

editorial essay

as a journal of critical environmental studies, *UnderCurrents* provides a forum for ideas which challenge traditional conceptions of nature and/or the “natural.” Contributors are accordingly encouraged to question disciplinary boundaries in search of new ways of presenting these ideas. Published by graduate students in a faculty which struggles to find the spirit of interdisciplinarity within the official mantra of “thinking, learning and acting environmentally,”

UnderCurrents has historically embraced a working philosophy which engages this spirit in a variety of ways. The Editorial Collective, which challenges the hierarchical model of decision-making traditionally employed by journals, has attempted to promote the free interplay of voices and ideas between journal participants, raising the product of consensus above the individually-crafted initiative even as it demands a high level of tolerance, patience and responsibility. This effort is mirrored in our submissions policy which, inviting work of every form and description from a variety of disciplinary and experiential backgrounds, presents a challenge of balancing the editorial demands of thematic focus with the hectic plurivocality often represented in interdisciplinary approaches to environmental learning.

The absence of hierarchical stability and continuity at *UnderCurrents*, coupled with the very breadth of its mandate, invariably generates a recurring scenario; each fall, a gathering of students with different backgrounds and interests come together to “reinvent” *UnderCurrents*, fuelled by those issues and feelings which impelled them to pursue interdisciplinary studies. And each fall, following from a combination of individuals and circumstances, a Collective emerges with a unique question or idea

which animates the journal. This year, amid a flurry of chalkmarks and furrowed brows in the inaugural sessions, the Collective at *UnderCurrents* came together around a discussion which featured a uniquely recurring phenomenon. Every idea for which there was some interest, when framed in terms of a possible theme, precipitated its opposite: concerns about “nature,” predictably, emerged opposite those about “culture”, “human” opposite “non-human,” “natural” opposite “artificial,” and so on. Patterns of semantic divisions, conceptual boundaries and disciplinary territories multiplied around these dualisms, inviting us to consider how a truly interdisciplinary journal might engage these lines of fracture without reinforcing the dualisms in which they remain pervasively grounded. We have attempted to draw this theme together in the title: “Divisions, Boundaries, Territories.”

Crossing boundaries with *Instinct*, her canoe, Zabe MacEachren’s reflections are spirited from “a travel journal that was never written, but was felt through the callous hands after the arrival home.” Through the myths and ceremonies of canoe culture, she finds herself drawn into a participatory relationship with the Northwoods, a journey fuelled, not divided, by ritual exchanges across boundaries. In the following paper, Yolanda Wiersma considers the physical, structural and curricular divisions which separate ecological communities from school communities. Her discussion moves us toward an understanding of ecological education that “blurs the edges” represented in and reinforced by the central divisions within Western educational pedagogy. Fiona Coyle turns our attention to the social construction of scientific knowledge in complexity theory and *Alife* (artificial life) narratives. The appropriation of geographical terms like space and landscape to ground these narratives, she argues, not only threatens the spatial territory of geographers, but disturbs the oppositional duality of “natural” and “artificial.”

In his essay “Doors,” Steve Slavik takes a broad, yet intensely personal approach to the perceptual dichotomy of “inner” and “outer” experience, exploring images and metaphors which transcend this dichotomy by engaging the participatory character of experience. Derek Teevan takes us to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, where the indigenous Gwich’in, the “People of the Caribou,” are engaged in a battle with Alaskan oil interests and Republican politicians over the future of the 1002 lands. As Teevan argues, however, the terms of the debate and diverse political, social and geographical constituencies of its participants are challenging the boundaries – and territories – of environmental decision-making. Revisiting Coyle’s concern with the social construction of scientific knowledge, John Sandlos examines how the scientific effort to “liberate” nature from purple loosestrife in North American wetlands involves us in the “larger mythic battle for control over the universe.” Operating at the conceptual margins of nature and society, he argues, the scientific manager plays the role of the “sane assassin,” protecting a sanitized and socialized natural world from the transgressive violations of “uncontrollable wildness.”

As this volume of *UnderCurrents* came together, the topical and stylistic “gaps” which appeared between contributions yielded a creative space in which both poetry and visual interpretation could take hold. In this light, the poems of Sheila Hassell Hughes, John Sandlos and Lisa Richardson might be considered thematic touchstones for the pieces which appear on their borders and at a greater distance. In crafting a visual dialogue across these gaps, Lesia Olexandra has also played an integral role in the production of this volume. As a representative rather than exhaustive effort to engage the lines of fracture in a non-binary universe, we hope the reader feels invited to participate in the “space of possibilities” which has opened up between these covers.

David Pauls

for the *UnderCurrents* Editorial Collective