These initial advancements in agriculture marked the beginning of the many environmental problems we are experiencing today. Specifically, three revolutionary periods can be identified as major contributors to the detrimental relationship between humans and the environment: the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution, and finally the green revolution. The compounding effects these three periods have had on the biosphere are exhibited in our environmental concerns today.

The Agricultural Revolution can be credited for the exponential population growth throughout the last 10,000 years. With the beginning of this revolution, humans began to esteem the land for its utility toward human prosperity and therefore reduced nature to an inferior place to the interests of human beings. We believed that by manipulating the earth and domesticating its plants and animals, we could cultivate a powerful dominion over all nature. Accompanying this was a shift from individual and family responsibility for obtaining food to the production of food for masses, allowing for a more complex form of civilization and leading to an expansion of human communities. Population growth was no longer limited by the availability of food, which allowed for the first developments of industry and commerce (Durham 116). Without humans realizing it, however, the unfortunate symptom of this growth was the denigration of the environment for future generations.

The Agricultural Revolution not only produced an ability to organize the domestic growth of plants and animals, but it also led to the development of new technologies. Primitive technology was created and thought to be the most efficient “less-work-more-product” means of cultivating the most food for the least amount of effort. More energy could be used to produce more food, resulting in an increase in population that few species had ever experienced. To complement this, the grain, which would never have been considered food in a hunter-gatherer community, was now being harvested at an alarming rate. This newly discovered resource, along with other expanding advancements that made life easier, was among a few important contributions that this period made towards both human development and a population explosion. Only today are we truly beginning to acknowledge the degradation that human numbers and activity have had on the world which we inhabit.

Fast-forward almost 7,000 years, and humans find themselves in, yet again, a tremendous period of change: the Industrial

Revolution. Between the time of the Agricultural Revolution and today, the world population increased ten-fold and the need for increased production became a pressing concern (*PRB*). Human communities expanded in every direction, and the materials harvested needed to be used in an entirely new way to support the expansion. New technological advancements were implemented into the daily lives of each individual as people continued to be motivated by the idea of using technology to make life easier. Obviously not everyone could share this privileged lifestyle: the Industrial Revolution only helped those of prosperous backgrounds. Ultimately, this revolution widened the quality-of-life gap between the third world and the first. The technologically advanced groups kept getting further and further ahead while those with less access to resources and technology fell further behind. This observation is in line with Karl Marx’s revolutionary observations during the late nineteenth century (Kirsch and Mitchell). Comparably, this concept can be taken down to a local scale, where the rich would continue getting richer while the poor would get poorer. This phenomenon was only just beginning.

The first thing we typically think of when it comes to the Industrial Revolution is the advancement of technology itself. However, it is not only important to acknowledge technology as a product, but also the consequences of the widespread usage of such technology. We’ve since seen the effects agricultural development has had on populations, but what of the effects of the Industrial Revolution? The advent of steam power, as well as an explosion in mining efforts, brought about transportation via rail and water. Similarly, roads and canals were built to accommodate the increase in travel. This ultimately allowed people to spread out, transport foreign materials to places that otherwise would not have had them, and increase farming yields. These developments, complexities, and abilities to share resources eventually led humans to cherish a more specialized

lifestyle as a response to the congestion and complexity of this modern world.

This Industrial period in history perhaps more clearly marked the point of distinction between humanity and the natural world. No longer could we consider ourselves part of nature; we were now the commanders (as well as the destroyers) of nature. We harvested grain and other sources of energy-rich polysaccharides at an extremely efficient rate with less manpower than ever before. This in turn created a surplus of food that would encourage a continued population boom that would soon stress the natural resources of the global environment. While these developments were seen as largely positive for human development, they created a great deal of waste through a combination of construction and the removal of trees and other natural resources.

The final contributing move that humans made toward today's environmental status took place during the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution is marked by the Mexican government's attempt to genetically develop alternative grains in order to supplement its expanding population. Although this attempt at feeding the Mexican population was a success, in that they achieved self-sufficiency almost 20 years later, it didn't solve the pressing dilemma of overpopulation (Dewar). The Green Revolution was the movement that spurred the interest in the genetic engineering sector of agriculture and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). From this point on, foods could be altered to thrive in certain environments and to be more resistant to infection and insect herbivory. What did this mean for humans? It meant that finally we could manipulate nature and inhibit natural selection while inducing "preferential selection." As opposed to the traditional domestic selection (primarily seen and easily understood by looking at how new sub-species of dogs were bred), preferential selection involves picking and choosing traits for our own benefit, outside of what is "natural." One

example of such an agricultural product is genetically modified corn—modified to the point that it has six times the amount of vitamin C that natural corn has (Shaista). This modern breakthrough was expected to potentially solve human hunger and poverty, but ultimately it would inflate it.

Ironically, the reliance on these preferentially selected, insect- and pathogenic-resistant agricultural grains as a primary source of nutrition ended up doing more harm than good. Attempts to introduce these foods internationally in order to provide improved nutritional diets were first carried out in Africa, but they failed. Africa lacked the proper economic infrastructure and harbored widespread political corruption, which ultimately undermined these philanthropic efforts. Also, by providing people with a source of food that could grow substantially faster and thus produce a higher yield, agricultural engineers induced the surplus that we have seen result negatively in past experience. Similarly to the advent of machinery during the Industrial Revolution, a surplus would only encourage population to flourish, thus increasing poverty as well as the AIDS epidemic. But with this new Revolution, we were no longer harvesting resources from the earth to satisfy human hunger, we were furthering our manipulation of nature for our own corrupt satisfaction.

What these revolutionary periods show is a movement away from a homeostatic equalized environment in which humans play a balanced role. As time progressed we saw a development in the ideology from the past, when we organized civilization around human survival, to today, where we manipulate our environments for scientific advancement and human control. We are now entering a time where some scientists, politicians, and historians have started to ring alarms regarding the consequences of our self-absorption. Each revolutionary invention, practice, and technique in farming over thousands of years has transformed the relationship between humans and nature from one based on

subsistence agriculture to one of surplus and exchange. This means that with each stage in this agricultural transformation, there was a different appropriation of raw materials and different modes of production with differing byproducts. Ultimately, these practices and byproducts have become more and more detrimental to the land we use.

Today we seem to have a specialized, functioning society where each corporation, industry, and governmental program is responsible for its part of the bigger whole. But this specialization furthers us from the natural world by displacing our knowledge of what actually happens to the water we use, the food we eat, and the products we buy. Everything has become so complex that a globalized company is *needed* to keep the system running. This institutionalized society that we have created is a result of those first thoughts running through our ancestors' heads several thousand years ago, when they were thinking, "How can I get more for less?" or, "What is the most efficient way to harvest all this barley grain?" From then on, as the world's human populations expanded, we came to rely on institutions and the companies we have appointed to take control of certain sectors of life.

Continual pressures from the environment, however, have indicated that a drastic change to the methods and perceptions of agriculture must be implemented if we plan on providing a future for generations to come. Today we have the ability to learn from our past and to apply the lessons to our future. From the past we have learned that we have the ability to control nature, but unfortunately we have been misguided in our attempts to maintain a sustainable and properly functioning environment. Therefore, I propose that our objective not be characteristically anthropocentric, but rather be one that acknowledges that we have the power to initiate change through our own stewardship of nature. As David Kline explains, "we should become stewards and caretakers of creation" (37), meaning that we can no longer

continue to focus on consumerism. John Zizioulas, a metropolitan of Pergamon and a noted theologian, explains, "The consumerist philosophy of life, which prevails in our time, seems to ignore [the] truth (that resources are limited). We encourage growth and consumption by making necessary many things which previous generations could easily live without" (24). A traditional consumerist would simply use earth's materials as available resources, with little regard for the indirect effects this would have on the land, water, and air around them. This type of person falls into the category of exploiter, who ultimately is the epitome of an anthropocentric being.

Alternatively, although in the minority, one who remains within the boundaries of a steward of nature represents the optimistic template for future humans, if we are to survive as a species. These nurturers live perfectly natural lives, without being driven by dependency on institutionalized companies. This type of human believes that living *with* the land, rather than off of it, should be the standard of a responsible and progressive lifestyle. This combination of solutions is drawn from Wendell Berry, David Kline, J. Baird Callicott, and David Sagoff, but it is best exemplified through Holmes Rolston's applicational paradigm shift in our view towards species. Though he focuses more on the transformational change away from instrumentally valuing the animal world, the same can be applied to nature as a whole. We need to see nature not through the question of what it can provide for us, but rather through a desire to find what we can do to improve our relationship with it. In the current direction we have been heading, "nature seems to produce as many species as it can, not merely enough to stabilize an ecosystem or only species that can directly or indirectly serve human needs" (Rolston 725). We have been preventing nature's course of action through modern technology and genetic engineering, which ultimately decreases nature's variation to a small number of species that directly impact human consumption. Instead,

Rolston's shift will help us transition from valuing nature purely for its resources to instead becoming stewards and nurturers of the nature of which we have always been an integral part.

Some may argue that many of these environmental solutions are at odds with the anthropocentric perspective. This is true to a point, but through our history we have continually been witness to the power of human impact on the world. After all, we do have the ability to alter nature, which places us somewhat above other species. Rather than letting this continue to be a negative characteristic, we may use this strength to correct our mistakes. Overpopulation has shown that we took our methods of agriculture and even our world culture to an unhealthy extreme. Therefore a secondary solution entails breaking away from the institutionally-run society and returning to valuing sustainability from a local scale. The community-based system formulated by the Anabaptists, in which the family, the land, and the local community are the pinnacle parts of daily life, only furthers the attempt to reconsider our relationship with nature and break away from society's norms. As we have seen the techniques in agriculture develop through each revolutionary period, we have seen the increase in the population of each community, as well as a decrease in the dependency upon human labor. Therefore, by sizing down the community to a smaller functional unit, we may potentially begin to fix our exponential destruction of the environment. Heather Ann Ackley Bean asserts that the main desirable feature of the "Anabaptist community is expressed through...[the] sharing [of] material resources" (196-7). She also describes the Anabaptists' focus on a web of reliable and useful local relationships. These two templates of the Anabaptist community could very well be the initial steps which need to be accepted by mainstream society. Relying on the community and contributing to the community for both services and the sharing of local goods can encourage people to relax their over-reliance

on the institution and focus in on what is best for the community and the land they live on.

Finally, by becoming nurturers of the land and working to support the local community, which is often overlooked by the large agribusinesses, we may begin to see alterations in the food business and even food itself. One simple example of this possibility is to be seen in my own attempt to be ecologically responsible as well as personally healthy. Having significantly reduced my intake of sugars and simple carbohydrates, I have noticed not only profoundly positive consequences physically, but a reduction in my carbon footprint as well. For example, examining the contents of my trash reflects my having omitted polysaccharide-rich foods, which constitute the majority of plastic-packaged, over-processed and sugar-laden products. I'm no longer throwing away paper, plastics, and metal foils. Instead, my trash is filled with organically degradable egg shells, stems, leaves, and other forms of plant matter. In turn this can easily be transferred to a compost pile to regenerate the nutrients within the ground. Even though I'm still eating meat, most of it is free-range and grass-fed, and much of it, just like my produce, is obtained locally, which is supporting the local community. Inevitably, by actively becoming part of one's local community, by incorporating manageable alterations in lifestyle or exploring simple means of participating in organized events, we can indirectly force a globalized change.

This goes to show that a simple and individual transition in dietary means, or in many of the other aspects of our daily lives (walking or biking to work? shopping less frequently? taking up gardening?), can completely alter our impact on the environment. Small steps can create a big impact, and from what we've seen so far, the trend is that humans have been stepping in the wrong direction. Garret Hardin notes that the populations with the greatest growth rate tend to be the least satisfied (1244). And so, as a side effect of altering our impact on the environment and

learning to live locally, we may just become a happier species! If there is any hope in saving the environment (and thus ourselves) from total degradation of soil, air, and nutrition, we should start by taking small and individual steps towards understanding our dietary needs, changing our outlook on the land we live on, and valuing the immediate local community by which we prosper. If our individual communities work together, we could formulate a global movement progressing to preserve the earth we share with millions of other species. And by slowing down and relaxing some of the drives created by the Agricultural, Industrial, and Green Revolutions, we may be able to hold onto the less harmful of those advances, while striving to achieve a new, more ethically developed approach: to give back more than we have taken.

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