

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.

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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



concerns us is not the threat of toxins to the body but the threat of contaminants to our cultural sense of order: "the threat is less to our stomachs than to our thought: to our clear classification of how the world should be." The way we talk about meat and its dangers (or strengths) is revelatory of our ideas about health in general, personal and global. Health becomes the medium of our discussion, but a discussion which goes well beyond the boundaries of bodily functioning.

Fiddes amply demonstrates that meat offers a useful entry to discussion of pollution and contamination. Yet he also demonstrates an emerging contrast between contemporary attitudes and those of the very recent past. Meat has long been regarded (and perhaps still is by a majority) as the premier food, one of so high a status that it seems a near-necessity. Indeed he cites one instance in which fresh fruit and vegetables were actually banned during an epidemic as unsafe, while meat was taken to be pure. But quite aside from its alleged physical properties, meat has also been emblematic of the status of its consumer. That is, the ability to eat meat has been taken to indicate a superior being, an aristocrat among people or among species, one who wields the power of life and death and who is entitled to consume the flesh of others. This evidence of power is part of the symbolic significance of meat-eating, and meat thus constitutes the kind of nourishment needed to sustain the arrogance of a world-dominating being. Meat-eating is, then, the environmental crisis in microcosm: it is daily evidence of the attitude of domination and control which Western societies have practiced upon nature and upon their own minorities. Parenthetically, Fiddes' distinction between the contrasting reactions to environmental malaise - the advocacy of ever-greater

control under the guise of "wise stewardship" versus the call for greater humility in the face of environmental limits -- is a useful encapsulation of much of the literature, and his contrasting labels "light green" and "deep green" are a welcome change from the shallow/deep dichotomy more common in North American debates.

The really striking feature of recent times, then, must be the evidence of a decline in meat consumption, accompanied by a rapidly growing antipathy to the very idea of flesh-eating. It is not the mere fact that some people shun meat that is significant, for there have always been dissenters. What is interesting in the current debate is the range of participants and the rapidity with which the resistance to meat seems to be growing. The larger context which Fiddes provides -- the underlying significance of meat eating -- helps considerably in understanding the current trend. Simply put, resistance to meat is a social indicator of resistance to the traditional attitudes to nature in general.

However, while this may constitute the major significance of the book, Fiddes' illustration of the symbolic content of material objects will also be of interest to those who have had only minimal exposure to the writings of social anthropologists. His discussion of cannibalism, for instance, reveals a traditional means by which one society can indicate its superiority over others, in this instance by implying that "they" eat people and are therefore subhuman. And if the ban on eating people is a consequence of the sense of kinship, we find ourselves in a categorical anomaly, which is always troubling. These creatures are clearly "they" and therefore devoid of any protection from our appetites, and yet at the same time they are "us" when taken into our homes. Hence our discomfort at the thought of

people eating dogs or cats, and at attempting to explain why it is proper to eat infant cattle as "veal" but improper to eat kittens. In short, Fiddes gives us a primer on the social constitution of meaning in the course of a discussion of meat.

Fiddes has provided an intriguing study of the history of meat-eating, and has done a considerable service in raising the level of the discussion from the physical benefits/hazards of that foodstuff to its symbolic importance to the societal psyche: meat is not just nutrition, but a metaphoric connection to the "otherness" of nature. A similar understanding of "environment" might well provoke a more useful discussion than does our usual litany of pollutions and depletions. The sparks that disperse from his discussion of meat will ignite enough intellectual bonfires to keep any reader entertained -- and this despite the fact that the book had its origins as a doctoral dissertation, which so often leads to stodgy literature. But Fiddes writes very clearly, and deftly directs the reader to his thoughtful conclusion. Most readers will find this a thoughtful and enjoyable exploration of a surprisingly rich topic.

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## Reading Transvestism

BY Patricia Elliot

Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, New York: Routledge, 1992

On February 8, 1992, headlines "Burglars in Drag" and "Dressed to Steal" drew the attention of Globe and Mail readers to Eric Morgenthaler's story from West Palm Beach, Florida where "a shadowy gang of 100 transvestites has been terrorizing Florida's up scale boutiques". What makes a "big-time burglary ring manned by female impersonators" shadowy is their success in eluding police who "don't seem keen to go undercover themselves." The transvestite gang appears to have captured not only sequined gowns, but also the attention of "law-enforcement professionals" who attend transvestite beauty pageants in voyeuristic fashion, to videotape, photograph, and take notes. Transvestite beauty contestants appear to the police as suspects, as transgressing the border between law-abiding and law-breaking citizens. But the elusive nature of their criminal activities is repeatedly brought back to the elusive nature of their gender, hence to another transgressed border. According to detectives, the transvestite criminal eludes the police because society has sanctioned the transgression of gender borders, so that the transvestite no longer "stands out like a sore thumb." In this case, the failure to nail the transvestites as men is displaced onto, and given as a reason for the failure to nail the suspects as criminals. Although the detectives warn against the temptation to regard all transvestites as potential criminals ("These are criminals who just happen to be transvestites"), it is clear that they

also regard cross-dressing as a clever way to elude the law.

Neither the confusion nor the appeal of cross-dresser as criminal would be news to Marjorie Garber, author of *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. Professor of English and Director of the Center for Literary and Cultural Studies at Harvard, Garber draws on an impressive knowledge of cultural history to explore the nature and significance of cross-dressing and to account for our fascination with it. Garber contends it is important to look closely at the transvestite, rather than looking through or past him/her, because the transvestite is a complex and overdetermined cultural signifier.

To facilitate focusing our gaze on the transvestite, Garber has included forty pages of photographs and illustrations of transvestism (both familiar and obscure). These images are helpful reminders of the prevalence of transvestism in culture, and reinforce Garber's claims that transvestism both creates culture and is created by culture. *Vested Interests* is organized into two sections, "Transvestite Logics" and "Transvestite Effects," where arguments for these two claims are made and supported by an almost overwhelming number of examples. It is clear that the transvestite (defined by Garber, perhaps too broadly, as any cross-dresser, from Tootsie to transsexuals) appears in

