

Response: where is the politics in political ecology?
University of Kentucky discussion group
<http://www.politicaecology.org>

A case for 'so-far stories' Kate Foster © 2011

Working as an ecoartist, the 'politics' in political ecology lies in making and placing images about entwined patterns of co-existence, as animals, people, climate and land adjust to each other. This piece is about how I try to expand my human viewpoint.

At one point I worked within a university where there were 'cuts' in the offing, with corporate and commercial values winning the day. I found I was beginning to self-censor and started to stitch this response.



It consists of the letters "ICANTHINKWHATILIKE" (Image 1) re-placed onto camouflage fabric. But circumstances interfere with free-thinking. Creative scholarship and artforms can lever open possibilities and shift thought patterns. Detailed attention and liminality can draw out complexity and surprise. While others listen, perform, write, paint, to me a sketchbook is an important tool (see Image 2 below):

WHEN I LOOK AT THINGS CAREFULLY, I DON'T KNOW MUCH
AT ALL. THE PATTERNS I DISCERN ARE RUTS OF
FAMILIAR MENTAL TRAFFIC. MY AIM IS TO DRAW
DIFFERENT, UNFAMILIAR PATTERNS, DRAWING ON
OTHER KNOWLEDGES, OTHER SENSES. MAKING
ANOTHER SENSE PERHAPS, PROBABLY INCOMPLETE

Perhaps we can admit that constructing academic texts has a limited appeal to the human sensorium. Of course, a rigorous and self-disciplined approach, learning from shared experience, is important. Happy-endings appeal too - but for whom, where, and in what timescale?

The perspective of geographers can help: for example Doreen Massey requires us to consider landscape as an event, as a simultaneity of 'stories-so-far'.

Aha! "*So-far stories...*" may be a way to reach 'more-than-human' perspectives. The idea of simultaneity (at different timescales) by-passes anthropocentrism. I have reconsidered my initial goal of attaining 'ecocentrism'. For example working on '*biogeographies*' (re-presenting the unique histories of museum specimens of endangered species) taught me more about being human, as well as environmental histories.

Unfinishable as they are, *so-far stories* may afford possibilities and juxtapositions that escape an aesthetic of despair. Of course the prompt might be anguish or anger, but fury and grief should not overwhelm quieter voices and tender ways of working, in order to acknowledge complexity.



Image 3: Newly independent states develop their own army camouflage; each animal acquires a pattern from its country of origin.

References and credits:

Image 1: ICANTHINKWHATILIKE © Kate Foster 2005

Image 2: sketchbook extract, © Kate Foster 2011

Image 2: Deer of the world © Kate Foster 2005

Massey, D. 2006. 'Landscapes as a Provocation: reflections on moving mountains. Journal of Material Culture, 11(1-2), pp. 33–48.

Further info and references for collaborative '*biogeographies*':

www.meansealevel.net