

Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of **Undercurrents**. This journal is the initiative of a group of graduate students at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. Our motivation to publish a journal comes from a realization of the need for a forum to present critical and innovative graduate student work in the area of environmental studies. This, however, is an area of great diversity and a glance at the table of contents may leave some readers re-examining their assumptions about their notion of "environment." Indeed, it is the philosophy of **Undercurrents** to pursue the widest possible understanding of environment.

Working within the interdisciplinary setting of the Faculty, we found that we share the belief that one-dimensional or single discipline approaches to our complex contemporary social and environmental problems are inadequate. What is needed, we feel, are approaches that are informed by the different disciplines but not limited by them. We want to present scholarly, but also creative and accessible works that challenge conventional thinking in the area of our annual theme.

For this first issue we have chosen to explore the theme, "**Human Interaction with the Natural Environment**." The thread that winds its way through each of the papers is that at the heart of our "environmental crisis" is a flawed, but pervasive view of nature. Certainly, many views of "nature" can be found within society, but overall patterns reflect a human-centered and narrow utilitarian perspective. If we hope to change the destructive trends in society, we have to start rethinking our relationship to nature by redefining what we mean when we say "nature" and perhaps, also, by redefining what it means to be "human." We believe healthy and dignified human relationships are inextricably linked to healthy and caring human/non-human relationships.

This issue begins with a paper by Jacqueline Pearce, in which she provides an overview of the various streams of thought within environmentalism and eco-feminism, and in turn, explores some of their common ground. The second paper by Gary Genosko offers a provocative re-reading of Rachel Carson's classic **Silent Spring**. His imagery gives new meaning to the concepts of "the war against nature" and "military zone," where women get caught in the crossfire and children are conscripted into the battle. In a different light, Leesa Fawcett's analysis of anthropomorphism is a hopeful re-evaluation of this once taboo form of metaphor. She suggests that anthropomorphism can be a positive characteristic of a caring relationship with non-human nature. Lori Scheffel's paper on traditional literary expressions of the human relationship to other animals asks us to re-consider the potential for stories as a means for fostering healthier attitudes to non-human beings. Following this paper is Adrian Ivakhiv's modern-day fable about the disrespect for life that seems to characterize Industrial civilization. Mike Carr's paper is an exploration of paganistic and pantheistic themes in Antoine de Saint Exupery's **The Little Prince**, and Timothy Findley's **Not Wanted on the Voyage**. Finally, John R. Livingston's paper on the **World Conservation Strategy** attempts to locate this influential document within a long tradition of utopian thought, and considers the ironic possibility that it is no more than a blueprint for the dystopian domestication of the planet.

At each stage of the Journal's development the Editorial Board has received a great deal of support from students, staff and faculty. What follows, then, must be considered a joint effort by those who are acknowledged as well as others who provided assistance, encouragement and helpful suggestions along the way. We are especially grateful to Steve Lloyd and Jean-Marc Daigle for their participation in the group. Credit must also go to Mark Jowett, Julia Murphy, and Anne Pyke who were instrumental in helping to plan the Journal when it was still an idea. We are also very thankful to Dean Edward Spence, Professor Gerry Carrothers, and to Frances Chan.

The presentation of critical environmental studies is, we think, one way of making academic research more relevant to our urgent social and ecological problems. With this Journal, then, we enter into and hope to encourage a thoughtful dialogue on these diverse issues. We wish to challenge mainstream thinking with these undercurrents of thought. We hope you enjoy the contributions to the dialogue in this issue.

The Editors

