



The Abstract Wild

Jack Turner

The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.

—William Blake, *The Prophetic Books*

The mountains have many moods. Even under clear summer skies I require my clients to pack warm clothing, to be prepared for the worst. I am a mountain climbing guide, and like all mountain climbing guides I am a skeptic about mountain weather. We abide by a local adage: only fools and newcomers predict the weather in the Tetons. If someone does not have the right equipment—a hat or a pair of warm pants—I send them to Orville's, a nearby Army surplus store that sells cheap wool clothing. Once, however, I sent a client to Orville's for pants and he came back without them, although he did not reveal this until later, after the climb was well underway. Since he was ill-prepared for our venture I was annoyed, and said so. He replied that the only pants available at Orville's were old German army pants; he would not wear them.

My client was a Jew. He offered no further explanation, no list of principles; he expressed no hate. The decision was visceral, as private as the touch of fabric and skin.

His action suggests a code: if justice is impossible, honor the loss with acts of remembrance, acts that count for little in the world, but which, if sustained, might count for oneself, might shore up a portion of integrity. Refuse to forgive, cherish your anger, remind others. His code was old-fashioned, almost Biblical. A less impassioned attitude, indeed, an almost indifferent one, was expressed by then Vice-President Bush when he visited Auschwitz in September, 1987: "Boy, they were big on crematoriums, weren't they?"

I understood my client. His conviction opposes our tendency to tolerate everything, to accept, to forget, to forgive, to get on with life, to be realistic, to get over our losses. We accept living with nuclear weapons,

toxic wastes, oil spills, rape, murder, starvation, smog, racism, teenage suicide, torture, mountains of garbage, genocide, dams, dead lakes, and the daily loss of species. Most of the time we don't even think about it.

I, too, abhor this tolerance for anything and everything. My client's refusal stems from the Holocaust; mine started with the damming of the Glen Canyon of the Colorado River and its tributaries, especially the Escalante River, and specifically Davis Gulch, which I visited twice in 1963 just before it was drowned by the waters of Lake Powell. Visitors now houseboat and water-ski hundreds of feet above places where I first experienced wilderness. It broke my heart then; I am still angry about it now. I am angry that Wallace Stegner and the late Edward Abbey would boat around Lake Powell as guests of universities and the U.S. government, I am angry with those who vacation on houseboats there, I am angry with friends who kayak and skin-dive its waters. I make a point of being nasty about it.

Some find it obscene to mention the loss of six million people and the loss of one ecosystem in the same breath. I am not ignorant of the difference in magnitude, but I refuse to recognize a difference in causation. In the September 11, 1989 *High Country News*, there is a picture of eleven severed mountain lion heads stacked in a pyramid at the base of a cottonwood tree. You can see the details of their faces; they are individuals. The association with death camps is involuntary. These are only eleven of the 250,000 wild predators killed by the U.S. government in 1987. No one raised a voice to the Animal Damage Control division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. No one got angry. These deaths, the destruction of the rain forest, and the death of 2 million Cambodians have a common source, a source that deserves our rage, but a source that we do not yet comprehend.

It is now often said (ever since Wendell Berry stated it so clearly and forcefully) that our ecological crisis is a crisis of character, not a political or social crisis. This said, we falter, for it remains unclear what, exactly, is the crisis of modern character; and since character is partly determined by culture, what, exactly, is the crisis of modern culture. Answers to these questions are not to be found in the writings of Thoreau, or Muir, or ecologists ("deep" or otherwise). Answers, always controversial, are found in the study of the Holocaust, the study of "primitive" peoples untouched by our madness, and in the study of the self.

Although the ecological crisis appears new (because it is now "news") it is not new; only the scale and form are new. We lost the wild bit

by bit for 10,000 years and forgave each loss and then forgot. Now we face the final loss. Although no other crisis in human history can match it, our commentary is strangely muted and sad, as though catastrophe was happening to us, not caused by us. Even the most knowledgeable and enlightened continue to eat food soaked in chemicals (herbicides, pesticides, and hormones), wear plastic clothes (our beloved polypropylene), buy Japanese (despite their annual slaughter of dolphins), and vote Republican—all the while blathering on in abstract language about our ecological crisis. This is denial, and behind denial is a rage, the most common emotion of my generation; but it is suppressed, and we remain silent in the face of evil.

Why is this rage a silent rage, a quiet impotent protest that doesn't extend beyond the confines of our private world? Why don't people speak out, why don't they *do* something? The courage and resistance shown by the Navajos at Big Mountain, by Polish workers, by Blacks in South Africa, and, most extraordinarily, by Chinese students in Tiananmen Square render much of the environmental protest in America shallow and ineffective. With the exception of a few members of Earth First!, Sea Shepherd, and Greenpeace, we are a nation of environmental cowards. Why?

Effective protest is grounded in anger, and we are not (consciously) angry. Anger nourishes hope and fuels rebellion; it presumes a judgment, presumes how things ought to be and aren't, presumes a care. Emotion is still the best evidence of belief and value.

Our most recent conceit is that certain places and animals and forests are "sacred." We have forgotten that sacred is a social word and that "sacred for me" is as irrelevant as "legal for me." We ignore that our culture is as sacred as any other because we do not distinguish between formal and popular religion. If it is true that our national parks are sacred, it is also true that Disneyland is sacred, and that the location of President Kennedy's assassination is sacred. But these pilgrimage sites are sacred because of the function of entertainment and tourism in our culture. In a commercial culture the sacred will have a commercial base.

We have forgotten the relation between violence and the sacred, forgotten that the wars in Ireland, Palestine, and Kashmir are, in part, about sacred land (and, in part, as Joseph Campbell points out, about mistaking a piece of real estate for the "Kingdom of God"). If you go to Mecca and blaspheme the Black Stone the believers will feed you to the midges, piece by piece. Go to Yellowstone and destroy grizzlies and grizzly habitat and the believers will dress up in bear costumes, sing songs, and

sign petitions. This is charming, but it is not rage, and it suggests no sense of blasphemy. The sacred must be more than personal preference.

It would be helpful to acknowledge that we fear our rage for two reasons: it might lead us to do something illegal, thus threatening our freedoms; and it might lead to violence. This fear is justified. Any form of resistance to public or private authority that is *effective* (e.g., spiking trees) must of necessity become a felony. Historically, continued effective disobedience has been met with violence. At Amritsar, India, in 1919, the British slaughtered 379 non-violent demonstrators in cold blood and wounded more than 1,000. In 1930 they murdered 70 more at Peshawar. The non-violent demonstrators in Norway who successfully resisted German attempts to teach Nazi ideology in Norwegian schools were sent to concentration camps. Remember Kent State?

Violence breeds violence. In the October 1967 demonstrations at the Pentagon, protesters were non-violent until U.S. Marshals began dragging women by their hair and beating them in the groin with clubs. Only then did the demonstrators riot. The cant of messianic humanism conceals our culture's highest command: thou shalt not defy authority. To effectively protest the destruction of the earth we will have to face these facts, surmount these fears.

A *sacred* rage does often surmount these fears. The belief, emotion, and action of the little old Christian lady arrested for protesting abortion can reasonably be connected to the sacred. So can the non-violent protest of a Buddhist peace activist. So can the terrorist activities of a Moslem fanatic. Whether we like or dislike these acts, think them good or bad, or right or wrong, is irrelevant to their being sacred. They are sacred because of their origin. For the believer, the sacred is the *source* of belief, emotion, and action, what is good and what is right; it *determines* life and is immune to merely secular legal and ethical judgments. This is vital religion, lived belief. Old forests will be sacred, and their destruction blasphemous, when we demonstrate that *our* rage is immune to secular judgment. The hard question is this: do we want an environmental *religion*? Do we want nature to be *sacred*? I am inclined to agree with Dogen Zenji: "Clearly nothing is sacred—hard as iron."

Effective protests are grounded in a refusal to accept what is normal. We accept a diminished world as normal; we accept a diminished way of life as normal; we accept diminished human beings as normal. What was once considered pathological becomes statistically common and eventually "normal"—a move that veils a move toward abstraction. Decayed teeth are statistically common, just like smog and environmentally-caused

cancers. That a statistically-common decayed tooth is also an abnormal tooth, a pathological tooth, a diminished tooth, a painful, horrible, mind-bending tooth, is a fact we ignore. Until it is our tooth. At present most of us do not experience the loss of the wild like we experience a toothache. That is the problem. The "normal" wilderness most people know is a charade of areas, zones, and management plans which is driving the real wild into oblivion, but we deny this, accepting the semblance instead of demanding the real. This too is normal. The real loss is not experienced.

Effective protests are grounded in a coherent vision of an alternative; we have no coherent vision of an alternative to our present maladies. Deep Ecology does not, as yet, offer a coherent vision. Our main resources for Deep Ecology, the books by Sessions, Devall, and LaChapelle, are hodgepodes of lists, principles, declarations, quotations, clippings from every conceivable tradition, and tidbits of New Age kitsch. The authors do not clearly say what they mean; they do not forcefully argue for what they believe; they do not create anything new. That some are professional philosophers is all the more confounding. Presented as revolutionary tracts aimed at subverting Western Civilization, these works embarrass us with their intellectual timidity and flaccid prose. Compare them with other revolutionary works—*Leviathan*, the *Social Contract*, the *Communist Manifesto*—or even the work of contemporary European thinkers such as Foucault or Habermas and we glimpse the depth of our muddle.

Deep Ecology is suspicious. It lacks passion, an absence that is acutely disturbing given the current state of affairs. A reading of Marx's theses on Feuerbach is in order, especially the 11th: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." If we do not change the world soon, Deep Ecology will become an obtuse form of necrophilia.

Apathy, complacency, docility and cowardice are not new; they were, for instance, major subjects of both *Walden* and "Resistance to Civil Government." (It is always helpful to recall that for most of their lives Thoreau and Muir were considered maladjusted failures, even by those that knew and loved them.) But for the present let it be, at best, controversial, and at worse improper, to have strong moral feelings about the treatment of animals, plants, and places—an emotional mistake—like being in love with the number 2. Let the case for the destruction of the earth rest—we are smothered with facts; they are both depressing and endless. What is shocking is that we are all "good Germans." That is *our* problem, and

a problem we can attempt, at least, to solve.

The social reasons for our apathy are numerous: religious traditions (Christian and Buddhist) that glorify acceptance and condemn emotion (particularly anger) and judgment; a political ideology that extols relativism, pluralism, tolerance, and pragmatism in internal affairs (although not in external affairs—until recently it was all right to hate the “Commies” and be enraged at *their* “evil”); the inertia of any social structure; a claustrophobic conformity behind a mask of individualism; and a love of expediency that is short-sighted and self-serving. The most readily accepted social criticism in our society is cloaked in humor—the political cartoons of Gary Trudeau and Gary Larson, for example. Ordinary people don’t talk of normal and abnormal. We no longer talk of good and evil; we talk about what we like and dislike, as if discussing ice cream. To defend our likes and dislikes we quote opinion polls and surveys that track the gentle undulations of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

There are also private reasons for apathy and indifference. As Marcuse noted twenty-five years ago: “The intellectual and emotional refusal ‘to go along’ appears neurotic and impotent.” Even as citizens of the alleged high-point of Western Civilization, we are ridiculed for equating public pathology and personal tragedy. Criticize the greed of the rich and you are *envious*; become enraged at the killing of 100,000 dolphins every year and you are *infantile*; protest the FBI’s harassment of dissident organizations and you *have a problem with authority*; condemn the state for exposing citizens to radiation from nuclear-arms testing and you are *unpatriotic*. The reduction of social criticism to private defect is incessant in our culture and has the crippling effect of diminishing our outrage and numbing our moral imagination. Convinced that it is really *our* problem, we fail to be astonished by evil; living nightmares no longer awaken us. We are put down, so we shut up, abandoning the prospect of autonomy, self-respect, and integrity.

Signing more petitions, giving money, or joining another environmental organization helps some, but is too abstract to help *us* and *our* problem. These means are too far from the end, the intention unachieved. Indeed, our apathy and cowardice stem, in part from this: these abstractions *never* work; they *never* achieve for us a sense of power and fulfillment; they correct neither the cause nor the effect. We end up feeling helpless, and since it is human nature to want to avoid feeling helpless, we become dissociated, cynical, and depressed. Better to live in the presence of the wild—feel it, smell it, see it—and do some small thing that is real and

succeeds—like Gary Nabhan’s preservation of wild seeds, or Doug Peacock’s study of grizzlies. Thoreau’s “In Wildness is the preservation of the World” is exact truth. We know that in the end moral efficacy will manifest knowledge and love—our intimacies. We only value what we know and love. We no longer know or love the wild. So we no longer value it. Instead, we accept substitutes, imitations, semblances, and fakes—the diminished wild. We accept abstract information in place of personal experience and communication. This removes us from the true wild and severs our recognition of its value. Most people don’t even miss it. Most people *literally* do not know what we are talking about.

In 1928, Walter Benjamin sadly remarked, “The earliest customs of peoples seem to send us a warning that in accepting what we receive so abundantly from nature we should guard against a gesture of avarice. For we are able to make Mother Earth no gift of our own.” Now a gift is possible: knowledge, passion, courage, and a long list of heresies (often called felonies). We must become so intimate with wild animals, with plants and places, that we answer to their destruction from the gut. Like when we discover the landlady strangling our cat.

If anything is endangered in America it is our experience of wild nature—gross *contact*. There is knowledge only the wild can give us, knowledge specific to it, knowledge specific to the experience of it. These are its gifts to us. In this, wilderness is no different from music, painting, poetry, or love: concede the abundance, respond with grace. The problem is that we no longer know what these gifts are. In our noble effort to go beyond anthropocentric defenses of nature, to emphasize its intrinsic value and right to exist independently of us, we forget the reciprocity between the wild in nature and the wild in us, between knowledge of the wild and knowledge of the self that was central to all primitive cultures.

Once the meaning of the wild is forgotten, because the relevant experience is lost, we abuse the word, literally, mis-use it. The savagery and brutality of gang rape is now called “wilding,” and in New Age retreats men search for a “wild man within.” It is doubtful these people have been in a wilderness. They don’t know what wild means. They don’t “know,” that is, in the sense of having experienced it, though they may “know” it abstractly. (Bertrand Russell put the difference nicely: knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description.)

Why do we associate the savage, the brutal, and the wild? The savagery of nature fades to nothing compared to the savagery of human agency. The most civilized nations on the planet killed 60 to 70 million of each

other's citizens in the 30-year span from the beginning of World War I to the end of World War II. Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Kant, Rousseau, Dogen, Mill, Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Manet, Basho, Van Gogh, and Hokusai didn't make any difference. The rule of law, human rights, democracy, the sovereignty of nations, liberal education, tradition, scientific method, and the presence of an Emperor God didn't make any difference. Protestantism, Catholicism, Greek and Russian Orthodoxy, Buddhism, Shintoism, and Islam didn't make any difference. How can we, at this time in history, think of a bear or a wolf as savage? Why laugh at the idea of the noble savage when we have discovered no "savage" as savage as civilized man?

Why equate the wild only with the masculine, as though the feminine were not also wild? The wild is neither and both. The easiest way to experience a bit of what the wild was like is to go into a great forest at night alone. Sit quietly for awhile. Something very old will return. It is well described by Ortega y Gasset in *Meditations on Hunting*: "The hunter . . . needs to prepare an attention which does not consist in riveting itself on the presumed but consists precisely in not assuming anything and in avoiding inattentiveness. It is a 'universal' attention, which does not inscribe itself on any point and tries to be on all points." This is very close to a description of certain meditation techniques, especially "shikantaza," a practice of the Soto sect of Zen. (It is not an accident that Lama Govinda believed meditation arose among the hunting cultures of the Himalayan foothills; it is not an accident that the Balti and the Golok handle utensils like masters of the Tea Ceremony.) Alone in the forest, time is less "dense," less filled with information; space is very "close"; smell and hearing and touch reassert themselves. It is keenly sensual. In a true wilderness we are like that much of the time, even in broad daylight. Alert, careful, literally "full of care." Not because of principles or practice, but because of something very old.

The majority of Americans have no experience of the wild. We are surrounded by national parks, wilderness areas, wildlife preserves, sanctuaries and refuges. We love to visit them. We also visit foreign parks and wilderness; we visit wild, exotic cultures. We are deluged with commercial images of wildness: coffee table books, calendars, postcards, posters, T-shirts, and placemats. There are nature movies. A comprehensive bibliography of nature books would strain a small computer. There are hundreds of nature magazines with every conceivable emphasis: Yuppie outdoor magazines, geographical magazines, philosophy magazines,

scientific magazines, ecology magazines, and political magazines. Zoos and animal parks and marine lands abound, displaying a selection of beasts exceeded only by Noah's.

From this we conclude that modern man's knowledge and experience of wild nature is extensive. But it is not extensive. Rather, what we have is extensive experience of a severely diminished wilderness animal or place—a *caricature* of its former self; or, we have extensive indirect experience of wild nature via photographic images and the written word. This is not experience of the wild, not gross contact.

The national parks were created for and by tourism and they emphasize what interests a tourist—the picturesque and the odd. They are managed with two ends in mind: entertainment and preservation. Most visitors rarely leave their cars except to eat, sleep, or go to the john. (In Grand Teton National Park, 93% of the visitors never visit the backcountry.) If visitors do make other stops, it is at designated picturesque "scenes" or educational exhibits presenting interesting facts—the names of the peaks, a bit of history—or, very occasionally, for passive recreation, a ride in a boat or an organized nature walk. None of this is accidental. It results from carefully designed "management plans" that channel the flow of tourists according to maximum utility—utility defined by the ends of entertainment, efficiency, and preservation.

The problem is not what people do in the parks; it is what they are discouraged or prevented from doing. No one, for instance, is encouraged to climb mountains, backpack, or canoe alone. Hikers are discouraged from traveling off-trail, especially in unpatrolled areas with difficult rescue. They are often prohibited from remote areas where they might encounter bears, or else travel is restricted to groups. Their movements are always tracked. It is *illegal* to wander around the national parks without a permit defining where you go and where you stay and how long you stay. In every manner conceivable national parks separate us from wildness.

If we go into a designated wilderness area, say the Bridger-Teton, we are slightly less restricted, but we find as much degradation of the wild environment. We see signs and hike horse trails and cross sturdy bridges and find maps on large boards at trail junctions. We meet patrolling rangers, Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops working on character, and the National Outdoor Leadership School teaching "wilderness" skills in a corporate management seminar. We meet trail crews, pack trains, and hikers galore.

At night we see the distant lights of cities and highways and sodium vapor lamps in the yards of farms and ranches. Satellites pass overhead.

By day, contrails from commercial jets mar the sky; military planes, private jets, small aircraft, and helicopters are a common presence. We camp by a lake, the outlet of which is filled with spawning golden trout. We notice they are thin as smelt. They are not indigenous to these mountains. Around camp, many small trees have been cut down by Basque sheepherders. The trails of their herds are ubiquitous; domestic sheep still graze this wilderness. In autumn we find hunting camps the size of military installations, the hunters better armed than Green Berets. Many of the camps use salt licks to lure the elk, deer, and moose. If we wander out of this narrow "wilderness zone," we walk straight into clear-cut forest, logging roads, and oils wells.

This is no longer the wild, no longer a wilderness; and yet we continue to accept it as wilderness and call our time there "wilderness experience." We *believe* we make contact with the wild, but this is an illusion. In both the national parks and wilderness areas we accept a reduced category of experience, a semblance of the wild nature, a fake. And no one complains.

We visit the zoo or Sea World to see wild animals, but they are not wild; they have been tamed, rendered dependent and obedient. We learn nothing of their essential life in nature. We do not see them hunt or gather their food. We do not see them mate. We do not see them interact with other species. We do not see them interact with their habitat. Their numbers and their movements are artificial. We see them controlled. We see them trained. In most cases they are as docile, apathetic, and bored as the people watching them. If we visit wild animals in sanctuaries we are protected by buses and Land Rovers and observation towers. We are separated from any direct experience of the wild animals we came to visit. No *contact*? Why call it a visit?

The majority of people who feel anguish about whales have never seen a whale at sea; the majority who desire to reintroduce wolves to Yellowstone have never seen a wolf in the wild, and some, no doubt, have never been to Yellowstone. We feel agony about bludgeoned seal pups and shredded dolphins without ever having touched one or smelled one or watched it swim. However much these emotions promote environmental causes, they remain suspect, for the object of the emotion is experienced through a *medium*, via movies, TV, the printed word, or snapshots. They pass as quickly as our feelings about the evening news or our favorite film. They are the emotions of an *audience*, the emotions of *sad entertainment*. We cry our hearts out about "Old Yeller"; the Humane Society has to

destroy thousands of dogs and cats because homes cannot be found for them.

Dissatisfied with the semblances and imitations at home we travel abroad in a search for the real thing. But there isn't anything different out there, no *exotic* context by which to judge the absence of context in our lives. The context remains, in the apt phrase of George Trow, "the context of no context." We do not find the Other. We can spend a lifetime in parks and wilderness areas and on adventure travel trips and remain starved for wild country and wild people.

Thirty years ago no foreigner had set foot in Khumbu, the beautiful valley that approaches Everest from the south. When I started going there thirteen years ago it was advertised as a remote wilderness, despite the presence of thousands of Sherpas in dozens of villages. Sometimes it is still advertised that way—an exotic Shangri-la. That this is false is not the point; it is the form and magnitude of the con that is important, the "size" of the illusion.

Now, tens of thousands of foreigners visit the region every year. Most arrive by plane at the village of Lukla. The trail from there to the old Everest Base Camp—Interstate "E"—is always crowded with tourists, many of them in shorts and sandals with Pan Am flight bags over their shoulders containing all they need for several weeks in this wilderness.

In Namche Bazaar I recently stayed at a hotel owned by a Sherpa I worked with years ago. I slept in one of the "special" rooms separated from the dorm used by most tourists. On the wall are two scribbles. One is the signature of former President Jimmy Carter. The other is the signature of Richard Blum, husband of former San Francisco mayor, Dianne Feinstein. Both needed to let us know they slept in this special room in this remote wilderness. In the morning I was served the first omelette prepared in the hotel's new microwave oven, the first microwave in Khumbu. It was so hard I barely got it down. The cook, who happens to be the owner's wife, said "Sherpa way better" and headed back to the kitchen in disgust. Right! That next winter electricity came to Thyangboche monastery and promptly burned it down.

At the old British Base Camp in Tibet, on the north side of Everest, is a bare concrete platform awaiting a communications satellite dish that will improve weather predictions for climbing expeditions. Soon there will be a hotel.

The north side of K2 is more difficult to reach. Fly to Beijing. Fly from Beijing to Urumchi. Fly from Urumchi to Kashgar. Drive two days

by Toyota Land Cruiser or Mitsubishi bus to Mazar on the long road between Kashgar and Lhasa. Ride camels for a week (they are required for the many fordings of the Shaksam river). Walk for several days up a glacier. What do you find? Skeletons of tents, with pieces of nylon flapping in the breeze. Inside are boxes of unused stainless steel pressure cookers, cases of antipasto, and Italian magazines. On a ridge above the glacier is a concrete platform with a radar dish.

Tibet is still described as wild, exotic, and forbidden. When in Lhasa, I stay in a large, modern hotel operated by Holiday Inn. The manager meets me at the door. He is an Englishman dressed in an impeccable three-piece Saville Row suit and speaks with an Oxford accent. My room is like any other Holiday Inn room. It has closed-circuit television. In the lobby, during cocktail hour, there is a string quartet that plays Mozart and Beethoven. I drink Guinness Stout and Corvouisier Cognac. I dine on pasta and Yakburgers.

In the streets I see a Red Army soldier driving a lime-green Mercedes Benz; another soldier drives a cobalt blue Jeep Cherokee. Golok nomads wander the bazaar wearing yak-skin boots, woolen breeches, and cloaks (Tibetan "chuba") fringed with snow leopard fur. Their hair, entwined with scarlet cloth, is gathered on top of their heads. One carries a ghetto-blasters the size of a small suitcase. The volume makes me wince. He is playing Bruce Springsteen.

The preferred style of dress for young male Tibetans in Lhasa is called "Kathmandu Cowboy": black Hong Kong cowboy boots, stone-washed Levis, a black silk shirt, gold necklace, and Elvis Presley hair cut. Young Tibetan women date Chinese soldiers.

I am thankful for the small things. Once at a monastery outside of Lhasa, I witnessed a senior monk debating with a large gathering of students. He shouted his questions, clapping and stomping to an eight-count beat. His students shouted their answers trying to keep up with his furious pace, and he continued at the same furious pace. When they failed to answer correctly he would brush the back of one hand with the back of the other, dismissively smiling and laughing. The students, animated and responsive, would try again.

Once I saw a pilgrim circumambulating the Jokhang monastery through the Barkhor bazaar. He was wearing only yak-skin boots and woolen breeches; in the middle of his back, a gilded prayer box the size of a gallon of milk hung from a thick leather strap slung over one shoulder. He chanted continuously in a strong voice, first holding his hands in prayer high over his head, then bowing hard to the ground in the middle

of the bazaar—first knees, then chest, then elbows, his hands still held in prayer over his head. Then he would rise, take one step to the left, and repeat his prayer. Though the bazaar was packed with people there was a forty-foot circle around him. No one interfered; very few tourists had the temerity to photograph him, and then only from a great distance. He is the only wild human being I have seen during fifteen years of travel in Asia. A modern Milarepa.

At the Dalai Lama's old summer palace—the Norbulingka—there is a zoo, his private zoo. There are long trenches cut in the ground for yaks and buffalo; all they can see is the sky. There are small cages for wolves and fox and cats and bears. In one of the cages there is a bear the Chinese call "ma-shang." We would call it a grizzly. I think of Buddhism's first vow—"Beings are numberless: I vow to enlighten them"—trying to discover the proper relation between the Dalai Lama, enlightenment, and a caged ma-shang. I feel that I have arrived at the end of a long labyrinth and found a mirror.

These places *are* beautiful; these people *are* wonderful. I continue to go there and always will. There are small pockets of wilderness left, and a few wild people, but, in general, the wilderness and the people of the wilderness are gone; wild things cannot necessarily be reached by travel. We perpetuate the idea that is it out there, we console ourselves with feeble imitations, we seek reassurance in nature entertainment and outdoor sports. But it is nearly gone. Unless we change the world soon the wild will be but a memory in the minds of a few people. When they die it will die with them, and the wild will become completely abstract.

What is wrong with all this fun and entertainment, with this imitation of what was once a real and potent Other? Nothing, if it is recognized for what it is—a poor substitute. But we do not note that the wild is missing, and it is not clear how we might re-establish contact with wild things. It is probably best to begin now with what we are emotionally closest to—animals. Plants can come later, places last. Despite all the eco-babble to the contrary, at present we do not understand what it might mean to communicate with a plant or a place as Native Americans did. Unfortunately, the conditions under which we might form a relationship with wild animals are also diminishing.

The story is repeated daily in the media. A natural habitat is eroded or lost, a species suffers, becomes endangered, or is lost. Efforts are made to save it, study it, and arouse public sympathy for its plight. This always sounds so inevitable, as though the loss of habitat is as incorrigible, as

implacable as fate. There is no mention of human agency, no suggestion that we are responsible for the loss of wilderness habitat, no possibility that we could have done otherwise, that we could reverse this horrible situation, no suggestion that we have this power, no realization that the abstract language of wildlife management aids and abets the continued loss of wild habitat, no acknowledgment that a zoo, a circus, a Sea World, a national park, is *a business*. Reading these articles, hundreds of them, we never discover why an orca like Shamu has to jump through 10,000 hoops next year to help make 338 million dollars for the parks division of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.

Zoos are getting bigger and more “natural”; wildlife sanctuaries and national parks are “islands,” too small and increasingly artificial. Yellowstone National Park is really a megazoo. *Everything is exploited and managed, now; it's just a matter of degree. Accept this. It's normal. Nothing to be done.*

When we deal in such abstractions boundaries are blurred, between the real and the fake, between the wild and the tame, between independent and dependent, between the original and the copy, between the healthy and the diminished. Blurring takes the edge off loss and removes us from our responsibilities. *Wild nature is not lost; we have collected it; you can go see it whenever you want.* With the aid of our infinite artifice this fake has replaced the natural. It's not really *very* different from the original! Why worry? As Umberto Eco observes in *Travels in Hyperreality*, “The ideology of this America wants to establish reassurance through imitation.” And that ideology has succeeded; we are reassured, we are not angry, we are not even upset.

Abstraction masks horror. A zoo is a very different kind of place from the wild; a caricature requires an original. A zoo, a Sea World is (at best) a fake habitat presenting pseudo-wild animals to the public for entertainment and financial reward. The wild is the original, the wild is home. The bigger and more naturalistic the megazoo, the “better” the fake. But it is still a fake. And why we should or should not accept this fake is a subject that cannot be addressed by the abstractions of wildlife management.

Abstraction displaces emotion, constraining us to relate to the “problems” of wild animals rationally—the excuses of scientific knowledge, commerce, and philanthropy. It leaves us without an explanation of our emotional relations to animals. It cannot explain why I went beserk, amok, at the zoo in Mysore, India, at the sight of a crowd pelting an

American mountain lion trapped in a cage on a small wooden platform. This animal was suffering due to a very un-abstract cause. She had been sold to a foreign business for purposes of amusement and profit, and human beings there were mistreating her. Nothing unusual here. *Normal.*

Her suffering was obscene, the solution simple: she needed to get home. To run along rims through pinyon and cedar and crouch and leap and dance on her toes sideways, her tail curled high in the air to seduce a mate and then hunt with him in the moonlight and eat deer and cows and sheep and make little pumas and die of old age on warm sandstone by a clear spring at the end of a gulch dense with cottonwood and box elder.

The condors need to get home, too. So do the orcas. That they no longer have a home is not their problem. (That homeless humans no longer have a home is not their problem.) It is our problem; *we* have done it. The solution is to give them their home. (The solution for the homeless is equally simple: to give them their home.) Why is this so difficult to conceive or act upon? Part of the answer is this: *we* no longer have a home except in a brute commercial sense; home is where the bills come. To seriously help homeless humans and animals would require a sense of home that was not commercial. The Eskimo, the Aranda, the Sioux, belonged to one place. Where is our *habitat*? Where do *we* belong?

“All sites of enforced marginalization—ghettos, shanty towns, prisons, madhouses, concentration camps—have something in common with zoos.” (John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?*) If we add Indian reservations, aquariums, and botanical gardens to this list, then a pattern emerges: removed from their home, living things become marginal, and what becomes marginal is diminished or destroyed. Of bedrock importance is community, for humans, animals, and plants.

We know that the historical move from community to society proceeded by destroying local structures—religion, economy, food patterns, custom, possessions, families, traditions—and replacing these with national, or international, structures that created the modern “individual” and integrated him into society. Modern man lost his home; in the process everything else did, too. That is why Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic is so frighteningly radical; it renders this process *morally wrong*. “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” Apply this principle to people, animals, and plants and the last 10,000 years of history is *evil*.