

Human beings, says Aristotle, are by our very nature political animals. The ways that we live our lives, the ways in which we organize our societies, the many ways through which we interact with our environments, all of these ways of being, he suggests, are essentially and ultimately political. But what does this mean, 'to be political'? Is it the same as 'being social', as being, in some way, 'artificial'? Or are the terms 'politics' and 'nature' intertwined much more closely than our present understandings of the words would lead one to believe?

by Pablo Bose and Dana Mount

Editorial Essay

Such grossly over-wrought and overly-determined concepts demand at least an attempt at definition. Yet rather than narrow the range of meanings that politics and nature might entail, in this, our twelfth issue of *UnderCurrents*, we invite you to join with us on an exploration that seeks to expand and broaden our understandings. By 'politics' we do not constrain our discussion to one of governments and social movements, of electioneering and power-profiteering, of rarefied decisions and elite decision-making. And by the same token, our invocation of 'nature' should not lead one to expect stories and images of flora and fauna set apart from or subsisting beyond the realm of the 'human political'. This is not, in other words, an issue devoted to the ceremonial rites of elections, nor to the whim and whimsy of trees, as we try to understand them outside of ourselves.

Our hope is to dissolve as much as possible the barriers between the concepts, to show the fluidity and intermingling between them. 'Politics' might today be appropriated by the worlds of the state and of backrooms and diplomacy, 'nature' by social movements and multinational corporations alike, but the present issue of *UnderCurrents* seeks to move beyond tired clichés and simple dualisms to embrace the complexities and ambiguities contained within these two words, to show their antithesis as a contrived rather than inherent one.

The question that our contributors ask in poetry and song, in essay and sketch, in painting and photo, is what are our political natures? How do we understand and constitute our selves? What are the spaces that we inhabit, spaces of contestation and debate, of collective action and of interconnection? What are the visions that we bring forth for our lives- visions of justice and of beauty, of freedom and of mortality, of the sublime and the terrifying? In what do we see the political and in what the natural, in what their intersect, their overlap, their indivisibility?

Traci Warkentin suggests this indivisibility in *Scream*, a poem that imagines our connection to animals based on the shared experience of inhabiting the body. The poem is weighted in its use of space, it covers the page with dripping imagery and sensitive language. Using the dryer, cleaner lines that her envisioned desert landscape conjures, Elana Wolff presents ideas on the nature of growth in her poetry. There is a sense of displacement and persistence in her lines, some most suitably set here in Toronto.

Four graduate students take us back to Brazil through their writing, where they attended the World Social Forum last winter. Their report back is a conversation on the experiences, contemplating the nature of local and national politics especially as an alternative political form gains growing support in Porto Alegre. The reflections are as much an exploration of alternative political systems as it is a critique of these alternative conventions, and the accessibility they strive for versus that which they reflect.

Richard Oddie's "Justice, Dissent and the 'War on Terrorism'" is a more detailed consideration of the current global and anti-globalization political spheres. His post-September 11th analysis of American militarism and its effect on the activist movement offers astute perceptions for all in the movement. The article extends its significance by arguing for change based on a new sensibility rooted in the philosophies of Herbert Marcuse.

Leah Burns' painting, an intimate portrait of a fish, reminds us of the individuality of the 'non-political' animals that exist within our political realms. Sau-Wai Tai offers another perspective on 'animal' through her photograph "Lawn Snakes", which depicts her interpretation of the human-built as natural.

Together on these pages are the critical and creative explorations of our varied political natures. Read them well, reflect, enjoy.

