

Seemingly Unconnected Events: The Writing is on the Wall

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The Writing is on the Wall is Karen McCoy's collaboration with members of Ecosphere Studies, including Wes Jackson, Bill Vitek, and Aubrey Streit Krug. *The Writing is on the Wall* quotations in order of appearance:

"The split between what we think and what we do is profound."

—Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 1977, p. 17.

"An extractive economic system to a large degree is derivative of our perceptions and values. But it also controls our behavior. We have to loosen its hard grip on us, finger by finger."

—Wes Jackson, *Nature as Measure*,
"Becoming Native to our Places," 2011, p. 92.

"Mosaic of Loss"

...Recovery
when it comes
is slow
and fragile

tender green shoots
arising
from the blackened
wasteland

From the scattered
mosaic of loss
they begin
a new life
piece by piece

—Arna Radovich, quoted in *How the World Breaks*
by Stan Cox and Paul Cox, 2016, p. 17.

“Dedicating our lives to reality forces us to acknowledge that we have a choice: either accept the burden of defending the supply lines of a consumptive culture that is dependent on depletable resources, or begin the long journey toward decentralized, more local, more sustainable economies. If we opt to maintain the supply lines that feed our appetites, then we must be prepared to admit that we are willing to trade our freedom for a consumptive lifestyle...We are not going to stop anything all at once, but we are going to start a tendency and set mileposts to measure our progress...Our imagination has been too limited...”

—Wes Jackson, *Nature as Measure*, “From the Margin,” 2011, p. 193, 196, 197.

“Consult the genius of the place . . . nature as measure”

—Titles of books by Wes Jackson, in which Jackson references Alexander Pope’s poem “Epistles to Several Persons: Epistle IV” to Burlington, 1731, and Wendell Berry’s essay “Nature as Measure” in *What Are People For?*, 1990

“...how the world breaks—not all at once, but in millions of cataclysms small and large...”

—Stan Cox and Paul Cox, *How the World Breaks*, 2011, p. 14.

“...I ask of all of us here, if not us, then who? If not now, then when? If not here, then where?”

—Naderev “Yeb” Saño, quoted in *How the World Breaks* by Stan Cox and Paul Cox, 2011, p. 46.

“The transition beyond oil is not merely a technological transition—it is above all a political transition in which we stop being passive and become active agents of transformation by recognizing that we have the capacity, the energy, and the creativity to make the change.”

—Vandana Shiva, “Cultivating the Wild,” *Wildness: Relations of People and Place*, edited by Gavin Van Horn and John Hausdoerffer, 2017, p. 229.

“The Grass was the Country as the Water is the Sea”

—Willa Cather, *My Antonia*, quoted in
Nature as Measure by Wes Jackson, 2011, p. 139.

“Blood can...be thought of as a private ocean...Not only is blood mostly water, but the watery portion of blood...has a concentration of salt and other ions that is remarkably similar to sea water.”

—Natalie Angier, “The Wonders of Blood,” *New York Times*, 20 Oct. 2008

“This vast prairie was once under an ancient sea.”

—Karen McCoy, in conversation

“If consumers begin to think and act in consideration of their responsibilities, then they vastly increase their capacities as individuals.”

—Approved paraphrase from Wendell Berry,
The Unsettling of America, 1977, p. 24

(Original text: “If a consumer begins to think and act in consideration of his responsibilities, then he vastly increases his capacities as a person.”)

“As the process of ocean acidification demonstrates, life on land and life in the seas can affect each other in unexpected ways. Actions that might appear utterly unrelated—say, driving a car down the New Jersey Turnpike and secreting a shell in the South Pacific—turn out to be connected. To alter the chemistry of the seas is to take a very large risk, and not just with the oceans.”

—Elizabeth Kolbert, “The Darkening Sea,” *The New Yorker*,
20 Nov. 2006, p. 75.

“For the Children”

The rising hills, the slopes,
of statistics
lie before us.
The steep climb
of everything, going up,
up, as we all
go down.

In the next century,
or the one beyond that,
they say,
are valleys, pastures,
we can meet there in peace
if we can make it.

To climb these coming crests
one word to you, to
you and your children:

*stay together
learn the flowers
go light*

—Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*, 1974, p. 86

