

51. Waste Deep

In their mad quest to provide miles of new asphalt for a motorized majority, “a thousand miles a day”, wastelands are created. Road construction, and railroads before it, left quite a few cut off pockets of unusable real estate, like islands in rivers, without access, not something you can easily develop. They’re also found in back of industrial sites, shopping plazas, and unused terminals. Bits of feral road isolated when interstates were built still pass by crumbled foundations of homes removed. Such areas become buffer zones between industry’s fumes and noise and residential bliss. They absorb broken bricks, busted concrete, clippings, things that would look out of place on manicured lawns. Out of sight, out of mind. Where’s the feng shui in that? Every bit of your environment should bring balance and oneness with nature, harmonious flashes of metal, water, wind and wood.

A decaying train station stands just off Columbus Square. Few know it’s there. A wonderful Victorian goth example of the notion of 19th Century progress, one can imagine yesteryear’s bustle of travelers to area’s most significant mill, once renowned for nonferrous castings, flatware, service sets, as well as major pours of significant bronzes by famous sculptors. His own grandfather had a hand in these, but died before WWII, pre-OSHA, from cyanide and metal poisoning. Since he wasn’t born until ’52, Al never got to meet granddad. Soil surrounding mill is still toxic fourscore years after its close and supports spotty vegetation barely. One wonders if nearby homeowners suffer ill effects. One wonders, too, if corporate offshoring policies have anything to do with avoiding incredible cost of super-fund cleanups. If anything, Chow Inimical’s disaster in Bophal proved why it was cheaper to operate overseas. When catastrophes occur, companies can easily weasel out of responsibilities. It would have cost Chow 10 times as much had it happened in America. This is ironic, since America has vast undeveloped areas, while nowhere in India is it devoid of people, whose lives, it seems, are not as highly valued. This equation pitting safety against profits was immoral. Shouldn’t there always be big buffer zones between humble domiciles and potentially lethal industry?

Citizens and visitors should feel blessed there are a few preserved pockets of greenery or history. Each offers a small chance to commune, escape urban claustrophobia, though few around him were developed for that purpose. Crossing a wildlife management area, he spied 7 species of songbirds all at once, close together;

this seldom happens, birds being territorial until forced to occupy ever smaller habitats. Bicycling embraces earth goddess. But it can be taken too far. Reaching out you might get burnt. The World doesn't need you, you need it. There could be practical benefits from paving trails that skirt wildlife areas. People could better enjoy them. Those flustered, injured or lost would be able to follow paths out. Awareness might lead to further conservation.

How such places came to be set off was seldom a conscious decision but rather coincidental. Forebears claimed land then found some corners totally unworkable: boulder deposits from ancient glaciers, cliffs, ravines, rock outcroppings, swamps. If a roadbed could be blasted or wetland drained, it would be by contractors eager to supply single family homes to expanding populations. Practically no road, paved or not, wasn't dotted with houses on hillocks above standing puddles. He could pass hundreds of them before seeing anyone outside enjoying or maintaining yards, usually something left to unskilled labor, who clip quickly for little, then reek revenge by using leaf blowers to launch airborne dust into your lungs while you're pedaling by. Plainly rude.

Ironically, wildlife gravitates to waste areas as much as places carefully preserved. Many birds need perches on which to rest at short distances along migratory routes and sources of food. Falcons have been known to build nests on city skyscrapers and feed on pigeons and rats. Nevertheless, accommodating wildlife generally means leaving adjacent stands of trees in unbroken strings. Science has yet to fully comprehend consequences for violating this principle. Before development got out of hand, this was never a problem. But now vast tracts are covered with asphalt and concrete, entire hills of old growth have been defoliated, and sheltering perches are separated by great distances. The only species that can survive such planetary neglect are pests like pigeons and seagulls, who can fly great distances to feed on garbage. You'd think a mall parking lot in a gale would be as inhospitable a place as you could imagine, yet he watched gulls set down, poke about for an odd french fry then spread magnificent wings to instantly and effortlessly elevate to great heights right in front of speeding motorists.

Mankind disrupts natural balances by building roads. Results can be weird. Soon after interstate was open, there was a few weeks when you couldn't roll along certain sections without wheels crushing frogs or turtles, who were bound by instinct to traverse new pavement on some annual migration. Kill-off eventually suppressed that population, literally drove it into extinction locally. Suits area residents just fine, at least they think so until plagued by mosqui-

toes on Summer nights stuck behind screens or indoors with air conditioning and television watching wild kingdom programs, about the only way they have left to enjoy it. Best not to think. Experts just do. At some point intuition and muscle memory fail them; it's tragic. But if you try to do it all with intellect, mind will seize up immediately. Whoever says, "I can't do that," can't. How do you know until you try? Make safe small experiments and move forward on your own experiences. Never take *no* for an answer. Neither ask permission nor trespass.

In any hierarchy of utopian urban planning, walkers rate #1; you can't very well provide services or sell retail to motorists without turning them into pedestrians. Drive throughs and pit stops have limited appeal. Sidewalks are critically important to growth. Separate bike lanes and wheelchair ramps are #2. Busses, mono-rails, people movers, subways and trolleys #3, connected to parking garages and lots on city's periphery. Motoring into city centers can only be allowed as long as self propellers are accommodated; 1-way motoring lanes can occupy streets where there's already a shoulder. Can't just leave disabled vehicles in middle. Traffic lanes in both directions need a throughway width of at least 48 feet. Narrow alleys built centuries ago will never support vehicular traffic. Limited access intercity highways and suburban roads are designed for mo-ves, the only venues where their speed is any advantage, but, even there, roadnet must be made permeable at frequent intervals for crossing users and wild creatures, preferably not having to interact through bridges and underpasses. Up North, elevated roads allow elk to pass under. Otherwise, motorists barreling along in the dark suddenly collide with spindly legged moose with huge torsos that crash through windshields killing occupants. Happens often enough to be a known menace, roadkill impossible to ignore.

He was prepared to be disturbed by art movie *Drawing Restraint (Cremaster) 9*. Its flensing scene was brutal to watch, irresponsible with depraved minds eager to duplicate mayhem, but it wasn't close to being as frightening or gross as Jason Kruger slasher flicks or Serengeti wildlife documentaries. Any chaser ship filled with disapproving censors was in filmmaker's mind. *DR9* is about giving yourself totally to someone in order to transform into your higher self, at one with nature from which you extract life, not something to be discouraged by tax collectors. Barney's ubiquitous sculpture symbolizes at once a cetacean, hunted into near extinction by people too eager to expand themselves, or same process of petroleum abuse, constantly attended to, manipulated, and, in the end, a mess of waste. There's a scene where a label is affixed to a

present, then a stripe is stripped to reveal blood red below, just like a whale giving up its flesh. Japanese eat raw food, high in nutrients, but it betrays their impatience. For them ritual heightens experience, provides balance, tantalizes before fulfilling, teaches restraint. Dud's impatient dad doesn't eat sushi anymore. Like bicycling, *DR9* gets you to think about extinction, living on less, putting more of yourself into every effort, returning to origins, sharing fairly. Easy to see how museum patrons infatuated by ideas could be attracted to a guarded expression as this.

Laura McPhee's photographs, which happened to be concurrently exhibited, echo similar concepts. All on a grand scale befitting big sky country, 2 images taken days apart in July from same inhospitable spot show extremes of Summery verdure and Wintery snow. Idaho's pastoral expanses would seem more than capable of absorbing all human influences. Yet there's already signs of degradation, fish depletion, forest fires, production of deadly chemicals, strip mines, all leading to less than ideal landscapes. Gore from those carcasses McPhee portrays shames you into seeing what's really happening when you swallow steak or stew. Conservation goes hand in hand with rational land use, not abuse, and reevaluating effects of your presence constantly. Conservation, along with development of humanities and sciences, extends love into future.

He'd ridden every road recommended by his state's bicycling guide, and then some. When routes from home became boringly familiar, he'd just give up riding for awhile. Then it rained for 7 days, which put 2005's October on record as wettest ever locally. He needed a ride bad. Day after rivers crested it turned sunny, so he went for a theme spin hugging nearest big river to assess damage. Still swollen, it had receded off main roads. In spots, cars parked by mills were totally submerged, roof lines barely visible. About the only dry roads were abandoned railroads, which were obviously engineered by those who considered recurrent flooding and constructed on flat high banks between mills, so trains never had to rise more than a few degrees gradually over long distances.

Trying to get as many views of river as possible meant riding on broken, sand-strewn roads and unpaved lots beside several old mills in succession, roads he'd always avoided. Strange how a paradigm shift, harnessing electricity, made it possible to locate manufacturing plants in industrial parks away from potential flood damage. As a result they gradually abandoned hundreds of years of waterwheel driven facilities, almost a forgotten culture, ruins akin to Egyptian and Mexican pyramids. It was where waterfalls thundered below bridges just hanging on and through sluices designed

to contain flow and usher it away once kinetic energy was extracted. Ruins are such a Romantic notion, there was a 19th Century cult devoted to drawing them during visits, origin of archeology and cultural tourism. Cults today use abandoned mills for thrill orgies in total reversal of Puritan wage enslavement for which they were built. What a waste of salvation.

Wished people were somehow encouraged to clean up environment, do whatever they can to make facilities safe and scenery pleasant. Rivers could use very coarse netting to catch debris, like logs and barrels removed at frequent intervals. In all likelihood, nets would fill up too quickly, form dams that spill over banks, result in local floods. Road gutters ought to be swept monthly, not yearly. Major debris must be dealt with immediately; otherwise rivers of drivers will be diverted into a flood of bloodshed. Controlling flows can be crucial. China's Yellow River flooded its banks many times and killed millions. History's greatest dam project now underway attempts to control this massive waterway.

Swirling winds spun around him. Chunks of debris raced across his path. Trees with over saturated roots bowed and downed power lines in spots. Limbs cracked in gusts and fell here and there. Power may have been cut, but rivers flowed steadily in contrast with those spells in Summer with so little rain cascades stopped altogether. He wasn't frightened because he steered away from big trees. Every ride offered another glimpse into environment's sculpting forces, eloquent messages to note, never something to get bored by after all. You have to reach out carefully with your own fingers, test reality's risks, and touch and try for yourself what you might tolerate. Bragging about your own escapades, copying someone else's, or warning others away are all inappropriate and unethical. Good thing nobody listens to insane rulers anyway.

Most riders avoided rain. It did create havoc with equipment, increased need to clean and lube. What he liked least was how it clouded glasses and vision, only just bearable until it poured steadily. Motorists couldn't see you through fogged windows and worn out wipers. But there were something special about rain. People seldom go out of their way to accost you, much easier on a dry day, and rather stay inside buildings and cars. Bikeways are deserted. Lonesome rainy days are for quiet reflection. Biked at dusk though slop, beside rivers and mists with fog banks suddenly forming, past dark woods with spectral trees woven with soupy grayness. Seeing so few people on such secluded rides makes them somehow special. Asphalt slipped under him as if a river. Riding in rain was like taking a shower. Just as droplets race by and run down

drains, all bits, bumps, cracks and twigs were cruised around, instinctively avoided, slashed between through slight hand actions; cleansing, purifying, they slipped behind into past forgotten. Figuratively naked, he was awash in a spray of liquid revelation, bathed in fresh air, rain and sweat blurring any boundary between inside and outside. Some of it had begun to sink in.

As ancient sage Lao Tzu suggested, "The best people are like water. Water cleanses and nurtures, parts to let all pass, settles to dwell in lowly places." Be like water, he decided, which enables growth, persistently reminds of origins, suggests that others might go with a cooperative flow. Go with that flow. Humans are 87% seawater, anyway, exhale humid vapor, live in a water-laden atmosphere. "Your tears are salty, and so am I." Man's connection with sea is totally indomitable, inseparable, intimate. Water is powerful, relentless, reliable; it governs all life; without it all die. Remaining hydrated was supremely important; water your horses every 5 miles. It redistributes filth after raining down: attaches itself to what's bad, carries it down drains or into storm grates, then evaporates. Besides being a universal solvent, water was cohesive, combines, recombines, resolutely sticks together, sometimes even defies gravity, unlike almost everything else. Those acting together like a sea inevitably wear down rocky shorelines. Some say water is always in a hurry, which is true, but it's also persistent, wants immediate action yet waits forever. Water isn't always pleasant: bitter rime ice freezing on exposed spots burning as sorely as a hot poker, driven rain tearing like nails into your skin, floods pulling people down to drown, hurricanes devastating all before them, miserable damp dripping off helmet into your eyes and over your glasses making you not only shiver with hypothermia but roll blind. At these times, water reveals its collective strength and indomitable resolve.

Imagine a 3-island archipelago called Rye-App-Lee. Standing by any shore, you can see across but can't go there. Roads are short and end abruptly. App politicians fret they can't bolster commerce. Lee citizens never venture from their dry island surrounded by sea. Rye is mostly undeveloped hillside and swamp. They border very close to capitol of App, called Destiny. Although everyone clamors for Destiny's mayor to build a bridge, nothing happens. Mayor claims Destiny's too poor. Everyone would gladly chip in, longing to mingle, but nobody can bear to be accountable, make a decision, or put out a welcome mat. Decades pass fruitlessly. A neighboring country decides Rye-App-Lee would make a good set of footings for a bridge to a country beyond which they'd rather visit. They build a hallowed train corridor and walled expressway, but omit

ramps or stations or underpasses. These barriers make citizens of Rye-App-Lee virtual prisoners relegated to watching visitors rush by. Poverty increases and tensions mount. People who can sail for distant shores or scale walls do, while the rest starve and suffer. Sadly, this is where fable ends. One can only hope for a sequel with a happy ending after mayor is ousted and normalcy returns.

As part of his advocacy penance, he surveyed all shared streets in city's bicycling plan. Bicyclists complain about grates with slots that run parallel to street, which present a distinct danger of snagging tires should you be riding too close to curb. Planners had some notion of fixing the nearly 500 he found before they knew there were so many. Not all streets have storm grates, but drain slots in curbstones which seemed to work just as well. During his survey, he noticed some placements were obvious, like grates alongside ponds and streams, at base of hills where water would collect, before bridges. Streets above areas that drain well rely on natural runoff rather than intentional drainage. For other grates there seemed to be no reasonable explanation for their placement, show up midway along inclines or repeat patterns that suddenly stop. He recalled cholera epidemics that swept through teaming European cities without sewers. Proper drainage means better sanitation. When rains get too heavy, toilets positioned at low points back up, spewing filth back into homes. Before purchasing real estate, studying nearby terrain and water flows makes sense. A house at a tee at base of a hill might get flooded or plowed into by mo-ves when their brakes fail. You'd think city inspectors and zoning ordinances would restrict building there.

Pavement only a day after a deluge, once kissed by sun and wind, is bone dry. Fields and woods, not so, but fairly dry. Thin sheets quickly rise off tarmac to rejoin sky in clouds only to fall elsewhere at another time. It's a replenishing process, coming and going, some draining back into coves and ponds, some slowly soaking in. Cycles of water on a wet planet fascinate, certainly support food chain. Meteorologists identify a disturbing trend that's related to carbon dioxide. By making atmosphere more opaque, it warms quicker. Initially you think, "Wahoo, milder Winters! More bike miles!" but that's not how it works. Warmth somewhere means more evaporation, glacial ice melt, snow, storms, wet. When atmosphere gets sufficiently filthy, all it does is constantly drizzle or flurry—increasingly acidic and injurious—or destructively hail. When England stopped burning so much coal, local climate actually improved, smog lifted, wellness was restored. So what's the latest solution to oil uncertainties in United States?

Burn more coal! Invest in rubbers and umbrellas. This will disrupt outings, drive people indoors, make them motor all the more.

Federal government loses billions by mismanaging country's forests. By neither logging nor subsidizing changes for lumbering communities, Feds actually come out ahead. Woodland conservancies have other motives, walls between rabble and wealthy. That's the economics of ecology. Leave environment to its own devices and save money while people starve. Is this wise? Studying forests and their value is thought best left in hands of those who would exploit; they should do it wisely, since it means their continued livelihood, you'd think, at least until pressures mount and profits dwindle. You need watchdogs. Conservationists, harvesters, regulators all need to get together and set limits and parameters, lest resources are destroyed beyond saving. Forests demand respect, yet offer their riches gladly to those who tread lightly. Oceans would team abundantly with life if you didn't dump foulness and overfish.

This model would work well with just about any public trust. Someone should start Operation WEB: Watching Entire Business world. Spider's web would gather input from field operatives, who would change assignments often. They'd infiltrate and monitor businesses and report regularly. They'd be recruited from all walks of life, and, while they blow whistles on abusive practices, be guaranteed a paycheck even when not working. Some might denounce this as industrial espionage or white collar welfare. But it'll never happen: not profitable. Corporations exist only to produce profit. If that means destroying communities, paying less taxes, ruining the environment, screwing the public, so be it, they say.

Radio broadcasted latest thinking, "Country's landfills could be mined." Hadn't he been saying this for over a decade? Did he make it up? Or did someone else thinking along those lines pass it on to him back then? No matter. Good to hear someone is being proactive about landfills. But how effective is mining garbage over mining raw materials conventionally? That question will be moot when raw materials no longer exist in natural abundance. What about tires? They also need recycling. You'd think they could amalgamate all that rubber and make more. Doesn't happen. Tires being chewed by and chewing up pavement can be counted among the most unsustainable processes in existence. Utilities used to burn trash to make electricity, but they'd rather build new gas plants, charge consumers for inflated construction costs including kickbacks, and maximize profits.

Recycling on a grand scale could become a global growth industry over the next century. Those with smarts to collect other

country's garbage now will be able to sell materials back to them 50 years hence. Ultimately, land will be the deciding factor. Those with enough to dedicate large tracts to salvaging operations will someday be winners. Angola, Libya, Morocco and other desert countries should take notice. Trouble with this scenario is biological and chemical toxicity of waste, cost of shipping, and potential threat to seas. It never stopped oil shipments, high on list of most toxic substances. Meanwhile, landfills are filling so fast there won't be any more room soon. Local recycling seemed to make more sense, even analyzing garbage for its constituent parts and finding economies that return each compound to use, if only as fuel. Waste oil burns well and is already used to heat garages and workshops. Tires can be granulated into useful pellets. Glass and plastics can be pulverized then added to concrete and paving asphalt.

Technological solutions that include harvesting renewable resources could be invented by anyone. Meanwhile, there are corporate programs exploring them designed to lock up patents so you can't spread plans around for free. Many of these technologies are simple yet effective, but require rethinking how you act. They'd prefer you continue to drive biofuel, hydrogen or natural gas cars or heat with electricity, gas or oil to keep their revenue stream flowing, when there are existing substitutes with which you can give them all up. There is little commercial value to pleasing bicyclists. But burning fossil fuel is destroying everyone's atmosphere.

You needn't allow yourself to be victimized. Apathy, division, and laziness caused climate change; collective individual actions may be only way to restore balance. What can you personally do?

- Abstain from beef; among foodstuffs it pollutes and wastes most
- Choose products in bulk or packaged in recycled materials, which can themselves be recycled (glass, paper, plastics 1 and 2)
- Collect rainwater to use in garden instead of tap water
- Cook less; eat fish and locally grown fresh fruit and vegetables
- Do work during daylight; dress warm; insulate; lower thermostat
- Eliminate lawns or mow infrequently; use hand not power tools
- Fast 1 day/week to cut air polluting, landfilling, trucking -14%
- Frequently bike or walk instead of drive
- Hang clothes to dry rather than use an appliance
- Mulch with compost; plant species that don't need much water; replant bushes, groundcover and trees that die
- Route all trips in as efficient a loop as possible
- Think "less is better"; cure consumerist mentality
- Turn off passive television; use active, efficient computer to make waves and write representatives.

This is not advice you'll hear from advocates paid by business interests. They'll tell you to drive slowly or tune up your car to squeeze 10¢ a gallon from a \$300 service visit, ROI in ~4 years. "Drive less for instant savings," is characterized as impractical.

Just as inanely, he recycled coffee into a plethora of words. Bear in mind the implications: Someone scrambles up a mountain path in morning mists to gather green beans, stumbles over rocks and roots, then laboriously carries them back down through jungle heat. Plantation slaves pack rough burlap bags and tote to pick up points. Buyers brave being kidnapped or killed where lawlessness rules. Global shippers ply dangerous seas through storms to shadeless heat at busy centers, where crane operators offload and stevedores manually stack bag after 75 pound bag. Truckers haul to and unload at roasting plants, something he'd actually done himself for awhile. Workers arise and commute every day to run roasting bins and other processes. Tasters mix for consistency. Plant workers grind, package, ship to stores. Middlemen deal and wheedle. And he markets, stores at home in airtight containers, then brews. Hiking, biking, boating, hauling, motoring, mankind in motion all for a simple cup of joe. Was this momentary taste and wakeup buzz worth all this effort? Better be a damned good cup. He drank as if hundreds of eyes stared down in nervous anticipation. Yeah. It was that good, among World's unique tastes. Good job, everybody. All he could do is offer his gratitude and wonder post-oil if this could be sustained. He was working as hard as he could, given all his flaws, to do exactly that, honor and thank doers. It meant tickling keys, toiling every day at what he'd always done, tolerantly shouldering cares of mankind while being crushed like Atlas by World's weight. No time to change his mind or let ball drop.

This was a short chapter on purpose: catchall for bits and notions that were extracted while editing others, tucked in inconspicuously near the end like dust under a rug. Isn't this exactly the point, what do you do with refuse? Some people economize because they are simply cheap. Others hoard empty bags, shoe boxes, string; it's a mental disorder. Some sick writers never let go of any idea. But this doesn't mean you shouldn't recycle. Design with recycling in mind. Buy products with a thought how you'll dispose of containers. Consider effect it has on everyone collectively. Honor everyone who contributes.

