

The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses

By John S. Dryzek

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This is a book about how we talk about the earth and our place on it. Hence, the idea of discourses, those shared, structured ways of speaking, thinking, interpreting, and representing things in the world (and which have been called by other names, such as frames, speech genres, or interpretive repertoires). Dryzek describes a set of discourses used in a "politics of the earth": deliberations about environmental policies and politics. In this easily read and highly engaging book his main goal is to "advance analysis in environmental affairs by promoting critical comparative scrutiny of competing discourses of environmental concerns" (pg. 20). In the context of his extensive writings and research, Dryzek is very much concerned with how the discourses interact and can play a role in what he has referred to as ecological democracy (Dryzek 1990). From a human ecology perspective, this book is important as it helps us to understand how human actions both reflect and create the complex characteristics of human systems and ecological systems.

In his introduction, Dryzek illustrates that environmental discourses are often in conflict. This is not a new observation. As he notes, "each discourse rests on assumptions, judgments, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements, and disagreements in the environmental area no less than elsewhere" (pg. 8). In one discourse, the earth can be conceptualized as a living organism (the Gaia hypothesis) while in another nature is "brute matter." In another, experts and managers are thought best for guiding decision-making, which is contrasted with discourses that "leave it to the people."

Dryzek develops a taxonomy for organizing conflicting environmental discourses. Eight discourses are defined as arguments *against* industrialism, "the long-dominant discourse of industrial society" (pg. 12), and its commitment to unlimited growth in goods and services as part of the "good" life (this is the ninth discourse he describes). The taxonomy is defined according to two dimensions. The first dimension concerns the degree to which alternatives wish to move away from the conditions created by industrialism: reformist or

radical departures from the terms of the dominant discourse. The second dimension further defines the character of the alternatives proposed: prosaic or imaginative. Prosaic alternatives take the "political-economic chessboard set by industrial society as pretty much given" (pg. 13). On the other hand, imaginative alternatives "seek to redefine the chessboard" (pg. 13). These two dimensions give four categories of environmental discourses.

Chapters 2-10 describe the eight discourses defined by the four categories, along with the ninth, dominant discourse. Each chapter follows a similar structure. First, the historical origins of the discourse are described, placing it into context and identifying the key individuals or institutions who employ it. Dryzek then proceeds to his "discourse analysis." Discourses, as described in chapter 1, are understood as "shared ways of apprehending the world" (pg. 8). They are stories, built from specific kinds of structural elements. Dryzek defines four structural elements which he uses to define each of the environmental discourses in more detail. They are: 1) basic entities whose existence is recognized or constructed, 2) assumptions about natural relationships, 3) agents and their motives, and 4) key metaphors and other rhetorical devices (these are based on Dryzek 1988). Finally, Dryzek discusses effects that each discourse has had on environmental policy making (e.g., framing debates, limiting what are considered "reasonable" options, informing environmental management structures and policy-making processes). Within these chapters Dryzek also discusses how the discourses relate to each other; unfortunately, however, he is all too brief in this area and much of the comparative work is left for the reader to do on his or her own (the tables in each chapter summarizing the main elements of each discourse were helpful to this reader). Since comparative analysis was one of his main goals, I felt that he could have gone further in this direction.

Now, there is no room here to describe each discourse in enough detail to do them justice. Since this is what Dryzek does in the book I will limit my remarks to how each discourse fits into his taxonomy.

The radical and prosaic category is called *survivalism*, and is discussed in chapter 2. This is a discourse defined by its attention to limits and carrying capacities. It is radical because perpetual economic growth and power relations are challenged. It is prosaic because solutions are proposed within the constraints of industrialism (e.g., more administrative control and science-based decision-making). This discourse was popularized by the Club of Rome report in the 1970s. It stands in opposition to the dominant "no limits" "Promethean" discourse of industrialism, articulated forcefully by Julian Simon (1981) and Myers and Simon (1994). This Promethean response is discussed in chapter 3.

The reformist and prosaic category of discourses is termed *environmental problem solving*. The three discourses which make up this category are administrative rationalism, democratic pragmatism, and economic rationalism (chapters 4-6, respectively). These discourses are prosaic because the economic-political status quo of industrialism is taken as a given — albeit one in need of some pragmatic adjustment. But not too much adjustment — thus, they are considered reformist. The distinction between the three discourses rests on the agent that should be in control of environmental policies: experts, “the people,” or the market.

The reformist and imaginative category is defined by the quest for *sustainability*. Two types of discourses are defined: sustainable development and ecological modernization (chapters 7 and 8, respectively). Imaginative methods to “dissolve the conflicts between environmental and economic values that energize the discourses of problem solving and limits” are a characteristic feature of both. They use multiple images of sustainability which, according to Dryzek, do not include notions of limits. And, “without the imagery of apocalypse that defines the limits discourse, there is no inbuilt radicalism to the discourse” of sustainability (pg. 14).

The last category includes discourses which are imaginative and radical. These are discourses of *green radicalism*. This category includes the discourses Dryzek labels green romanticism and green rationalism (chapters 9 and 10, respectively). Those who employ these discourses reject the basic structure of industrial society. The discourses imagine radically different understandings of the environment, human-environment interactions, and human society. These two discourses include diverse ecologically-oriented political and social movements, including social ecology, deep ecology, bioregionalism, ecofeminism, and environmental justice; some, like ecofeminism and bioregionalism, exhibit elements of both green discourses.

While Dryzek’s discourse based approach to the study of environmental conflicts and politics has some unique features, his is not the only one employing this methodology. For example, others have discussed and identified discourses in environmental (and risk) policy arenas within specific, focused case studies (Buttimer 1992, Hajer 1995, Litfin 1994, Tuler and Webler 1998). Dryzek, though, takes a broader swipe at environmental discourses that are dominant in Europe, North America, Australasia, and the global arena. This broader approach may be one reason that he does not provide an analysis of the discourses backed-up by systematic data analysis; rather he seeks “vindication only in the plausibility of the stories I tell. These stories are backed by my own twenty years of working and teaching in the environmental field” (pg. 9). This is both a benefit — for Dryzek

does have extensive experience in this area and has written extensively on environmental and political discourse — and a limitation, for this reader, because I am left wondering why his “meta-view” of environmental discourses is any more compelling than that of others.

This limitation provides a challenge. There are many questions that can and should be addressed in further research. For example: can we empirically demonstrate that these discourses are used? Are there others? How do they emerge and interact, as individuals talk in concrete interactions? How are they learned by individuals? Who uses them, and in which contexts (e.g., decision arenas, interactional settings)? Are they employed strategically? Reflectively? Are some discourses more appropriate, useful, or insightful for certain kinds of environmental policy arenas? These are only some of the questions that I am left asking. Dryzek devotes a few concluding pages to an initial discussion of some of these questions. In particular, he is interested in how the nine discourses may inform and engage each other, thus leading to “social learning,” and how they can contribute constructively to a “politics of the earth.” In this regard, we are referred to Dryzek’s extensive earlier writings on discursive designs and ecological democracy. However, it is also worthwhile to look elsewhere in response to the challenge. Human ecologists, with their interdisciplinary approaches and close attention to human and environment interactions, can help respond with even more insights.

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Landscape in Sight: Looking at America

By John Brinckerhoff Jackson

Edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz

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John Brinckerhoff Jackson, who died in 1996, was among the most innovative and influential twentieth-century scholars of American landscape. During a long and productive career in which he published nearly 200 books, essays, and reviews, Jackson helped Americans to look more carefully, critically, and constructively at the way their modifications of the physical environment both expressed and inspired important changes in their cultural values. As the founder of *Landscape* magazine (and its editor from 1951 until 1968) and as a professor of geography and landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley and at Harvard University, Jackson was also largely responsible for helping the discipline of cultural geography achieve the academic credibility it enjoys today.

Landscape in Sight: Looking at America, edited and introduced by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, is the most complete available collection of J.B. Jackson's work. Although seven previous books have offered excerpts of Jackson's writing, none is as ambitious and comprehensive as *Landscape in Sight*. Contained here are selections not only from Jackson's major books — including the PEN prize-winning *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (1994) — but also from the essays, reviews, editorial statements, and brief commentaries he published between 1951 and 1994. In addition, Horowitz has identified and added a number of Jackson's pseudonymous and unsigned pieces, thereby giving a more complete sense of his range both as a writer and as a critic of American landscape aesthetics and land use practices. "Places for Fun and Games," Jackson's geographical and historical study of how Americans organize cultural space for various kinds of play, was written shortly before his death and is here published for the first time. *Landscape in Sight* is also handsomely illustrated with Jackson's own drawings, sketches, and photographs of American landscapes, and the volume concludes with a comprehensive bibliography of his published works.

While the inhabitation and transformation of local environments has been an obsessive interest of American intel-

lectuals since the colonial period, J.B. Jackson's legacy to scholars of place is his particular focus upon what he called the "vernacular landscape": that matrix of quotidian landscapes so long shunned by an American culture that has preferred to discuss the monumental architecture of cities or the idyllic grandeur of wilderness. Rather than celebrate the modernist austerity of a New York City office tower or the sublime beauty of a Yosemite Valley waterfall, Jackson instead takes us into the houses, yards, cars, highways, gas stations, drive-throughs, shopping malls, supermarkets, and graveyards that contain and enable our daily existence. Believing strongly that the study of these everyday familial, civic, and architectural spaces is imperative to a full understanding of how a culture comprehends and modifies its environment, Jackson frequently chastised historians, landscape architects, and urban planners for their unwillingness to study a slum or truckstop with the same attention they would devote to a cathedral or museum. If in doing so he earned a well-deserved reputation as an iconoclast, he also anticipated by several decades the legitimate scholarly interests of cultural geography and cultural studies, disciplines now vital to our understanding of the human relationship to nonhuman nature.

Several examples from *Landscape in Sight* will illustrate Jackson's characteristic approach to the study of human-modified environments. In his superb essay, "The Westward Moving House," he uses historical changes in the physical and landscape architecture of the American dwellingplace as a means to explore changes in the social structure and environmental integrity of American communities. Deftly using the techniques of the novelist to create a narrative context for his analysis (he had actually published a novel, *Saints in Summertime*, in 1938) Jackson tells the story of three generations of farmers in the fictional Tinkham family: Nehemiah, a devout Puritan who settled the wilderness of Massachusetts in the mid-seventeenth century; Pliny, an enterprising pioneer who plowed the plains of Illinois in the mid-nineteenth century; and Ray, a trained agribusinessman who farmed the fields of Texas in the mid-twentieth century. For Nehemiah, the home was viewed as a shelter, a source of economic stability, a social meetingplace, a site of education, and an anchorage for the children of Israel in the New World, and was therefore constructed with a permanence reflective of the crucial familial and cultural purposes it was intended to serve. For Nehemiah's descendent Pliny, whose family lived a more secular life on the Midwestern prairie, the home was seen primarily as a domestic center, a means of communing with nature, and a place to live until either soil exhaustion or substantial wealth prompted the family to move farther west.

By 1953, when Pliny's descendent Ray began to work his Texas farm, the home had been physically separated from the now highly mechanized agribusiness, and was devoted primarily to the linked pursuits of convenience and leisure. In each generation Jackson analyzes, he describes precisely how the evolution of American civic, religious, and economic ideology was reflected in the design of the home and the transformation of the landscape surrounding it; by placing his analysis in the engaging context of an intergenerational family history, he helps readers visualize the vital, mutually constitutive relationship between cultural ideas and physical environments.

Additional examples of Jackson's critical approach to landscape studies may be enumerated more briefly. In "Ghosts at the Door" he reads the cultural institution of the front lawn as a rich text which encodes Americans' frustrated need for genuine attachment to landscape; unlike his predecessor Henry David Thoreau, who thought the lawn a poor excuse for both art and nature, Jackson defends the value of this vernacular space, arguing that the lawn allows suburban dwellers a valuable symbolic engagement with the land while also mediating between individual interests and the aesthetic sensibility of the larger community. "The Domestication of the Garage" examines changes in American domestic values by tracing the gradual incorporation of the automobile garage into the construction and functioning of the family dwelling; once a freestanding building affordable only by the rich, and later converted to a small but practical workshop for the maintenance of the automobile, the garage has at last been transformed into a large, physically connected element of the home, and one that serves a number of important domestic functions no longer associated with the automobile. In his essay on the landscape architecture of graveyards, "From Monument to Place," Jackson demonstrates how historical changes in American attitudes toward death have been manifested in the physical organization of the cultural space of the cemetery; while early American graveyards were cited prominently and intended to remind the living of their civic and religious duties, nineteenth-century cemeteries were secluded so as to put death both out of sight and out of mind, and the economic efficiency and architectural openness of the twentieth-century "memorial park" reflects an attempt to express death as an efficient, controlled process that results in a pastoral rather than an imposing landscape.

Jackson's work is often most valuable when it is most energetically devoted to defending and explaining such commonly reviled American cultural spaces as the highway strip ("Other Directed Houses"), trailer home ("The Movable Dwelling and How it Came to America"), or truck stop ("Truck City"). By compelling us to examine vernacular landscapes Jackson insists that we look closer to home, at the

world we've created rather than the one we've imagined — that we seek to understand how our very real transformation of the immediate physical environment necessarily reflects our cultural values. In particular, he offers a powerful and salutary critique of the way environmentalists have often celebrated wilderness while hesitating to acknowledge the vitality of the human-modified landscapes in which we live our daily lives. Anticipating the social constructionist approach of environmental historians William Cronon and Richard White, Jackson argues that popular environmentalism has committed "the error which proclaims that nature is something outside of us," and he instead asks us to adopt a more culturally informed definition of landscape as "a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence" (339, 305). As *Landscape in Sight* demonstrates, Jackson was among the first cultural geographers to reject pastoral and romantic notions of landscape in favor of an understanding of landscape as a communally negotiated space in which we live, work, and express both our hopes and our anxieties.

Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz has done an admirable job selecting and editing J.B. Jackson's work for inclusion in this collection. Her careful choices give a good sense of Jackson's contributions as a cultural critic of American environments, and her liberal use of his earlier and lesser known pieces demonstrates the developmental trajectory of his ideas over more than four decades. Horowitz's introductory essay provides helpful context for understanding Jackson's professional life and accomplishments, and her comprehensive bibliography of his published works is invaluable. Unfortunately, minor problems with the structural organization of the book occasionally obstruct the otherwise smooth presentation of materials. The seven parts into which the book is divided sometimes appear out of balance, and the pieces in the final section, "Landscape Revisions," are not clearly identified by the titles under which Jackson published them. More troubling is the inexplicable inclusion of an "Editor's Introduction" to part 5, "Taking on the Modern Movement," but to no other part of the book. Despite these structural idiosyncrasies, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* is a valuable contribution to the interdisciplinary study of the dynamic human relationship to place, for it demonstrates the importance of the vernacular landscape J.B. Jackson called the "concrete, three-dimensional, shared reality" binding human culture to the environment which must sustain it (302).

Briefly Noted

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Res publica, Res communes, Res nullius, Res privatae

The Global Commons: An Introduction

By Susan J. Buck
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Antarctica ... the atmosphere ... the high seas ... the deep seabed ... space — who rules these domains? The technology to claim and value these five global areas has developed much faster than legal ways of protecting them, creating the need for a comprehensive history of their development and an analysis of their legal and political states. *The Global Commons: An Introduction* does exactly this, examining how evolving legal and political regimes have affected the management of these global commons. Susan J. Buck considers human interactions with these areas, and provides a concise yet thorough account of the history of each area. She outlines historical underpinnings of international law, examines the stakeholders involved, and discusses current policy and the related problems. Buck's approach is narrative as well as analytic, with a specific focus on giving an overall perspective of the commons and demonstrating how our actions affect their environmental status. Buck introduces the reader to the basic concepts necessary to study global commons and then offers in-depth case studies on each of the five domains. Terms, definitions, and concepts are clearly delineated throughout the text, and each chapter concludes with a suggested reading list. In each case study, the development of legal and management regimes is described, with attention given to the role of law. Buck examines the history of resource exploitation in the domain, conflicts among nations over use of the commons, efforts to institutionalize access to and use of the domains, and the management regime that has arisen. All of the historical events are examined through the tools provided by regime theory and institutional analytical frameworks, beginning with the development of the law of nations from European feudal regimes, where decisions were based on personal loyalties and mercantile considerations, to the modern era in which international law is systemized and has contracts. Buck discusses influence of national politics, scientific uncertainty and interest groups on the formation of international regimes. For each area, history provides a useful perspective on present day issues of resource management.

The Global Commons concludes with what can be learned from historical exploration of the global commons and suggests where the management of each of the global commons is headed.

Oyster Wars and the Public Trust: Property, Law, and Ecology in New Jersey History

By Bonnie J. McCay
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Public access to our national lakes, rivers, and oceans has long been considered an American birthright. Unfortunately, unlimited access to these waterways has resulted in the pollution of the waters and the depopulation of edible fish. A victim of these forces, New Jersey's oyster industry has seen a rapid decline. The competition among fishermen for access to a shrinking resource has led to a cultural and legislative discussion of public property. Exactly who owns our nation's waters? And how do we maintain and protect those waters without limiting access? The implications of such public rights litigation over the oyster beds of New Jersey extend to current debates over the Northwest timberlands and the cattle-grazed national parks of the West. In *Oyster Wars and the Public Trust*, Bonnie J. McCay takes an historical and anthropological look at the legislation of property rights in America. It is a study focused on early court cases in New Jersey that defined and delimited the public's right to exploit and enjoy its environment. It is also a story of violence. The access to such beds ensured the livelihood of many fishermen who resorted to piracy to protect their rights and when that didn't work, armed conflict and guerrilla warfare. *Oyster Wars and The Public Trust* combines history, anthropology, and law into a unique and important story of political ecology and the commercialization of nature.