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Ecological Sustainability
Fall '04 – Scherch

Assignment #2 – Annotated Bibliography

For me, the issue of ecological sustainability is inextricably tied to the study of political economy. Much of this resource list reflects that personal bias. However, I have tried to develop a list of materials that reflect a broad, but serious focus. I offer these resources as suggestions that may be useful to expand a library of materials related to concerns about the environment, community and sustainability.

This annotated bibliography is arranged roughly in order from ancient and global to more local and specific. I then transition to several edutainment fiction titles that may be of interest. I finish with a bonus reference to a recent article about the frontier of GMO research: part human chimeras.

Diamond, J. (1999) *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. W. W. Norton

Developing a sweeping and broad examination of how geography and place shaped history, Jared Diamond explains how European culture peculiarly developed technological advantages because of specific conditions of environment rather than due to some imagined racial or moral superiority. Diamond defuses both ethnic and racial theories of superiority. Diamond also defuses the idea that Western civilization developed as a world power because of some divine right or manifestly superior culture, and thus takes the wind out of the sails of those that want to claim Western civilization as the clear, practically social darwinistic, evolutionary pinnacle of possible civilizations. The superiority of Western-style cultural and economic progress takes a back seat to the

profoundly mundane and practically accidental circumstances of environment in Diamond's work.

Tuchman, B. (1987). *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*. Ballantine

Many of the struggles over power, privilege and political boundaries are neither new nor unique. Tuchman produced a work of historical fiction as a vehicle to examine the socio-economic and political conditions of post-plague Europe. The extravagance of the upper class, the struggle between government oversight and the merchant class, the tension between the poor and the rich, the battle lines between Christian and Moslem civilizations in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe – Tuchman holds up a historical period as a mirror for the present day.

The cyclical and repetitive elements arising from the comparison of historical events and current unfolding history offers a seldom glimpsed temporally extended view, a chance to see patterns and relationships that only appear when taking the oft ignored broad historical view.

McNabb, V. (2002). *The Church and The Land*. IHS Press.

For those that find Wendell Berry compelling, this book may be a fruitful additional resource. As a Catholic in England in the '20s and 30's, McNabb advocated Distributism as a socio-economic and political movement. McNabb speaks of an essential relationship with the land and need for agrarian reform.

Likely informed by a long tradition of popular agrarian resistance in England that dates back at least to the 17th Century Diggers and Levellers movement, and probably has intellectual ties to the Peasant Revolts in 14th Century Europe, the Distributism

movement informed the Catholic Worker movement and likely also had some influence or connection to the strong Socialist Party during the same decade in the United States politics.

Hunt, E. K. (2002). *Property and Prophets: The Evolution of Economic Institutions and Ideologies*. M. E. Sharpe

Property and Prophets may be a dense read for those that are not familiar with political economy, but the book is a strong survey of the historical precedents to the modern capitalist economic system. The intellectual and spiritual predecessors to the modern day manifestations are ignored in public discourse.

The Western cultural pattern that believes the past is inferior to the current time is a blind-faith in the ideal of progress that excuses ignorance of history. The notion of US exceptionalism further masks the influence of history and obfuscates rational public debate about the nature of current economic and political issues.

Cornell, S. (1999). *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism & the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828*. University of North Carolina Press

There is a long history of dissent in US politics that not only deserves to be remembered but must be remembered to keep alive a respect for the necessary function of dissent required for Democracy to develop. The typical picture of the Constitutional period is one of 18th Century gentlemen working together on the side of history and God to produce what becomes the United States. The truth is quite a bit messier. There were long and complicated battles for control fought over the development of what had become The Constitution and The Bill of Rights. The Federalists, more properly the Nationalists, were an elite and small group of political and social elite that wanted to

consolidate power. They were opposed by a wild collection of strange bedfellows linked together, mostly in Federalist rhetoric, as the Anti-Federalists, or, more properly, anyone that disagreed with the Federalist position. The wide variety of ideas and opinions within the Anti-Federalists was the rich soil from which was born the Bill of Rights as a balance to the grants of National power in the Constitution. The Anti-Federalists were a populist and radical group of dissenters from which much of the popular and radical opposition in the US today might recognize echoes of their own issues and concerns. Learning about the continuation in the US of many of the European popular struggles against the consolidation and exercise of elite power should be an important part of any study of change and dissent.

For me, this relates to Ecological Sustainability because the Anti-Federalists were a force of dissent that was, in large part, agrarian and popular. The history of conflict over power is an important reflection of present day struggles for progressive environmental reform movement.

Renshaw, P. (1999). *The Wobblies: The Story of the IWW and Syndicalism in the United States*. Ivan R. Dee.

As a further reflection on the history of dissent and popular resistance in the US, this history of the Industrial Workers of the World, also called the Wobblies, is a look at the way that popular resistance is mobilized and is itself resisted.

In many ways the Wobblies were an organization of populist, cultural and local resistance to corporate pressures on community and environment. The membership was largely divided into two groups: migrant farm workers and loggers. The combination proved to be quite formidable and many of the struggles and tactics of the Wobblies

foreshadow current conflicts over Globalization, economic justice and multinational corporatism.

Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. Marlowe & Co.

The public sphere of ideas and of discourse has been consistently eroded by the corporate enclosure of the physical and intellectual commons. Oldenburg points out the importance of the physical commons, a place that is neither work nor home but a third place. The third place is an interpersonal ecotone, a space where ideas mix and lively interaction takes place. The unstructured nature of this common space provides an enabling space in which dialogue can possibly emerge and in which culture develops as the public domain of ideas in the public sphere.

McDonough, W. & Braungart, M. (2002). *Cradle to Cradle*. North Point Press.

One particular fruit of the exploration of biomimetics is the observation that in natural systems waste is a nutrient that is used by a whole system. McDonough and Braungart make a case for and explore the implications of a design principle that waste from technological processes should be nutrients for further processes in a whole system.

In my estimation, *Cradle to Cradle* offers a particularly designerly view of ecological sustainability and serves as a great introduction to issues of natural capitalism, biomimetics and sustainability concepts.

One of the striking failures of this book is that all of the efforts cited as examples required massive capital leverage by large corporations. Wide implementation of sustainable whole system design will require either individually achievable goals or an

economy of scale that makes technology available to individuals, but the examples provided are almost without exception out of reach for most.

Further, the signal example of the cradle to cradle automotive design must be recognized as a market failure. While not identified as the EV-1 that was only briefly offered in select markets, the cancellation of the program must be a significant counter-argument to the optimism of the work.

Fuller, B. (1982). *The Critical Path*. St. Martin's Griffin.

The introduction alone is worth the price of this book as it surveys the history of the world as the product of a succession of robber-barons, and frames the long history of structural and economic hierarchy which any change agent must consider as a source of resistance to sustainability for the mass of humans on this planet.

The rest of the book details an amazing vision for the future of humankind that, while requiring what might be an improbable level of whole planet cooperation, offers hope for what could be an answer to the whole system of perils faced by the inhabitants of this planet.

Garreau, J. (1989). *The Nine Nations of North America*. Avon.

Garreau develops what are essentially bioregional boundaries for North America along functional and pragmatic boundaries rather than strictly environmental divisions. The nine national boundaries are lines of political and cultural interests. Not only is one of the divisions called Ecotopia, but there is a striking similarity to the nine national borders and recent satirical maps that delineate the boundary between the "United States

of Canada” and what has been variously titled “The United State of Texas” or “Jesusland,” the boundaries between the “blue” and “red” states.

In this book, that is now two decades old, the pragmatic boundaries of shared ideology, political reality and economic productivity are provided as a modest proposal for new national divisions. Because bioregional boundaries are so difficult to definitively draw, these pragmatic boundaries might become more real and functional if a push toward bioregionalism is made.

Pragmatically, these are virtual nations now, in the current political landscape of this continent and are worth consideration. While the bioregionalism of Ecotopia may make sense to those in that region due to shared ideology and politics, the population of other areas of the continent might find other divisions and distinctions more important.

Solnit, R. (1999). *Savage Dreams: A journey into the landscape wars of the American West*. Berkeley, CA: University of Berkeley Press.

From the ongoing struggle of the indigenous people around Yosemite to the nuclear blasts at the Nevada Test Site, this is a survey of US conflicts with Native Americans and the environment. Solnit offers a thorough examination of culture and politics in relation to landscape and place and a very critical look at early and current US cultural constructs, like the widely accepted myths of early European settlers that the Americas were an empty and abundant virgin wilderness. The reality was that the indigenous population, pre-colonization, was intentionally ecologically sustainable in creating and maintaining specific environments with which they were in relationship. Native Americans terra-formed their environment in accord with a whole system approach while the European culture conquered to subdue their environment. These

cultural patterns are examined in an engaging and comprehensive comparison between the histories of two landscapes in the American West.

Miller, W. M. (1976). *A Canticle For Leibowitz*. Bantam.

On the heels of the previous reference that discusses the nuclear testing grounds, I switch to a science fiction novel set in the 32nd century, after a nuclear war has devastated to planet. This novel examines the question of whether it is inevitable that cycles of devastation repeat, and whether there is hope for a future that learns from the past.

Another reason this novel is present for me right now is because of an exercise in Visual Literacy Studio for which I must design a sign that would mark the storage area of nuclear waste materials for 10,000 years such that the sign would still communicate a warning to distant readers. The complete distance from any cultural reference or accepted symbolism must be contended with by the design, and is also a theme that is explored in this novel.

Furlong, M. (1989). *Wise Child*. Random House.

A woman with magical powers fosters a young child in a rural Scottish community, but, among several adventures, they run into problems when they are made the scapegoats for an illness that sweeps through town. For me this story is an allegorical tale is about what it is like to be ecologically aware and concerned within a culture and society that values the environment primarily as an economic resource to be exploited.

Callenbach, E. (1990). *Ecotopia*. Bantam.

Callenbach's *Ecotopia* is a future history of a bioregion that spans from northern California into British Columbia seceding to become a country of its own. The story

follows a reporter from New York who travels in Ecotopia several years after the secession occurred. When I think of bioregionalism or concepts like Cascadia, I think of this story.

There is also a prequel called *Ecotopia Emerging* by the same author. In the prequel, Callenbach details the events that led up to the formation of Ecotopia and offers a fanciful, but possible, single technological development that becomes a turning point to the emergence of a new culture.

Weiss, R. (November 20, 2004). *Of Mice, Men and In-Between: Scientists Debate Blending Of Human, Animal Forms*. The Washington Post.
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A63731-2004Nov19>>

Artificial, cross-species chimeras are the newest example of genetically modified organism that are coming from stem-cell research. Animals with human cells, organs and brain tissue are being produced. What could possibly go wrong? It's not just a scientific dilemma, but also a political, moral and ethical one about which the implications and reverberations will be heard for decades. For example, how human does an organism need to be before being considered human? At what point does the treatment of a humanized animal cross from an animal rights issue to a human rights issue? Fantastically like a science-fiction short story, these issues are currently being debated in relation to what is happening in stem-cell research today.