



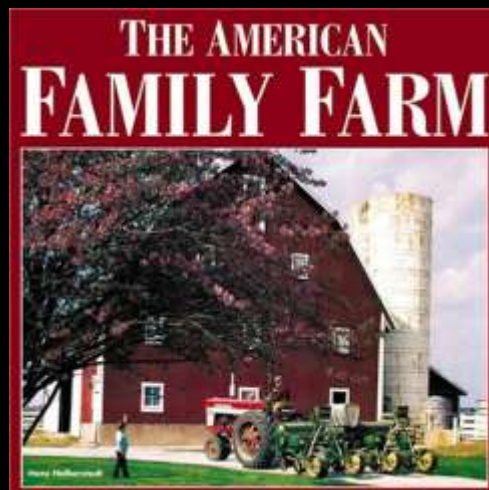
The Urban Wilderness: Wildness and the American City

Kevin Michael Anderson, Ph.D.
Austin Water – Center for Environmental Research



American Concept(s) of Nature

In the United States, the kinds of nature that we celebrate are *wilderness and pastoral nature*.



The American Concepts of Nature and Urbanized America

In American cities and towns, we perceive nature filtered through a ***conceptual framework that prejudices its ecological and cultural value.***

Wilderness



Pastoral Nature



Urban (Suburban) Nature?



The Conceptual Framework and Urban Nature

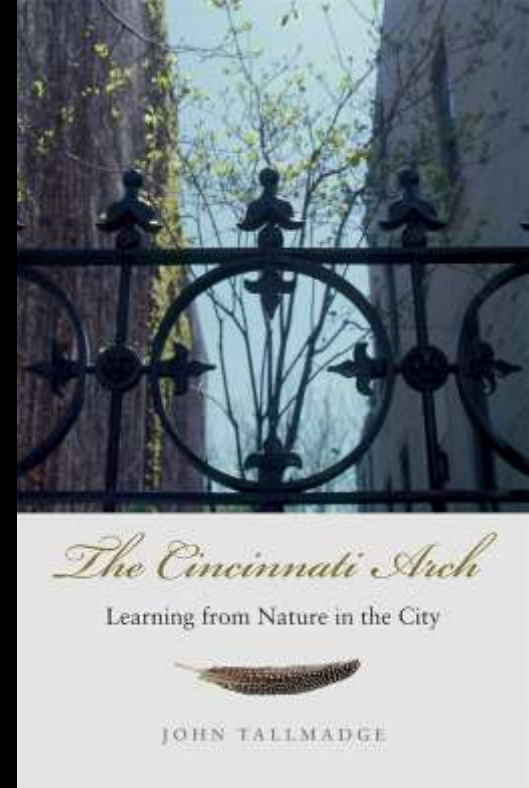
“Urban nature is not sublime...There’s too much sterility in the form of roofs and pavement, and, oddly enough, there’s also too much wildness, too many weeds and wooded borders and tangled banks, not to mention vacant lots going to brush.

Of course, “wilderness” won’t do to describe such landscapes either. Despite the degree of wildness, there’s too much human impact, too many alien species, too few large animals to meet the legal and cultural criteria.

The fact is that urban landscapes are just too mixed up, chaotic, and confused to fit our *established notions of beauty and value in nature.*

Maybe it’s not really nature at all, not a real ecosystem, just a bunch of weeds and exotics mixed up with human junk.”

John Tallmadge
The Cincinnati Arch: Learning from Nature in the City (2004)



Established Notions of Nature
Classical Western Ideas of Nature
Iterative Natures

First nature - wilderness or pristine (untrammelled by humans) the realm of the gods or “primitive” humans

Second nature – pastoral arcadia – farms, gardens

Third nature – Renaissance geometrical gardens



The illustration shows a distant mountain (first nature) giving way to cultivated agricultural land (second nature) and then a formal garden (third nature).

Frontispiece to l'Abbé de Vallemont's *Curiositez de la nature et de l'art* (1705)

“Established Notions of Nature”
Myth/Narrative – First and Second Nature
Harmony and Innocence within the Garden Wall



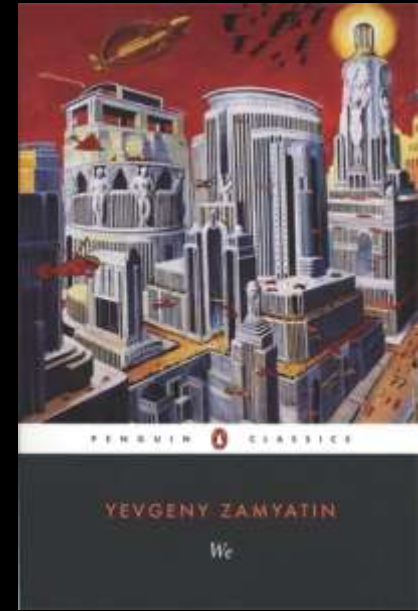
Wild Nature and The City – First and Second Nature

Irrational, Ugly Nature vs. Rationalism and Modernity

“Oh, how great and divinely limiting is the wisdom of walls. This Green Wall is, I think, the greatest invention ever conceived.

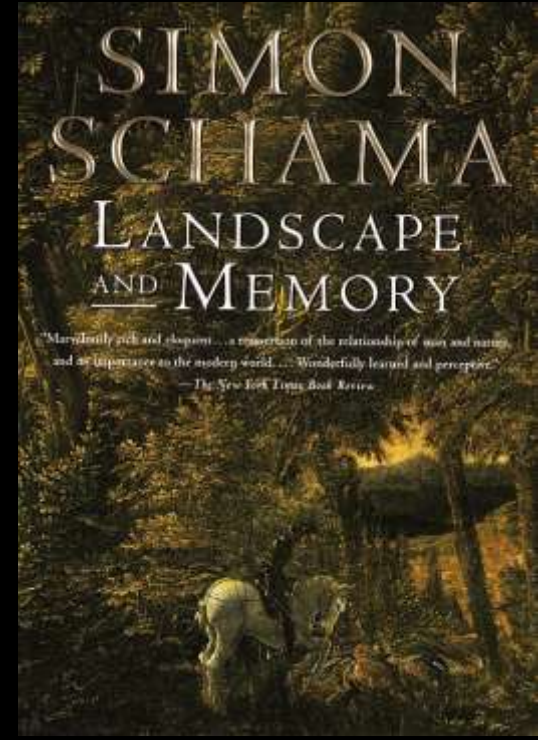
Man ceased to be a wild animal the day he built the first wall; Man ceased to be a wild man only on the day when the Green Wall was completed, when, ***by this wall we isolated our machine-like, perfect world from the irrational, ugly world of trees, birds, and beasts.***”

- Eugene Zamyatin, *We* (1921)



First Nature – Howling Waste of the Wilderness

- The word derives from the notion of "wildness"—in other words, ***that which is not controlled by humans.***
- Samuel Johnson Dictionary of the English Language 1755
“a desert; a tract of solitude and savageness” (wasteland)
- The Pilgrim leader William Bradford’s well-known description of the forbidding Cape Cod shoreline as seen from the deck of the Mayflower in 1620 - ***“a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men.”***
- Old Testament – ***He findeth him in a desert land, in the howling waste of the wilderness.*** Deuteronomy 32:10
- New Testament - Jesus in the Wilderness – Temptation and finding your true self



The Howling Wilderness

The wilderness is a locale for intense experiences—of stark need for food and water, of isolation, of danger and divine deliverance, of renewal, of encounters with God...and with predators, savages and Satan.



In America there is a mythology, a theology, a psychology and a commerce of wilderness.



Generally speaking, a howling wilderness does not howl: it is the imagination of the traveler that does the howling.

(Henry David Thoreau)

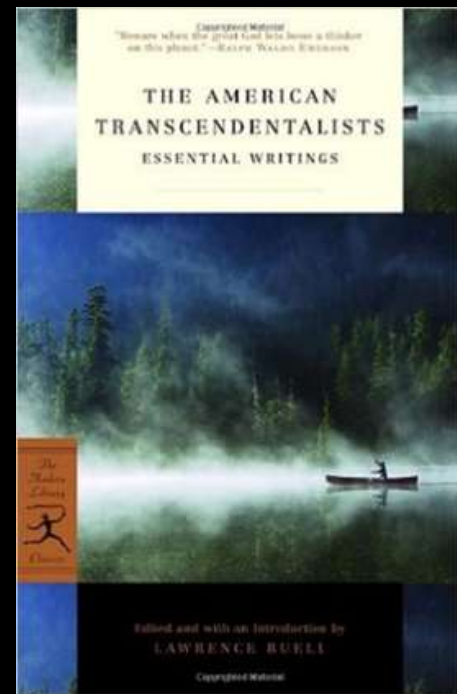
Inventing American Nature - What Nature Is and Does Transcendentalism

The American Transcendentalist idea of Nature in Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay, "Nature" (1836)

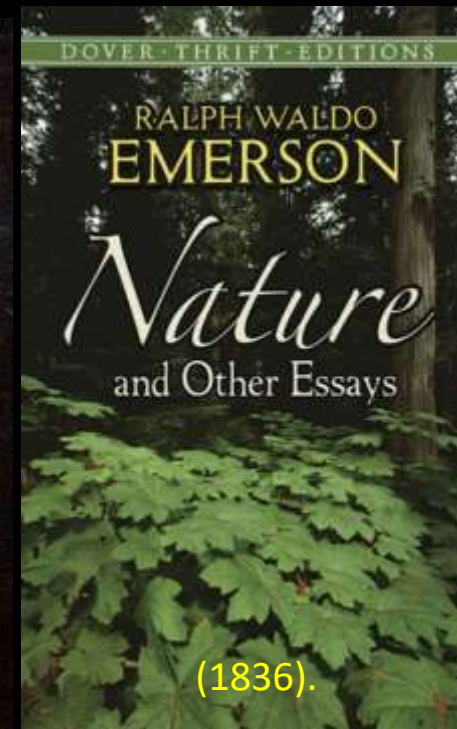
Nature contact as therapy for a diseased, over-civilized heart.

- Nature is a source of sensations--healthy feelings.
- Humans can discover emotional health in nature.
- Such health leads to moral and spiritual clarity.

The Urban Disease – the City/Town makes you sick



(1803 –1882)



(1836).

Thoreau and Wildness

“The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, ***that in Wildness is the preservation of the world.***”

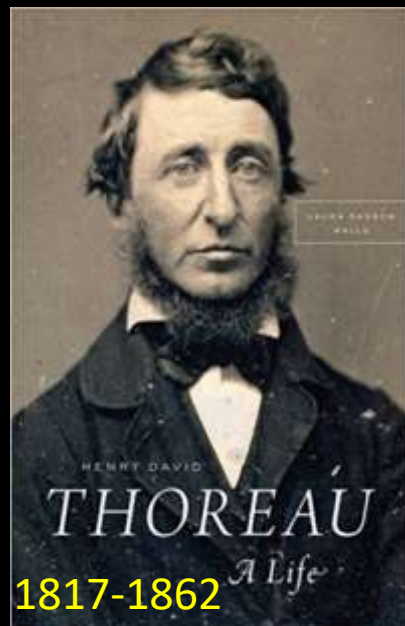
“I wish to speak a word for Nature, for *absolute Freedom and Wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society.*

From the forest and wilderness come the ***tonics*** and barks which brace mankind. . . .

Life consists with Wildness. The most alive is the wildest. ***Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him.***

In short, all good things are wild and free.”

Thomas Cole
“Oxbow” 1836



Thoreau and Wild Nature

Physical Particular Nature

“I long for wildness, ***a nature which I cannot put my foot through***, woods where the wood thrush forever sings, where the hours are early morning ones, and there is dew on the grass, and the day is forever unproved, where I might have a fertile unknown for a soil about me.” — Journal, 22 June 1853

Medicinal Nature

“We need ***the tonic of wildness*** — to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hearing the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close o the ground.” — Walden

Otherness and Agency of Nonhumans

“***What we call wildness is a civilization other than our own.***”
Journal, 16 February 1859

Near-at-hand

“***It is in vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such.***” — Journal, 30 August 1856



Thoreau, the City, and the Tonic of Nature

“Every tree sends its fibers forth in search of the Wild.

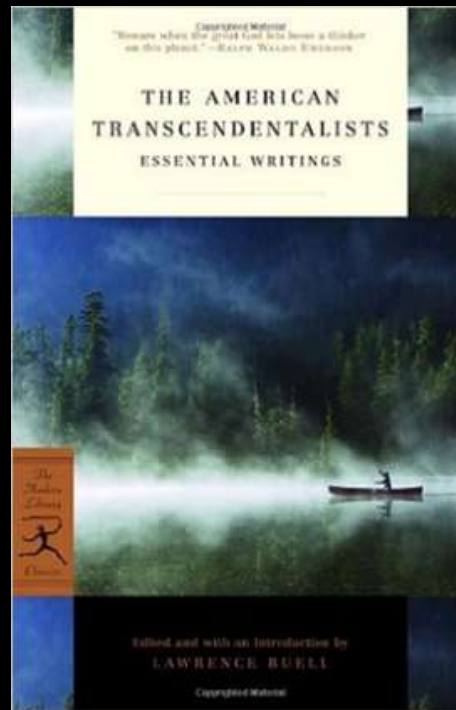
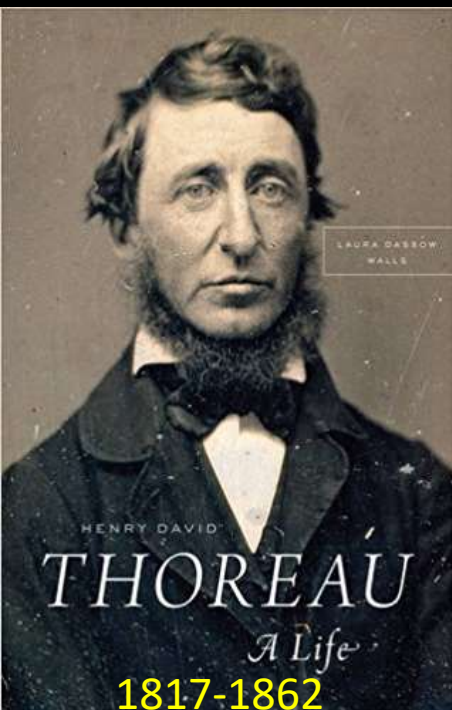
The cities import it at any price....

Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities...”

The Transcendentalist concept of nature as a tonic for the urban dis-ease

Good Nature = Wilderness

Bad Nature = the Urban



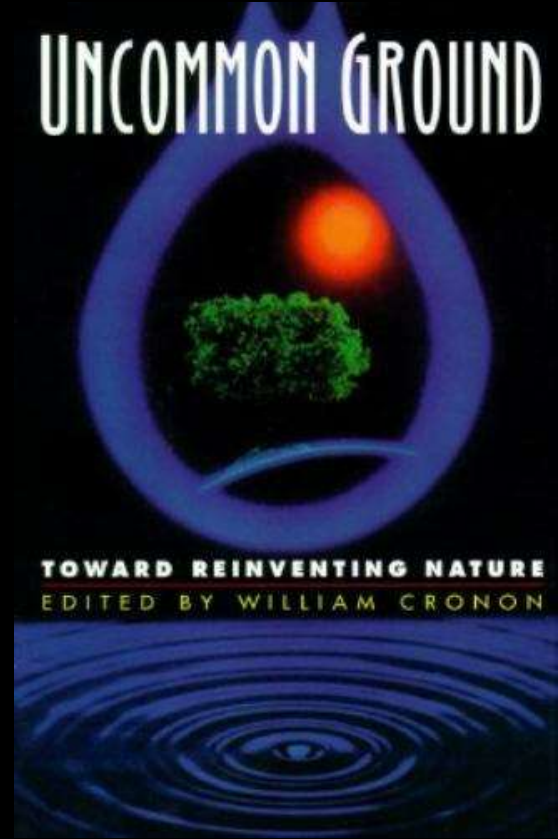
The Urban and The Proper Place of Nature

“We need to embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural, in which ***the city, the suburb, the pastoral, and the wild each has its proper place***, which we permit ourselves to celebrate without needlessly denigrating the others.”

“The Trouble with Wilderness or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”
William Cronon

Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature
(1995)

UNCOMMON GROUND

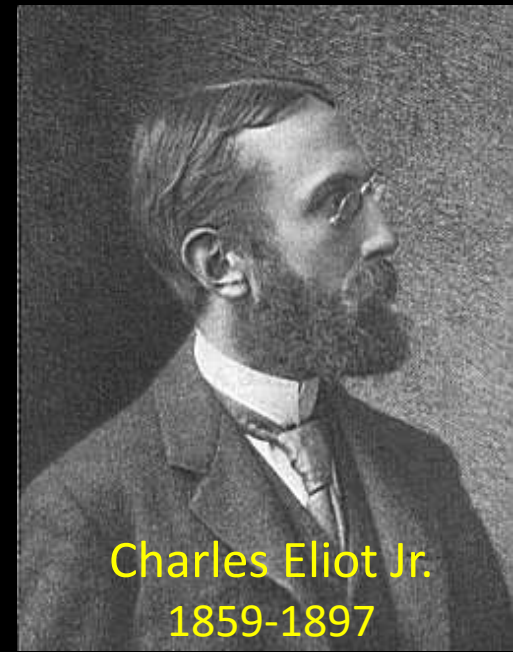


Narrative of Redemptive Urban Nature

“Should the forces which push men into the arms of ignorance, sin, and death, be allowed a free field in our cities or should there be parks and open spaces *to redeem the city* with all that mingling of the natural and the human which we call landscape?”

Metropolitan Park System of Greater Boston

First Regional Park System – First Land Trust



Charles Eliot Jr.
1859-1897



Redeeming the City with Nature continues today...

21st Century Officially Sanctioned Urban Nature “Imported at Any Price”

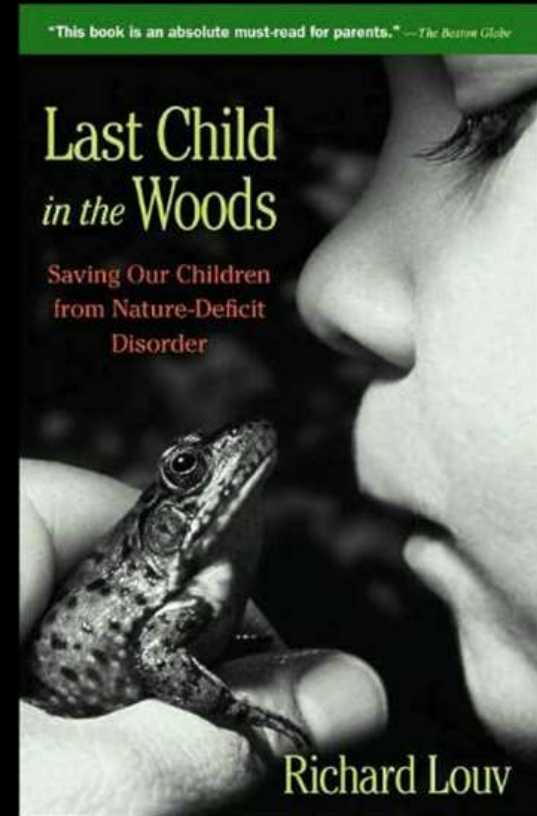
In America, we celebrate urban nature that is either deliberately cultivated pastoral “greenspace” like parks, gardens, and urban farms or formally protected as remnants of the “wild” native landscapes obliterated by the creation of the city in preserves, sanctuaries, refuges, and other “wildlands”.



21st Century Narrative of Redemptive Urban Nature

The Wild Imported - Presuppositions

- **The framework of iterative natures** - wildlands, preserves, parks, and gardens established for imaginative urban landscapes of wild first nature.
- **Degradation and Redemption** - Urban industrial second nature is degradation in need of redemption.
- **Transcendentalist concept of nature** - a tonic for body and spirit which is deliberately incorporated into urban design.
- **Nature Deficit Disorder** - Space for nature is essential - to provide recreation for physical health and for mental health – children must know proper nature to be proper humans (Urban/Technological Disease)



Import it at any price...

Narrative of Restorative Urban Nature

Versions 1 and 2

Urban
Ecological
Design/Planning

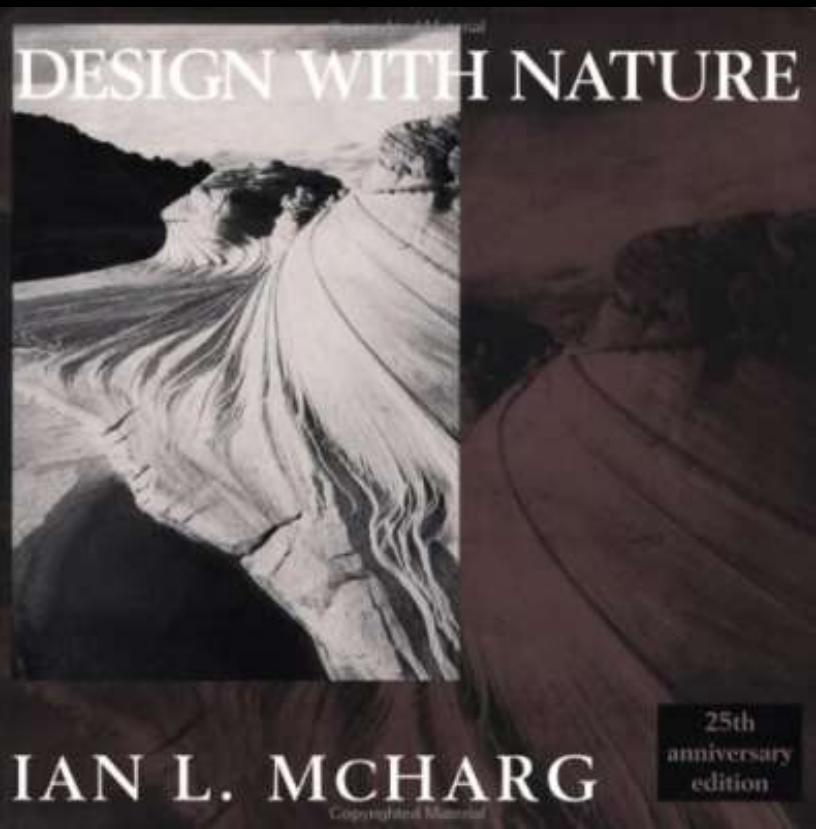


Urban
Restoration
Ecology



Version 1 - Architecture and Urban Design

- Presupposition – Urban nature is degraded nature needing to be restored
- Presupposition – “Ecological design/planning” can make the city “sustainable”
- Presupposition – **Science (Ecology) is the principal authority for proper urban design**



A 'Design with Nature' approach to community design means...



- Develop compact, complete communities
- Increase transportation options
- Reduce the loads on water, waste and energy systems
- Protect and restore urban 'green' space
- Strive for a lighter 'hydrologic footprint'
- Achieve higher levels of stream, wetland and lake protection

Narrative of Restorative Urban Nature

Version 2 – Restoration Ecology and Conservation Biology

- Restoration ecology developed alongside conservation biology with the goal of **not just to conserve remnant historical habitats and species but to actively restore “native” historical habitats.**
- **Urban Restoration Ecology** - Emerged in the 1980s focused on the restoration of “native historical habitats” in urban landscapes.
- Presupposition - ***Good (Urban) Nature = Native Nature***

Restoration
Ecology

THE JOURNAL OF THE
SOCIETY FOR ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION INTERNATIONAL



Blackwell
Publishing

SOCIETY FOR ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

*Foundations
of Restoration Ecology*

SECOND EDITION



Edited by
MARGARET A. PALMER, JOY B. ZEDLER,
AND DONALD A. FALK



The Nature
Conservancy



Protecting nature. Preserving life.®

Retrospective Ecology

Perceptions of American Urban Biologists, Ecologists, and Environmentalists

Ecology “in” cities (not “of” cities) – ***A weedland community of inappropriate nature*** needing restoration back to historical naturalness before the city destroyed nature

“(Urban growth) replaces the native species that are lost with widespread “weedy” nonnative species. This replacement constitutes the process of biotic homogenization that threatens to reduce the biological uniqueness of local ecosystems.”

Michael L. McKinney, “Urbanization, biodiversity, and conservation”. *Bioscience* 52(10), (2002), 883–890.

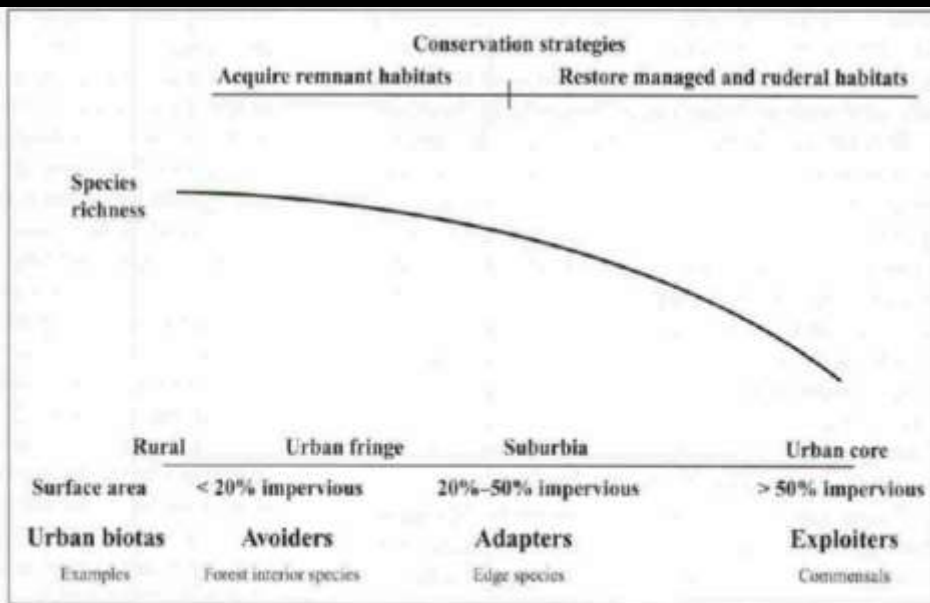
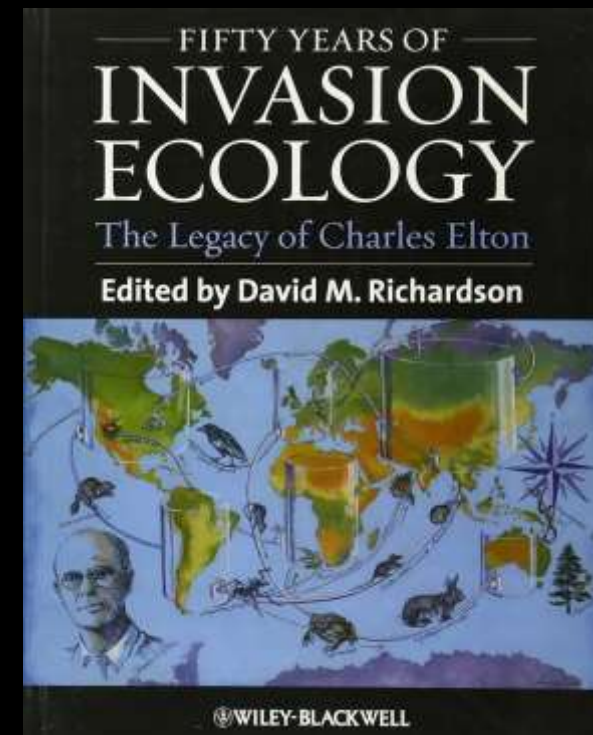


Figure 2. Urban–rural gradient. This is a very generalized and simplified depiction of changes in surface area, species richness, and composition, as compiled from a number of sources discussed in the text. Two basic conservation strategies with respect to urban sprawl are shown at the top.



CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

WELCOME CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

BECOME A CITIZEN SCIENTIST

TOOLKIT

SATELLITES

WORKSHOPS

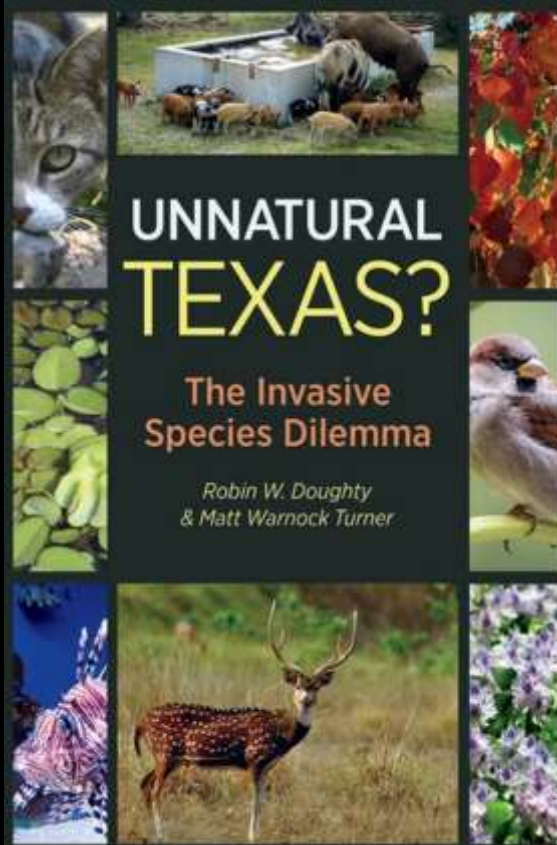
ONLINE TRAINING

LOGIN & REPORT



CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

The Invaders of Texas Program is an innovative campaign whereby volunteer "citizen scientists" are trained to detect the arrival and dispersal of invasive species in their own local areas. That information is delivered into a statewide mapping database and to those who can do something about it. The premise is simple. The more trained eyes watching for invasive species, the better our chances of lessening or avoiding damage to our native landscape.



UNNATURAL TEXAS?

The Invasive Species Dilemma

Robin W. Doughy & Matt Warnock Turner



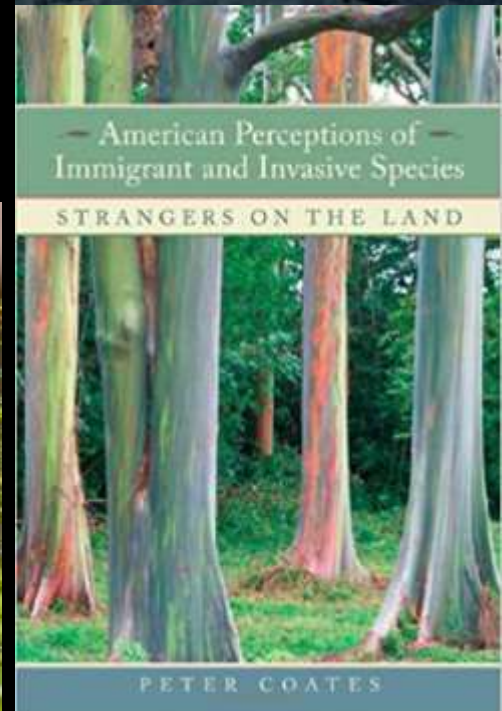
Narrative of War – Invasive Species

The Worst of the Wild - **non-native species** - must be eradicated because they are disruptive aliens. The most controversial of these aliens are called “invasive species”.

- *Trash Animals: How We Live with Nature’s Filthy, Feral, Invasive, and Unwanted Species* (2013)
- *American Perception of Immigrant and Invasive Species: Strangers on the Land*, Peter Coates (2006)

Restorative Urban Nature = Native Species

Trash or Treasure?



Permanence and Change

“The distinctions between native and invasive are not hard and fast, and perceptions of what is invasive have changed over the centuries...

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution for invasives, and removal or complete eradication may not be possible or even desirable.

The dilemma of what to do about invasive species also raises moral, social, economic, and cultural questions.”



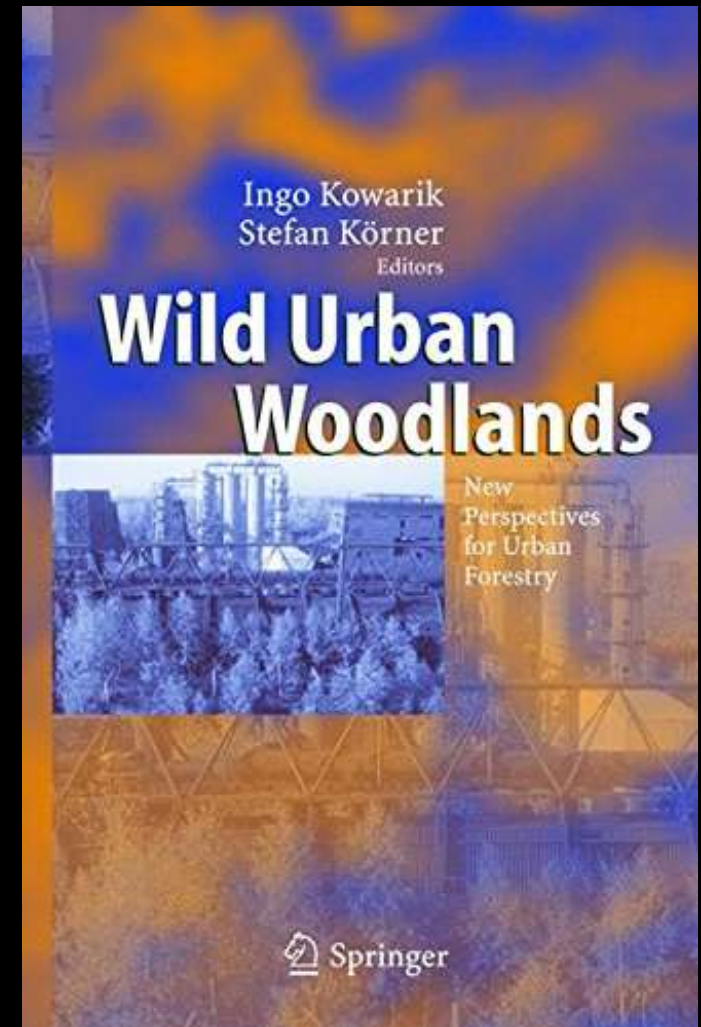
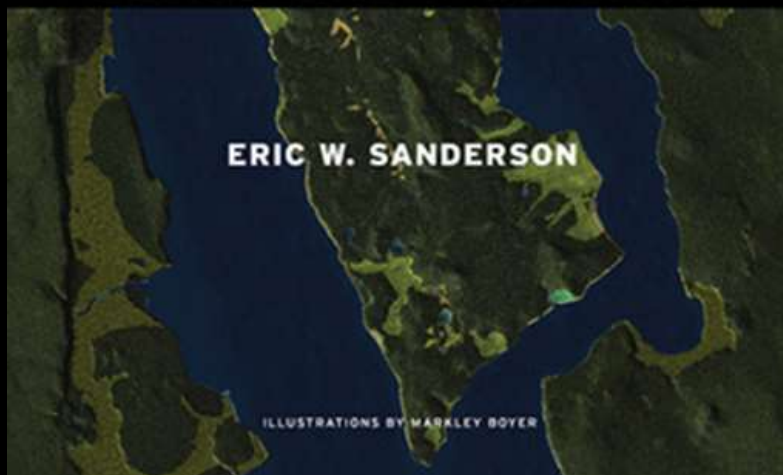
UNNATURAL TEXAS?

The Invasive Species Dilemma

Robin W. Doughty
& Matt Warnock Turner



21st Century Ecology and the City
The Problem of Scientific Knowledge and Urban Nature
Retrospective Ecology vs. Prospective Ecology



Retrospective Ecology, Historical Naturalness

American Urban Ecology

Good Nature vs. Bad Nature Native vs. Nonnative



MANNAHATTA

A NATURAL HISTORY OF NEW YORK CITY



ERIC W. SANDERSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARKLEY ROYER

The Mannahatta Project began in 1999, when landscape ecologist Dr. Eric Sanderson moved to New York City to work for the Wildlife Conservation Society....

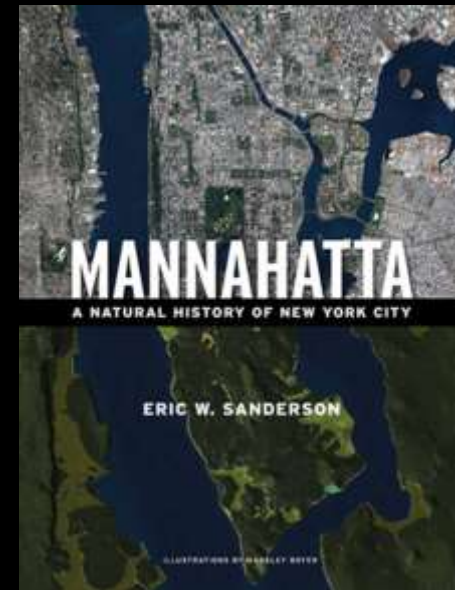
“to fully appreciate the concrete landscape of streets and buildings that was his new home, he would have to ‘go back in time’ to recreate the its ecology from the ‘ground up’...

Going back to 1609 allows us to see what New York City was before it was a city and to reimagine the city’s development in a way that would incorporate more of the natural cycles and processes (such as the hydrological cycle) ***that made the island the ecological gem that it was.***”

Retrospective Ecology vs. Prospective Ecology

Retrospective Naturalness - Native Historical Habitats

- “The point of reference is therefore, **pristine vegetation uninfluenced by humans**. Based on the cultural history of the relevant area, **the reference period may lie decades or a few millennia in the past.**”
- “remnants of pristine woodlands are **most natural.**”
- “the development back to nearly natural or **natural woodlands composed of historical native species can be analyzed well.**”

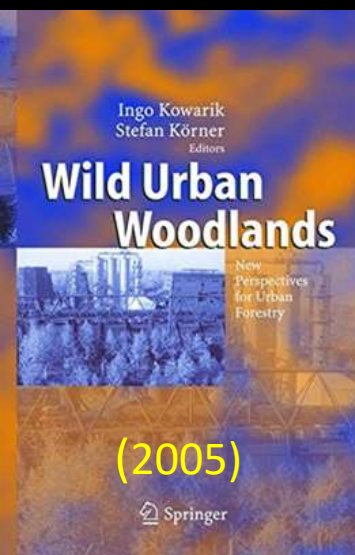


The Problem of Wild Urban Woodlands

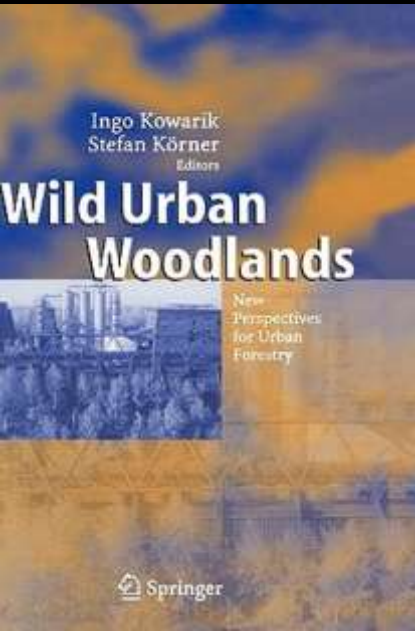
“With the evaluation of **new development of ‘wild’ urban woodlands**, however, the traditional concept of naturalness oriented toward **historical comparisons runs aground.**”

New/Novel Wild Urban Woodlands cannot be “analyzed well”

Prospective naturalness? Permanence and Change



The Problem of Wild Urban Woodlands – Waller Creek 7th Steet Bridge



2024



2005



2009



2012



2017

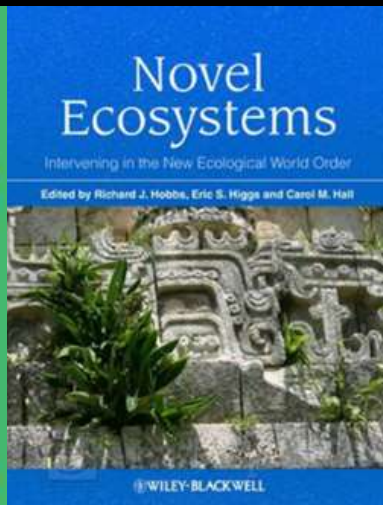
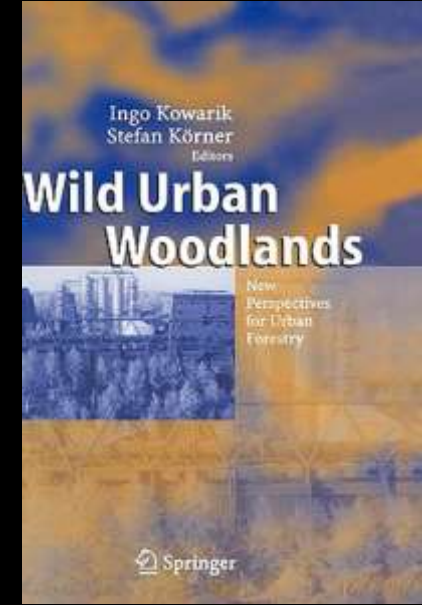
How Does Nature Work?

The New Ecology – Prospective Naturalness

Permanence and Change = Process

“the reference point is not an original condition of a natural landscape, but rather a condition defined based on the current site potential and the greatest possible degree of self-regulation.

From this perspective, therefore, the natural capacity for *process* is the central point, not a particular, retrospectively determined and often idealized, *picture of nature.*” - Kowarik



How Does Nature Work?

The New Ecology - No inherent stability

Robert May, *Stability and Complexity in Model Ecosystems* (1973)

- Mathematical models demonstrate **that the more species there were, the more fragile the ecosystem**
- Chaos theory and complexity, “Confronted with disturbances beyond their normal experience” complex systems like rainforests tended to crumple.

PRINCETON
LANDMARKS
IN BIOLOGY

STABILITY AND
COMPLEXITY IN
MODEL
ECOSYSTEMS

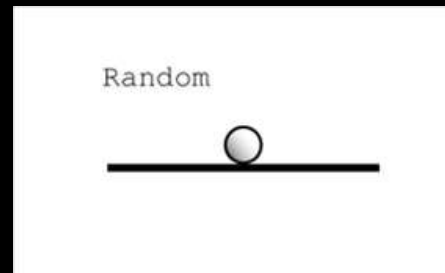


WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

ROBERT M.
MAY

The new ecology emphasizes

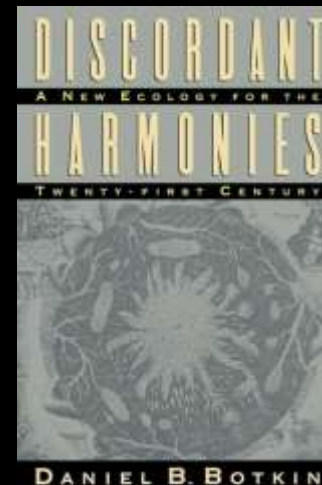
- **Disequilibria**
- **Instability**
- **Chaotic fluctuations**



in ecosystems both “natural” and human impacted

“If 20th-century ecology was marked by an infatuation with balance, then our era is one of **disturbance, disruption, non-equilibrium, chaos, and randomness.**”

— Daniel Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies* (1990)



The Balance of Nature – The End of Stability?

“The existence of a balance of nature has been a dominant part of Western philosophy since before Aristotle.

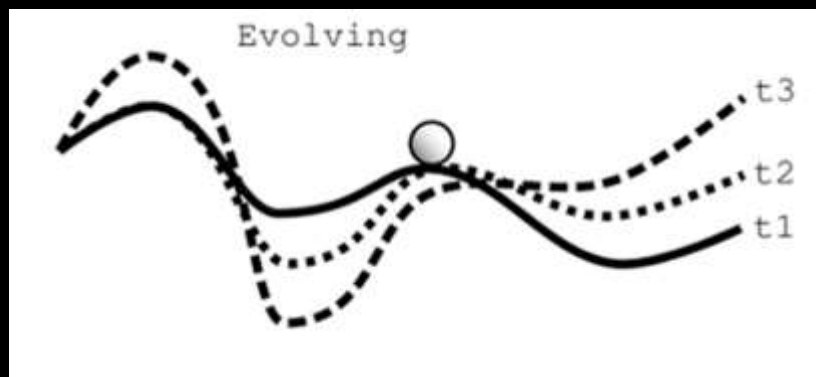
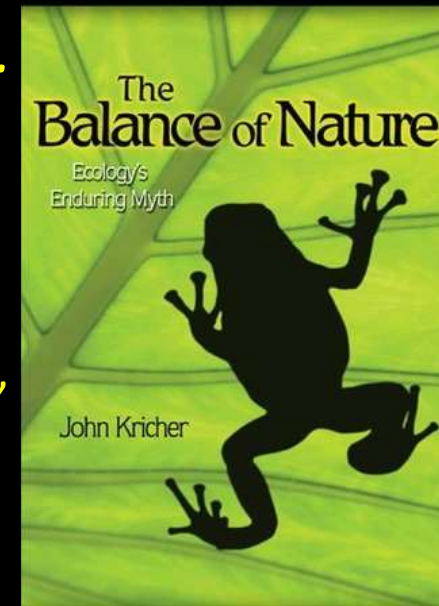
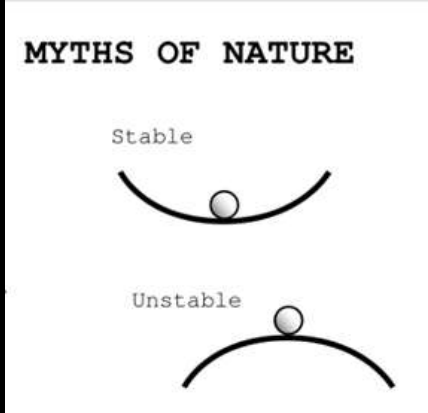
But the science of ecology and evolutionary biology together demonstrate that ***there is no balance of nature—not today and not at anytime in Earth’s long history.***

The paradigm is based on belief, not data; ***it has no scientific merit.***

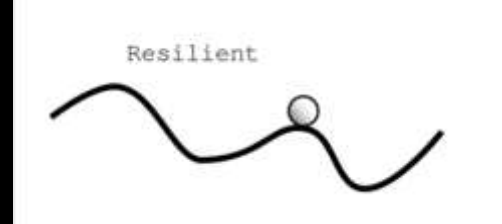
Nature is constantly in flux varying in scales of space and time, and most of that flux is due entirely to natural causes. At this time of extraordinary human influence on Earth’s ecosystems and biota, I argue that it is essential for humanity to understand how evolution occurs and why ecology is ***far more dynamic than static.***”

The Balance of Nature: Ecology’s Enduring Myth (2009)

John Kricher



"Resilience and stability of ecological systems" 1973

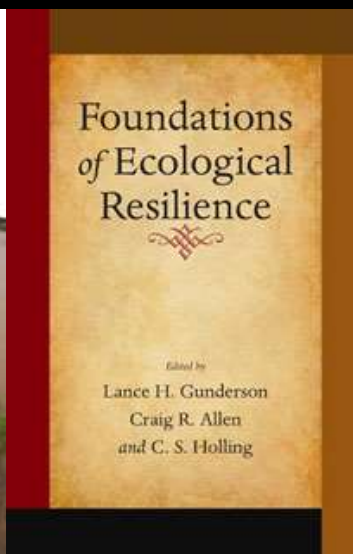
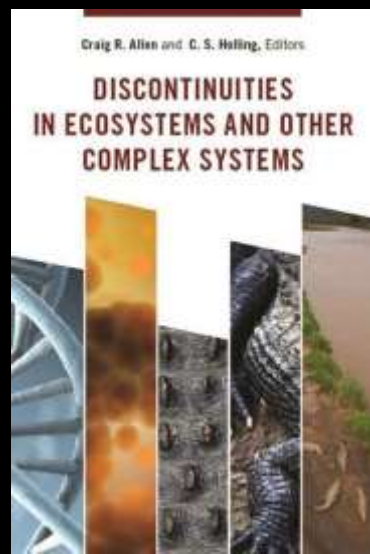


Balance and Disequilibrium - Permanence and Change

- **The concept of resilience** in ecological systems was first introduced by the Canadian ecologist C.S. Holling in order *to describe the persistence of natural systems in the face of changes in ecosystem variables due to natural or anthropogenic causes.*
- **Resilience**, derived from its Latin roots 'to jump or leap back', is the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.
- Ecosystem resilience is **the capacity of an ecosystem to tolerate disturbance.**

Holling, C.S. (1973). "Resilience and stability of ecological systems"

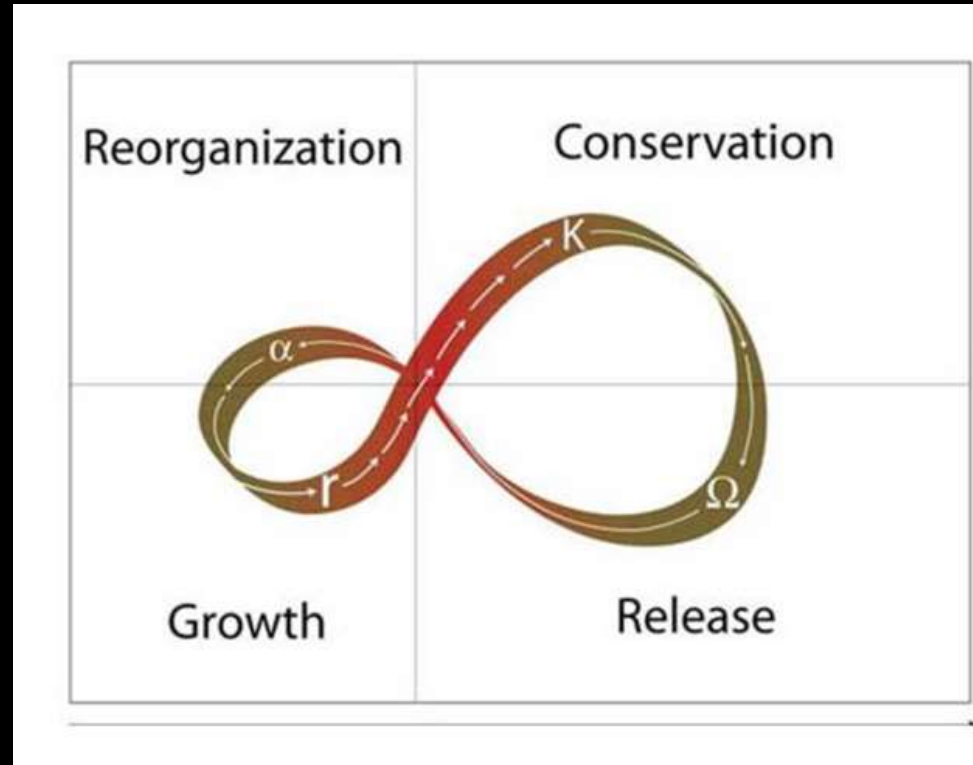
C.S. Holling 1930-2019



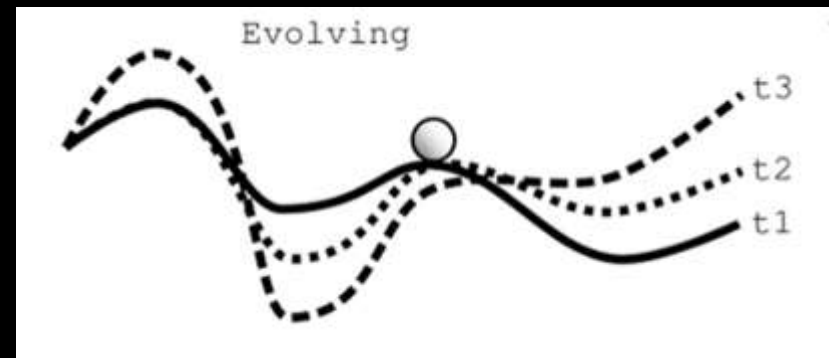
How Does Nature Work?

The Adaptive Cycle

- **Growth** - species and systems grow and diversify to exploit new opportunities and develop entirely new ecological ways of being.
- **Conservation** - species are tightly connected and organized, and systems “stabilize” into often hierarchically nested systems, where there is little or no room for innovation or growth.
- **Release** – where “mature” systems destabilize and collapse and become increasingly discontinuous and chaotic
- **Reorganization** – systems return in new ways, which creates a new field of conditions and possibilities for the next growth phase



- **Incremental change** in the r and K phases, which are smooth and fairly predictable
- **Abrupt change** in the transitions from K through Ω and α



How does Nature work?

Biotic Change - Integrity and Instability

New Nature - Novel Ecosystems

- Assemblages of species in a given area that have not previously occurred.
- They lack historically natural analogs
- Novel ecosystems are not really all that novel, except in their species composition.

The interplay between change and persistence

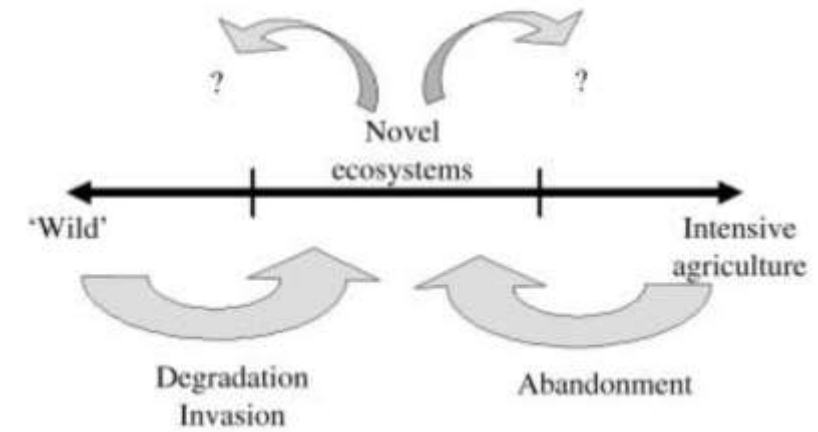
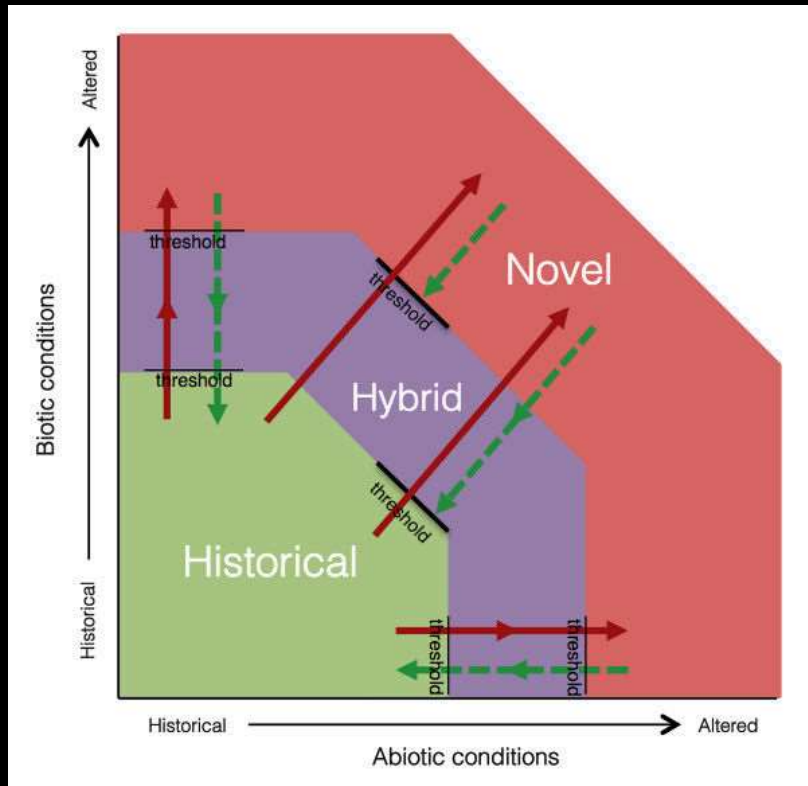
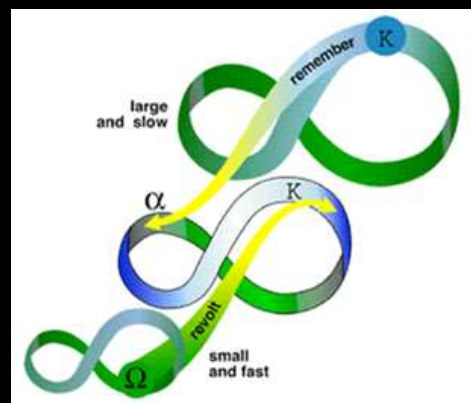
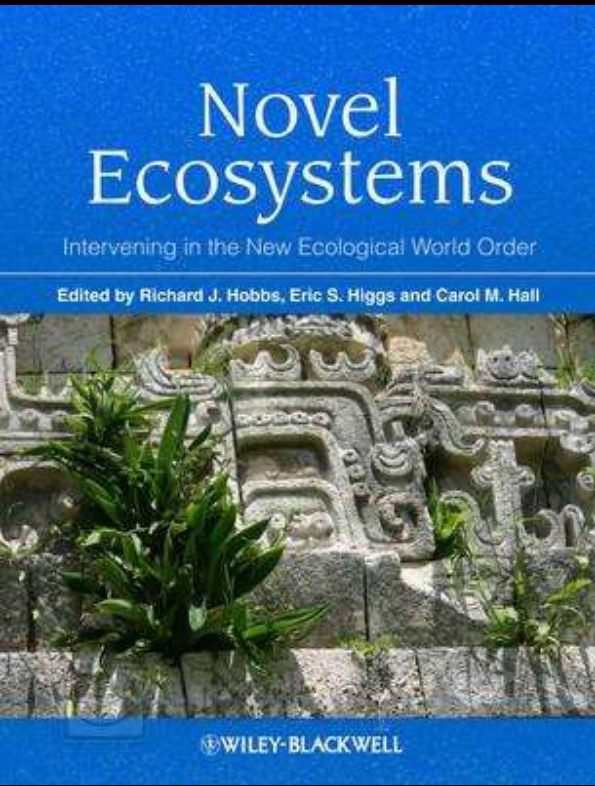


Figure 1 Novel ecosystems arise either from the degradation and invasion of 'wild' or natural/seminatural systems or from the abandonment of intensively managed systems.



A New Narrative of Nature with Humans

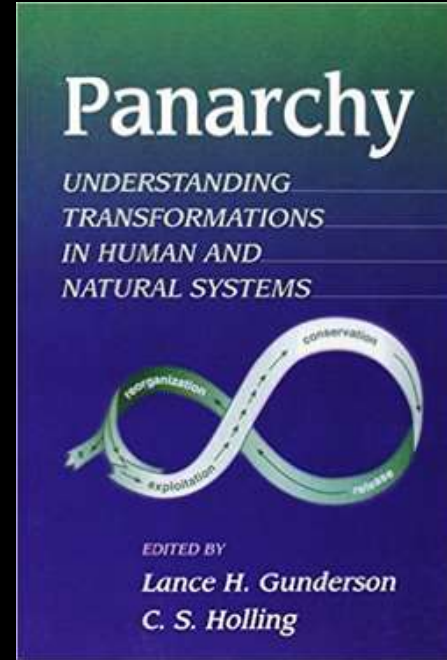
Human and Natural systems - Socioecological systems

Transformation - A Narrative of Resilience and Disruptive Change

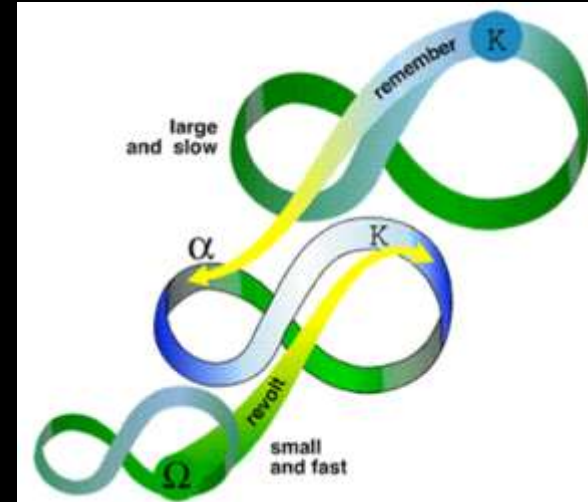
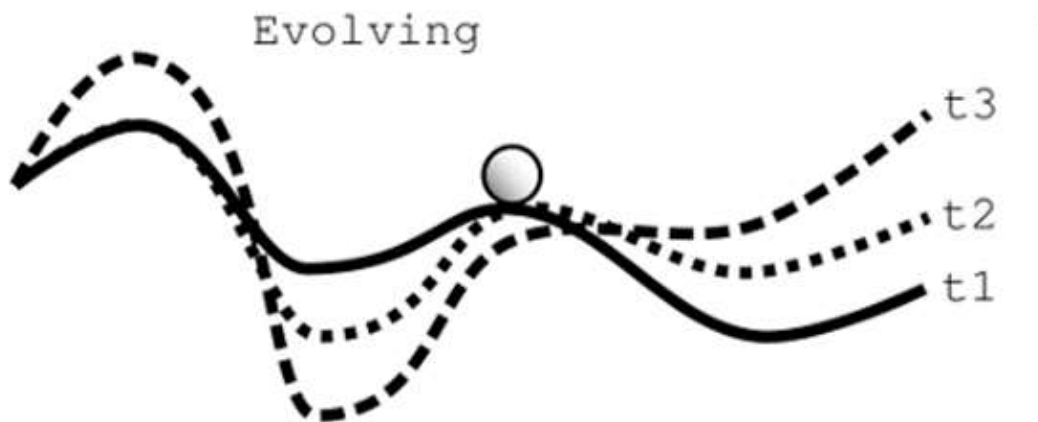
'Panarchy' is a term that

“explains the evolving nature of complex adaptive systems”

- **Panarchy is a new narrative or myth of evolving nature**
- **Pan** - the Greek god of nature and disruptive change.
- **Change is not always for the good**
- Pan has a destabilizing role – **panic, chaos, disequilibrium**



The essential focus of Panarchy is to explain the interplay between change and persistence, between the predictable and unpredictable.

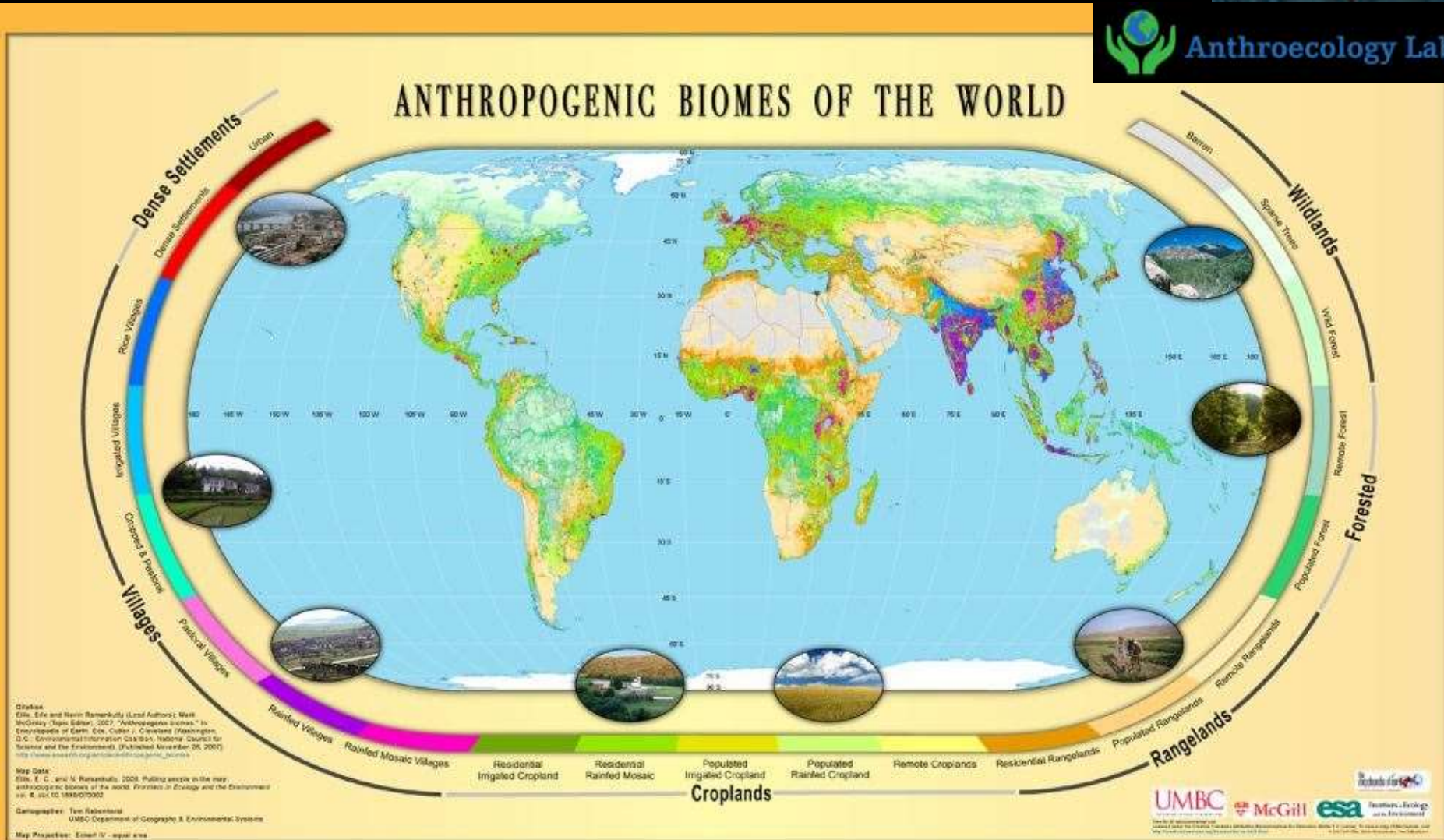


The Socioecological Earth – A Coproduction

Erle Ellis, University of Maryland

Anthropogenic Biomes ("Anthromes")

“Global ecological patterns shaped by humans”

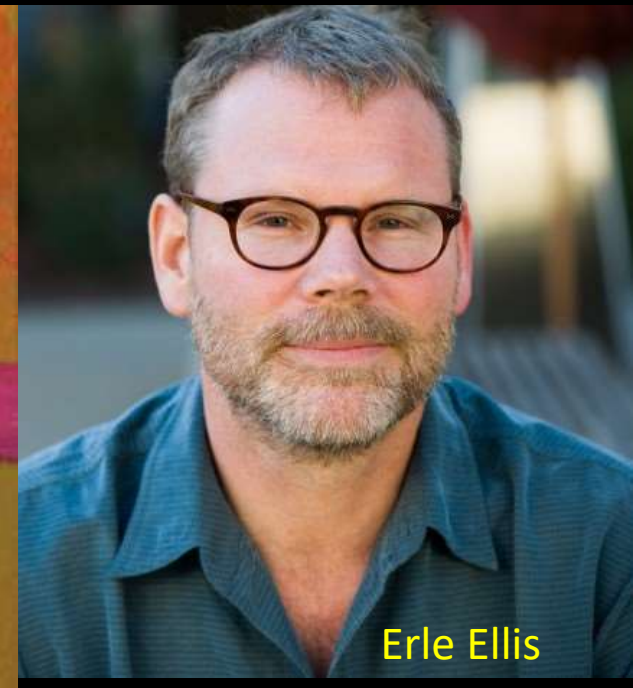
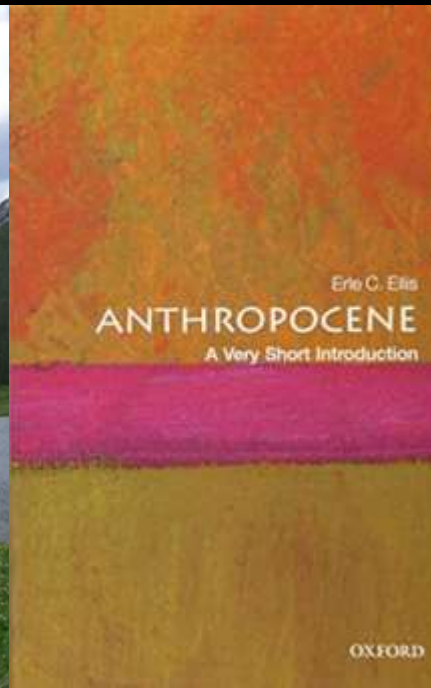


Anthropogenic Biomes – A New Story (Myth) of Nature

“Anthropogenic biomes point to a necessary turnaround in ecological science and education, *especially for North Americans*.”

Beginning with the first mention of ecology in school, the biosphere has long been depicted as being composed of natural biomes, perpetuating an outdated view of the world as ‘natural ecosystems with humans disturbing them’.

Anthropogenic biomes tell a completely different story, one of ‘human systems, with natural ecosystems embedded within them’. This is no minor change in the story we tell our children and each other. Yet it is necessary for sustainable management of the biosphere in the 21st century.”



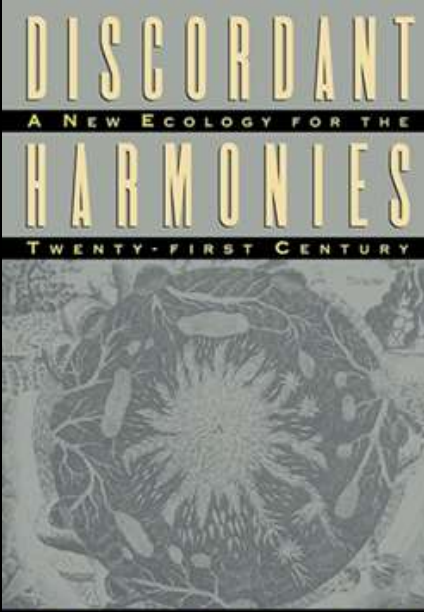
Erle Ellis

New Metaphors of Permanence and Change

“Clearly, to abandon a belief in the constancy of undisturbed nature is psychologically uncomfortable...

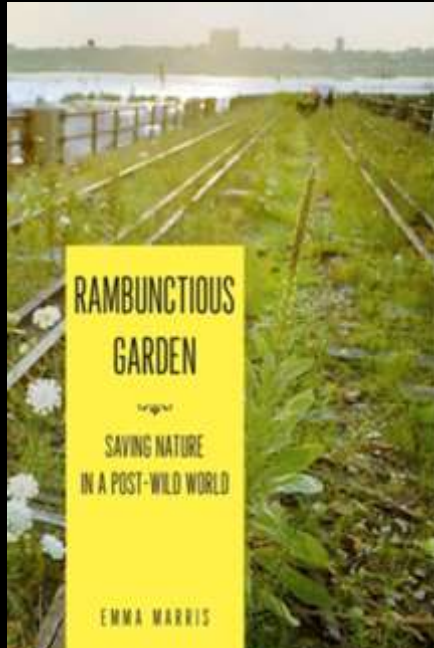
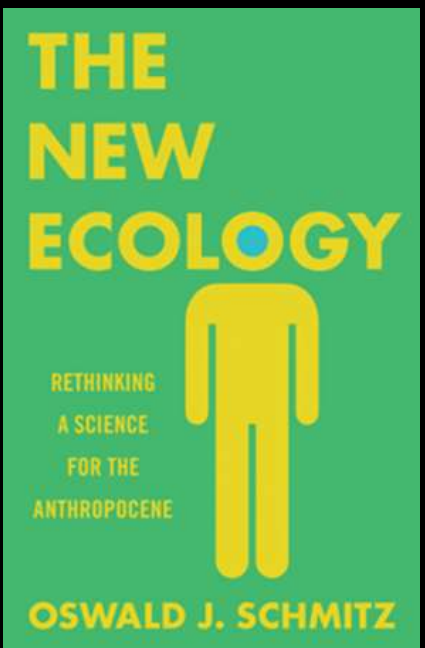
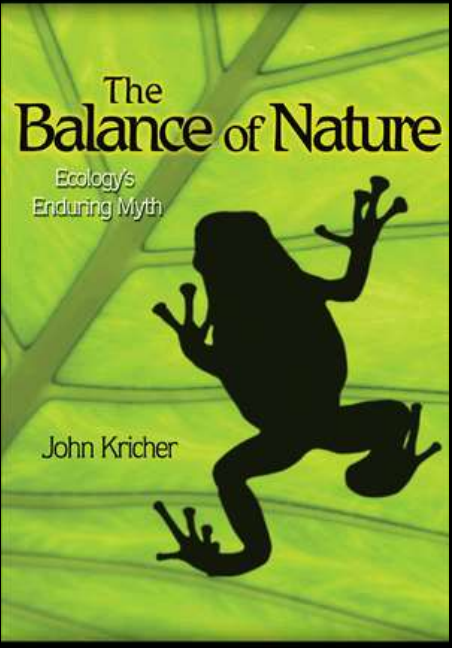
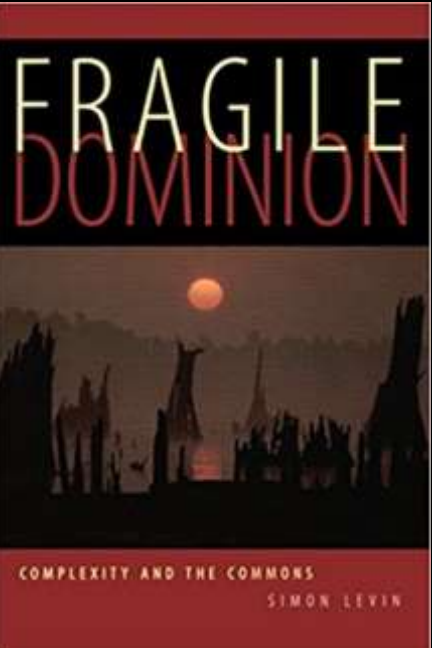
The way to achieve a harmony with nature is first **to break free of old metaphors and embrace new ones** so that we can lift the veils that prevent us from accepting what we observe, and then to make use of technology to study life and life-support systems as they are.”

Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies*



DANIEL B. BOTKIN

1990



Natural What?



Urban Nature – The Nonhuman Perspective





The Urban Wilderness - The Socioecological City
A coproduction of humans and nonhumans

The Narrative of Marginal Nature – The Urban Wilderness

“Maybe it’s not really nature at all, not a real ecosystem, just a bunch of weeds and exotics mixed up with human junk.”

What emerges in these urban wastelands is a hybrid type of nature both weedy and wild - the unintended product of human activity and Nature's unflinching opportunism, which I call **Marginal Nature**

Marginal Nature: Urban Wastelands and the Geography of Nature

Anderson 2009 UT Geography



Urban Wildness and the Agency of Nature

- Agents - Nonhumans are active subjects using the urban landscape rather than passive objects for human appreciation and use.
- Agency - Non-humans do unexpected things and defy our expectations of how non-humans should behave and where they should live (their proper place)...



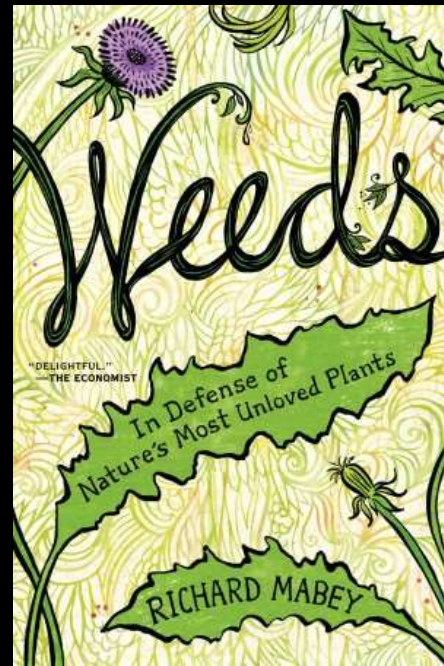
Agency of Nature – Wild Urban Flora

...and where they should thrive.

Beautiful flower in your garden
But the most beautiful by far
Is the one growing wild in the garbage dump
Even here, even here, we are

Song by Paul Westerberg, “Even Here We Are” (14 Songs, 1993)

“I like it when a flower or a little tuft of grass grows through a crack in the concrete.
It's so ... heroic.” - George Carlin



The Narrative of Good Urban Wildlife

Urban wildlife is judged **favorably** when it behaves as it should - ***fulfilling our expectations of wild nature but not threatening humans.***

And so, nesting red-tailed hawks and peregrine falcons are redemptive wild additions to the city.



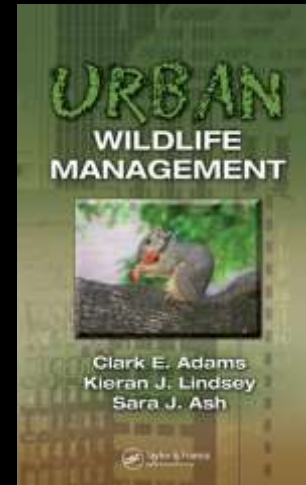
Welcome to the Live Falcon Cam! The University of Texas Tower is home to a female Peregrine Falcon, nicknamed "Tower Girl."



Urban Fauna - The Narrative of Bad Urban Wildlife

However, urban fauna is **condemned as pestilent** when it fails to follow the narrative for good fauna in the city or ***stay in the proper places for nature in the city.***

This narrative of urban wildlife declares that transgressive coyotes, rats, grackles, and pigeons are ***urban pests that further degrade the city...***



What does the City mean to Pale Male?

Pale Male the famous red-tailed hawk
Performs wing stands high above midtown Manhattan
Circles around for one last pass over the park
Got his eye on a fat squirrel down there and a couple of pigeons
They got no place to run they got no place to hide
But Pale Male he's cool, see 'cause his breakfast ain't goin' nowhere
So he does a loop the loop for the tourists and the six o'clock news
Got him a penthouse view from the tip-top of the food chain, boys
He looks up and down on Fifth Avenue and says "God I love this town"



"Down Here Below" Steve Earle
Washington Square Serenade
2007



Proper Place for Urban Wildlife? **All of the City is Habitat**

The mobility of urban wildlife allows them to exploit the entire city as habitat and ignore human boundaries for proper urban nature.



The Urban Wilderness - Nature Out of Place

Space and Place - Dr. Anderson's Geography Research

Nature flourishes through its own agency in neglected urban spaces and margins like overgrown urban creeks, vacant lots, garbage dumps, sewage ponds, unmaintained roadway and railway verges, derelict industrial tracts, abandoned buildings, crumbling walls, and other *urban waste spaces*.



The Geography of Urban Wastelands

Wastelands - whole patches

- Vacant lots
- Dumpsites
- Industrial Wasteland
 - Brownfields
 - Greenfields
 - Quarries and Gravel Pits
- Urban Infrastructure Land
 - Power plants
 - Water treatment plants
 - Reservoirs
 - Wastewater treatment plants
 - Sewage ponds
 - Constructed wetlands
 - Stormwater retention structures
- Unusable Land - bits and pieces
 - Slopes, gullies, corners, fragments

Margins – edges and ledges

- Urban waterways
- Canals, drainage channels
- Utility corridors
- Waysides
 - road waysides
 - railway verges
- Alleys – paved, unpaved, grass
- Walkways and pathways
- Fencelines
- Walls and ledges
- Pillars and bridge abutments

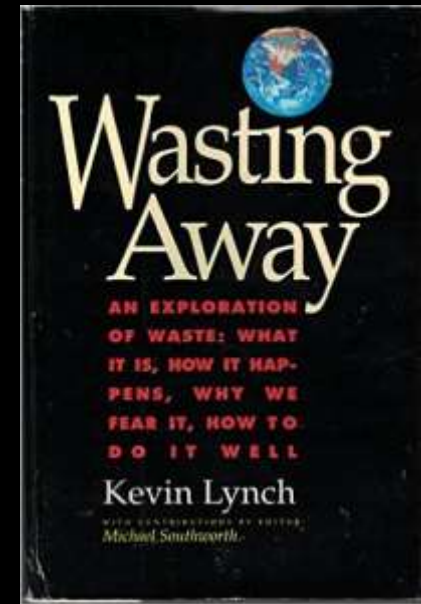


Urban Wastelands and the Proper Place of Humans?

Ruinous Attractions

“Many waste places have these **ruinous attractions**: release from control, free play for action and fantasy, rich and varied sensations. Thus children are attracted to vacant lots, scrub woods, back alleys, and unused hillsides...

Those screened, marginal, uncontrolled places where people can indulge in behavior that is proscribed and yet not harmful to others – are **regularly threatened by clean-ups** and yet are a **necessity for supple society.**” Kevin Lynch



The Paradox of Meddling

“Cleaning and Greening”
“Vacant” land for proper
urban nature

The High Line – New York



Putting Vacant Lots into Perspective



The City of Pittsburgh has no easy way of categorizing its vacant land. In fact, there is no one unifying definition used throughout the city. In some databases, vacant land means any land without a structure. Other databases classify it as any structure or parcel with no residents. There is no database that easily defines vacant land (no structure) that is un-maintained and not part of a right of way or park. Most of this variety of vacant land, (estimated between 6,000 and 12,000 lots), is symptomatic of communities with high levels of disinvestment, absentee landlords, and underserved low income residents. Vacant land can also be a cause, however, of many negative characteristics associated with urban blight. Thus, un-maintained spaces in the midst of urban communities create a vicious circle that many communities do not have resources to address.

Negative Influences, Positive Opportunities

A growing body of statistical research revolving around vacant lot issues in urban areas point toward direct, empirical correlations between vacancy and a variety of negative economic, environmental, and social influences. Thankfully, there is a flip side - equally strong evidence that reversing vacancy leads to stronger, healthier neighborhoods.

Negative Influences of Vacant Lots

The impact of vacant lots reaches beyond visual blight and decay, negatively affecting communities across economic, environmental, and social bounds.

Economic Influences

A study of vacant lots in Philadelphia estimated that the city and closely related public agencies spent \$1.8 million annually on cleaning vacant lots.

Neighborhood blocks with higher concentration of unmanaged vacant lots decreased property values by close to 18% (Wachter, The Wharton School)

Environmental Influences

Vacant Lots are targets for litter, illegal dumping, and criminal activity.

Security Influences

The City of Richmond, Virginia found that of all the economic and demographic variables tested, vacant properties had the highest correlation to the incidence of crime. (The National Vacant Properties Campaign)

Positive Influences through Greening Strategies

Strategies that address vacant land through green means are proven to have positive effects on communities in economically feasible ways.

Economic Influences

Cleaning and greening of vacant lots can increase adjacent property values by as much as 30% (Wachter, The Wharton School)

Planting a tree within 50 feet of a house can increase its value by about 9% (Wachter, The Wharton School)

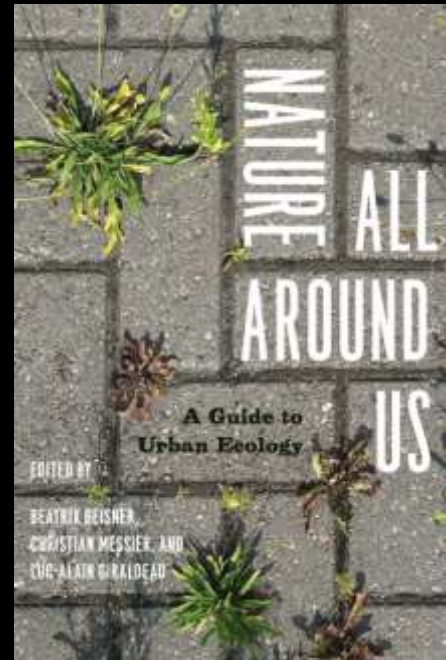
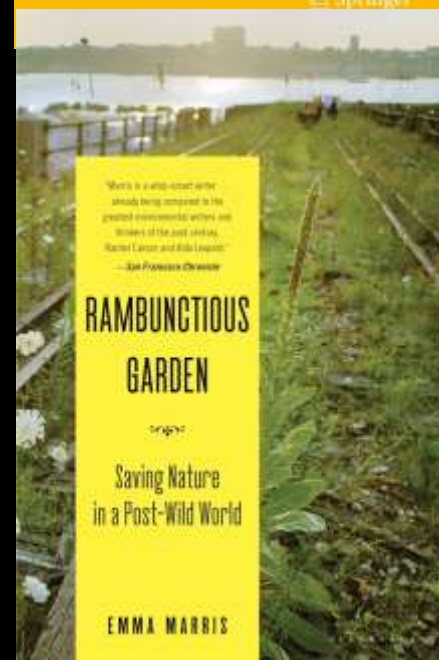
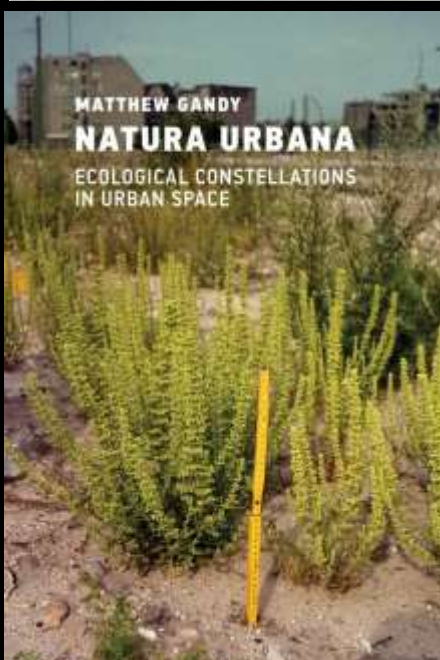
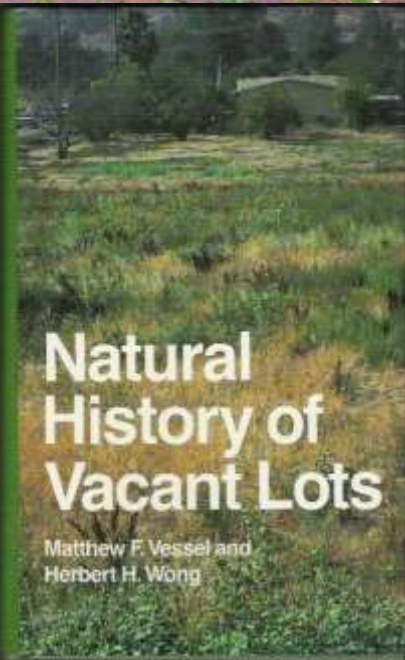
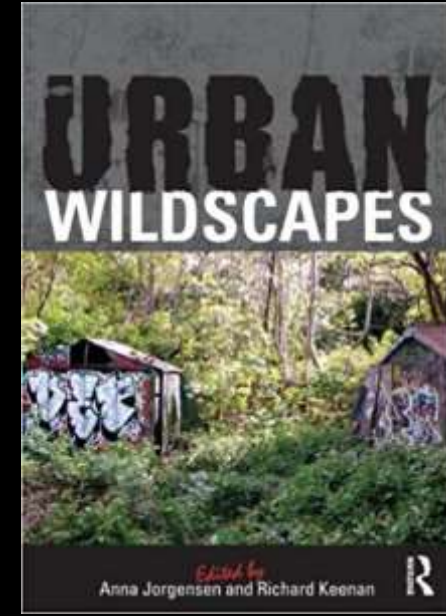
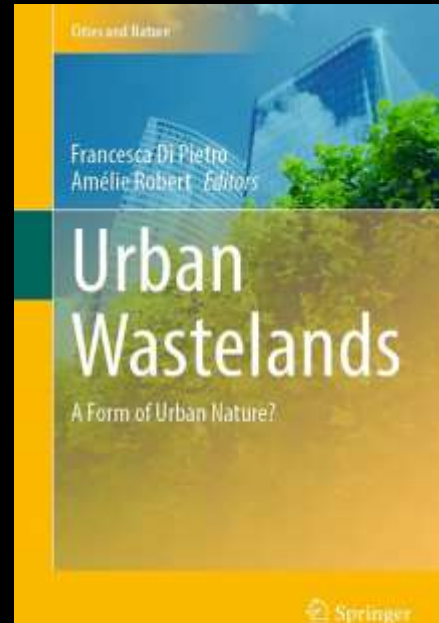
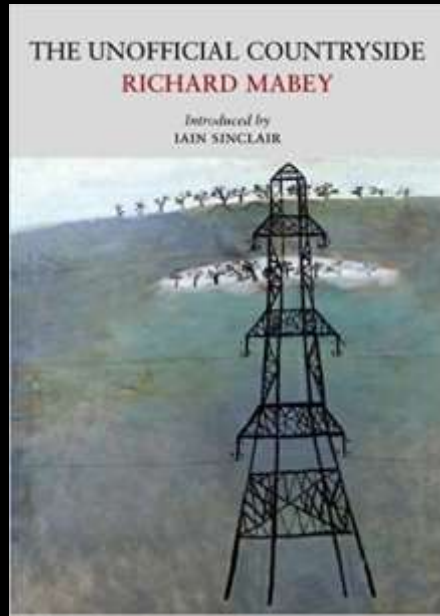
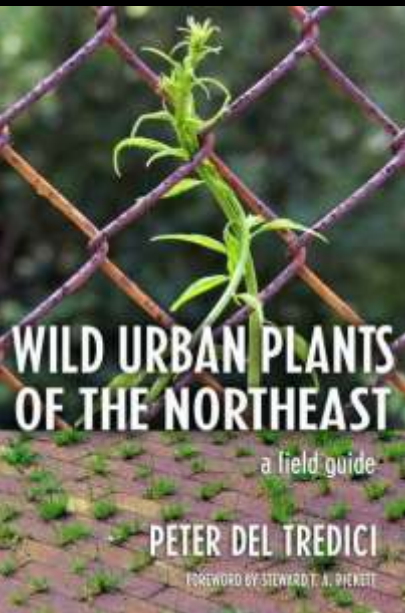
Location of a house within ¼ mile from a park increased property values by 10% (Wachter, The Wharton School)

Vacant properties located near newly constructed parks were the first to sell during a revitalization project in North Philadelphia. (Philadelphia Green - Urban Impact)

Health & Recreation Influences

When people have access to parks, they exercise more. Access to places for physical activity leads to a 25.6% increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days a week (Trust for Public Land)

Marginal nature in the urban landscape is neither pristine nor pastoral, but rather it is a new kind of nature whose ecological and cultural meaning is an open question.



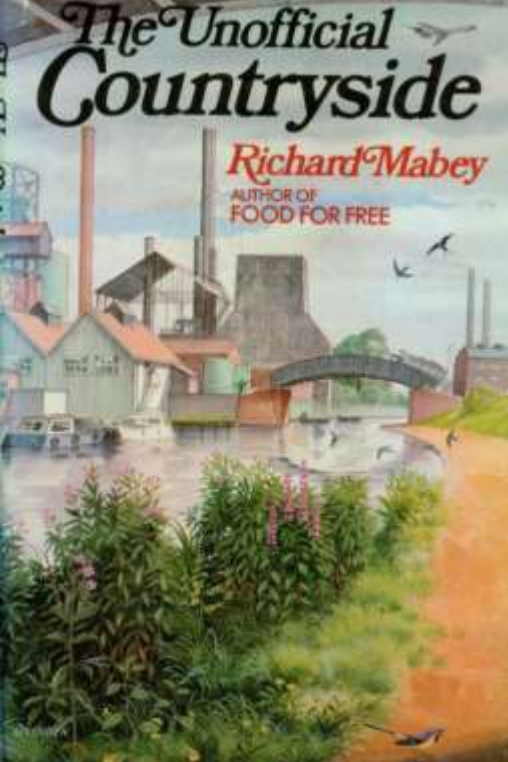


Hornsby Bend - A coproduction of humans and nonhumans



© Sonja Sommerfeld / TPWD





Answering the Question of Marginal Nature New Metaphors - Urban Nature Writing

The Unofficial Countryside Richard Mabey (1973)

“I have called it ***the unofficial countryside*** because none of these places is in the countryside proper, nor were they ever intended to provide bed and board for wildlife.

They are all habitats which have grown out of human need. This is a scrappy definition, I know, covering everything from a planned suburban playground to the accidentally green corner of a city-centre parking lot.

Yet I think all these places do have one quality in common, and that is that, in them, the labels ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ by which we normally find our bearings in a landscape, just do not apply. It is not the parks but the railway sidings that are thick with wild flowers.”



Answering the Question of Marginal Nature American Urban/Suburban Nature Writing

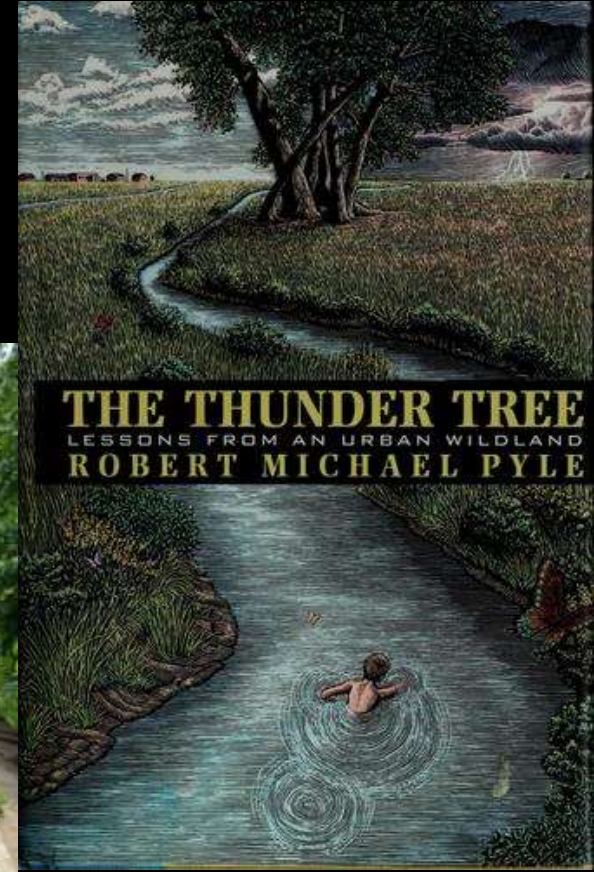
“What do shreds and scraps of the natural scene mean, after all, in the shadow of the
cified whole?”

What can one patch of leftover land mean to one person’s life, or to the lives of all
who dwell in the postindustrial wasteland?”

Robert Michael Pyle, *The Thunder Tree: Lessons from an Urban Wildland* (1993)



“Accidental Wilds”



Urban Wasteland Poetry – “*Haphazard Wilderness*”

“This is the landscape that nobody wants. It’s my cup of rejection: Driven to this unformed scraggly ignored backlot, this not-quite Prairie, not-quite thicket, not even natural corner of Texas, the hardscrabble left butt of a demoralized nation, It is my choice and my pleasure to cherish **this haphazard wilderness.**”

No, it’s not even “wild” – it’s a **neglected product of artifice.** Come, let us walk by an improvised lakeshore, be given a vision: Beaches of black dust, beautiful white ghosts, this drowned forest...”

- Frederick Turner, first stanza “Texas Eclogue” in *Hadean Eclogues* (1999)

Hadean Eclogues



Poems by Frederick Turner

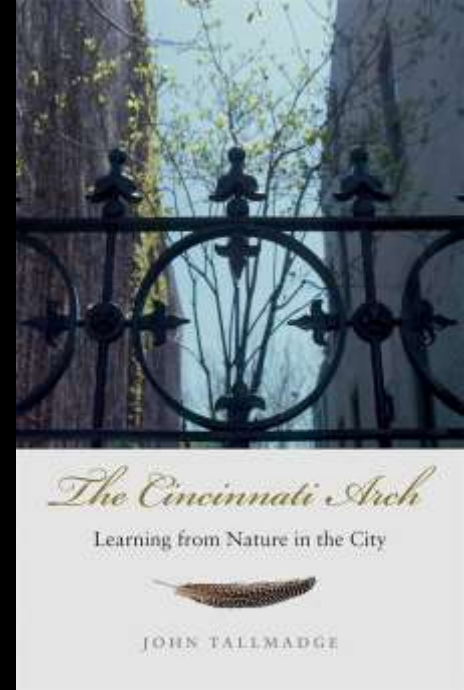


The Conceptual Framework and Urban Nature

Urban Nature is Sublime

“Urban nature is not sublime...The fact is that urban landscapes are just too mixed up, chaotic, and confused to fit our established notions of beauty and value in nature.

Maybe it’s not really nature at all, not a real ecosystem, just a bunch of weeds and exotics mixed up with human junk.”





The Urban Wilderness - The Socioecological City
A coproduction of humans and nonhumans