

Ecologue

NEWSLETTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

Winter 1990 Volume 1, No. 1

Successful SCA Seminar Issues in the Study of Environmental Advocacy by J. Robert Cox

"It's so encouraging to find this many people in SCA who are interested in the environment!" one person told me at the end of the day. We had just concluded what everyone agreed was a successful SCA seminar on "Issues in the Study of Environmental Advocacy."

The seminar, held at the San Francisco Hilton Hotel on November 18, 1989, attracted 14 participants and a dozen or more observers during the day's vigorous discussions. Seminar members came from all sections of the U.S. and included senior scholars and recent Ph.D's as well as current graduate students. Brian Erwin, Assistant Director of Public Affairs of the Sierra Club, opened the seminar with a case study of "Planning an Environmental Advocacy Campaign."

The original call in *Spectra* announced that the seminar intended "to open lines of inquiry in a new field of 'environmental advocacy.' Its principal goal [would] be to identify core questions relating to a study of the discursive practices that may sustain or challenge the dominant paradigm." Along the way, the seminar also explored some of the implications of research programs proposed by participants as ways of answering these core questions.

Among the conclusions reached during the seminar's free-wheeling discussions was a central insight: *The study of "environmental advocacy" is*

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Getting the Newsletter Off the Ground by Carol Corbin

Putting together this first newsletter made it clear to me that we need to begin to clarify who we are and how we should approach environmental issues from the standpoint of communication. As Jonathan Lange pointed out in his "Spotted Owl" paper, we have the opportunity to construct a research agenda for the study of environmental advocacy. Jonathan goes on to ask, "What are the frameworks, methods, constraints, special demands, and questions peculiar to this communication context?" How should we define ourselves? These are some of the questions I hope we will address in upcoming issues of the newsletter. (See "Environmental Advocacy: What's in a Name?" in this issue.)

First we need a logo for the newsletter--all suggestions are welcome. In fact, to add incentive, we're sponsoring a newsletter logo contest. The winner receives a personal escorted tour of the Raptor Center outside Iowa City, Iowa, on a warmish day in the next few years before both Sue Tjardes and Carol Corbin graduate.

We also urge you to raise questions for us all to think about as we continue to work in environmental advocacy. We are including a column (*Kireji*) for the presentation of ideas, the opening of dialogues--a place to start to address the issues we need to air.

Kireji is Japanese for a so-called "breaking word" in haiku poetry. Such

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*Successful Seminar**(Continued from page 1)*

inherently paradoxical. As several papers pointed out, language separates us from *nature*, even as it depicts or represents "Nature" *for* us. Several questions followed during the day from this initial observation:

(1) Can environmental advocates ever be other than what some Deep Ecologists have called "anthropocentric," that is, human-centered in our perspective and concern for language? Or, as one participant argued, might we guard against some of the biases of anthropocentrism by conceiving of an "ecologic" discourse that is reflexive (and self-critical) *vis-a-vis* the human production of discourse about "Nature?"

(2) Another participant asked a related question: "What unspoken consensus must be presumed for our linguistic depictions to have force?" Should we be interested in examining the social (ideological) formations upon which discussion of environmental problems rests? What is our role as scholars when it is this unspoken consensus itself that most threatens nature? This latter question encouraged some seminar members to propose that our study must be "radical," that is, it must work at the *radius* (root) or at the level of production of discourse that constitutes "culture" itself.

Some participants were willing to take this set of questions one step further: Do the discourses of *rhetorical and communication studies* themselves privilege a certain kind of perspective on environmental advocacy, i.e., one that views all interaction normatively as the need for "common ground" and whose goal is consensus? While some seminar members affirmed this paradigm, others wanted to push the idea of advocacy in the direction of social critique. (The assumption of critique is a reconstitution of human motives toward the goal of material change.)

The issue is important and prompted vigorous debate at times. Some argued that even thorny disputes can be

accommodated through a "conflict resolution" approach. Others held such disputes are themselves symptomatic of larger (economic) interests that cannot be directly mediated through communication. These participants viewed environmental advocacy as a form of social critique and as the site of political struggle. In this view, communication is an agency of change (hence "advocacy"), rather than a mode of reaching agreement *per se*; dissensus would no longer be taken as a sign that communication has failed.

(Despite the heated debate, the ecological center held, and good humor prevailed. Afterward, one member remarked, "my only intention in participating was to make sure the conflict resolution and cultural perspectives were included along with all that jazz you critical/interpretive types were ranting about!")

At the end of the seminar, we seemed to have strong agreement to try to continue our inquiry both as a group of individual scholars and as a part of the SCA organization. Toward those ends, therefore, we decided to: (1) initiate a newsletter, (2) seek affiliate status with SCA (as a commission or caucus), (3) investigate the possibility of a conference in the next two years, (4) begin a bibliography, and (5) locate a publishing forum for a collection of (revised) papers from either the seminar or conference.

Our inauguration of *Ecologue* represents the beginning of this chaining out of "new lines of inquiry in a new field of 'environmental advocacy.'"



We should begin planning now for an organizational meeting in Chicago of those interested in petitioning for SCA "Commission" status. Look for further announcements in *Ecologue*.

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poetry is marked by its reference to nature. While this column is not poetry, it will attempt to introduce new currents of thinking (the "breaking word") in our study of environmental advocacy.

Another column (*Belles Lettres*, French for a study in works of literature considered a source of spiritual pleasure) will include reviews of literature, and we may contact each of you to submit a brief article. Keep this column in mind as books, journals, and articles cross your desk.

Our calendar and announcement column (*Chronos*, Greek for time) will include items of interest to the group in general, as well as updates on issues or events. We are waiting to learn our status in SCA, information about other confer-

ences, and our potential connections to other groups. In addition, we would like information about environmental education programs that may be of interest to the group.

As Robbie mentioned in his seminar follow-up letter, we have a committee preparing a bibliography. James Atkinson, 201 River St., Quayside Apts, #17, Troy, NY 12180-3809, and Sue Tjardes, 801-1/2 Bowery St., Iowa City, IA 52240, are compiling the bibliography. Please send your submissions to one of them.

Please send submissions for the newsletter to Carol Corbin, 1024 E. Washington St., Iowa City, IA 52240, (319) 337-4004, or Robbie Cox, Dept. of Speech Comm., University of North Carolina, C.B.# 3285, Bingham Hall, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3285.

Kireji

Breaking Word



Environmental Advocacy: What's In A Name?

What's in a name? As Kenneth Burke reminds us, "the magical degree is implicit in all language; for the mere act of naming an object or situation decrees that it is to be singled out as such-and-such rather than as something-other" (*Philosophy of Literary Form*, p. 4). The title of the November 1989 SCA Seminar was "Issues in the Study of Environmental Advocacy," and it proposed to "open new lines of inquiry in a new field of 'environmental advocacy.'"

What, then, is in the name "environmental advocacy?" What are some of the implications of naming our inquiry the study of "advocacy" as opposed say, to "discourse" or simply "communication?" Since I coined the term "environmental advocacy," perhaps I had better offer some explanation.

Actually, I had three reasons for choosing the phrase "environmental advocacy." First, I wanted to distinguish us from several closely related fields: "Environmental Education" (which often uses the term "communication") has surfaced in a number of publications and journal titles in recent years, and "risk communication" is a phrase used in environmental engineering and in the social sciences studying risk assessment in technology. Further, Niklas Luhmann has recently published *Ecological Communication*, a work that pulls together the major strands in his social theory, but which explicitly *avoids* many of the concerns of practical discourse held by seminar participants.

Second, I wanted to identify with our own heritage as a discipline. "Advocacy" retains our discipline's historical (even classical) concern for the problems of the public, and it designates the human mode "citizens" have used in mediating power and social change in democratic governance.

Third, "advocacy" suggests a particular rationale in our inquiry; that is, it assumes an interest in studying the

processes of *change*. (This should not be confused with the role of the scholar/critic as "advocate," though that is another issue we should devote some discussion to.) It focuses our attention on "advocates" and "advocacy," phenomena of social interaction whose effect is the alteration of motives and practices harmful to both the human and natural environments.

Finally, the modifier "environmental" itself defines advocacy as a *kind of communication*. Environmental advocacy, of course, refers to a discrete subject (e.g., communication "about" the environment), but it also presupposes certain principles of ecology. Environmental advocacy is self-critical and acknowledges a reflexive set of relationships among human agents, language, and non-human systems of nature.

Let's think about that last sentence: If you have thoughts on this topic, send a brief comment for the next issue of *Ecologue* to Robbie Cox, CB#3285, Bingham Hall, UNC, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3285.

--J. Robert Cox

Belles Lettres

Literature



I came across a book review in *World-Watch*, the magazine of the World Watch Institute, that I thought would be of interest to some of us. The book is called *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*, by Roderick Frazier Nash (University of Wisconsin Press, \$27.50). Although I haven't yet been able to get a copy of the book, I was intrigued by the review and wanted to include excerpts of it here.

According to the reviewer, Stephen R. Dujack, *The Rights of Nature* traces the evolution of American thought about environmental ethics from its

Biblical roots in the Genesis story "in which God gives humanity 'dominion' over the plants and animals," through American liberalism, Jefferson, Locke, and Descartes, to the present. For the most part rights extended to nature were done so as an extension of human rights, particularly when plants and animals, as "things", were a person's property. During the 19th century a British animal rights movement introduced the notion of "humanitarianism" and suggested that it diminished the human to be cruel to animals.

"The rights of nature lay dormant for most of the 19th century in the United States, preoccupied as the nation was with the extension of rights to classes of humans and with conquering a seemingly inexhaustible wilderness." Although John Muir spoke of nature's rights, for pragmatic reasons he dropped this idea from the philosophy of the Sierra Club and "argued instead that nature must be protected to respect the interests of people." Even Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* of 1962 was not a biocentrist work, for as Nash observed, pesticides are bad when they fail to "keep the balance of nature tilted in our favor."

In 1973, the Norwegian Arne Naess "published his lecture proposing a 'deep ecology' that brought biocentrism to its current form, in which all species are equal." And, although few people have heard of deep ecology, in environmental philosophy circles it has caused a stir. Dujack notes that, "American liberalism traditionally defended the rights of individuals, but the biocentrists believe that the ecosystem is all-important. It is a deep irony, then, that the progress away from anthropocentric environmental ethics, for most of American history driven by consideration of animal rights, has put its foremost proponents at odds." Nash offers no solutions, since he is primarily concerned with writing a history, but "hopes that Americans will once again find answers to these dilemmas in their liberal heritage."

--Carol Corbin

Here are some environmental publications available through *Utne Reader*. To receive a sample copy, send the indicated amount to *Utne Reader*, Off the Newsstand, P.O. Box 5064, Pittsfield, MA 01203-5064.

The Animals' Voice Magazine is the international award winning magazine of animal defense issues. Best Overall Consumer Magazine (1988)--Successful Publisher's Group. The magazine is the newest magazine about animal defense issues to reach mainstream America. This beautiful full-color magazine offers factual information about the plight of animal suffering, along with stunning photography and thought-provoking commentary. Sample, \$3.

E Magazine is America's only not-for-profit independent magazine covering a wide range of environmental issues and the growing movement. Each issue contains feature articles on key issues and campaigns; in-depth news analysis; industry and consumer product trends; interviews with leading advocates and thinkers; profiles of grass-roots activists and organizations; reviews of books, films, and videos; and tips on incorporating ecological principles into our daily lives. Sample, \$3.

In Context gives you fresh, whole-systems thinking and tools for positive action in our fast-changing and endangered world. Acclaimed as one of the six best alternative publications, it explores personal, cultural, and planetary change through in-depth articles and authoritative interviews--so you can truly "think globally, act locally." Sample, \$5.

For ideas and opinions too controversial for the mainstream media, **On the Issues** discusses feminism, politics, health, social reform, animal rights, ecology, global humanism, and more with thoughtful, unexpurgated insight. Kate Millet, Rep. Pat Schroeder, Andrea Dworkin, Flo Kennedy, Petra Kelly, and others. Sample, \$3.

Chronos

Announcements



Most seminar participants have received a letter from James Cantrill, Planning Committee Chair, about an upcoming conference. He is still interested in receiving your ideas and suggestions about the conference. Here are the Planning Committee's questions in six topical areas:

1. What do you envision as being the *nature* of this conference? Should there be different sections/divisions of like-minded analyses? Should sections run concurrently or consecutively? What about providing workshops for activists and scholars?

2. To which *publics* should we market the conference? Do we limit formal participation to academics? Do we draw in representatives from various organizations? How about invited speakers? Should we try to incorporate members of industry and government?

3) What about the *logistics* of the conference? How large do we want it to be? How long should it run? What is the optimal time of year in which it should be held?

4) What would be a good *location* for the conference? Should it be held in conjunction with another meeting (e.g., Alta) or separately? What sort of on- and off-site amenities should be available (e.g., food, transportation, recreational/cultural enticements)?"

5) What about *funding*? Should we seek corporate, institutional, and/or organizational sponsorship? What groups or persons would be interested in such support? What about fees for attendance?

6) How are we to promote *advertisement* of the conference? In what publications do we issue a call for papers? What should be the guidelines for these submissions? Do we use blind review? Should we try to incorporate a variety of media representatives?

Update on SCA Affiliation

It appears that the most appropriate route for affiliating with SCA is by petitioning the Legislative Council for "Commission" status. A Commission is an area of special academic interest which extends beyond any single Division or Section. Current Commissions include: Communication and Aging, Health Communication, Experiential Learning in Communication, and Peace Commission.

In order to proceed we must establish evidence of SCA members' interest in establishing such a

Commission. Plans for mounting a "petition" are now being formulated; if interested in helping, please contact Robbie Cox.

Sue Tjardes reminds us that it is never too early to begin planning for the next SCA convention. Maybe some environmental panels or another seminar should be organized. The conference will be held in Chicago this year. That's not far from Iowa City, and if you happen to win the logo contest, you could collect your prize. Even if you don't win it, you're all welcome.

Please include me on your newsletter mailing list:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip Code: _____

University or other affiliation: _____

Phone Number: _____

Send to: J. Robert Cox, Department of Speech Communication, University of North Carolina, CB# 3285, Bingham Hall, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3285.

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