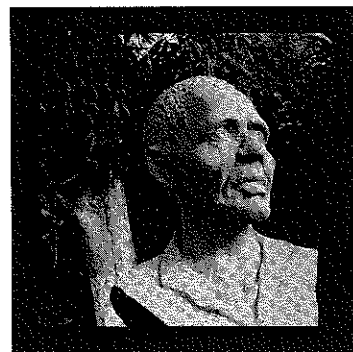


Border/Lines



guidelines for



contributors:

Photo: Malcolm Brown

Border/Lines is an interdisciplinary magazine committed to explorations in all aspects of culture -- including popular culture, fine arts, gender, literature, multiculturalism, mass communications and political culture. Although its geographic focus is Canada, this is taken as meaning anything that is relevant to understanding Canadian culture.

Border/Lines aims to fill the gap between academic journals and specialist cultural magazines. Our audience is diverse and eclectic; so too are our contributors, drawn from a broad base of writers, cultural producers and animators. Potential contributors should bear this diversity in mind, and try to address cultural issues with spunk, humour and the occasional sideways glance. For example, we would hope that theoretical debates would be opened up to the intelligent, but non-initiated reader.

The magazine contains four sections:

Excursions deals with specific cultural themes, topics and responses directed towards a non-specialized audience. It attempts to provide contextualized readings of places, events, objects and presentations. Length ranges from 100 to 1500 words.

Articles range from 1500 to 4000 words and include investigative journalism, critical analysis, theory, visual essays and short stories.

Reviews vary in length according to the number of books covered; review essays can be up to 4000 words.

Junctures examines other magazines, journals and aspects of radio, television or video.

We welcome new writers, but suggest that potential contributors send an abstract of 200 words before submitting an article. Manuscripts should be sent to our editorial address: 183 Bathurst Street, Suite No. 301, Toronto, M5T 2R7 Telephone: 416-360-5249 Fax: 416-360-0781

All correspondence should be accompanied by a stamped return envelope. If your manuscript has been typed on a word processor, please send us the disk.

Visuals: Writers may send illustrative work with their article. Visual artists are also encouraged to submit work. Please carefully consider the reproductive qualities of your submissions, as well as the page proportions of the magazine. All photos should be submitted unmounted as black and white prints (as large as possible) showing good contrast and clear definition of outline. Charts, graphs, drawings and so on should be rendered in black ink on good white paper. Captions, photo credits and return address should be typed on an appended sheet of paper. Final design decisions rest with the collective.

AFTER NATURE

BY GARY GENOSKO



Anyone familiar with the evolution of *Border/Lines* will have recognized our long-standing commitment to the cultural study of nature. In the following pages I reflect upon the diverse ways in which numerous authors have attempted to address both pressing eco-political concerns

and struggled to find something of the once mighty referent called Nature, in spite of an almost overwhelming sense that it has passed into a state of pure simulation.

In a past issue of *B/L*, Alex Wilson's appraisal of six books urban nature in "Toward A Culture Of Diversity: Politics In The

Urban Ecosystem" (*B/L* No.4, 1985-86), furthered theoretically his activist goal of remaking the city in biologically and culturally diverse ways, while Grahame Beakhurst's review (*B/L* No. 7/8, 1987) of 'deep ecology' literature, a monkeywrenching handbook, and Neil Evernden's *The Natural Alien*, a book inspired as much by Heideggerian phenomenology as European biology, interrogated the diversity of contemporary environmental thought - from how to disable construction equipment through how to do things with the bio-semiotics of Jakob von Uexküll to how, if possible, to take seriously whimsical American versions of the Norwegian tradition of *friluftsliv* (the 'open air' life); Jimi Hendrix, I think, summed up the matter rather well when he sang 'scuse me while I kiss the sky.'

What my former teacher Evernden taught me was to be suspicious about environmentalism. For, in short, the environmental crisis is the crisis of environmentalism, the splitting apart of environmentalism from the environment. When certain factions in the environmental movement began to borrow the methods of their opponents, supporting their own positions with techniques which were once an anathema to them, they ensured a future for themselves among the ecocrats and solar-powered barbecues. Such factions, then, came to depend upon the internal inconsistencies of their newly acquired methods because these methods enabled them to validate certain kinds of claims and show them to be true in the very forums to



which they were once denied entry or were received very poorly. This trial by paradox has exacted a heavy toll: much of what is called environmentalism is laughable but very marketable.

One of the issues here is that nature has been reconstituted, like a fruit drink, as environment. 'Environment' tells us about the world-wide phenomenon of environmentalism in which conservation strategies are exchanged by governmental and non-governmental organizations. When environment became a strategic global concern, it began to drift without an anchor. What we are witnessing today is the manipulation of an empty sign in the fantastic copulation of strategic environmental scenarios and summits which refer to one another and little else. In spite of the headlines, Earth comes last. These scenarios and scenes are like energy probes, satellites which carry environmental concerns into orbit around our blue planet, and report on its slow burn while adding fuel to the fire. As everyone becomes more desperate about the disappearance of nature, strategies proliferate, white and green papers are produced and circulated, scenarios are staged, and 'environment' becomes a word on everyone's lips. This desperation produces more 'environment,' more empty signs of itself.

My Baudrillardian rant has not dissuaded those ecological thinkers wedded to phenomenological method from recovering their own primal scenes of nature. Recalling the rally cry of phenomenology 'to the things themselves,' Evernden writes that phenomenology 'requires a return ... to a world that precedes knowledge and yet is basic to it, as a countryside is to geography and blossoms to botany.' A sense of wonder emerges after the achievements of the positive sciences have been put into brackets. The necessity of recovering the ability to wonder at the world, not as quizzical bemusement nor as a variant of curiosity, but to be continually surprised and thus to lift the 'disguise of ideas,' is the message of *The Natural Alien*:

If we were to do so, and if the new story we subsequently elaborated no longer cast us in the role of global locust, then our essence would no longer be environmental crisis. But there is no way to deliberately elaborate a new story - it is not a conscious exercise, not something susceptible of reasoned solution. One can only hope to pull back and see what emerges to fill the void.

Evernden asks the ecologist and the wilderness defender to remember their wonder at life behind the disguises of the laboratory and real estate interests. He puts his faith in the 'natural alien' or human placelessness, a faith propelled out of existential despair by the lure of flexibility. One must be flexible enough to let go of modern environmentalism, and perhaps even have the strength to not take refuge in the abstract notion even if, in the end, what is required is that one take a purely theoretical attitude out of contexts in which questions of value can arise and make sense.

Squirreled away in his cabin in rural New Hampshire, the phenomenological philosopher Erazim Kohak found a place conducive to bracketing the world of artifacts in order to achieve a nonreductive understanding of the intrinsic sense of natural events. Kohak's literal clearing in the forest opens up the Da - the space of understanding and disclosure - so that the evening, the forest and a family of porcupines, as he describes in *The embers and the stars*, have room to show themselves. For Kohak "the sense of nature's presence, ultimately, is the sense of the



presence of God." Even nonhuman animals, to the extent that they know in some respect, should not be excluded from knowing God. What is disclosed is the ingression of the eternal or value in the temporal. In Kohak's hands, phenomenological understanding leads to a stewardship argument: the faithful steward is responsible for a part of God's household because one is responsible to God.

One of the Canadian naturalist John Livingston's most enduring and controversial contributions to Canadian debates on conservation is his sustained questioning of stewardship and wise-use arguments. His article on the implications of domestication, "Rightness or Rights: Dominance, Domestication and the Paradox of Animal Rights" (B/L No. 5, 1986), was no exception. Indeed, the scripts Livingston produced for CBC TV's ground-breaking series, *The Nature of Things*, brought the pot of the conservation movement to a boil despite the fact that they were softened for televisual consumption and mouthed by David Suzuki.

Livingston's inflammatory arguments in such books as *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation* struck at the presuppositions of self-interest arguments buttressing stewardship entreaties

(anthropocentric dominion and the utilitarian imperative). Among the bird watching set, Livingston is far removed from the proselyte Jack 'in-the-pulpit' Miner (1865-1944) for whom "He ... gives me dominion over the fowls of the air and they honk and sing their way to and from my home." Miner's conversion from hunting fowl to banding and mapping the navigation patterns of Canada geese from his bird 'sanctuary' in Kingsville, Ontario was serialized in comic strip form by Walt McDayter and Norman Drew in the *Toronto Telegram* in the 1940s. It is doubtful that Livingston too will receive the dubious honor of having his life work turned into a comic strip.

Echoing Freud's remarks in his letter to Einstein of September 1932 that the evolution of civilization "is perhaps comparable to the domestication of certain species of animals," Livingston came to focus on the processes of domestication, not so much in psychological terms of aim inhibitions, sublimation and displacements of sexual and aggressive instincts, but through the means by which animal-human relations are shaped by distorting the relationships between animals and their conspecifics. In the aforementioned B/L article, Livingston wrote:

The essence of domestication is tractability, docility and manageability. This is obtained through selective breeding, by systematic dismantling of the animal's social dependence on conspecifics, while at the same time maintaining, encouraging and reducing its innate need to participate in a group social arrangement. Group interdependence is replaced by one-way dependence on the human proprietor.

Under the tutelage of Livingston I

applied his insights by comparing the domestication of animals to military indoctrination in the context of studying the military uses of animals in war and the symbolic construction of pseudo-species in advertisements for armaments ("Animals in the Army," B/L No. 9/10 1987-88).

The mechanomorphic hybrids which I discussed 'evolved' into product lines of children's toys while the military bestiary of advertising



simultaneously became more toy-like. This military imaging system has expanded into what is called the *animat* approach to artificial intelligence. The Proceedings of the First International Conference on Simulation of Adaptive Behavior, *From animals to animats* (1991), contains a remarkable overview of the research, most of which has developed only over the last five years, involving the use of simulated animals in the study of adaptive behavior and intelligence. First coined by Stewart Wilson in 1985, the term 'animat' - often simply referred to as 'bug' given the large number of artificial insects under study - refers to a simulated animal or autonomous robot. The study of an animat's 'adaptive behaviors' (physiological, sensory and learned) in selected artificial environments, the mutual influences of which are modelled on the postulates of ethology, biology as well as cognitive

science, furthers a variety of Artificial Intelligence research agendas such as making practical inroads into robot design and construction, improving computer modelling techniques, investigating the difficult question of emergent consciousness, and returning to ethology something of the insights gleaned (I am reminded here of the naturalist-documentary film maker Wladyslaw Starewicz's reanimation of insect

corpses dressed in human garb in his pre-revolutionary Russian films such as *Happy Scenes of Animal Life* (1912), *The Grasshopper and the Ant* (1913), and *The Lily of Belgium* (1915), in which stories of love, betrayal and the 'environmental' excesses of war are rendered, often parodically, in taxidermic simulations). It is perhaps not, as Baudrillard once put it, a castrated little doggie which exists somewhere between a piece of furniture and a living being, but an animat, a simulated animal like the 'papoola' described in Philip

K. Dick's science-fiction novel, *The Simulacra*. This is the animat, a simulation of an extinct Martian creature, which used car salesman use to draw passersby into the lot.

After nature, there is Disney. As Joyce Nelson stated in the first essay of her two-part exploration of "Culture and Agriculture" (B/L No. 18 & 19, 1990), "Disneyland - and its later clone, Disneyworld, which is 150 times bigger than its predecessor - tells us that technological simulacra are superior to their biological counterparts." Disney's vision of nature without dirt and animals without shit created what Nelson calls "a spectacular advertisement for the end of nature." Working at the tail end of nature, Margot la Rocque and I launched into "Animal Reproduction" (B/L No. 18, 1990) with the phrase: "The extinction of animals is offset by their textual reproduction," thus lifting sex out of biology in order to



describe "the pre-eminent manner in which our culture recoups its losses." The circulation of animats and pseudo-species of all kinds in artificial environments not only furthered Disney's sense of his own patriarchal dominion over the earth, but inspired his crony Ray Kroc to establish a McNature populated by caricatures of physically and mentally challenged adults and children (Ronald McDonald, The Hamburglar, etc.) to promote his simulation of food. If Baudrillard is the theorist of the conditions which obtain after nature, then Disney and Kroc were true frontiersmen and profiteers from this abject condition.

Lest we forget that Vancouver too had its 'Disneyland,' all we need be reminded of is that Brian Fawcett used the very term to describe Expo 86 in his article "How Walt Disney infected the design of Expo 86 and why we should all be frightened as Hell about it ..." (B/L No. 7/8, 1987). Not only did Disneyfolk (senior administrative staff from Disneyland and Disney-inspired projects) come to dominate Expo by "erect[ing] a post-ideological monument to geopolitical globalism, which is to say, to propagandize consumerist values, and to degenerate any other form of consciousness," but they put into place a great deal of "sterilized novelty" to sterilize the critical imagination of, Fawcett fears, many young people in Greater Vancouver. Vancouver already had its own third-rate "debraining facility," after all, in Fantasy Gardens.

France has its EuroDisney; Alberta has its indoor beach, petting zoo, and exotic animal displays in West Edmonton Mall; Ontario has its fiberglass mountain at the heart of Canada's Wonderland, and Arizona has its pseudo-planet Biosphere; but there remains the massive intrusion of Hydro Québec in James Bay I & II. Winona LaDuke's critique of Canadian 'environmental racism' in her article "The Culture of Hydroelectric Power" (B/L No. 23, 1991/92) exposes provincial and federal intolerance for cultural and biological diversity, perpetrated in the economic name of 'cheap electrical

rates,' with reference to the concept of 'sustainable development' as an endocolonialist strategy which requires the destruction of an entire ecosystem and Cree society:

...it makes no sense, whatsoever to explain to a Cree the concept of 'sustainable development' when my father-in-law and his ancestors have been harvesting and hunting this same area, for thousands of years. It appears to me that 'sustainable development' and a 'sustainable economy' are scheduled for destruction, only so, twenty years from now, some southern expert can 'reinvent' a sustainable economy for this same area.

Like all simulacra, a 'sustainable economy' attempts to put *Aborigines* in their place; (Both the original inhabitants and their place; the Latin term *aborigine* retains the name of the Italian tribe from whom, since *ab* means 'away from,' the Latins were descended) that is, finds a place for them in history since they are not supposed to be of the present, for instance, in Quebec, this is accomplished by literally drowning their place in order to replace them with its own hydroelectric culture and subsequent higher-order simulations (hyper-sustainable developments) of this ecocatastrophe. A similar point is made by Edward Poitras in his contribution to the *Eye of Nature* exhibition, "Summer Snow Tribal Relocation Project." The work consists of four white panels upon which three words, English, French and Spanish, are foregrounded in black script against the background of the names of dozens of tribes written in white script, appearing and disappearing from view like flakes of summer snow.

Alex Wilson's namesake was a well known American bird biologist (1766-1817) who, together with his contemporary, John James Audubon (1785-1851), is considered a 'father' of North American ornithology. Our contemporary Wilson's two articles, "The View From the Road: Nature Tourism in the Postwar Years" (B/L 12, 1988) and "Nature at Home: A Social Ecology of Postwar Landscape

Design" (B/L 22, 1991), both of which found their way into his recently published book *The Culture of Nature*, treat the expansion of 'landscaping' toward the artificial (chemical, technological, monocultural) as inevitable but not irreversible.

Wilson's redemptive vision and commitment to natural restoration based upon topo-sensitivity is at odds with the dark scenes of the death of nature which I have discussed. This is the tension which has run through and animated investigations of 'natural' phenomena in B/L. What makes Wilson's project an exception is his ability to rethink in-between places such as parkettes, empty lots, degraded river banks, and everywhere designated by the Canadian term 'wastelot,' including many people's backyards, as well as overdesigned 'green' spaces. He tries to reread these places in terms of a democratic, interventionist, environmental ethic cognizant of its own history, pitfalls and successes. His position will be tested every time the results of the next site design competition are announced, when the disarray of the landscaping profession redresses itself, and during the debates in which light green to hunter green revolutionaries engage in hot pursuit of their educational goals.

Gary Genosko is a member of the *Border/Lines Collective* and a *McLuhan Program Fellow* at the *University of Toronto*.

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The Principal Meal

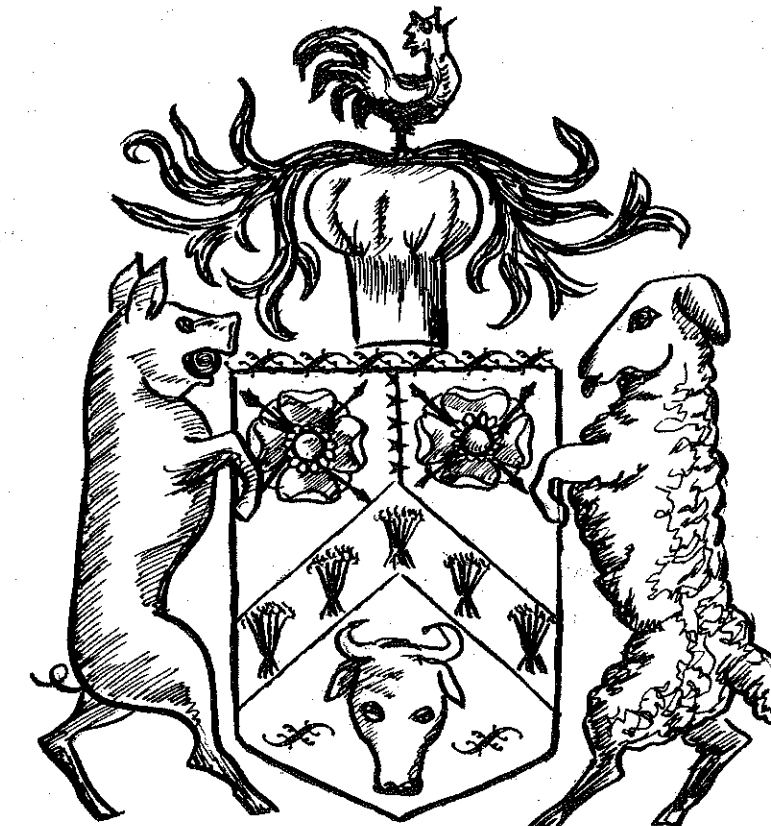
BY Neil Evernden

Nick Fiddes, *Meat: A Natural Symbol*. London: Routledge, 1991

I suspect that a person's initial reaction to seeing this book on the dealers' shelves would be mixed. There is no ambiguity about the prominent title *Meat*, nor any doubt about the appropriateness of the reddish cast to its cover images. I also suspect that an ambiguous response to the book is entirely appropriate to its topic: we are both attracted and repelled by this material entity that plays such a central role in our social life. The term "meat" is, on one hand, an easy, apparently neutral means of identifying a range of foodstuffs. Yet on the other hand, it can leave slightly troubling aftershocks: it sounds slightly vulgar, a little raw, and could quite easily be turned into a derogatory term if transposed to other contexts. It is a highly valued indicator of civilized dining, but its history is inevitably bloody and "primitive." And it constitutes a very rich topic for discussion, since it reveals so much about our association with the natural worlds.

Fiddes' choice of title was felicitous, yet it does have one failing: it falls far short of indicating the full range of his discussion. One might expect to encounter

discussions of nutrition and the history of meat-eating in such a book, but perhaps not cannibalism, pet-keeping, and sex. Yet so central is meat to our ordering of affairs that very nearly any social activity may be shown to have some connection to it. That is, meat constitutes the kind of symbolic entity through which we think about a wide range of social and material relations. It is, as the subtitle



asserts, a "natural symbol." As the author says, "what meat exemplifies, more than anything, is an attitude: the masculine world view that ubiquitously perceives, values, and legitimates hierarchical domination of nature, of women, and of other men and, as its corollary, devalues less domineering modes of interactions between humans and the rest of nature."

As Fiddes explores the development of our attitudes toward meat, it becomes apparent that much of our conversation about it conceals its deeper significance. We speak, for example, about its qualities as a source of protein, and we use such qualities in support of meat as a superior foodstuff which can produce a strong, healthy body for its consumer. Yet while we couch this assertion in terms of

chemical ingredients, we are also implying that the qualities of the animal -- its strength -- are to be acquired by the appropriation of its life force. Conversely, when, as is increasingly common, we criticize the consumption of meat, we speak of cholesterol levels or the probability of contamination by hormones of toxic chemicals, thus maintaining credibility by expressing our concern in terms of empirical fact. Yet that concern with contamination is also symbolic, and our critique of meat constitutes a critique of our

system of relationships with the natural world.

Our concern about meat is, in short, evidence of the more wide-ranging concern over environmental well-being and the appropriate relationship of humans to nature. Fiddes cites the well-known anthropologist Mary Douglas as saying that what

REVIEWS

