

## Reviews

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**Cultural Encounters with the Environment: Enduring and Evolving Geographic Themes. By Murphy, Alexander B. and Douglas L. Johnson, eds. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2001), 337 pp.**

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Four decades ago, Philip Wagner and Marvin Mikesell compiled *Readings in Cultural Geography*, arguably the founding text in modern cultural geography. In it, they outlined the primary subsets of the discipline, and defined as well the role geographers play in exploring relationships between cultures and their environments. "For [...] cultural geographers, any sign of human action in a landscape implies a culture, recalls a history, and demands an ecological interpretation—the history of any people evokes its setting in a landscape, its ecological problems, and its cultural concomitants; and the recognition of a culture calls for the discovery of traces it has left on the earth" (p. 23). Mikesell himself explored many of these themes in his own work; his research interests ranged from exploring ecological relations in North Africa to presenting ideas on how we should conceptualize nationhood. His scholarship in the field, and in cultural ecology in particular, is the inspiration behind *Cultural Encounters with the Environment*.

Alexander Murphy and Douglas Johnson have brought together fifteen of Mikesell's colleagues and former students in this festschrift to the University of Chicago geographer. The result is a well-written, well-ordered addition to the recent array of literature in cultural geography. The contributors in this volume fuse the major themes emphasized in the 1962 compilation, such as cultural ecology, settlement and diffusion, and cultural adaptation, with discursive interpretation, place perception, and other contemporary approaches and perspectives. At the same time, they engage in what Chris Philo (2000) refers to as "rematerializing," or rather, putting the "field" back into the field work of cultural geography.

Murphy and Johnson divide the volume into three sections: "constructing cultural spaces," "remaking the environment," and "claiming spaces," a schematic that demonstrates the degree to which traditional themes have been reinterpreted. No one essay is easily classified within this breakdown, however, as each addresses the changing nature of how space and place are organized within cultural systems and in relation to the immediate environment. The subject matter is diverse, yet complementary, in both focus and approach. Chad Emmett's paper on the division of religious spaces in Israel and Palestine illustrates how fragile is the peace attained among competing actors in contested spaces of worship. Segregation of worship spaces in some situations provides for a "form of scattered sovereignty" (p. 279). Such sovereignty is begrudgingly ceded in the West Bank, the focus of Shaul Cohen's essay on the "absence of place" among Palestinians. The scattered zones of varying authority in which Palestinians live, coupled with shifting social constructions of place through literature and nationalist sentiment, mean that place is a construct which is as much "circumscribed or dictated" (p. 299) from above as from within. These constructions and meanings are derived from Israeli authorities and international conventions, rather than from a singular, internally driven, Palestinian self-image.

Charles Good, James Wescoat, and Karl and Elizabeth Butzer, also present case studies on understanding cultural practices and adaptations of non-Western societies. Good's historical examination of western vs. non-western understandings of the traditional practice of female circumcision demonstrates the need to combine cultural with medical geographies, and for deconstructing the discourse surrounding those cultural practices seen as

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controversial and inconsistent with western values. The latter is particularly important in recognizing long-held cultural beliefs. (Indeed, female circumcision has been renamed female genital mutilation in most western literature, notes Good, without regard to the type or severity of the practice.) Both Wescoat's and Butzer and Butzer's essays provide comparative studies of cultural adaptations in old world and new. Wescoat reexamines the development of ideas on irrigation leading to Wittfogel's hydraulic utilization hypothesis, which was the basis in part for Donald Worster's *Rivers of Empire*. He further illustrates networks of information sharing and technical innovation (or sometimes the lack thereof) in irrigation infrastructure developed in the United States and India. In the same vein, Butzer and Butzer question existing ideas of the diffusion of Spanish housing styles and building technologies in the colonies. Indigenous cultures not only continued to use traditional building techniques after colonization, they also rejected or dramatically altered many of the housing styles that the Spanish attempted to import.

Other pieces address issues involved in the human-nature relationship. John Kirchner and James Schmid examine the evolving legal and regulatory mechanisms surrounding the navigability of American rivers and wetlands protection in the United States. Schmid's contribution provides a clear understanding of how wetlands have traditionally been dealt with in law and politics. His essay reads less like a piece of academic literature and more like a government report. As a result, it often misses the larger cultural context. David Lowenthal's essay on the major assumptions of modern environmental philosophies provides both a concise and readable history of environmental thought, and a call to question some of the inherent problems in how we frame the environment or nature. Lowenthal's interpretation shares much in common with the William Cronon line of environmental thinking, and he provides what might be considered optimistic suggestions on how to reposition ourselves in nature. The essay's readability makes it a good candidate for any environmental studies course syllabus, as his suggestions, which resemble those put forth by the sustainable development school, could spark a lively round of debate regarding the feasibility of suggestions on how we should improve our relationship with the natural world.

Even Anne Buttner's piece on Ernest Hemingway ties nicely into the discussion of perceptions of nature. Hemingway's characters, and, indeed, Hemingway himself, found not only solitude, but home in wild places when fishing (as was so eloquently evoked in *The Big Two-Hearted River*). Buttner's analysis of place in Hemingway begins nicely with her own reflections on Mikesell and ends with some on the great fisherman.

*Cultural Encounters* provides a strong collection of readings on critical themes within environmental history and cultural geography. Carville Earle revisits one of American history's most contentious debates, that surrounding Turner's frontier thesis. Earle's analysis falls short, however, as he fails to address key elements endemic to the West that lay between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Coast. Earle demonstrates that the frontier process was a dynamic and cyclical one tied to economic expansion. His assertion that the frontier closed in the 1840s, rather than in 1890, however, is problematic, as it is based on evidence illustrating a decrease in the rate of settlement expansion to below 2% per annum once the movement of people reached the harsh conditions of the Great Plains and Far West. While the later date could legitimately be called into question (the Census Bureau in 1890 merely announced that a continuous line of unsettled land no longer existed), slow growth does not equate to a lack of a frontiering process. Earle's treatment also ignores the important role San Francisco and other urban places in the West played in regional development, opting to draw instead from the Heartland-Hinterland thesis. The Great Plains and Far West constituted a slowly expanding periphery of marginal interest relative to the dynamic concentrations of population and economy then under way in the Northeast (p. 102). Earle's decision to study rates of economic expansion coincident with settlement rates is undoubtedly valuable. Yet, these figures alone cannot demonstrate the complex and varied nature of frontier settlement in the trans-Mississippi West as compared to the trans-Allegheny frontier.

On the whole, *Cultural Encounters* flows nicely from one work to the next. Even the essays that cannot be easily packaged with those mentioned above seem well-placed in the context of the larger compilation. Michael Conzen's piece on the German utopian societies of the 19th century Texas Hill Country (which seems almost unimaginable in Texas today) shares the same section as Peter Goheen's discussion of the public's right and ability to determine the future of the Toronto waterfront in the 1800s. The two essays share more than just a historical perspective. Both demonstrate the role of particular groups to shape their surroundings according to their own ideas. Chauncy Harris demonstrates the link between ethnicity, language, and urban-rural settlement differences in the Russian homelands. His emphasis on language and ethnicity serves as a fitting tribute to Mikesell's interests. The final piece, by Philip Wagner, along with many of the other pieces in the book, serves as a tribute not only to Mikesell, but also to the long-past glory days of the Berkeley School of Sauer-inspired cultural geography. Many of the writers included in *Cultural Encounters* did not themselves work west of the Sierras; the legacy of the program, and of Mikesell, however, is readily apparent in the collection's emphasis on cultural ecology, field work, and the role of place in culture.

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**Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology. Edited by Eric Katz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg. Cambridge, MA & London, UK: The MIT Press (2000), viii, 328 pp.**

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Ecology is the "skin-out" study of what envelops and influences things, as compared to physiology with its focus on "skin-in" functions--which leads to the thought that the appropriate title for those primarily concerned with their inner soul/selves is "Deep Physiologists." In contrast, the name Deep Ecology (DE) suggests exploration of human ecology to its outer limits, asking what is the reality of people's relationship to the world that envelops them, and what ethical actions flow from that relationship? Over the last quarter century Arne Naess has been the most influential voice of eco/philosophy and eco/sophy (ecological wisdom) in the Western world.

Naess's thoughts and actions have been motivated by what he sees as the appalling deterioration of planet Earth, overpopulated and under attack by a consumer society. From this came his founding of the Deep Ecology Movement (DEM) for social-political change, centered on a Platform of eight Principles (composed with George Sessions) that, in summary, calls for valuing and respecting all forms of life, for an attitude of non-interference with natural processes and systems, for de-emphasizing the primary significance of people and their institutions, for restructuring society in harmony with natural processes, and for a reexamination of the ends of human life, replacing the pursuit of material abundance with a heightened quality of life experience.

The introductory chapter of *Beneath the Surface* states that the book's primary goal is "to examine the philosophy of DE," a difficult task without a philosophical interpretation of the DEM Platform. The editors propose six points as essential to the philosophy of DE. In abbreviated form they are: (1) Rejection of strong anthropocentrism, (2) Replacing anthropocentrism with ecocentrism (the ecosphere and ecological systems central), (3) Identification with all forms of life, (4) The sense that caring for the environment is part of individual human self-realization, (5) A critique of instrumental rationality and an emphasis on alternative modes of thinking, (6) Personal development of a total worldview prior to social action.

Naess values the diversity of philosophical/cultural faiths and is willing to recognize many as underpinnings of the DEM. He conceived it as four linked levels, illustrated with the "Apron Diagram" so-called because it flares out generously above and below the Platform-Principles "waist." Level 1, the bust of the apron, encompasses a broad spectrum of religions and philosophies willing to subscribe to Level 2, where the "Platform Principles" cinch all together. Level 3 and Level 4 comprise the hips and hem of the garment, the former expressing general consequences (such as choice of lifestyle) in harmony with the Platform, and the latter specifying concrete situations and practical decisions of a political nature. In Naess's words, "The DEM thus can manifest both plurality and unity: unity at Level 2, and plurality at the other levels."

Midway through the book editor/essayist Andrew Light examines ethicist Callicott's arguments for a singular foundational ecophilosophy based on Aldo Leopold's concept of people's duties to the larger biotic communities of which they are members. Light concludes that environmental philosophy is too young to settle on one right path, and