

## Book Reviews

**The Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration and the New Communion With Nature.** By William R. Jordan III. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003. \$27.50 (hardcover), 270 pp.

William Jordan sees a productive future for restoration ecology. In this future, damaged and obliterated natural systems will begin to function properly again. But beyond making ecosystems function, the restoration of the future will include people as a part of the repaired ecosystems. Partly because of this inclusion, the environment will have a constituency, and a stronger and more effective environmentalism will emerge. The intellectual route that he takes to arrive at this outcome is interesting.

In *The Sunflower Forest*, the story is very much about how we perceive nature and our relationship to it. As restoration ecologists, we must stop thinking of restoration as something that produces a product, and start thinking of it as a way to make natural processes work. As human beings, we must begin to forget the distinction between nature and humankind. Historically, there has been a spectrum of ways that people have viewed their relation to nature. On one end is the resource landscape, with a nature that is to be utilized for our benefit; on the other is the sacred landscape. Some including Jordan, have proposed, as a middle ground, the idea of community (of humans and the rest of nature). This is a very Leopoldian point-of-view, a tenet of Aldo Leopold's land ethic. Environmentalism, ecology, and liberalism have all failed to come to grips with the need for community with nature. Environmentalism has failed to deal with the fact that humans must destroy other parts of the community (for food, shelter, space) to survive. Liberalism is too focused on the rights of the individual. Ecology emphasizes only an objective analysis of interactions and linkages.

The basis of Jordan's hoped-for attainment of community is our recognition of human shame. Humans are part of a community, but we live by killing others. Even when we restore, we kill (we kill invasive species; we cause collateral damage to other species during restoration). Aboriginal

and agrarian societies realized this intimate link with nature, and ritualized the relationship. As primarily urban and modern people, we have lost our connection with the land and have forgotten how to confront shame. Religion and the arts have been traditional ways of dealing with shame (by providing transcendent experiences to escape it). Jordan compares the historical responses to man's perceived "fall from grace." He sees restoration as a modern-day pathway for dealing with shame and to reconnecting with the land, combining cleansing work and refreshing recreation. He sees in agriculture an important model, one that has generated rituals associated with the seasons and the harvest. Everything that we have, we take from nature. The act of restoration is both a substantive and symbolic return of what we have taken or destroyed. But since restoration is often inadequate and the exchange is one-sided, it becomes a symbolic or ritualized recompense. The gift exchange is ritualistic. In the ritual, we must become not the audience, but the participants. Even though we are modern people, we still use ritual extensively and commonly, often not even recognizing what we are doing as ritual. Jordan thinks that we must take control of rituals or they will be imposed upon us. An example of imposed ritual is television. "Television is a ritual that only works for the priests." In restoration, we need to create land rituals, rituals that resonate with existing or historic ones. But we need to be creative about new ones, using performance, art, and participation.

In the final chapter, Jordan outlines a paradigm made up of eight premises describing how we can become a community, be a part of nature, confront shame, and remake environmentalism into a more effective movement. Restoration is the means for doing this, and its importance will grow as it is recognized as the dominant methodology for the conservation of natural and historic landscapes. Restored areas will become not preserves, but dynamic worksites. Restoration will become a performing art and a basis for ritual. The ritualized relationship with nature will build community and result in a growing and politically powerful constituency for the natural landscape.

As a restoration ecologist, I see important elements of the human involvement in restoration accurately described by Jordan. Restoration is spiritual to many, and political to many, but certainly not to all. Technicians can do good restoration without ritual; in fact, the lower the level of skill and experience in the practitioner, the greater one might expect the attraction to ritual and community to be. There is currently a duality, a schism between restoration the art and restoration the applied science. As a scientist, the participatory ritualization of restoration, in pursuit of a transcendent experience, makes the process uncomfortably like a secular religion. We have spent a long time trying to differentiate between things

that are faith-based and things that are based on science. Can we afford to purposely blur the lines again? Jordan's ideas are powerful, and they will make quite a few people more than a little uncomfortable.

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**Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empires, 1895–1945**

By Peder Anker. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2001.  
ISBN 0-674-00595-3, \$59.95 (cloth). Index, 329 pp.

In this ambitious study, Peder Anker sets out to trace the evolution of ecology from its beginnings in botany through the study of forests, fish, animals, and finally human relations. The British Empire played a central role in the development of ecology through the pioneering efforts of such towering figures as Arthur George Tansley and the South African general-politician Jan Christian Smuts, both having inspired a large following of men of science, some with a background in the humanities, and even writers such as H. G. Wells and J. R. R. Tolkien.

Prior to 1945, and for a brief period afterwards, Britain ruled over a vast colonial empire covering a diversity of environments and human societies. The book's main thesis is that the discipline of ecology emerged out of the imperial administrative and political culture of this empire. The inclusion of humans as subjects of study was meant "to satisfy administrative demands for social control by colonial patrons," using ecology as a means "of naturalizing and thus legitimizing imperialism." According to Anker, despite this shared focus, ecological thinking had developed two contrasting philosophies by the end of the 1930s: a mechanistic approach advocated by Tansley and the Oxford School, and a holistic ecology formulated by Smuts. Each grew out of distinctive physical and social environments at opposite ends of the Empire's north-south axis: England and South Africa. To strengthen the methodological aspects of their research, ecologists drew on a variety of disciplines not only in the natural sciences, but also technology, psychology, philosophy, epistemology, sociology, geography, and historiography.

Students and practitioners of ecology may be surprised to learn about the marked influence of psychology, which Anker identifies as the most significant source of inspiration for the expansion of ecology. A disciple of

Sigmund Freud, Tansley wrote extensively on the nervous system while developing his ecosystem theory, and Smut's theory of holism and evolution was largely inspired by the poet Walt Whitman's thinking, as well as the physics of Albert Einstein.

Anker devotes a great deal of space to the debate between the British mechanists who believed that the economy of nature should be planned and the South African idealists who subscribed to the notion that nature's economy is fixed. The former advocated an ecological reordering of nature, society, and knowledge, while the latter favored naturalizing the existing ecological segregation of their country. The mechanists' position that Europeans should control nature to suit the economic and political interests of the dominant culture has roots that can be traced well beyond nineteenth-century imperialism, as illustrated in Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism* (1986). At the same time, however, proponents of both schools argued vigorously for environmental protection. Even Tansley turned out to become an ardent defender of national parks and the protection of the environment in Britain when the Empire gradually broke apart at the end of WWII. True to his initial exposure to Freudian psychology, Tansley argued that "the ecologist was to be a social analyst protecting environments so that people with troubled nervous systems could go and find healing in the childhood of Britain's national heritage: the untouched ecosystem."

The ecologists' defense of colonialism was supported by the prevailing view that little could be learned from indigenous groups. This argument is familiar to contemporary anthropologists, who have highlighted for some time the set of false assumptions about the relationship between "natives" and their environment. For example, imperial ecologists held that colonized societies had in the past been directly responsible for causing disequilibrium of "virgin forests" with the help of fire, so that it never crossed anyone's mind to seek lessons on land management from indigenous populations. The high birth rate noted among several colonized groups certainly acted to influence these negative perceptions. While Tansley, Smuts, and their followers made significant contributions to environmental science, the human condition (human ecology), and the organization of knowledge within academia, Anker nevertheless views them as agents of often misguided racist policies, such as Carr-Saunders's eugenics or Smut's evolutionary perspective on society that allowed him to differentiate between high and low human personalities. Ecologists were to help provide benefits to outsiders, the so-called "races with higher qualities;" their interests in need of protection from the actions of those with "lower mental capacities." As result, ecology was reduced to "an entangled bank of economy, colonial management, and systems of vegetation classification."

While many of those assertions are certainly true, it would be naïve to assume that today's researchers have shed all their biases and conduct their work independently from their sponsors. Even "native voices" and the multifaceted postmodernist discourse should be regarded as part of broader economic, social, and political agendas that do not necessarily address the full range of issue underlying environmental and social justice. For example, the concept of "sustainability," which was far from the minds of imperial ecologists, has multiple meanings, each one competing to accommodate different interest groups (Acselrad, 1999). A holistic vision of ecology was also expressed by the Oxford School, notably through Julian Huxley and H. G. Wells who differed, however, from Smut's holism by focusing on mechanistic explanations and support of international socialism and global planning. Both schools have left their imprint on contemporary human ecological thinking. Issues ranging from global warming to globalization of the economy are now providing the incentive for social and natural scientists, as well as philosophers, to join forces in unprecedented ways, paralleling Biersack's (1999) observation that the old idealism versus materialism division has become blurred with the emergence of today's synthetic new ecologies. However, this has not eliminated all theoretical divisions.

Anker should be commended for the depth of his scholarship. The wealth of information on the key players of the ecology debate is well summarized at the end of each chapter, and the reader will certainly appreciate the "compendium" of ecologists at the end of the book. The anthropocentric methodology should inspire other works in environmental studies.

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