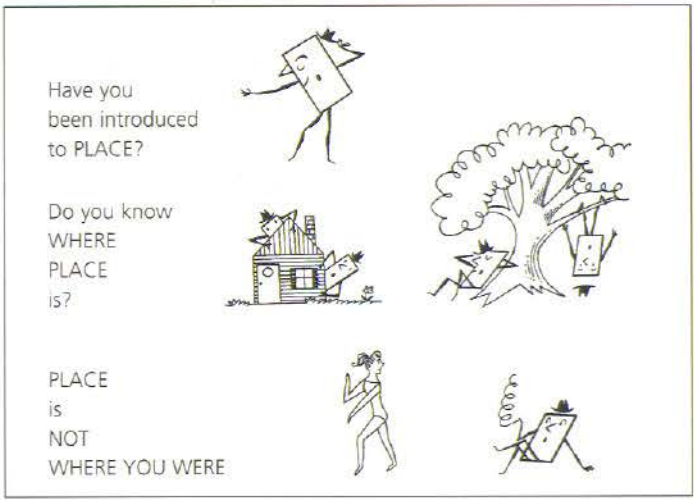


Editorial

Perhaps it might be best to begin here, with the particularities of the space in which *UnderCurrents* is produced. In its rather desultory isolation from the intensities of the city of Toronto, and its somewhat ironic "distance" from the mythos of the wild, *UnderCurrents* is both figuratively and literally situated at a juncture between the realms of culture and nature. For readers familiar with this journal, part of what we have attempted to negotiate over the years has been some of the conceptual boundaries which work to bracket and divide these intimately inseparable realms. In essence, *UnderCurrents* has sought to define something of a liminal, in-between space from which to consider various problematics of nature and the "natural". This project exists in what is strictly speaking, the 'suburban.' York University happens at edges of both Canada's largest metropolis and the nation's most densely populated and highly 'cultivated' cottage and farm country. Beside the woodlot stands the mall, and within this nexus, we sit in a three-story, neatly partitioned, sealed glass building which houses the Faculty of Environmental Studies. Needless to say, this site is full of contradictions. And yet there is, most definitely, a here here. Like any place, it has its pleasures, conditions of power, regulatory structures and regimes, deprivations, excesses and economies. As such, and in consideration of its multitude of contradictions, we find this to be an apropos site from which to instantiate some discussions about an equally contradictory figure we initially termed, and perhaps now, after putting this journal together, can only provisionally call, "natural space".

By looking to present some of the issues at stake when the question of "natural space" is at stake, our intention here is not to offer neat resolutions of the contradictions or conflicts this question might involve. Rather, one critical point of this issue of *UnderCurrents* is to suggest that space has a history, defines a history, and marks a way of being in history. Considered in this manner, the ostensible figure of "natural space" stands as an important subject of concern for various social critics, including environmentalists. For one, by coupling together two terms – the spatial and the natural – we can get a sense of how "nature" has been historically circumscribed, produced and designated spatially, whether it be in parks, cities, conservation areas, the global commons, heavy industries, scientific laboratories or in various human and nonhuman bodies. Perhaps more significantly, because such circumscriptions are constituted through often deeply contested political and ideological frameworks, and thus very much acts and effects of power, they differentially define meanings and experiences of "nature" (and "culture") for various populations across the globe. Definitions of "natural space" in every way work within and are constitutive of prescribed economic, discursive and geopolitical contexts. Immanent to the social, they are a condition of its very ontology.

Part of this ontology of space concerns the very contingencies of what we in the West call the natural. Whether taken in terms of the "accidents" of geography, the availability of "resources", or the "limits" of the body, the very natures that spatialization processes circumscribe make crucial demands upon the organization of space and definitions of its history. Not that these natures "fight back" by way of a militaristic mathematics of neo-Malthusianism. They are more significantly locations where nature is not simply acted upon but is itself an actor. Considered in terms of its variegated historicity (which at once includes the biological, political and technical), "natural space" presents a complex, polysemic and deeply conflicted figure whose exigencies call for multiple kinds of critical engagement.

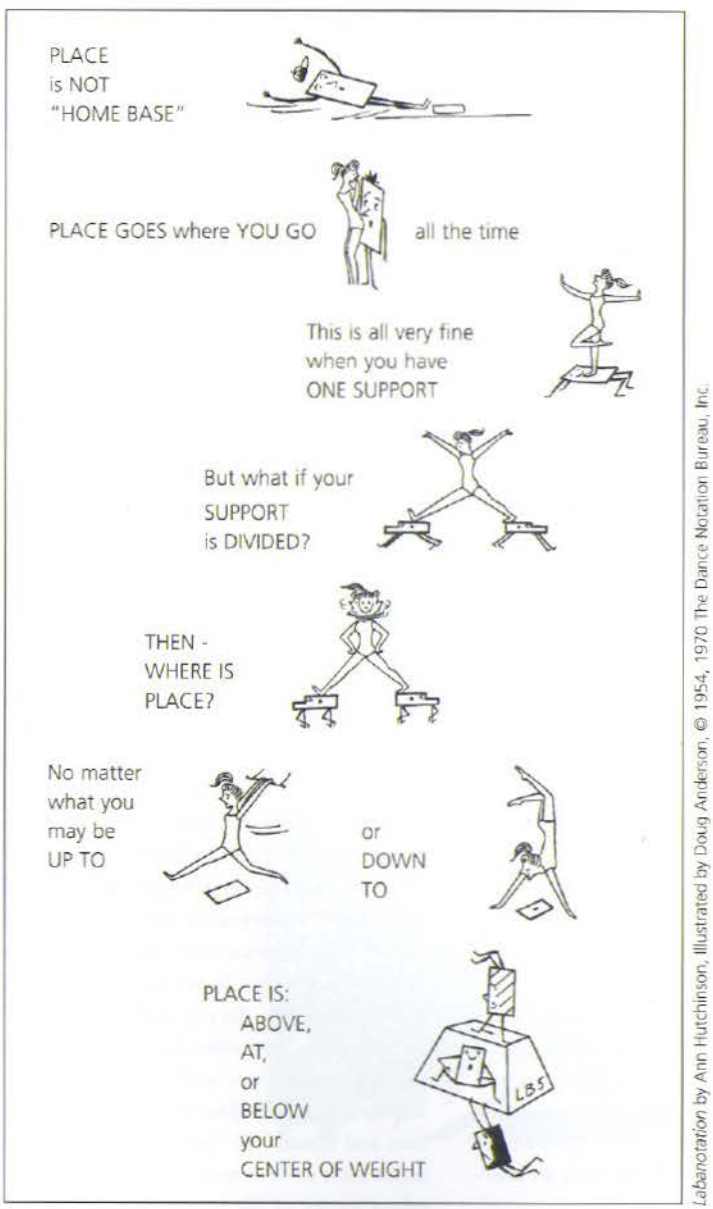
In this issue of *UnderCurrents*, we wanted to script together some of the complexities raised by the question of what constitutes "natural space". As is indicative in the pieces selected here, such a question not only invokes concerns over what counts as "natural space", but for whom it counts, and at what cost. Such concerns give rise to some very important considerations that, perhaps not so surprisingly, suggest a need to look at a series of problematics regarding the politics of nature. One critical example centres on the implications of colonization in constructions of "natural space" and land claim struggles of Native peoples. Colonization, as a number of writers in this issue suggest, has often involved a two-fold process of Euro-American settler states appropriating and controlling the lands of Native peoples and simultaneously redefining (or, in some cases, imaginatively inventing) the terms by which these lands are to be represented, understood and known. Colonization is a spatial process that accordingly ascribes use and exchange values to particular "natural spaces" and, in turn, to the bodies and lives of those who happen to inhabit these spaces. Struggles of reclamation and restitution, whether enacted at Oka, on the Hawaiian island of Kaho'alawe, Irian Jaya or Haida Gwaii, are thus very much imbricated in political contests over meanings and configurations of natural space. In significant ways, they exemplify the degree to which what is given as a space of nature is often in fact the outcome of historical processes of domination.

Such challenges to this ethos of the domination of nature have certainly had the highest profile in interventions, strategies and discourses of recent environmentalist thought and practice. There can be little doubt that contemporary discourses of North American environmentalists have offered up some key re-definitions of natural spaces and meanings and relationships to "the environment." But sorely lacking in these often romantic, at times reactionary discourses is a consideration of the degree to which nature is constituted in the urban realm. Consistently viewed as an environmental pariah – the antithesis of the "natural" – the modern city cannot be so quixotically overlooked, for it is a crucial site within which nature is engaged with and defined by global populaces. As different writers herein suggest, not only is it impossible to arbitrarily divide city and country, but to do so is shortsighted. It will become crucial for environmentalists to engage with urban space, not only as a generator of vast amounts of pollution and waste, but as a legitimate and viable site for transforming our practice of living on this earth.

If the city is a crucial site for the articulation of discourses and politics of nature, so too are bodies. Due in large part to the foundational work done in feminist studies and gender theory, the previously neglected relationship between the body and nature requires greater consideration than ever before. Indeed, as is evidenced by a number of discussions occurring in this issue, the politics of nature is in every way inseparable from the politics of the body.

In sum, as an increasing number of environmental initiatives and preservation objectives seem to be blinkered by forms of single issue argumentation, an engagement with spatial politics might begin to suggest different ways of articulating "environmental problems" by situating them within wider discursive and political fields. Thinking of the politics of nature spatially can possibly effect different questions and thus different kinds of concerns for social and environmental praxis. As the above problematics suggest, the point is, space matters to any consideration of the environment or nature.

Michael Bresalier with Shauna M. O'Donnell



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