

# Ecologue

NEWSLETTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

Spring 1990 Volume 1 No. 2

## Further Planning for a National Convention

by James G. Cantrill

Plans for a national conference on environmental advocacy continue to move along. From our perspective, we can certainly affirm the need, desire, and commitment for a conference in the summer of 1991. A number of responses to the recent calls for input into the planning stages for this meeting have raised a variety of important issues, and various colleagues have volunteered their resources for its planning and execution. And, while many issues must still be considered, we seem to be positioned to cast a general, flexible mold to guide future discussions.

Most colleagues who have responded to requests for input prefer a relatively small (i.e., around 60 participants), scholarly conference confined to academics which would provide both open discussion sessions as well as formal presentations. There is a consensus that we should reasonably exclude representatives of government and industry, avoid the partisanship associated with tying ourselves to established environmental organizations, and focus on bolstering who we are and what we are about. Nonetheless, there may be value in having a variety of practitioners present and incorporated into the project at some level (e.g., invite representatives from a variety of organizations to serve as critics). Listening to voices from a variety of disciplines (e.g., social psychology) and including a wide range of perspectives

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## *Kireji*

Breaking Word



## A Word for Environmental Discourse

by Chris Oravec

In last issue's *Kireji*, Robert Cox gave a rationale for the name of our new interest group, "Environmental Advocacy." Interestingly, the alternative, "Environmental Discourse," was dismissed along with "Environmental Communication;" yet no separate argument accompanied this dismissal. I recognize Robert's concerns about the word "communication," but I leave the proponents of "communication" to defend of their own choice. Here I wish to ask the question: what is wrong with the word "discourse?"

"Discourse" is inclusive, embracing all types of language-in-use, including poetry and song. "Advocacy" appears to restrict its interest in discourse to the courts, the media, and the halls of Congress. Would we have to ignore John Muir's early essays of nature appreciation because he and his contemporaries did not consider them advocacy? Would we have to exclude oral legends, campfire tales and private correspondence from our study of language directed toward the environment? We should open up the domain to include not only conventional forms of public discourse but also those that have not been recognized by the public.

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*Kireji, Environmental Discourse*  
(Continued from page 1)

What Robert describes as "our discipline's historical concern for the problems of the public" has not always treated well or democratically those who are marginalized with respect to that public (that is, minorities, women, and the environment). Advocacy entails argument and struggle, but change is not only struggle but natural process and growth. One need only point to the combat metaphors accompanying the classical ideology of advocacy to suggest that its roots lie in the blood of the arena, not the loam of the earth.

I must agree with Robert when he says it is important to define the kinds of communication we study. But we must be sensitive to not only the *kind* of communication, but the *style* of communication we address. While it is impossible not to advocate something, we all do it in different ways. Hence we must beware of valorizing only a certain style of discourse in our references to advocacy. For example, we should include not only the lobbying efforts of the Sierra Club, but also the activities of Earth First! and Ecofeminism. Some of these groups may be seen to have a more "advocative" style than others. But they all use discourse.

Finally, "discourse" implies a conversation, and hence a dialog between equal partners, neither of which is defined solely in terms of the other. In this respect, Robert's final line is suggestive: "Environmental advocacy is self-critical and acknowledges a reflexive set of relationships among human agents, language, and non-human systems of nature." In general I agree, but there's a part of this statement I wish to revise. Let's not only define nature in terms of what it is *not*; that is, *not* "human" and *not* "public." Let's also recognize what nature *is*; that is, an integral partner in the conversation. We do this when we use the phrase "Environmental Discourse."

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*Convention*  
(Continued from page 1)

beyond those normally associated with environmental discourse studies in the humanities may be very heuristic. If the focus is upon how we go about using communication to understand, transform, or reify environmental issues, there should be little problem in dealing with issues tied to advocacy, discursive practices, or information processing. By soliciting contributions, using a system of peer review, and creating panels of like-minded analyses, we could manage the potential conflicts in disciplinary interests as well as encourage a holistic approach to the subject matter. A variety of conference formats can accommodate such an eclectic interest and we would want to further explore a variety of options so as to maximize participation and value.

The site for this first national conference on environmental advocacy has yet to be determined, but a number of promising venues have been suggested. In general, most respondents thus far seem to prefer that the conference be held prior or subsequent to an already established convention/conference, be located in an aesthetically pleasing locale, and be readily served by an adjacent transportation hub. Although such ideal conditions are not often found, we are fortunate in that the next SCA argumentation conference at Alta, Utah, is slated for next summer. Furthermore, we have been investigating the possibility of joining Chris Oravec in her hopes of developing a conference in the study of the discourse of the environment to compliment the fellowship she has recently been granted by the Utah Humanities Institute. In coordinating our obviously compatible projects, we may gain the advantage of tapping into a well-established system by using the Alta facilities as well as that of increasing the constituencies to which our discussions might be of importance.

While we hope to have another interest group meeting at SCA in the fall, it is vital that we receive your additional

ideas and concerns in the very near future if we are to forge a greater consensus for planning the upcoming conference. Consequently, if you have any additional input that you would like to share with us, please contact: James Cantrill, Communication Studies, Carroll College, Helena, MT 59625-0099, or call (406) 442-3450.

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### Petition for SCA "Commission" Status

Participants in the Nov. 1989 SCA seminar "Environmental Advocacy" concluded that some affiliation with the Speech Communication Association was desirable. In the Winter 1990 issue of *Ecologue*, we reported the most appropriate route for this was to petition SCA for "Commission" status. A Commission is an area of special academic interest which extends beyond any single Division or Section. Current Commissions, for example, include the Peace Commission, the Commission on Health Communication, and Communication and Aging.

Although SCA is in the process of changing the procedure for creating subunits, the new method will not be official for some time. For now, the SCA Administrative Committee (AC) and Legislative Council (LC) can create SCA Commissions. These groups do not have an explicit method for evaluating such requests, but there are some informal guidelines they have traditionally followed:

(1) The request for Commission status should state the purpose of the new unit and why it should be created (why the need cannot be met by an existing subunit);

(2) The request should be accompanied by a *petition from current SCA members* indicating support for the new Commission. While there is no specific number of signatures needed, both the Administrative Committee and Legislative Council have specified a

minimum number of 100 signatures.

The next meeting of the AC is scheduled for September 7, 1990, and the LC will meet in Chicago at the next SCA convention in November 1990.

Robert Cox, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has agreed to lead our effort to present a request for Commission status to the September AC meeting. Copies of a formal petition (including name, statement of purpose, and "need") will be mailed to *Ecologue* readers in advance of that meeting.

*If you are interested in participating, or if you have any suggestions for a name or statement of purpose for the new Commission, please contact Robbie immediately.* Your help will also be needed to gather signatures for our petition.

(Contact: Dr. Robert Cox, CB #3285, Department of Speech Communication, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3285. Telephone: (919) 962-5096 (O), and (919) 968-1625 (H, answering machine).

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### SCA PANEL

#### Naming Places: Three Studies of Discourse Defining the Environment

Sponsor: Public Address Division

Chair: Jonathan Lange, *Southern Oregon State University*

Respondent: Jonathan Lange, *Southern Oregon State University*.

Few decades have been characterized in advance so certainly and with such consensus as the 1990s. We already know the crises with which the next ten years will be concerned. Highly respected sources from President Bush to *Time* magazine have labelled the nineties the "Decade of the Environment," and few among us have disagreed. The act of naming, performed by authority,

determines the very tone and content of our future.

Much as discourse can "name" a decade, discourse also "names," and hence puts boundaries upon, the environment itself. Indeed, "naming," or defining a place and its inhabitants, seems to be a particularly convenient rhetorical appropriation of something as inchoate, and at the same time, pervasive, as our physical setting. For human beings, Adam's task is never-ending; as a species we compulsively name and rename the surroundings we swim in.

This panel attempts to capture some of the sense of prophecy implied in naming a decade by analyzing specific past attempts at naming the environment. More specifically, the panel examines the power of naming the environment that is inherent in public officials, or an incumbent President. Each paper bases its analysis upon a discourse or body of discourses that employ a strategy of naming for the purposes of appropriating natural resources, as well as human ones, more efficiently. Such appropriation underscores the fact that the futures of both the environment and of humanity, insofar as they are positioned by authority, are inevitably intertwined in the act of definition itself.

--Chris Oravec  
University of Utah

**"The Discursive Construction of Nature: A Cultural Analysis,"** Donal Carbaugh, *University of Massachusetts, Amherst*.

Communication everywhere occurs in identifiable natural contexts. Also, and relatedly, communication everywhere creates a sense of place, of what is given as natural, of the emphatically and already there. This essay explores the senses of natural place constructed within the discourses surrounding a social controversy, the handling of Greylock Glen in western Massachusetts. Of special focus is a) the way discourse patterns "position" environmentalists, politicians, and developers in distinct but overlapping ways, and b) the distinctive sense of

"place" constructed within each discourse. Implications are drawn for a communicative theory of nature, as well as the impact of various cultural discourses upon nature.

**"From Polluted Environment to Endangered Planet: Qualitative Changes in Popular Environmental Discourse, 1969-1990,"** Dennis Jaehne, *San Jose State University*.

What happens to the social construction of the environment when administrative bureaucracies employing technical rationality influence public discourse? This study compares discourse from the Earth Day period with contemporary public discourses concerning the environment after twenty years of increasing bureaucratic influence upon environmental policy. The analysis centers upon popular representations of environmental problems in leading periodicals (*Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*) during the years 1970 and 1989. For example, in 1970 the term "environment" seemed sufficient to encompass and express our understanding of the scope of ecological problems. In 1989, by contrast, *Time* replaced its "Man of the Year" cover issue with "Planet of the Year: Endangered Earth." The change makes the problem seem larger and more comprehensive, but also tends to distance and mitigate any sense of meaningful individual participation and impact. Public discourse, in sum, is the justification for public policies and social actions that will affect nature, and bureaucratization affects this discourse by authorizing, validating, and empowering certain definitions over others.

**"Truman's Point Four Proposal: A Study in the Discourse of Development,"** D. Kevin Sargent, *University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*.

In perhaps one of the most significant parts of his 1949 inaugural address, President Truman proposed a "bold new program for . . . the improvement and growth of under-

developed areas." The Point Four Proposal led to the creation of a new set of government institutions for the promotion of "development" in the Third World. Research has shown that "development" as Truman defined it has failed to achieve results anticipated by its proponents, particularly in regards to environmental consequences. Nonetheless, "development" remains an important goal of U.S. foreign policy. This study examines Truman's justification for development policy by using McGee's concept of the "ideograph" to draw out Truman's role in defining the associative linguistic boundaries of "development." If environmental advocates are to build effective counter-discourses to the dominant discourse of "development," it may be helpful to examine the origins and dimensions of the ideograph to understand how institutions promoting "development" legitimate policies destructive to the environment.

## *Belles Lettres*

Literature



### BOOK REVIEW

#### *The Dream of the Earth*

by Thomas Berry

Sierra Club books, 1988

247 pages. \$18.95

The essays of Thomas Berry (historian of cultures, specialist in Asian religions, and Catholic monk) in *The Dream of the Earth* present two contrasting ways of experiencing the earth. The present way is to see the natural world as an object that exists solely for the purpose of human exploitation and consumption, and that must be manipulated and controlled by human beings. As a result, we are alienated from the earth--the true ground of our being.

"The natural world is the maternal source of our being as earthlings and the life-giving nourishment of our physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and religious existence" (p. 81). Today, we do not see ourselves as belonging to the earth, but, rather, as beings separated from and superior to all other forms of existence. Berry says that "we are presently in a state of exile from our true country" (p. 149). This exile makes us "destitute in all that makes us human" and diminishes our human existence (p. 81).

The causes of this alienation are many, including culture, religion, language, technology, and our value systems. Perhaps Berry's most penetrating analysis is the role of Christianity in fostering a spirit of earth degradation. With its other-worldly orientation and its emphasis on the unique superiority of human beings over other forms of creation, Christianity has created a view that the natural world exists only for human use and exploitation. Christianity's preoccupation with redemption instead of creation also fosters alienation from the earth in that the redemptive myth predicates a one-to-one, individual relationship with a transcendent God rather than emphasizing, as the creation myth does, our primordial attachment to the natural world. Finally, the Christian religion has seen a church or scripture as the primary source of revelation. Like Emerson and Teilhard de Chardin, Berry argues that the universe is God's primary source of revelation.

In contrast to the present utilitarian view of the natural world, Berry posits his dream vision of the earth. By dream he means an intuitive, evocative, non-rational, mythic, and imaginative approach to the natural world. Berry calls us to view the earth as subject, not as object, and as "the meeting of the divine and the human" (p. 81). We are urged to renew our enchantment with the earth.

To realize his dream of the earth, Berry sets an agenda for an ecological age (a period that Berry hopefully believes we are actually approaching) when we see the interdependence, intercommunication, and

consubstantiality of all living and non-living elements of the earth. This agenda, which Berry presents in detail, calls for a radical redefinition of the roles of religion, education, psychology, law, medicine, and economic institutions. In short, the ecological age calls for a complete redefinition of consciousness and the development of a sustainable approach to using the resources of the world. For Berry: "The time has come to lower our voices, to cease imposing our mechanistic patterns on the biological processes of the earth, to resist the impulse to control, to command, to force, and to begin quite humbly to follow the guidance of the larger community on which all life depends. Our fulfillment is not in our isolated human grandeur, but in our intimacy with the larger earth community, for this is also the larger dimension of our being. Our human destiny is integral with the destiny of the earth" (p. xiv).

In the style and spirit of Muir, Emerson, Thoreau, and de Chardin, the essays in this book provide a spiritual/mythical sense of intellectual, valuational, and cultural cohesion to a newly emerging ecological dream of the earth, its systems, and our proper place within these systems. Berry's theology of ecology calls us to return "to our native place after a long absence," and to meet "once again with our kin in the earth community" (p. 1). "The dream of the earth. Where else can we go for the guidance needed for the task that is before us?" (p. 223).

--John W. Ray  
Montana Tech, Butte, MT

## Chronos

Announcements



## A Course in "Environmental Advocacy"?

Should teachers and scholars in the area of communication studies develop

courses in environmental advocacy or in environmental discourse more generally? Do such courses exist now? The following article, "The Global Classroom," reprinted from *Greenpeace Magazine*, March/April 1990, reports one interesting experiment in this direction. Perhaps it will stimulate some thoughts from our readers about similar curricular projects in the field of communication.

(REPRINT)

### THE GLOBAL CLASSROOM

Middle Schools in North America, Europe and the Soviet Union are now testing an international environmental-action curriculum developed by Greenpeace. The 18 schools participating in the pilot program will ask students (aged 11-14) to identify a local environmental problem, research causes, design solutions and develop a public relations strategy to focus attention on the issue. "The idea is to develop a multi-disciplinary, hands-on approach to education by teaching students problem-solving skills they can use throughout their lives," said Micki McKisson, the North American educational coordinator.

The program grew out of a 1986-87 Netherlands Greenpeace project where 1,500 schools asked students to formulate solutions to environmental problems. For the international project, students will share experiences via global computer telecommunications, summer camps, and an international publication. Educational TV networks in six countries will broadcast documentaries about the program. "It's the first curriculum in the world to combine environmental action, internationalism, and a multidisciplinary approach in one package," added McKisson.

Once this pilot project is evaluated this summer, a full package will be available for teachers worldwide. More information will be available in the fall from the East-West Project, Greenpeace, Washington, D.C. --RS

### Environmental Communication Course Offered at Iowa

The University of Iowa's Saturday and Evening Undergraduate Program is including a new course, "Environmental Communication" in its offerings for the fall. The objectives of the course are:

(1) to begin to understand how social problems are discursively constructed;

(2) to read and interpret the original texts of the environmental movement;

(3) to understand the importance of language, discourse, and culture to the environmental movement;

(4) to analyze the political process and processes of change as they relate to the environment;

(5) to build a framework for criticism from an environmental perspective.

The reading list will include Roderick Frazier Nash's *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*, as well as selections from various environmental movements such as The Sierra Club, deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism. In addition, selections from journals within the discipline of communication studies will be included.

The course will be taught by Carol Corbin, a graduate student in Communication Studies. For a copy of the syllabus write to Carol at 1024 E. Washington Street, Iowa City, IA 52240.

### Environmental Ethics Graduate Certificate Program Offered at University of Georgia

Environmental ethics is a systematic approach which takes into account the social, political, legal, economic, scientific, and aesthetic aspects of environmental problems and provides guidance for environmental decisions involving competing values. Graduate students in the Environmental Ethics program benefit from viewing environmental ethics issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. The Certificate, combined with a degree in a major field, provides additional credentials for

professional advancement in a number of fields, such as teaching or philosophy. In addition, the program draws on the resources of The University of Georgia to offer regular contact with other disciplines through issue-oriented seminars of faculty and graduate students.

The Certificate in Environmental Ethics is awarded to graduate students meeting the following requirements: The completion of at least 30 hours of graduate work, including at least 25 hours of graduate work in approved courses along with an approved research paper in environmental ethics designated for at least five hours of graduate credit.

The University of Georgia is home for the world-famous Institute of Ecology. The University also houses *Environmental Ethics*, the widely indexed and refereed journal intended as a forum for diverse interests and attitudes. The journal also seeks to bring together the non-professional environmental philosophy tradition with the newly emerging professional interest in the subject.

For details contact Professor Frederick Ferre, Chair, Environmental Ethics Certificate Program, Peabody Hall, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602; Telephone (404) 542-2823.



*Ecologue* is not printed on recycled paper, yet. At this time 11x17 inch recycled paper will not run through copiers. It buckles. I am encouraging the copy centers to remedy the problem. Your suggestions for solutions are welcome.

Please submit articles, book reviews, and points of interest for the fall issue of *Ecologue* by September 1 to Carol Corbin, editor, *Ecologue*, 1024 E. Washington Street, Iowa City, IA 52240.

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Please include me on your newsletter mailing list:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

University or other affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

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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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Department of Speech Communication  
University of North Carolina  
CB#3285, Bingham Hall  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3285