

The Trumpeter
ISSN: 1705-9429
Volume 24, Number 1 (2008)

Holism with a Hole? Exploring Deep Ecology within the Built Environment

Kate Booth

Kate Booth is a PhD candidate at the School for Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania. Following years of wilderness activism, informed by a deep ecological perspective, she found herself settling down and starting a family in the suburbs. She was somewhat surprised to discover that what she had considered to be adequate account of the world failed to gel with her experience of suburban life. Kate is now exploring the phenomenon of the interplay of deep ecological metaphysics and her home suburb of Risdon Vale. She is keen to receive feedback on this paper.
Email: boothk@postoffice.utas.edu.au

Introduction

I sit gazing out my front window. Mount Wellington is the wild backdrop, and the tinderbox subdivision of Government Hills the restless middle ground. Out of sight lies the River Derwent travelling slowly in estuarine form, banked by suburbs and polluted by industry. Closer to home, across the shallow valley, houses—near matches to mine—box between scattered shrubs and grassy verges. In the foreground a roughed-up park and tended gardens fringe the little piece of land that I call home.

My front garden is an attempt to explore and develop a sense of place here. It is a declaration, made at the age of 30, that I plan to put down roots. The plants are all indigenous to this area, to Risdon Vale. There are endemic, rare Risdon peppermints, globe trotting native hops, low lying saggs, yellow dogwoods (not doing very well for some reason), a black wattle, red and green flowering correas, a pain-to-weed-around prickly mimosa, and a few poas in need of a burn.

Beyond my fledgling natives, passing through and over my garden and pushing up through the mulch are a myriad of other species. Dusty brown sparrows stuff dead grass beneath neighbour Harry's eaves; as

Topsy-cat rounds the corner a blackbird sounds a yellow-beaked alarm; twitch travels swiftly underground popping up occasionally for a bit of sun. An ornamental, reminiscent of flared pants and paisley minis, unloads a sticky seed mass over the fence, and two scruffy shia tzus circle nose to bum along the footpath.

Watching out my window I begin to ponder: What are all these other species? Where do they fit into my sense of place? Are they part of me putting down roots? If so, how? My ecological background fostered by an active passion for wilderness, a degree in the biological sciences and work in government and non-government environmental bodies leads me to disregard all these other species—to ignore them, to control them, or ideally, to kill and eliminate them. How this relates to nurturing a sense of place quite unexpectedly presents a quandary for me. When I experience this place, my place, there is no clear boundary between what is native and what is feral. The sparrows gather native grass for their nest, the blackbird's alarm is sounded from the high branches of a self sown native wattle, twitch gains refuge from a determined weeder in the dense roots of the sagg, seeds hitch a ride on trouser, hair, and breeze, and in native and feral guts alike.

Beings are interacting, interrelating everywhere any old how.

Up until the point of buying a house and putting down roots, deep ecology, particularly its focus and prioritization of wilderness and the wilderness experience, had provided an adequate account of the world for me. In settling within the suburbs, however, I was starting to feel incomplete.

Freya Mathews describes a similar feeling:

The ecological ideals to which I had been committed in my work had hitherto seemed impossible to put into practice in the heart of the city. I had been waiting, for decades, for a chance to relocate myself to the country, to take up a lifestyle compatible with my dreams and convictions. In the meantime, I had searched among the innumerable urgent and compelling environmental issues that came to my attention daily for the one to which I could devote myself wholeheartedly; for a time it was rainforests, then uranium mining, then Tibet, and so on.¹

Deep ecology has long been criticized for its focus on the wild non-human, this occasionally being interpreted as antihumanist and even misanthropic. But this is not what my experience of deep ecology and the suburbs was telling me. Rather I had a growing recognition of a gap to be explored, of terrain just waiting to be navigated. It struck me that the built environment opens up a whole new realm for deep ecological discourse—one that draws on the wild knowledge gleaned from

wilderness, yet is inclusive of the burgeoning spatial, temporal, and cultural locale of the city.

This paper takes a tentative look at deep ecology's relationship with the built environment through a consideration of two early works by Bill Devall and George Sessions.² It reviews the growing body of ecophilosophical literature that looks toward the built environment and considers how this literature interprets deep ecology's relationship with the built. I argue that failing to engage fully and openly with the built environment places deep ecology in a metaphysical dilemma—a sense of holism with a hole. Unresolved grief is offered as a means of understanding more deeply the nature of the deep ecology relationship with the built, and an avenue for exploring deep ecology within the built environment is proposed.

Deep Ecology and the Built

Warwick Fox argues that the built environment is a realm of ethical consideration often overlooked in philosophical discourse.³ With interhuman ethics focused on what goes on between humans, and environmental ethics focused on the natural or wild sense of the environment—other species, ecosystems, the “planet,” wilderness, and so on—the built environment hangs in a state of limbo, directly addressed by neither and with no voice of its own. Fox finds this circumstance exceedingly odd as it appears obvious that the “fate of the ‘green bits’ of the planet is now inextricably bound up with—indeed, effectively at the mercy of—the future of the ‘brown bits’.”⁴ As he points out, the environment “consists not only of a self-organizing, natural environment but also of an intentionally organized, artificial, built, or constructed environment (as well as all manner of combinations of these two kinds of environments).”⁵ And, of course, it is the latter that most people are immersed within on a day-to-day basis.

Deep ecology is no exception to the observation made of environmental ethics by Fox.⁶ The following tentative introduction to the relationship between deep ecology and the built draws on two early works by foundational deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions: *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*⁷ and *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology*.⁸ In both books, references to the built are few and far between, with the focus primarily on wilderness, the wilderness experience, and the ramifications thereof.

Deep ecology without question has its roots within wilderness—be this the wilds of the Norwegian peaks or the diversity of the Sierra Nevada. Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, and John Muir are all cited as key sources of inspiration for, and evocation of, deep ecology, and all

turned from “civilization” to the wilds, gaining in the process a greater understanding of the world and the human place within it. This tradition continues in deep ecology with the contrast of the “civilized” and the “wild” providing a foil for a case for intrinsic value and for the virtues of wild experiencing for humans.

Experiencing the wilderness or the wildness of a place . . . is a process of 1) developing a sense of place, 2) redefining the heroic person from conqueror of the land to the person fully experiencing the natural place, 3) cultivating the virtues of modesty and humility and 4) realizing how the mountains and rivers, fish and bears are continuing their own actualizing processes.⁹

Back in the cities:

We let ourselves become colonized by mass media, by expectations in our culture. We are seduced by entertainments and promises of pleasures on city streets. We break away only by becoming self-conscious. Thus we have a paradox, in order to lose our *self* into the larger self, we must become more self-conscious in the midst of techno-scientific civilization. Without cynicism or sentimentalism we create an opening for discovery. Outside the ordered, bordered, fenced, domesticated, patrolled, controlled areas of our region, our wild self is waiting.¹⁰

There is a geographic dualism inherent within deep ecology that runs along the lines of the wild and the built. The ennatured place, like the ennatured person, lies in sharp distinction to the encultured place and person. On one side there is diversity, maturity, and growth, and on the other paucity, confinement, and stuntedness. The wilderness is where the former exists and may be experienced and nurtured. In the built the latter is found and fostered, and threatens to subsume.

It is but a small step from this wild/built dualism to a devaluing of the built landscape and its inhabitants. When arguing that “even in large cities, a sense of place can be recultivated”¹¹ Devall and Sessions bypass engagement with the actual, the landscape of the built, and promote as an example a project that uncovered “information on the geology, native plants, animals and land forms buried under the mass of concrete that forms the modern image of the city.”¹² In an act of “psychological palaeontology” the existing landscape is disregarded, dismissed and devalued. All that is of true value is what lies beneath the concrete and the tar; the crushed and broken remnants of the wild.

And the inhabitants of the built? Sessions draws on Spinoza’s account when he states:

Most people are like the slaves in Plato’s cave; they have mostly opinion about casual sequences in Nature in that their perceptions and thoughts are colored by their ego desires. They are essentially helpless and passive, moved by emotions,

fears, and desires based on ignorance and imagination, and living life largely by reacting to external causes and situations.¹³

What perhaps saves deep ecology from allegations of antihumanism or misanthropy is that both Devall and Sessions see the built and its inhabitants as redeemable. Devall asks “Is it possible to explore our ecological self while imprisoned in the concrete streets of a modern metropolis?”¹⁴ Only, he concludes, if there is radical change within the cities, and such radical change is possible. Devall and Sessions¹⁵ include in their book a critique of a range of ecotopian options. These include ideas that specifically address the issue of cities, such as a perspective offered by Paul Shepard in *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*.¹⁶ Shepard envisages a world in which the entire population inhabits cities spread along the edges of continents and islands leaving the interior free for ecological and evolutionary processes.

In one sense, Devall and Sessions are candid about the absence of a deep consideration of the built environment within their work.

Nothing is said in this book about the export of commodities—water, plants, timber, etc.—to cities, nor anything about managing cities, their size or design, nor the political power of cities to take natural resources from far away for their own uses. Nor do we discuss jobs, the structure of decision-making in natural resource extraction and the creation of jobs for ever-growing human populations. These are vital issues for individuals and for public policy and deserve careful, thoughtful consideration based on deep ecology norms and principles. We encourage readers to draw from their own experiences, whether living in large cities, suburbs or the countryside, to make more specific decisions based on their own knowledge, information, and intuitions within the deep ecology framework.¹⁷

Devall and Sessions’ deliberate focus on the wild can be seen, at least in part, as an attempt to give the wild the hearing it is denied within traditional philosophical thought. However, in light of the illustration of their brief yet illuminating descriptions of the built, such acknowledgement and call for future work may be construed as somewhat irrelevant. If it is the wild—be this the wild that lies beyond the city limits or beneath the concrete and tar—that spurs Self-realization, and it is the built that hinders it, a clear decision for a deep ecologist to make is to abandon the city, seek out the wild, and return only to the built for wilderness promoting and preserving activism. It is important to note, that until recent work by Freya Mathews¹⁸ (reviewed below), and despite Devall and Sessions’ encouragement, deep ecology literature has continued to ignore and devalue the built.

This raises the question of whether this relationship that deep ecology maintains with the built is a necessary and inherent feature of deep ecology. Or, is it a realm of consideration, as proposed by Devall and Sessions, that is just waiting for exploration? To address these questions, I begin by reviewing the literature that has emerged within the last ten years regarding environmental ethics and the built environment.

The Built Blind Spot

A growing body of literature has emerged that calls into question the lack of engagement with the built environment within environmental ethics. As Alastair Gunn points out in a 1998 paper,

the central concerns of environmental ethics have been and largely continue to be heavily slanted towards animals, plants, endangered species, wilderness, and traditional cultures and not toward the problems of life in industrialized, urbanized society where most people now live.¹⁹

Gunn goes on to make a case for the active involvement of environmental ethicists in environmental restoration and environmental justice within urban communities. Rodger J. H. King²⁰ contends that there is a direct connection between the issues affecting the built environment and those impacting upon the wild.

. . . if we are to contribute to articulating the outlines of an environmentally responsible culture, we must be prepared to address the problems faced by people in the places they inhabit. Degraded urban, suburban, and rural environments are obstacles to the development of an environmental conscience. In addition, they are objective constraints on our efforts to minimize waste and pollution and to enjoy a harmonious and integrated human existence in the natural world. Built environments affect how we perceive the natural world and how we understand ourselves. It is crucial, therefore that we consider how we might critique the contemporary built environment and envision one more in consonance with environmental aspirations. Such a task calls for philosophical attention as strongly as the more typical concerns with nonhuman value and the health and integrity of wild ecosystems.²¹

For King, the built environment, where increasing numbers of people are spending increasing amounts of time, has metaphysical implications that lead to attitudes and behaviours that threaten to inhibit the development of a broad-based and effective environmental consciousness. He proposes four tentative principles to guide building and design within the built, and sees a “philosophical articulation of the built environment as a complement to the defence of the value of wild ecosystems and species.”²²

In a subsequent paper, King²³ builds his case, highlighting the relationship between the making and unmaking of space within the built environment. For King, place conditions awareness and feeling, and conditions and educates imagination.

. . . the domesticated is *our* space. It is from this world that we move out into the wild landscape, either in fact or in imagination. Our ability to do this with respect and attention to details presupposes an education of our moral perception to overcome the habitual and acculturated anthropocentric neglect of nature.²⁴

More recently King,²⁵ maintaining his focus on the built environment, assesses the pros and cons of green technologies, ecocentrism, and civic environmentalism for moving us toward an “environmental culture.” He concludes by stating that all three have much to contribute, but affirms that “ridding ourselves of our environmentally harmful habitat requires mindfulness about our choices and actions and, ultimately, a change in the belief systems themselves.”²⁶

Robert Kirkman²⁷ takes this growing concern with the built environment into the suburbs. He gives two reasons why the suburbs deserve philosophical consideration. One, the suburbs are an environment in that they are the surrounds in which most of us conduct our daily lives; they are, if you like, our native habitat. And two, suburbs are heavily implicated in the traditional concerns of environmental ethics, such as habitat loss, resource depletion, climate change and so on. Kirkman makes an important point:

The peculiar intertwining of technology, culture, and nature in suburbia opens up whole new categories of environmental problems that push at the limits of traditional environmental ethics. What do we do when there are conflicts not over endangered species or pristine woodlands, or even over overt cases of toxic pollution, but over various ways of using environments that are already deeply enculturated and thus deeply ambiguous.²⁸

Engagement with the built environment may be the ultimate test of the validity of pre-existing branches of environmental ethics. Ethical positions that may have seemed plausible in the wilds of “free nature,” if they are to stand the test of time, must also be able to account for, make sense of, and act decisively within the expansive realm of the built, including within suburbia. A line can no longer be drawn between the pared omnipresence of the wild, and the burgeoning pervasiveness of the built.

While Gunn, King, and Kirkman take a somewhat tentative, introductory approach to environmental ethics in the built environment, preferring to suggest options and opportunities for a change in this relationship, Andrew Light²⁹ constructs a detailed critique of the

relationship between environmental ethics and the built environment (or lack thereof). Within environmental ethics, Light argues, the built environment is a “landscape either to be mined for examples to be avoided or ignored all together as a product of human intentions—an artefact rather than part of nature and so outside of the appropriate boundaries of the discipline.”³⁰ He contends that the non-anthropocentric prejudice of environmental ethics—the focus on discerning, formulating, and defending the presence of values within wild nature independent of human agency—leads to an inability to engage with the built, especially when such an approach goes hand in hand with both nature/culture and geographical dualisms.

In a bid to escape from the confines of the anthropocentric worldview and the instrumentalist approach it is seen to imply, environmental ethicists have headed into wild nature, for it is here that the clearest expressions of non-anthropocentric value are to be unearthed.

. . . since many if not most environmental ethicists see the principle [sic] goal of their inquiry to involve the identification of an acultural non-anthropocentric value in or for nature, most theorists focus in their work on what they perceive to be pristine forms of natural value, such as wilderness areas, as exemplar forms of this value. If nature is to be considered as valuable in itself then, however the ground of that value is metaphysically or ontologically conceived, it will be best identified in those areas relatively independent of human invention as opposed to those humanly shaped areas which exemplify exactly those culturally bound preferences that many environmental ethicists wish to reject.³¹

A consequence of such a position is to denigrate or ignore, not just the built as an environment, but also the inhabitants of the built. Light cites the work of Holmes Rolston III as an example. For Rolston, humans are not fully human if they only dwell within the built as the built does not include wild nature. To be complete we must actively engage with and respect wild nature. For Light, there exists within environmental ethics both the familiar nature/culture dualism and a geographical dichotomy—one pole, one place contains “nature” and the other, the built, does not.

This leads non-anthropocentrically motivated ethicists to distinguish not only between the value of the wild and that of the built, but also between the very nature of the landscapes themselves. Culturally modified and built landscapes do not simply reflect a different type of value to that of the wild, they are disvalued. Here Light identifies what he terms an “undefended prejudice—a move from a critique of crass human-centred forms of valuation to a rejection of humanly produced landscapes, landscapes which cannot possibly bear any semblance of acultural descriptions of value.”³² Hence, anthropocentrism for many (if

not most) environmental ethicists does not only imply anthropocentric values, but anthropocentric landscapes. In taking a non-anthropocentric stance one is compelled to at best ignore these ‘human-centred’ landscapes, and at worst to deride and demean them. For Light, the urban blind spot is not simply an oversight by a branch of philosophy that has been spurred toward a rediscovery of the inherent values of wild nature. This blind spot presents an anti-urban bias based on prejudice and perhaps, dare I say it (Light does not), misanthropy.

In way of a solution, Light suggests that we steer clear of an engagement with the “turgid arguments in epistemology and metaphysics to decide whether our intuitions about the relative importance of experiences in wilderness and cities are correct.”³³ Rather, he prioritizes the importance, in ecological terms, of environmental issues within the built, by which he refers to the potential for having meaningful contact with wild nature in the built, the environmental pluses of cities such as lower energy consumption, and the interlinking of sustainability of the wild with that of the population-dense cities. In addition, Light advocates that we consider the potentially destructive social implications of maintaining an anti-urban bias, specifically, environmental ethical positions providing the basis for fascist and racist tendencies, albeit inadvertently. Light concludes:

If environmental ethics is to fully embrace the urban, then it must describe the brown space of the city to be as important a locus of normative consideration as the green space . . . we will only have a fully environmental ethic, which covers all environments, when we turn our attention to the preservation of richly textured urban spaces as often as we do to old growth forests.³⁴

Deep Ecology Revisited

While the tentative consideration of deep ecology’s relationship with the built offered above appears to sit well within the perspective offered by Light,³⁵ what is interesting here is that deep ecology lies outside environmental axiology—the formulation and defence of theories of value regarding the nonhuman world—and it is environmental axiology that is now predominant within environmental ethics, including the works cited by Light. It is not unusual for this distinction between deep ecology and environmental axiology to be overlooked, especially within ecophilosophy.³⁶ This oversight is in part due to the frequent use and apparent prioritization of terms such as *intrinsic value* and *inherent value* within deep ecology literature. For example, the first principle of the deep ecology platform formulated by Naess and Sessions states: “The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth

have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.”³⁷ This appears to place deep ecology well within the bounds of environment axiology. However, as Naess and Sessions stress, the use of these terms is not intended to imply a strictly philosophical position. Rather these terms are used non-technically—in a colloquial everyday sense—aimed at making the deep ecology position broadly understandable and widely acceptable.³⁸ As such, the philosophical rigour required in value discourse does not apply to considerations of value within deep ecology; deep ecology simply states a potentially shared understanding that many people feel about the broader ecological world.

Deep ecology has long argued that the fundamental problem with the relationship between humanity and nature is primarily ontological, rather than value-based. In other words, the issue that needs addressing is who and how we perceive ourselves to be in relationship with the broader ecological world. Once we have assessed, developed, and internalized a metaphysical position that sees us as thoroughly interconnected and interrelated to the rest of nature, then more caring and considerate norms and behaviours will flow. As Michael Zimmerman has asserted: “Deep ecologists claim that before knowing what we *ought* to do, we must understand who we really *are*.”³⁹ This is a distinct approach, one that differs from that taken by the environmental ethicists reviewed by Light.⁴⁰ Such ethicists maintain that the real work lies in finding value within nature separate from human machinations that would impel humans to behave more responsibly toward nature. From this perspective, metaphysics is not the primary determinant of human behaviour: defined, justified, and enculturated values are. Deep ecology argues that, without a deep internalized picture of our selves as intimately bound up with the planet, without a metaphysics that infuses our very being with a sense of existing as a small part of a larger ecological whole, such enforcement of values will always be tenuous and unreliable.

As an environmental pragmatist, Light⁴¹ makes it very clear that he is not concerned with such metaphysical musings. Hence, Light’s explanation of the built “blind spot” does not provide an adequate explanation of why deep ecology has not engaged in depth with the built environment. It provides only a partial understanding of deep ecology’s relationship with the built environment.

Freya Mathews is one thinker associated with deep ecology who has turned her attention toward the built. Mathews⁴² notes that the definition of *environment* within radical environmental thought, including deep ecology, excludes aspects of the physical world

impacted by human agency: the non-natural or artefactual, or what is termed here, the built environment. The emphasis of radical environmentalism is on the protection and preservation of the aspects of the world that remain largely free of human agency. Such an approach, Mathews maintains, rests on an inappropriate Cartesian dualism: the separation and oppositional juxtaposition of mind and matter where the human mind is the sole custodian of value, meaning, and telos, and matter only obtains such properties through the agency of the human mind. This is despite recognition within radical environmentalism of the inadequacy of dualisms to provide a thorough account of reality and the flawed and destructive nature of outcomes emanating from such approaches. While both deep ecology and ecofeminism strive to reject distinctions of a dualistic nature, Mathews argues that by failing to integrate consideration of the built into theory and practice, radical environmentalism acts to reinforce the mind/matter dichotomy and, as such, remains incomplete, providing an inadequate base from which to address the environmental crisis.

Mathews' critique of radical environmentalism focuses particularly on the perceived shortcomings of deep ecology. Despite best intentions, deep ecology assumes a capacity on behalf of humanity to transform and shape the world for the better, particularly the built environment and its inhabitants. It offers "a *posture of opposition* to the contemporary world, but no true *praxis* for it, no way of living harmoniously in it."⁴³ For Mathews, deep ecology offers insights, a modality of being and a platform for protection in relation to wild beings and places, but by upholding ecology at the expense of the built environment, it falls short of providing a consistent challenge to the "modern contempt for matter that lies at the root of the present environmental crisis."⁴⁴ She writes:

Deep ecology has achieved a certain depth of inquiry, but I think a further level of inquiry about the relation of humankind to the rest of reality is coming into view. Ecophilosophy has rightly invited us to resist the machines of modernity in defence of "nature", but at the same time it has left most of its followers still helplessly hooked up to the industries and technologies and modes of production of modern society in their everyday lives. There is an inconsistency here that undermines the ecological stance. In order to be consistent, ecophilosophy needs to complete or deepen the project of reanimation. It needs to take the final nondualist step and acknowledge an inner impulse or psychic principle, not only in the natural and biological order, but in the order of matter generally. Only when ensoulment is thus taken to its logical conclusion can we discover how to live attuned to soul in the world as it is, the world of cement, tar, and steel, of degradation and contamination, of the messes we have made.⁴⁵

For Mathews, it is a deep cultural malaise based on blindness to the value, meaning, and telos inherent within *all* matter, not just that of the wild, that contributes significantly to western society's brutish relationship with the world. In challenging dualistic notions of how we perceive matter and who we perceive ourselves to be in relation to matter, Mathews explores the potentialities of a panpsychic culture—a culture based on nondualism, which ascribes “a ‘psychist’ or mentalistic dimension to all of matter, or to the physical realm generally.”⁴⁶ It is from this perspective—this love of matter—that Mathews reflects upon the built environment. She turns to her own experience of the actual and the local in her personal relationships with suburban Melbourne and locations throughout rural Australia. She explores both the “affirmation of the actual, as opposed to the abstractly imagined possible, and . . . an affirmation of the local, that which is accessible to us here and now in place.”⁴⁷ What emerges through Mathews' reinhabitation of the built, however, “may not always match our ecological aspirations.”⁴⁸ She argues that her approach “offers a deeper response to the challenge of modernity than do philosophies that are purely ecological in scope.⁴⁹ . . . identification with place undercuts the consumerist imperative of capitalism and provides foundations for a conserver psychology. In this sense nativist attitudes contribute to environmentalism even when they are focused on sites of little ecological significance.”⁵⁰

Two assumptions about ecology, particularly urban ecology, appear to premise Mathews' position regarding the limitations of ecologism. One is that the built environment is in some sense *aecological*, or at least is ecologically corrupt. Mathews feels that there is a distinct determinate difference between the built and the natural environments.

The greater part of the population . . . lives in large cities, or on commercial agricultural lands, where original ecosystems have been dramatically modified or simplified, if they have not been outright demolished. Our selves are not in fact presently constituted within complex webs of ecological relations, at least at a local level, and many of the biological systems on which we depend are currently maintained not ecologically but artificially, with human intervention rather than ecological checks and balances sustaining production and other vital biological outcomes.⁵¹

A sense of an “original” ecology is prioritized as it is free from the abstractive machinations of modernity, and while the artificial humanized products of such machinations remain *matter*, their conative directionality only actualizes through their return to nature: through a “process to begin anew.”⁵² As Mathews' relationship with matter is premised on the establishment of a delineation between abstraction and what she describes as nativism, albeit more fluid than delineations

associated with traditional Cartesian dualism, she maintains the built as other to the ecological.

Secondly, Mathews accepts the broad assumption emanating from conservation biology that there is a hierarchy of ecological significance that is humanly discernible. For Mathews, ecologism can in no way engage with places of little ecological significance, such as the built environment, because there is no ecological imperative to do so. In other words, within the built environment with its lack of ecology and ecological significance, ecophilosophies that prioritize ecology, such as deep ecology, have no means of engaging with the actual and the local—with place—because these places are aecological or ecologically insignificant.

However, the interconnectedness and interdependency of all things that is recognized within deep ecology implies that hierarchical distinctions in ecological value, while potentially useful on a practical level, must always be up for challenge. In maintaining a focus on the relational quality of the world, the valuing of particular types of relationships over others is recognized as a complex and potentially fraught exercise. For example, when a butterfly flaps its wings in Chile leading to the formation of a cyclone someplace else, there is no reason why this butterfly couldn't be an endangered species laying eggs upon an urban weed. Both native and exotic species are part of the interconnectivity of the whole and hence have agency that may be described as unbounded. A distinction, a boundary, cannot be drawn between the simplified and degraded ecology that may be found in the built environment and the diverse complexity of many wild ecosystems. The ecology of the built is still connected with and interdependent upon that in the wild, and the ecology of the wild remains interconnected and dependent upon that in the built. It is perhaps easier to perceive the existence of these interconnections between certain ecosystems than between others. The connections between the scraggly weeds in a polluted industrial wasteland and the wild forests of southeast Asia, for example, may seem tenuous. They remain, however, a part of the relational quality of the world, and, as such, they spur us to look beyond hierarchical notions of value pertaining to such relationships and encourage us to approach *all* aspects of the world with care and consideration. Our interconnectivity and interdependency with it all instills in us a humility in the face of complexity, a humility that propels us to question statements that contain overtones of hierarchical valuing, such as that by Mathews (noted above). It is in light of this focus on the relational quality of the world that the relevance of deep ecology to the actual and the local of the built becomes apparent.

Holism with a Hole

Beyond the limitations of Light's account for understanding deep ecology's relationship with the built environment, and Mathews' critique of ecologism, an important point emerges regarding deep ecology's holistic metaphysics. Despite its holistic metaphysics, deep ecology has a tendency to disregard and devalue the built, thereby placing itself in a quandary—an emphasis and concern for a holistic account of the world to the exclusion of the spatially, culturally, and ethically significant and burgeoning built environment. Can holism contain a hole? With deep ecology's emphasis on Self-realization, is it possible to even begin to participate in this if the metaphysics underpinning this process is based on the exclusion of particular entities (in this case those concerned with the built environment)—a metaphysical blind spot? Can Self-realization fulfil its cosmological and ontological potentialities if what is unifying is exclusive and what exists is valued hierarchically? How can holism be exclusive, embracing one set of interrelationships and effectively severing these (in a psychological sense) from another set of interrelationships? Does holism with a hole provide an adequate account to deal with the complexity of ecological issues facing the world today? I would argue the holism with a hole seems a dubious metaphysical base from which to develop the “new foundations for environmentalism” claimed by Fox⁵³ in the subtitle of the book covering his own take on deep ecology. An opportunity exists to take a fresh look at deep ecology within the built environment.

A factor contributing to deep ecology's relationship with the built, and one that is covered by neither Light's analysis of environmental ethics nor Mathews' critique of deep ecology, can be gleaned in the following statement made by Devall. He states that

even in the concrete depths of the largest cities, a person can explore the bedrock upon which the city is built and trace the watersheds of streams and rivers channeled in concrete pipes. A person can feel the suffering of city-dominated watersheds and work for reconciliation.⁵⁴

In acknowledging the suffering of watersheds and our capacity to experience this suffering, Devall is taking a uniquely deep ecological position. He is pointing toward an expansive sense of self that encompasses the broader ecological world; a sense of self that is imbued with an interconnectedness of being. Such a sense of self feels the suffering of the world, or aspects of the world (in this case watersheds), as its own. A disregard of relational complexity, a devaluing of the inherent worth of entities for their own sake, is ultimately a disregard and devalue of self. The pain and grief

associated with the ongoing recognition of a disregarded and disvalued self is, within cities where instrumentalism dominates, likely to be overwhelming and debilitating. To participate in Devall's deep ecological practising, or Naess's Self-realization in the built environment, can place one within a realm of despair and disempowerment. Such a realm is neither an attractive nor promising place to dwell. Hence, I would contend that irresolved grief, and what some would perceive to be irresolvable grief, has a significant role to play in understanding deep ecology's relationship with the built environment.

These observations also shed light on the phenomenon of "psychological palaeontology" canvassed earlier. The pain and grief experienced by deep ecologists within the built is not only a reflection of identification of self with the broader ecological world. It is also an expression of a loss of *places* following the rapid and ongoing development and re-development of the built environment. Edward Casey⁵⁵ argues that to lose such places evokes a nostalgia—a deep yearning for the restoration of these places—because to lose such places is

to lose one's 'best, truest self,' one's most intimate identity . . . No wonder we are nostalgic (literally, "pained at the [non]return home"), not just over cherished childhood places but over many now inaccessible or despoiled places, often in consequence of ecological damage or negligence.⁵⁶

In an act of place-nostalgia, deep ecologists (and it must be added, many others) yearn for what is beneath the concrete and the tar and call for its restoration. Deep ecology's relationship with the built environment signifies grief for an expansive sense of self that is deeply rooted within place.

When deep ecology emerged in the early 1970s and turned towards the wilderness, it turned its back on the built. The opportunity exists to turn deep ecology back toward the built, but this time we should not fall foul of dualistic tendencies by rejecting one environment in favour of another. From a deep ecological perspective, a return to the built can take with it lessons learnt within the wilds of Yosemite, Tvergastein, the Sierra Nevada, the Amazonian rainforests and Tasmania's southwest. The inspiration, solace, and insights gained and spoken by Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, Snyder, and other great wilderness thinkers can come with us, equipping us for our inquiry within the built. We unpack this equipment—the ideas to nourish us and eloquent turns of phrase to sustain us—transferring it, as it were, from backpack to suitcase.

In leaving the wilderness, we travel along dusty, log-truck-compacted roads, through clearfell coupes, crossing wild creeks running through narrow forestry exclusion zones. We burst out of the forest fringe into agricultural land pushed by climate change into drought. Here we can still hear the call of the wild; we still know how wilderness and all we intuit there make sense here. The awareness of interconnectivity inspired by wilderness leads us to connect the loss of wilderness with the broader scale planetary crisis of change. A sense of self infused with a wildness of spirit drives us to question, protest, and blockade. Even as we approach the outskirts of the city, the sprawl of subdivision—the dozed piles of remnant native vegetation, the filled in creek beds—still make sense within the wilderness vision. Through the infinite greens of wild-tinted glasses, habitat and biodiversity loss, the desire for non-stop growth represented by housing and construction figures, and the assumption that the land is there alone to serve human needs, appal and confront us. But as we draw closer to home, the settled lands of the suburbs, things become less certain. Our connection to the wilderness becomes lost within the day-to-day primacy of the connections forged and galvanized by habit and habitation—forged and galvanized by living within place. We drive, visit the supermarket, tap away on the keyboard, repaint the house, sip coffee with friends, walk the dog, prune the roses, bait the snails and hang out the washing day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. The interconnections and interdependencies that come with the ritualized repetition of living, of being within place, ultimately, despite the occasional wilderness experience, consolidate to define who and how we are within the world. Wilderness is reduced to boot soles jammed with button-grass mud, broken leaves trapped within a damp tent roll, digitized imaginings on LED screens, a sentimental longing for a rhythm other than that of the hectic workaday.

Away from the wilderness, who are we and how are we back here in the city? If we manage to hang on to the threads of our wilderness experience, we may become activists and promoters for wilderness places. We may prioritize visiting the wild on every possible weekend and extended period of leave from work. But understanding who and how we are, or may be, within the context of wilderness, does not, at least directly, answer who and how we are within the built environment, especially for those of us whose connection with wilderness is made tenuous by physical and psychological distance. The key, I believe, lies in an openness and a reawakening to deep ecological metaphysics—a metaphysical conception that binds wilderness with human, with built, with valley, with cloud, with concrete, with daffodil, with

microorganism, with computer, and so on, in an entangling, enmeshing complex of ecological dexterity.

Conclusion

If it is grief that is holding deep ecology back from full and frank engagement with the built, then deep ecology's journey into the built is in no way going to be an easy one. In entering the built, we will come face to face with our world and with our selves of the here and now—the carnage and defilement upon which our affluence and wellbeing is tentatively poised. We will walk hand in hand with beings implicitly implicated within speciescide, and live day after day with things that scream to us of global catastrophe. We will butt up against the seemingly impenetrable walls of wailing grief as places we knew and loved, know and love, are lost.

But if deep ecology is to remain relevant in a time of ecological upheaval then this is a journey that deep ecology must take. In order to make some sense of the here and now and of ourselves within it, then we must at least hope for possibilities beyond a grief that petrifies and stupefies. We must begin to delve beneath the assumptions that we may hold about the built environment, such as how we perceive exotic species and technologies. It is through such openness that we may begin to discern yet more about the world, the wild, and ourselves. The built environment represents a hole within deep ecology's holistic metaphysics and, as such, offers fertile ground for the ongoing process of Self-realization.

References

- Casey, E. S. 1993. *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Devall, B., and G. Sessions. 1985. *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*. Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs M. Smith.
- Devall, B. 1988. *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology*. Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith Books.
- Fox, W. 1995. *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*. Dartington Totnes, UK: Green Books.
- . 2000. "Introduction: Ethics and the Built Environment." In *Ethics and the Built Environment*, ed. W. Fox. London: Routledge.

- Gunn, A. S. 1998. Rethinking Communities: Environmental Ethics in an Urbanized World. *Environmental Ethics* 20 (Fall): 341–60.
- King, R. J. H. 2000. Environmental Ethics and the Built Environment. *Environmental Ethics* 22 (Summer): 115–31.
- . 2003. Towards an Ethics of the Domesticated Environment. *Philosophy and Geography* 6(1): p. 3–14.
- . 2006. Playing with Boundaries: Critical Reflections on Strategies for an Environmental Culture and the Promise of Civic Environmentalism. *Ethics, Place and Environment* 9(2): 173–86.
- Kirkman, R. 2004. Reasons to Dwell on (if Not Necessarily in) the Suburbs. *Environmental Ethics*, 2004. 26 (Spring): 77–95.
- Light, A. 2001. The Urban Blind Spot in Environmental Ethics. *Environmental Politics* 10(1): 7–35.
- Mathews, F. 2005. *Reinhabiting Reality: Toward a Recovery of Culture*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- Naess, A., and G. Sessions 1985. “Basic Principles.” In *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, ed. B. Devall and G. Sessions. Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs M. Smith.
- Sessions, G. 1985. “Western Process Metaphysics (Heraclitus, Whitehead, and Spinoza).” In *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, ed. B. Devall and G. Sessions. Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs M. Smith.
- Shepard, P. 1973. *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*. New York: Scribner's.
- Zimmerman, M. E. 1986. Implications of Heidegger's Thought for Deep Ecology. *The Modern Schoolman* 64 (November): 19–43.

Notes

¹ Mathews 2005, p. 64.

² Devall, 1988; Devall and Sessions, 1985.

³ Fox 2000.

⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Devall and Sessions 1985.

⁸ Devall 1988.

-
- ⁹ Devall and Sessions 1985, p. 110.
¹⁰ Devall 1988, pp. 70–71.
¹¹ Devall and Sessions 1985, p. 24.
¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24.
¹³ Sessions 1985, p. 239.
¹⁴ Devall 1988, p. 51.
¹⁵ Devall and Sessions 1985.
¹⁶ Shepard 1973.
¹⁷ Devall and Sessions 1985, pp. 158–59.
¹⁸ Mathews 2005.
¹⁹ Gunn 1998, p. 341.
²⁰ King 2000, pp. 115–31.
²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16.
²² *Ibid.*, p. 131.
²³ King 2003.
²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
²⁵ King 2006.
²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
²⁷ Kirkman 2004.
²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.
²⁹ Light 2001.
³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.
³² *Ibid.*, p. 17.
³³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.
³⁵ *Ibid.*
³⁶ Fox 1995.
³⁷ Naess and Sessions 1985, p. 70.
³⁸ Fox 1995.
³⁹ Zimmerman 1986.
⁴⁰ Light 2001.
⁴¹ *Ibid.*
⁴² Mathews 2005.
⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 72-73.
⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.
⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.
⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.
⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.
⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.
⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.
⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.
⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 31.
⁵³ Fox, 1995.
⁵⁴ Devall 1988, p. 51.
⁵⁵ Casey 1993.
⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.