

SCIENCE / ENVIRONMENT

Our relationship with nature

Thoughts on who we are and where we need to go.

"The old question of whether a tree falling in the forest makes a sound if no one is there to hear it encapsulates the paradox: a tree standing in the forest is not a part of the "wilderness" unless a civilized observer is there to see it." — Alison Byerly, "The Uses of Landscape".

BY DAISY KIDSTON

As spring breezes through Halifax, flowers begin to tentatively bloom, the birds go crazy, flying and flirting wildly in the air, and nature begins to glow with the new green of renewal.

For me, and I'm sure I have many a kindred spirit out there, this arrival of spring has breathed in me a renewed inspiration to play

outside as much as possible, and to witness intimately the changes occurring in the great outdoors. It seems that I cannot keep my hiking boots off of my feet, and my clothes have taken on a muddy hue from tumbling around the earth. Nature has enticed me to the point of distraction, and I constantly strive to leave the city and go off alone, off into the realm of nature for yet another epiphanic experience in becoming one with the wind and sun.

Sounds pretty cool, right? Well, I thought so too, and I thought I had this whole human/nature relationship figured out. However, I recently stumbled upon the book *The Social Creation of Nature* by Dr. Neil Evernden of the Environmental Studies department at York University, a complex, philosophical book that probes at our western conception of nature as a distinct and separate realm from humanity.

Dr. Evernden, in his exploration of western historical conceptions of nature, likens humanity's discovery of nature as an entity in itself to the fish that discovers that there is an ocean. Before the fish had active awareness of the medium that it swam through, it viewed it "without awareness of [the water's] existence, and certainly without a concept of the whole body of water being collectively containable in a concept called 'ocean' However, once the water is categorized as a thing in itself, and is given the name, 'the ocean' becomes an object distinct from the fish."

This same process occurred between humans and nature once "nature" was "captured in a word-cage" as Dr. Evernden puts it.

According to Dr. Evernden, "all of creation became our object when the Greeks were able to capture it in a word-cage. Earlier humans could only conceive of a

single world, of which they too were a part." So once nature was given a name, a category, it was able to be viewed as something separate. Quite an example of the power of language.

This seed of division between nature and humanity continued to grow throughout the ages of humankind, though it did differ from period to period. For instance, in the medieval period, nature was viewed as a symbolic message from God — everything in the natural domain was seen as having a Godly secret meaning that the viewer "must read like a book, not dismantle like a machine." Hence humankind's relationship with nature was not scientific but based on empathy in which humanity viewed nature as intertwined with the social fabric.

However, with the arrival of the Renaissance, and the birth of humanism which put humankind on a pedestal above all other creatures, any personal, anthropomorphic, symbolic relationship with nature was frowned upon, as humanity was viewed as above nature. Thus nature was once again viewed as something separate and distant from humanity which could be dissected scientifically, but could not be empathized with as part of humanity.

Though from the Renaissance on, our popular perceptions of nature have altered between the ideas of nature as distinct and as a part of us. According to Dr. Evernden, the present day views nature as something separate and distinct from the realm of human life, with science viewed as the purest way of understanding and learning about nature.

However, with the birth of ecology in the 1960s, the science which studies the

"inter-relatedness" of things, the viewpoint of nature and humans as separate has begun to erode.

No doubt us humans are becoming more aware that we are indeed connected to nature, and it is not just a scenic backdrop in which we occasionally wander into for a hike. With such movements as deep ecology, ecofeminism and ecoactivism raging strong there does appear to be a bridging of the gap between humans and nature.

Yet we have a long, wide gap to bridge, as our perceptions of Nature are deeply rooted in our western society and our individual psyches. I feel, as with many ecologists and environmentalists out there, that until the gap between nature and humanity is bridged, our environmental crisis will continue to worsen. Until we view nature as intimately a part of us, and us a part of nature, we can easily continue to abuse it.

Easier said than done though. Even for the environmentally inclined it is difficult to view oneself as directly connected to the earth. I myself feel I am an environmentalist, yet I still tend to treat nature as something I go into when I wish to go hiking or study the coming of spring. When I go hiking, I frequently stay on the comfort of a human-made path, and gaze soulfully at the "scenery" of nature. When I return to my home, I return to the sphere of civilization and nature becomes but a fond memory.

Yet all is nature! Or is it? Can we consider parts of nature that we have altered so much into other materials such as cars and computers natural? Well, I'll have to end here, sans any closure to this issue. Let this be food for thought on your next outdoor adventure this spring.

Timberlea Green Bin Composting grows

BY ALAN MACGILLIVRAY

A survey of twenty households was recently conducted by members of the Dalhousie Nature Conservation class to sample public opinion and participation in response to the Halifax Regional Municipality's "green bin composition program."

The community of Timberlea, located at the head of St Margaret's Bay, was the location of the survey. One of four pilot projects chosen by the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) to test the feasibility of the of green bin composting.

The residents of the community have a pretty good idea of the pros and cons of green bin composting. The community has been participating in the composting program since 1996, while most other communities have not started since 1998.

The survey examined several areas of the composting program including overall effectiveness, reduction in the number of garbage bags per household, and whether the green bin program should be extended to include businesses and apartment buildings.

The results of the survey were encouraging. The average household contained three persons

and the majority of those questioned said that all of those in the household were participation in the program. This is a significant improvement since only about 45% of respondents said that they had participated in composting before the introduction of the green bins.

Most people thought they had been given sufficient information regarding the correct use of the bins, and considered themselves aware of the environmental benefits of composting. In additions, collection schedules for both compost and regular garbage bags were satisfactory to most residents.

Interestingly, many residents were unaware that the green bin program did not include businesses or apartments, and in most cases strongly supported the idea.

Probably the most impressive statistic that came out of the survey was the overall reduction in waste destined for landfill. Every household surveyed showed a significant decrease in the number of garbage bags produced. The average reduction was around 50%. Such a reduction goes a long way towards meeting the province's waste resource management goal of recycling or composition up to 75% of the municipal waste.

In general, the results of this survey indicate that the green bin composting is an effective system

and community acceptance for the program is high.

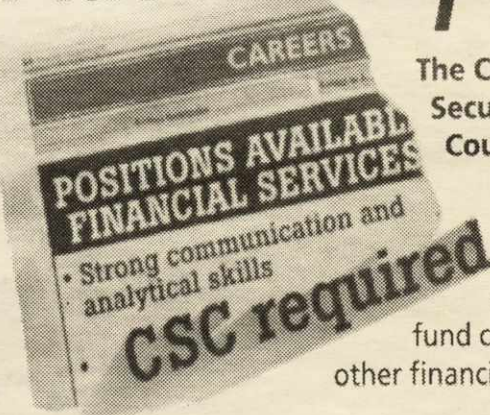
The history of green bin recycling began in 1995 with the imminent closure of the Sackville landfill site. By that time, the Sackville landfill had been receiving garbage from Halifax and surrounding areas for more than twenty years and had nearly reached capacity. In 1996, Nova Scotia's waste resource management strategy had come into effect. After a series of public consultations, provincial legislations was then passed banning all organic materials from provincial landfill sites after the fall of 1998.

In the fall of 1996 the HRM responded to the ban by distributing 2000 green bins to four municipalities, including Timberlea. The results were impressive, not only did residents approve of the bins, but landfill usage was down 50%.

With the success of the pilot project, another 103,000 bins were distributed through the HRM and by the fall of 1998 green bin composting was in full effect.

As a result of the green bin program, the HRM is now recognized nationally for its effort to reduce garbage and has become the model for municipal waste reduction in Canada.

Read The Job Ads Lately?



The Canadian Securities Course™ (CSC)

prepares you for a career with an investment dealer, mutual fund company, bank or other financial services firm.

Enrol in the self-study CSC this Spring and by the Fall you will have gained the competitive edge that financial services employers are looking for.


CANADIAN
SECURITIES
INSTITUTE

Ask About Our Special Offer!
15% off for University Students

1-800-274-8355

www.csi.ca