



Being Earth

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Introduction

Being Earth consists of four of the latest texts from a project begun under the title, “The Culture of Nature in a Post-Holocene World.” Its first four sections will be published in *Rhizomes* in 2022. This project is made under the rubric of poesis, which is, in a definition applied to much of my work: the emergence of a transdisciplinary text. In *Being Earth*, the question I put forth is: How do we gain a sane footing on a planet we’ve spent thousands of years as a geophysical bully wielding ever more clever tools and powerful machines in a mad quest for total domination? Usually these texts begin with fieldnotes made while ascending and descending the mountains that surround the valley in California where I live, then continue to develop, including research into work by scholars around the world, whom I gratefully acknowledge.

Keywords

eco-philosophy; paleoanthropology; Gaian politics; posthuman studies

1:1

On a cool autumn morning a red scarf of light warms the shoulders of the mountain’s highest peaks. While climbing I think: Do we still need a god to look up to? If so, perhaps we should worship the sun, who both makes life possible and will someday bake it to a crisp. A pinch of pollen at dawn, three bows facing east, and a pair of UV 400 sunglasses, is all this god requires. However, at this tipping point, when “prophecies are no longer proclaimed from the mountain-top but from the metrics,”¹ we need to make a gradient descent to Gaia, “who opened up and brought forth the first human beings.”²

1:2

Using 3D photogrammetry and laser scanning, reanalyzing footprints thought to be the paws of a bear now suggests they were made by “a small, cross-stepping bipedal hominin... indicating that a minimum of two hominin taxa with different feet and gaits coexisted” more than three million years ago.³

As scanning machines become more sensitive, who we are will continue to be theorized by posthuman anthropologists tracking the loops and curving paths homo sapiens had walked, leaving behind “a trace, and a trace of the erasure of the trace.”⁴

1:3

Falsifying predictions of another dry winter, the trail’s muddy lives stick between cleats.

Immigrants of pebbles and rocks slid down the mountainside. “On the horizon were just sky and clouds—and mountain ranges like so many distant waves. I couldn’t tell where the United States ended or Mexico began, and it didn’t matter.”⁵

Slip-sliding sideways, a gash in the path invites a fall into “instant global consciousness,”⁶ or dropping into Hades, and basking in its warmth on this two-sweater morning.

1:4

Today my mind is spinning the story of a species that became a predator then sharpened its teeth into technologies that made an entire planet its prey, mindlessly stripping its resources like meat flensed off bone; then metastasizing its wastes through the planet’s circulatory systems, throwing them into rages and assaults called hurricanes, tornados, heatwaves, droughts... So clever had this species become, even their visionaries couldn’t see they were tumbling ahead of themselves into a void.

1:5

One autumn morning at Ryutaku-ji, a Zen Buddhist monastery above Mishima City, Japan, its abbot, Nakagawa Soen, entered the sōdō, in which I and others had been asleep. Seeing a broken handbell he picked it up and cradled it as if a small bird with a broken wing. Then he walked away, intoning in a deep, compassionate voice, “Everything breaks...everything breaks.”⁷ But “there is such a *technological* fascination with the keeping alive of the all but dead.”⁸

1:6

From above and below, the din of human activity reached me shivering as if Boreas himself was shouting gloomy predictions into the darkest regions of my reddening ears. When the sun finally peeked over a frigid horizon, CO₂ continued to puff from my nose and mouth. Even if Net Zero emissions of greenhouse gases were achieved, we’d still be guilty of breathing.

Notes

1. A. Appadurai & P. Kift, "Beware the Magic of Metrics." *Eurozine*, 27 June 2020.
2. N. Hall, *The Moon & The Virgin*. New York, 1980. p.52.
3. E.J. McNutt, et.al. "Footprint evidence of early hominin locomotor diversity at Laetoli, Tanzania." *Nature*, Dec. 2021. Reference to prints found at a nearby site two years earlier.
4. J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago, 1985. p. 24.
5. T. Miller, "Visions of a Borderless World." *The Nation*, Dec 16, 2021.
6. Ibid. This was "astronaut Edgar Mitchell's reaction when he gazed back at Earth from the moon."
7. Revised from, "Two Words." *Shambhala Sun*, March 2002.
weishaus.unm.edu/Writing/two_words.htm
8. C. Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words*. Oxford, UK, 1993. p.41.