

Much modern environmental wisdom from such thinkers as David Suzuki has as its main theme the message that humans are animals and have the same dependence on a healthy biosphere as other forms of life. On the surface, it is puzzling that an apparent truism should find so much resistance and should need to be stressed so much. But the reason why this message of continuity and dependency is so revolutionary in the context of the modern world is that the dominant strands of western culture have for so long denied it, and have given us a model of human identity as only minimally and accidentally connected to the earth.

For all the formal knowledge of evolutionary biology, this model of disconnection remains deeply and fatally entrenched in modern conceptions of the human and of nature, inscribed in culture as a result of a dynamic which sought to naturalize domination in both human and non-human spheres. We must find ways to rework our concepts and practices of human virtue and identity as they have been conceived, since at least the time of the Greeks, as exclusive of and discontinuous with the devalued orders of the feminine, of subsistence, of materiality, and of non-human nature. The master culture must now make its long overdue homecoming to the earth. This is no longer simply a matter of justice, but now also a matter of survival.

*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood, 1993

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During the spring of 2012, I spent about a month picking up trash in an area where it would wash up along the Merrimack riverbank in West Newbury, Massachusetts. The concrete physical task of cleaning up a tiny half mile stretch of riverbank was therapeutic after years of signing environment themed petitions online and neurotically recycling even the tiniest fragments of paper. And it was fascinating, waterway trash is not simply litterers' trash of plastic cups and lighters (although there is always that), but trash that washes up from all over. I found toys, balls, picnic items...things which must have accidentally gotten left behind or been swept away, I found tampon applicators and other non-biodegradable remnants of sewage overflows, I found large styrofoam blocks and lumbar from construction sites, there were tires and, alarmingly, empty containers of car chemicals. I found areas full of styrofoam pellets that looked as if they had been hit by hyperlocal hail storms, and candy colored pockets of micro trash. I spotted dirty weather beaten chunks of Styrofoam with moss growing on top of them amidst the rocks. Nature, I guess?

The trash I saw was the stuff of all of us, it was also the stuff of corporations that prey on us. I wondered about what we need or what works, and where is the line?

I moved to Ithaca, New York, where I started picking up trash along the southern shore of Cayuga Lake. There was less trash, but I saw the same broad cross section that appeared along the Merrimack. I started taking pictures for fun but couldn't imagine putting them out there in the world. I thought they were too pretty, it felt like an itch to scratch, and I shook my head perplexed at the thought of advertising plastic filled landscapes.

When I was younger I wanted to be a fashion designer. I studied clothing and later worked in the fashion industry for several years. I loved clothing: the textures, the prints, the richness of colors that can only look that rich when they are saturated in cloth. It was also the gross excess of fast fashion, the news stories of labor abuse, the rapidly deteriorating quality of everything.

I have a hypothesis which states "The more giant plastic iced coffees one drinks, the more quickly the coffee drinker wants the plastic receptacle out of their hands after the coffee is done". Imagine the choppy air filled last slurp, then the glance down at the offending object fol-

lowed immediately by a “what the fuck am I holding” expression, surely you have witnessed this or even done it yourself. But what if we could hold this all a bit longer and appreciate these things of desire, try to understand these longings in the first place without judgement, the way a therapist might try to understand a client’s substance abuse problem (in the context, of course, of living in a place where corporation x is profiting off the substance problems that nearly everyone has). Possibly we could understand these substances as imitations or stand ins for some other better thing.

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Some of the most striking objects I find are fake plants. The shiny material, amidst the real plants, can look especially tacky. Other times the colors match up so closely it is uncanny, I do not notice them at all until I am literally on top of them picking up trash, or I am taking a picture of something else.