No-Man's Land: History and Nature Between States in the Korean DMZ

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ASIAN ENVIRONMENTS SHAPING THE WORLD:
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Photographer Atta Kim (1956-) opens the aperture of his camera for eight hours at a time.[1] The sun shifts position; the wind toys with trees and grasses; the weather changes slightly. The resulting photograph, blurred though it is, is still recognizable as a summer landscape. No human beings are visible, although human hatred in the form of double razor-wire fences inscribes the image's bottom edge. What we cannot see, even if viewing Kim's large backlit exhibition prints, are the plants and animals that flourish beyond the razor wire at the edge of the Korean Demilitarized Zone or DMZ. The "empty" space of this no-man's land is actually full; it is a place that is no place, falling between states, defined by what it is not, and yet so replete with wildlife that should it be absorbed within a state, more than a few species might vanish from the planet.

No one gave any thought to protecting wildlife when the "temporary" 1953 armistice halted the fighting. Instead, North and South Korea and their respective allies wanted only to end the human savagery that had killed a tenth of the peninsula's civilian population and resulted in military casualties numbering, on one side, 900,000 Chinese and 520,000 North Korean troops, and, on the other, 400,000 United Nations troops.[1] The war began on 25 June 1950 when North Korea backed by the Soviet Union and the Chinese invaded South Korea in an attempt to

forcibly reunify the nation, a nation divided in the last days of World War II when the United States sought successfully to halt a Soviet advance. After an uneasy five-year peace (1945-50) and a violent three-year war (1950-53), the truce, still in effect today, created a narrow no-man's land roughly along the 38th parallel where no army is supposed to go. Reckless human violence necessitated the evacuation of all human beings, and the unintended result is a border zone left to other species.[2] Although the consequences of the continued low-grade war may be tragic for human beings, other beings have flourished because of our relative absence.

Two aspects of this situation fascinate me: the purely accidental nature of environmental protection in the Korean DMZ and the difficulties historians face as we try to represent this accidental quality. At one level, this essay focuses on the DMZ's biodiversity and geography and on the politics and personalities negotiating this area's future. I explore the unlikely conjunction of people--including Korean governments, Crane enthusiasts, Swiss Peace keepers, a Japanese-Korean scientist, and business mogul Ted Turner--who protect unusual species--like the goat-antelope, the black-faced spoonbill, the brown spotted seal--in a scarred landscape created by the stroke of a pen across a line of latitude and a series of political mistakes. The purely fortuitous quality of this area's ecological salvation will be at the heart of my description. At another level, this essay considers the larger challenge that this fortuitous quality poses to the discipline of history and to our ideas about agency and narrative. As I will suggest, dealing with the environment strains history's fundamental ways of creating meaning. While making meaning out of the chaos of human history has always been difficult, the addition of physical forces, vast amounts of time, and the activities of animals, birds, and other non-human species

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[1] **Error! Main Document Only.**Atta Kim, *ON-AIR Project, DMZ Series, The Central Front, 8*

magnifies the complexity of our disciplinary enterprise–perhaps stretching it beyond recognition. In short, this essays moves from DMZ fauna to the people trying to protect this "global treasure house of ecosystems,"[3] to, finally, a consideration of how studying the environment challenges the separation of history from nature, a separation that in many ways undergirds our discipline. On both concrete and abstract levels, oddities abound as we try to capture the sheer randomness of the natural and political forces that have come together over the past sixty years to save a few creatures and a bit of land from devastation on a peninsula in northeast Asia.

Animals

Let me begin with the Amur Goral. The Amur Goral (Naemorhaedus goral raddeanus) is sort of like a goat and sort of like an antelope. Some people even say it is related to the camel. Referred to as a "fossil animal," it retains many characteristics found in its distant ancestors.[4] Not much is known about these rare creatures, although in 2002 a team of Italian and South Korean scientists (from Trento and Gangwon province, respectively) began a three year study. Apparently your average Amur Goral spends most of its time curled up on a mountain ledge, nibbling on snow-covered twigs, conserving energy under its heavy brown coat. It observes the world and its little group of 15 to 30 similarly engaged companions from under short, backwards-curving horns. This lack of dynamism may not make for exciting video footage, but given the million or so landmines in the Korean DMZ, inactivity is surely an advantage. During warmer seasons, the Amur Goral, weighing between 25 and 40 kilograms (55-88 lbs.), treads (gingerly, one hopes, given the explosives) down the slopes of the DMZ's high mountains to

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Hours, 2004.

graze on evergreen foliage and acorns, and, more peculiarly, to drink seawater and lick seaweed. Female gorals have four functional breasts in contrast to the two that goats, sheep, and humans have. In form and habits, these animals resemble the imaginary creatures of a medieval bestiary, bits and pieces filtered through a vivid imagination. Or, more scientifically, these animals' peculiarities underscore the sheer contingency of the evolutionary process resulting in a creature that is the product of no one's imagination, no one's design, and continues to exist by sheer good luck.

As an aside, it might be pointed out that the gorals' behavior is not nearly as peculiar–and much more benign–than that of its principle enemy, human beings, who like to eat its embryos for their alleged medicinal benefits. Indeed, along with habitat loss, the biggest threat to the goral is said to be poaching, although how the poachers negotiate the land mines is not made clear in the report.[5] At any rate, this gluttony for goral fetuses–and their meat and fur--is a very real threat to a species where females give birth to only one or two kids a year after a long, 230 day gestation period.[6]

Currently, estimates of the long-tailed Amur Goral population in the DMZ and adjacent areas–and they can only be estimates because scientists (apparently unlike poachers) fear being blown up–put the number at about 700 to 800, making this odd creature endangered–as are many of the fifty-some mammals in the DMZ and the adjacent Civilian Control Zone or CCZ.[7] This tiny threatened group lives in highland pockets within this thin strip of land as though on islands within an island created by human distrust.

Unlike the goral with its limited range, making only shy and occasional appearances in the valleys and coasts of this varied landscape, many of the DMZ's birds are migratory, easily

visible overhead or in the extensive wetlands and bays on the coasts. Japanese scientists using satellite telemetry have shown that these places provide "the major breeding areas for the global populations of 1,600 Black-faced Spoonbills, migration resting areas and wintering areas for perhaps one-half of the 8000 White-naped Cranes, and winter habitat for perhaps one-third of the 2500 Red-crowned Cranes."[8] Fifteen species of crane still exist world wide. For three of them, the Korean flyway is essential to their survival and for others very important. Taken together, migratory bird species create a different template for organizing the landscape, one that defies human territorial markers and stretches from the South Pole to the North, their frail existence dependent on dozens of human governmental entities.[9] While the cries of birds in the early morning are still rich enough to awe ornithologists, human encroachment from the North and the South has already emptied former habitats, forcing the birds into smaller areas.

The Black-faced Spoonbill is less charismatic than the cranes. It does not symbolize longevity, monogamy, spirituality, nobility, or good fortune as its more elegant cousins do, but it is an endearing creature nonetheless with its amusing masked face and scooping bill. Like the Asian cranes, the spoonbill also create a transnational flyway. Theirs sweeps from the wintering sites mainly in Taiwan, Vietnam, and especially the New Territories of Hong Kong which provide shelter to about 20% of the global population.[10] In spring, the endangered birds travel north to the Korean border zone and northeast China, establishing themselves in the tidal pools, wetlands, and islands. Their favorite Korean islets are Yudo and Yodo in the Han River estuary on the western side of the peninsula.[11] The valiantly optimistic Dr. Lee Kisup of the Korea Institute of Environmental Biology reports a slight increase in numbers of spoonbills on these islets since 1994 and an increase in breeding pairs from one hundred in 2003 to three hundred in

2006. Alas, these couples did not all raise chicks. Even Lee dims his optimism to report that of the 104 pairs on the islet of Yudo, none produced offspring in 2006, though no one knows the reason for this failure.[12]

The watery domains of marine species complement the birds' airy territories in defying human boundaries. The endangered brown spotted seals seem, although it is not certain, to traverse the Yellow Sea spending the spring, summer, and autumn feeding along the west coast of the DMZ and returning in winter to their breeding grounds in Liaodong Bay, China, in October, making them both "Korean" and "Chinese." Likewise, whale migration maps a vast area of ocean, also regardless of national borders, but reliant on the feeding grounds along the east coast of the DMZ. The Korea-Okhotsk Gray Whale has now been designated a "natural monument" by the Cultural Heritage Administration of South Korea, an official procedure redounding in ironies: the irony of a mobile, living "monument"–monuments being generally understood as fixed markers reifying dead glories; the irony of a natural species claimed as cultural heritage; and, finally, the irony of the South Korean government declaring some form of dominion over a species whose very name indicates its transnational existence. But irony aside, the DMZ for marine animals as for land dwellers and migratory birds is crucial to survival.

According to one reckoning, the DMZ shelters in one way or another 52 species of mammals, 201 of birds, 28 of amphibian and reptiles, 100 of fresh water fish plus uncounted ocean species, 602 species of insects; 282 species of mushrooms and other fungi, and 1597 taxa of vascular plants.[13] Telling the story of their activities and place in the world, their emergence as species and the delicate balance that supports their continued existence is surely crucial to understanding the value of the DMZ, but is telling this story the work of historians? If so, what

does it do to our ideas of agency when the agency is non-human, of time when it involves millennia, and of place when the territories spill beyond and above human borders?

Land

And yet, all these non-human creatures are succored in one way or another by a tiny space delineated by human agents and created by a political history well within bounds of traditional historical study. The Korean DMZ is only four kilometers wide–a mere 2.4 miles– and 250 kilometers long or about 150 miles across the whole peninsula: a ribbon of land running nominally along the thirty-eighth parallel comprising about 98,400 hectares in all. On one side is impoverished and secretive North Korea (the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea or DPRK.) How their land just north of the border is used is not well known to the outside world. On the other side of the DMZ is South Korea (the Republic of Korea or ROK), a modern industrial state with the world's eleventh largest economy. South of the DMZ's border is the area called the Civilian Control Zone or the CCZ (sometimes referred to as the Civilian Control Area or CCA) which is currently 10 to 20 kilometers wide.[14] No one is permitted to live in the CCZ, but farmers are allowed to enter what is otherwise a heavily fortified no-go zone to plant crops and harvest them. They then leave the gleaning to migratory birds, especially cranes, who flourish in the deserted fields.

Apparently, the line dividing the peninsula was drawn quite casually.[15] Certainly it was drawn without reference to biodiversity. In Washington D.C., on the night of 10 August 1945, as Soviet forces finally entered the war against imperial Japan, two young colonels, Dean Rusk and Charles H. Bonesteel, were told to partition the peninsula, carving out U.S. and U.S.S.R. zones

of occupation. Without particular knowledge of Korea or even a precise map, Rusk and Bonesteel sliced it like a birthday cake, leaving the capital in the south and pushing in the knife a tad further north than they actually believed would be acceptable to the Soviets. In the event, "the Soviets made no objections–which 'somewhat surprised' Rusk" and Soviet troops halted at the agreed upon line.[16] In 1950, however, Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean displeasure was made manifest. North Korean leader Kim Il Sung seeking to unify the nation persuaded Stalin to support his invasion of South Korea.[17] When the wretched fighting played itself out in exhaustion, the Armistice Agreement of 27 July 1953 established the DMZ pretty much along the same 38th parallel where the original partition ran. The lines north and south of the no-go area were immediately festooned with barbed wire, guard posts, booby traps, mines, troops from both Koreas and, operating under a United Nations mandate, other nations as well. This is where the Swiss peace-keepers mentioned earlier come in. On rotation for the UN, they monitor the armistice from a bizarre chalet-style outpost, stocked with Swiss chocolate.

Given all this activity, the DMZ is hardly a "sanctuary" in the sense of an undisturbed terrain, glorying under the dust of ages. Farmland for an estimated 5,000 years and currently full of deserted villages, it was a fiercesome battlefield six decades or so ago. The bones of tens of thousands of men still lie unburied between the lines, and military hardware litters the ground. Even today, army operations continue; military personnel are killed; and, the unresolved state of hostilities molds and disturbs the ecosystem. Forest fires, for instance, are lit for sight-clearing, creating meadows supporting deer, but limiting the deep forest beloved of owls and woodpeckers. The North assiduously tunnels under the soil, creating well-equipped conduits under the DMZ that could, in some cases, flood South Korea with North Korean troops at the rate of 10,000 per

hour.[18] Nevertheless, a tense semi-peace has reigned for almost sixty years inside the lines drawn by fear.

The semi-peace has preserved geographical features as well as fauna. The land of the DMZ and CCZ can be divided into four geographical zones: (1) the east coast region of lagoons, wetlands, and valleys, (2) the mid-eastern mountains and highland moors, (3) the inland mid-west region of the upper Hantan river watershed and lava plateau, and (4) the west coast hills, salt marshes and islands, each with its own peculiarities.[19] Alternatively, and just to show how difficult geographical categories are, the area can also be categorized according to "at least nine ecosystem types . . . as adapted from the UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment reporting categories: coastal and marine, island, mountain, river and inland waterway, wetland, grassland/dryland, farmland/cultivated, forest and urban."[20] Like the preservation of the animals of the DMZ, the continuation of this landscape is unintentional. Some agents in its creation are non-human physical forces–volcanos, earthquakes, tectonic plates, water, and wind over eons of time–and others are the usual suspects of human history like eager colonels, but neither human or non-human entities willed the preservation of lagoons, high moors, or free-running rivers.

People and Politics

When we turn from the animals, land, and unintended consequences of Cold War politics to the environmentalists, we shift quite abruptly to the terrain of conscious agency, dedicated political activity, and limited time-frames. Historians are particularly comfortable here. People make plans to protect the environment; organizations and nations produce publications and archives; the time frame narrows from millions of years to months. Currently, the interests and

concerns of governments, armies, and environmentalists serendipitously coalesce to protect the DMZ from human predation, but this could change overnight as the two countries come to terms. The goal of the conservationists is to turn serendipity into policy. They have a difficult task. An established peace, the rationalization of economic interests, concerns about North Korean poverty, and the imperatives of cultural unity could very well wipe "clean" the DMZ's biological efflorescence and homogenize its diverse territory into modern grids of suburb and highway. Indeed, very little stands in the way of this predation. According to the 2005 Environmental Sustainability Index, the two Koreas do not get high marks for environmental stewardship. South Korea ranks 122nd and North Korea is in last place out of the 146 countries studied for their ability to protect their environments over the next several decades.[21]

South Korea's low ranking is surprising given the vibrant environmental movement that sprang up as part of the democratization movement of the 1980s.[22] By 2004, about half of the 24,000 registered NGOs in South Korea were environmental groups.[23] However, according to sociologist Lee Hongkyun, the populations's seemingly high-level of environmental awareness is undercut by their inadequate recognition of the need to change their own behavior. Instead, South Koreans revel in increasing rates of personal consumption, while blaming environmental degradation on corporations and government policies catering to the very consumption they desire. As Lee puts it, South "Korean society seeks growth and expansion of the private space rather than preservation of shared space, i.e. the environment. They are unwilling to restrict the expansion of the private space in order to preserve shared space."[24]

As for North Korea, its autarkic ideology of self-reliance (juche) does not appear to encompass a self-sustaining environment. Immediately after the war, through ruthless

exploitation of mineral resources and forests, its economy soared. For the first twenty-five postwar years, North Korea was far richer than South Korea. However, as historian Lisa M. Brady argues, its success "was fragile, literally and ideologically, and began to founder once the initial benefits of such things as chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and industrialization took their toll on the soil and water of the nation."[25] Today, the North's economy has withered. Although there have been some environmental protection laws passed and some media campaigns to raise environmental awareness, North Korea, like South Korea, values economic prosperity and military strength above gorals and spoonbills. The suggestion by some that environmental protection "is a benign, seemingly apolitical issue on which the Koreas could possibly agree" seems naively optimistic.[26] Resource use is never apolitical and without a complete reorientation of values and an energetic drive toward sustainable practices at all levels of production and consumption in both Koreas, the bounty of the DMZ will be wiped away.

Today, cooperation on non-environmental issues grows by fits and starts. Already overland routes, including highways and the Gyeongeui and Donghae railway lines, traverse the DMZ and promote "reconciliation, economic cooperation, and cultural and tourist exchanges . . . .."[27] Contacts between the two states are by no means minimal. The South Korean Hyundai Corporation in partnership with the North Korean government is building an industrial park within sight of the DMZ that will cover 65 square kilometers.[28] The Diamond Mountain resort, located at sacred Mount Kumgang just north of the DMZ, has hosted upwards of 1.9 million visitors, most of them South Korean, since opening in 1998. These visits were suspended in July 2008 when a North Korean guard shot in the back and killed a middle-aged tourist as she walked down the beach.[29] And yet, as of 2009, there were no systematic studies of

the DMZ's ecological resources. Time for a comprehensive evaluation of the area's biodiversity is running out since South Korean scientists already report that "the DMZ and neighboring CCA have been damaged to the extent that significant wetland and forested areas have been lost. Therefore, habitats that do remain are even more valuable" *and,* one might add, more vulnerable.[30] Compared with the time frame of the evolution of a "fossil animal" like the Amur Goral, the actions needed to preserve the peninsula's biodiversity must occur on a completely different temporal scale.

The most concerted effort to forestall ecological destruction as Korea moves toward reunification is the called the DMZ Forum, founded in 1998 by Korean-American scientists, Dr. Ke Chung Kim and Dr. Seung Ho Lee. The DMZ Forum takes a three-pronged approach: conservation, sustainable agriculture, and economic growth. It aims to turn the DMZ into a nature reserve under the auspices of UNESCO, while realistically coping with the economic trauma bound to occur were the two disparate systems of North and South to merge. German reunification, it will be remembered, was hampered by the lack of economic parity, but East Germany's economy was at least a third the size of West Germany's whereas North Korea's economy is estimated to be only about one thirtieth the size of South Korea's. If this statistic is even approximately correct, reunification will be economically harrowing and the pressure to develop every possible resource will immediately menace the creatures of the DMZ. The Forum has been holding annual conferences since 2003 to support research and to persuade governments and interested parties that environmental sustainability and economic vigor could go peaceably hand-in-hand through careful management.

The DMZ Coalition, an off-shoot of the DMZ Forum, offers itself as an umbrella

organization for everyone interested in protecting Korea's globally unique resources. Its hodge-podge of about thirty (as of early 2008) individuals and organizations comes from all over the world, but, mindful of Korean national pride and prerogatives, the DMZ Coalition aims to place itself at the service of the Korean people, aiding rather than directing their conservation efforts.

As a group, DMZ Coalition members are almost as diverse as the flora and fauna they want to protect. Four South Korean organizations have joined, including a government research institute as well as municipal governments including the county of Hwacheon which abuts the DMZ. American members include the current President of the DMZ Forum, L. Hall Healy, an environmental consultant with a penchant for quoting Robert Frost, and representatives from various American universities–Harvard, Tufts, and Syracuse–and NGOs including the Sierra Club and the National Resources Defense Council. Ted Turner, the media mogul, is a also member of the Coalition (though not the Forum), and the Turner Foundation under its president, Mike Finley, has helped to fund its activities. The International Crane Foundation headquartered in Baraboo, Wisconsin enthusiastically participates in the persons of its co-founders, George Archibald and Ron Sauey. Archibald who saw the last Crested Ibis in South Korea in the late 1970s has links to Japan as well as the U.S. through his wife, a Japanese native. Japanese ministries have not yet shown an interest despite the fact that the Red-Crowned Cranes so beloved in Japan fly freely between it and the DMZ. However, several Japanese individuals and non-governmental organizations belong to the DMZ Coalition. One of Japan's top bird experts, Ichida Noritaka, Vice President of Birdlife Asia (the Asian offshoot of British-based Birdlife International), is a member. The Coalition has also drawn members and knowledge from Africa, joining forces with the South Africa's Peace Parks group, the world's foremost implementer of

transboundary nature reserves. In short, the people and organizations in the DMZ Coalition come from many walks of life, many countries, and many callings.

General support for the Coalition's efforts comes from an even wider group. Forum co-founder Ke Chung Kim won the backing of Nelson Mandela and Kofi Annan.[31] The Korea Society in the United States is a supporter without being a member. Chong Jong Ryol, a Japanese-Korean scientist who is director of Wildlife Research Centre at the Korea University, Tokyo, brings expertise in satellite telemetry that helps track cranes, and also the capacity to travel between Japan where he has been a professor in Tokyo and North Korea where his grandparents came from. In North Korea, he works on ornithological projects. Xi Yongmei, a Chinese expert on the Crested Ibis, has helped nurse that species back from almost total extinction. Today there are about 1000 Crested Ibis, half in captivity and half wild in Japan and China, and she hopes to reintroduce them to Korea. With enormous energy and diplomatic finesse, Hall Healy has fostered harmony among the efforts of the DMZ Forum, the DMZ Coalition, and these independent initiatives. At the moment, the diversity of conservationists and their transnational range mimics and enhances the diversity and transnational range of the creatures supported by the DMZ. Through fortuitous circumstances, these quirky groups cohere in finding the DMZ a vital place.

But for all their efforts, the environmentalists, as compared with the military, have done nothing as yet toward saving the DMZ's biodiversity. The paradox is that the preservation of these beasts, birds, fish, and fungi, meadows, rivers, seas, and forests has so far rested not with environmentalists but with armies. As long as North Korea does not carry out its threats to turn South Korea into a "sea of fire" or a "heap of ashes," cold animosity preserves biodiversity.[32]

And this truth–the dreadful truth that the salvation of countless non-humans lies in human hostility to other humans–plays itself out not only in Korea. Dozens of areas where military considerations have restricted other uses--uses usually considered more benign–demonstrate that our judgements on benignity and ruthlessness, depredation and development are easily reversed from an ecological perspective. From the perspective of the goral, internecine human hatred looks a lot like love.

But, our focus so far on environmental groups and the military standoff is insufficient. A more global view is necessary to truly understand the pressures weighing on the tiny strip of land between the Koreas. These pressures transcend national boundaries, transnational organizations, and human will, just as do the migrating spoonbills. China, Russia, Japan and the United States are included in the Six Party Talks, but those nations are only part of the weight. The multiplication of the human species from 1.6 billion in 1900 to over 6.6 billion impinges on this 2.4 kilometer wide strip of land; the fate of the estimated 1,100 non-human species in the DMZ is linked to the 31,500 species thought to be endangered or threatened with extinction around the planet; the greenhouse gases that sweep over the peninsula come from thousands of miles away; the Korean peninsula lies within warming ocean; the planet spins in an uncomprehending cosmos.[33] In one sense, every entity, living and non-living, has impact. In one sense, all the universe impinges on this fragile landscape.

History: Problems of Agency and Narrative

What are historians to make of all these marvelously idiosyncratic animals, geographical forms, individuals, non-state, state, and multinational organizations? The numbers multiply

almost to infinity like the bodhisattva of an esoteric mandala, the past, present and future, the human and the non-human, sentient beings and non-biological energies. Who are the agents of this history when purposeless evolutionary pressures, instinctual responses, casual acts, and passionate deliberations all shape the narrative? Where does this history take place with so many territories, mapped by so many different creatures and physical forces? What is the time frame when eons of evolution and yesterday's diplomatic initiatives both matter? What does it suggest to us when the narratives are so radically at odds? The DMZ is a comedy of errors from the point of view of the gorals; a sixty-year tragedy from the point of view of the Koreans; a necessary evil from the perspective of American policy; an indictment of American stupidity in the view of historians such as Bruce Cumings; a triumph for cranes; and, from the point of view of geology and physics, just another set of circumstances best conveyed without narrative tropes. Can a history encompass all this and yet remain history? Environmental history's multiplication and transformation of central tools of the discipline--agency and narrative--threaten, I argue, the discipline's very foundations and many environmental historians do not realize how radical this challenge is.

Take, for instance, environmental historian Ted Steinberg's essay, "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency and Power in History." Steinberg argues that if we focus on the natural environment--for example, if we pay attention to working class's roaming pigs in early-nineteenth century American cities--and take "an ecologically minded and socially sensitive approach," we will understand social networks better and, because of this, we'll be able to put history "back together again."[34] As Steinberg sees it, history, like Humpty Dumpty, lies in pieces--political, intellectual, and economic histories, histories of nations, societies, cultures,

regions, sexuality, class, race, and gender--and all that is required is "the natural world" to make it whole again. Similarly, historian John McNeill writes that "just as history is a seamless web, so in ecology everything is connected to everything else."[35] Without engaging the theoretical emphasis of the last thirty years on discursive disjunctions, environmental historians like Steinberg and McNeill adopt a Unified Theory of Everything. Because they consider the universe a "seamless web," they assume that our powers of representation will be able to render this seamless totality meaningful.[36] In so doing, they confuse reality with representation, the object of knowledge with the forms of knowledge.

Confidence about environmental history's position within the larger discipline shines forth in special issues on nature and history published by major journals: the American Historical Review in 2002, History and Theory in 2003, Daedalus in 2004, and Environmental History in 2005. From these discussions, it would appear that environmental historians are a cheerful lot, pleased with what their sub-field has accomplished and where it seems to be going. They rejoice in their professionalization as "a distinct branch of history"[37] with "a thriving journal, vibrant annual conferences . . ., an ACLS-recognized professional society, and tenure-track positions . . . in a growing number of universities."[38] This list of institutional accomplishments includes "a spate of book series devoted to environmental history" at scholarly presses, and "a number of universities [that] now have more or less formal programs" in environmental history in America, Australia, and Europe.[39] Though some doubts creep in, the larger question of what would happen to the discipline as a whole should the environment take center stage is rarely raised.[40] The environment becomes an additional topic for sub-specialists rather than an epistemological problem for the profession.[41] Few ask how best to represent the environment in which human

life takes place. Few consider the prospect that nature's cosmological indifference might overawe historians' efforts at anointing human actions with meaning. Few suggest that taking the environment seriously might render most human history mere sound and fury.

In order to recognize environmental history as the challenge that it is, historians must begin, I think, by recognizing the assumptions that founded our discipline. Modern history, institutionalized in the nineteenth century in Europe and elsewhere, came into being as one among many technologies of modernity, arising as human beings began to subdue and master–or so we thought–the environment in unprecedented ways.[42] Overcoming nature was the key to giving shape and sense to the object of our investigations as academic historians. History centered on human agency–our free (though limited) will–and the patterns of development created through the expression of that will through action[43] We relegated nature to the background of human activities not out of casual forgetfulness, but out of the imperative of our discipline. If our discipline's assumptions about the limited importance and force of nature are wrong, as Steinberg, McNeill, and environmental historians argue, then our assumptions about history's meaningfulness may be wrong as well. It is not merely the "arrogance of anthropocentrism" that is being challenged when the environment is taken seriously, but the very prospect of meaning itself. This is a challenge historians should not skirt--and more reflective environmental historians have proposed several ways of coping with it.[44]

Three solutions–all pertinent to our attempt to understand and represent events in the DMZ– present themselves. The first, articulated most compellingly by American environmental historian William Cronon, maintains the separation between nature and history, between reality and our modes of representation. Cronon recognizes the environment as chaotic, voiceless,

formless, and without inherent meaning. Non-human species, mountain ranges, and the universe itself "lack the compelling drama that comes from having a judgeable protagonist. Things in nature usually 'just happen'," he tells us, "without raising questions of moral choice."[45] This being the case, environmental historians do not represent the environment as they find it. Instead, Cronon argues, they supply judgeable protagonists by placing "human agents at the center of events,"[46] even ecological ones, and remain committed to "to narrative ways of talking about nature that are anything but 'natural.'"[47] In short, history, even environmental history, requires human agency and narrative. Cronon's reason for "organizing ecological change into beginnings, middles, and ends–which from the point of view of the universe are fictions, pure and simple . . ."[48] is to create didactic tales, to provide the "moral compass" that is at the heart of story-telling. For Cronon, then, the formal unity of environmental history resides not in the object of its investigation, but in our existential commitment to caring about certain things: ourselves, nature, moral rectitude, meaningful narratives. Nancy Langston, in the December 2008 American Historical Review forum on environmental historians, echoes this emphasis on human agency and narrative recalling Wallace Stegner's phrase that "we see the world through our 'own human eyes.'"[49]

Cronon would be the first to acknowledge that human agents have more often operated like blind moles than insightful or rational actors in affecting the earth.[50] He would certainly recognize that no one willed the accidental wonderland of the DMZ or the preservation of the Red-crested Crane's migratory route. And yet he would still insist that we tell the story of the DMZ as he tells the story of the American West, not from the perspective of gorals, spoonbills, or seals and not as a set of circumstances emerging in geologic time, but from the human point of

view, within a human temporal framework. Even after wrestling with the unnatural nature of history, he would, I think, still focus this story on accidental Cold War bounty and deliberate preservation efforts. Human beings, even when acting blindly, are still willful and still culpable. In Christopher Pearson's useful distinction between having a role and being agents, humans are, for Cronon, still the agents of history.[51] For scholars like Cronon, historical meaning arises from crafting the formal Aristotelian storylines that underscore our individual responsibility.

Other historians, emphasizing just how attenuated human will is once environmental factors are considered, blur concepts of "agency" and "role" and discount narrative. In the American Historical Review forum, Richard C. Hoffman articulates this second approach arguing that environmental history raises "the possibility of imagining other points of view" besides the human and that narrative unity may be "reductionist."[52] This expanded sense of agency suggests that processes of thought in both historical figures and historians, the very processes that Cronon and others treat as essential, are merely matters of scale and perspective.[53] All animate beings, human and non-human, are actors in history. Brett Walker, for instance, speaks of silkworms nodding their tiny heads with satisfaction "as Japanese farmers eliminated rice and soybean croplands to make room for more mulberries,"[54] and the Japanese beetle as stowing "itself away in the root-bundles of a batch of azaleas shipped to Riverton, New Jersey in 1916." Walker goes on to say that "it proved an advantageous *decision* for the hungry chafers, as they managed to escape several species of predatory flies and wasps not to mention several deadly diseases . ..."[55] At first we may balk at the image of insects calculating their best advantage, but looking at human history, it is not entirely clear that human calculations have been any more knowing. Just as the silkworms munched tender mulberry leaves to grow

exponentially without foreknowledge of the environmental consequences and beetles moved toward a particularly juicy root that happened to be in transit, human packs marked their territories in the Korean peninsula like wolves wary of mutual destruction and then hunkered down in a way that just happened to suit gorals. If sheer contingency and unintended consequences move history at least as much if not more than mindful action–as the DMZ seems to bear out–there is little to differentiate the pullulating mass of human beings from multiplying microbes or the decisions of dictators from the desires of whales. By these lights, every animate being has "agency"–but of such a deracinated kind that the old alliance between agency and will or consciousness comes close to elimination, and with it the moral imperative.

The same transformation of agency can be found with historians such as Daniel Lord Smail who focus not on other animals but on the human species as a whole over eons of time.[56] For them, the crucial determinants of history are not individual decisions but our species' transformation of habitat as it eats and breeds. Reversing what historian R.G. Collingwood presented as the consensus of the profession in the 1940s, Smail and others insist that historians should be interested in our animal natures rather than in those select human actions that are the expression of thought.[57] They argue that if we are to understand how past activities shaped present predicaments, historians need to look more at the instincts of our rapacious, expansive species than at individual deliberations.

With this transformation of agency comes a transformation of narrative. Cronon advocates human agency and narrative for their deontological benefits, but, if we wish to match the forms of representation with the nature of the ecological situation, it may be that charts, chronicles, and rich description without moral teleology are more suitable modes of presentation

because they do not rely on the artifice of a beginning, middle, and end nor suggest that the human point of view trumps that of other agents. Annal School historian Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie advocates and enacts historical research of precisely this kind, arguing that "in the long run, even in the more esoteric branches of history, . . . there will always come a moment when the historian, having worked out a solid conceptual basis, will need to start counting: to record frequencies, significant repetitions, or percentages."[58] In his view, all history will eventually become quantitative and scientific rather than narrative and anecdotal. Such an approach runs the risk of mimicking, in expanded form, the positivism trumpeted by Lord Acton and other grandees of the late nineteenth century historical practice where it was assumed that meaning would arise out of the sheer accumulation of fact without need for selection and craft.[59] For the DMZ, such an accumulation of data (as in the descriptions and lists above) provides copious information but risks obscuring any moral imperative because, given the multiplicity of views, the stress on the different forms of agency, and the widened temporal span, the case for any individual human action is enfeebled.

The third, most radical group are those historians who forgo a primary concern with animate agency or roles of any kind, moving beyond the biological to look at physical forces. A prime example is historian of fire Stephen Pyne who has tried to combine science and history in practice as well as in conceptualization. In 1990, working within Arizona State's history department, but teaching and researching in conjunction with scientists (not to mention spending his summers fighting fires on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon), Pyne argued optimistically that, "Done right, science and history can combine like epoxy into an unbreakable bond."[60] Today, however, he has moved out of the history department into the School of Life Sciences

and is considerably less sure of these epoxied bonds. Arguing like C.P. Snow that "the sciences and humanities operate very differently," Pyne now hopes, rather wanly, that environmental history can somehow bring science and the humanities together, but in the end, he titles his essay "Environmental History without Historians."[61] Such a perspective treats animal species (humans included) as epiphenomenal to the physical world which, such a view insists, should stand at the center of our inquiry into the forces that have shaped the earth. From this vantage, the DMZ is not primarily a political or social arena, nor even a field of biological struggle, but another particularity within a vast, chaotic clash of energies and matter. Both agency and narrative are discarded.

As we stand back, we see that none of these three approaches is wrong, none of them belie the truth of occurrences on the Korean peninsula, and yet the insights they provide about what happened and why are not commensurate. They exist on different planes of understanding, presented through different formal mechanisms of agency or role, narrative or non-narrative. In short, adding environmental concerns, instead of putting "history back together again" (as Steinberg promises) might well tear the discipline apart, uprooting our very strategies for creating meaning. We need to confront the possibility that our frail construction of coherent stories and our sense of who we are in relation to the past may tumble, and that after the fall, it may not be so easy to put the discipline back together again. I think this is what looking at the DMZ in Korea suggests. The situation there reminds me of a parlor game invented by the Surrealists in 1925 called "the exquisite corpse." Each artist added an element to a drawing without being able to see what others had drawn. The result was a concoction of random additions. With luck, the result could be startlingly beautiful, an emanation, they claimed, of the

collective unconscious. The beauty and biological diversity of Korea's DMZ also arise from sheer contingency. Right now, the DMZ is a paradox, a dead zone fortuitously alive with beauty, an "exquisite corpse" created unintentionally by many forces. The question for environmentalists, governments, militaries, indeed for all of us, is whether it will remain an exquisite corpse or become well and truly dead. The same question, I might argue, also applies to the discipline of history as it confronts the challenge posed by environmental factors. History may also be an exquisite corpse, an accidental marvel of a discipline. In light of environmental concerns, we need to see if it can be rejuvenated, and, if not, we need to consider how disciplines, like species, may evolve entirely new forms.

1. These figures are taken from Don Oberdorfer's excellent account, The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 9-10. About two-thirds of the UN casualties were South Korean.

2. Donald Worster draws parallels with the "rival American Indian tribes [who], in order to avoid mutually destructive warfare, sometimes stayed clear of their borderlands, allowing game and forests to thrive there." Worster, 'Environmentalism goes Global,' Diplomatic History 32/4 (September 2008), 641. Wolves also use this tactic to reduce violence although their territorial borderlands, unlike the DMZ, fluctuate. Jon T. Coleman, Vicious: Wolves and Men in America New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 24 and Brett L. Walker, The Lost Wolves of Japan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 179-181.

3. This phrase is used in Kwi-Gon Kim and Dong-Gil Cho, 'Status and Ecological Resource Value of the Republic of Korea's Demilitarized Zone,'online publication 19 March 2005 © International Consortium of Landscape and Ecological Engineering and Springer-Verlag Tokyo 2005.

4. The South Korean Environment Ministry designated the Amur Goral as Natural Monument No. 217 on November 20, 1968 and classified it as endangered in 1998. It also exists in the Hunganryung Mountains in northeastern China and in the Lazovskiy Nature Reserve in Russia. Park Grimm, 'Distribution and Protection of the Long-tailed Goral in the DMZ and Civilian Control Zone,' DMZ: Biodiversity and Conservation in the DMZ (Seoul: Korean Environment

Institute, conference proceedings, 2006), 49.

5. Park Grimm, ibid., 50.

6. Bears also suffer from predation for supposed medicinal benefits to humans. All wild Asiatic Black bears were thought to have all been eliminated from South Korea until one was caught by a local television crew in 2000. There are some caged bears whose bile is extracted daily and sold as a medicinal potion. The South Korean government has made some efforts at protection. http://eng.me.go.kr/docs/news/hotissue/hotissue_view.html?topmenu=E&cat=520&seq=8&page=5

7. The South Korean Environment Ministry designated the Amur Goral as Natural Monument No. 217 on November 20, 1968 and classified it as endangered in 1998. It also exists in the Hunganryung Mountains in northeastern China, and the Far East of Russia. Park Grimm, 'Distribution and Protection of the Long-tailed Goral in the DMZ and Civilian Control Zone,' DMZ: Biodiversity and Conservation in the DMZ (Seoul: Korean Environment Institute, conference proceedings, 2006), 49-50.

8. George Archibald, Malcolm Coulter, and Hall Healy, 'A Critical Time for Cranes and Spoonbills on the Korean Peninsula,' DMZ: Biodiversity and Conservation in the DMZ (Seoul: Korean Environment Institute, conference proceedings, 2006), 18. If these estimates on the Black-faced Spoonbill are correct, they indicate an increase in the total number of birds. A study done in 2000 found "an estimated population of about 600 birds." Lee Woo-Shine, Wee-Haeng Hur and Shin-Jae Rhim, 'Distribution Characteristics of Black-faced Spoonbill Platalea minor in

Western Coast of South Korea,' Korean Journal of Ecology 24/4 (2001), 219.

9. David S. Wilcove, No Way Home: The Decline of the World's Great Animal Migrations (Washington: Island Press, 2008) traces bird migration in South and North America, a migration which has the same parallels and perils as the great bird migrations from Australia to Russia.

10. Lee Woo-Shine, Wee-Haeng Hur and Shin-Jae Rhim, 'Distribution Characteristics of Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* in Western Coast of South Korea,' Korean Journal of Ecology 24/4 (2001), 219.

11. Lee Kisup, 'Importance of DMZ for Breeding Side of Black-Faced Spoonbills,' DMZ: Biodiversity and Conservation in the DMZ (Seoul: Korean Environment Institute, conference proceedings, 2006), 28. ["Kisup" can also be romanized as Ki-Sup but here I follow the romanization used in this publication.]

12. Lee Kisup, ibid., 29.

13. Joon Hwan Shin, Jong-Hwan Lim, and Jung Hwa Chun, 'Unique Biodiversity and Landscapes of Korea's Demilitarized Zone (DMZ): Overviews,' International Conference on Korea's DMZ Conservation: Science and Impact Assessment (Seoul: conference proceedings, 4 June 2007), VI-10-14.

14. The ROK Ministry of Defense has proposed reducing the CCZ by five kilometers. Hall Healy, 'Korean Demilitarized Zone: Peace and Nature Park,' International Journal on World Peace 24/4 (December 2007), 72.

15. In 1896, discussions between Japan and Russia almost resulted in dividing the peninsula "although apparently not at the thirty-eighth or thirty-ninth parallel as many historians have claimed" according to Bruce Cumings, Korea's Place in the Sun (updated edition) (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 123.

16. Cumings, ibid., 187.

17. Don Oberdorfer, The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 9.

18. Don Oberdorfer, ibid., 58.

19. Joon Hwan Shin, Jong-Hwan Lim, and Jung Hwa Chun, 'Unique Biodiversity and Landscapes of Korea's Demilitarized Zone (DMZ): Overviews,' International Conference on Korea's DMZ Conservation: Science and Impact Assessment (Seoul: conference proceedings, 4 June 2007), VI-4.

20. L. Hall Healy, Jr., 'Korean Demilitarized Zone: Opportunity to Help Reduce Economic Asymmetries on the Korean Peninsula,' The Journal of Economic Asymmetries (The Athenian Policy Forum Inc., APF Press, 2007), 102.

21. The "2005 Environmental Sustainability Index" was produced by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network, Columbia University. It integrates seventy-six data sets to measure the ability of

nations to protect their environments in the coming years. These findings emphasize the importance of government policy in creating sustainability, and find that there is no direct corollary between economic development and environmental protection, although civil and political liberties correlate highly with sustainability. http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/es/esi/ (accessed 19 January 2009).

22. Ku Do-Wan, 'The Korean Environmental Movement: Green Politics through Social Movement,' Korean Journal 44/3 (Autumn 2004), 186.

23. Cho Myung-Rae, 'The Emergence and Evolution of Environmental Discourses in South Korea,' Korea Journal 44/3 (Autumn 2004), 139.

24. Lee Hongkyun, 'Environmental Awareness and Environmental Practice in Korea,' Korea Journal 44/3 (Autumn 2004), 178.

25. Lisa M. Brady, 'Life in the DMZ: Turning a Diplomatic Failure into an Environmental Success,' Diplomatic History 32/4 (September 2008), 597.

26. Arthur Westing quoted in Lisa M. Brady, 'Life in the DMZ: Turning a Diplomatic Failure into an Environmental Success,' Diplomatic History 32/4 (September 2008), 605. Dr. Westing is on the board of directors of the DMZ Forum.

27. Kwi-Gon Kim and Dong-Gil Cho, 'Status and Ecological Resource Value of the Republic of Korea's Demilitarized Zone,' online publication 19 March 2005 © International Consortium of Landscape and Ecological Engineering and Springer-Verlag Tokyo 2005.

28. Lisa M. Brady, 'Life in the DMZ: Turning a Diplomatic Failure into an Environmental Success,' Diplomatic History 32/4 (September 2008), 609.

29. Tours to the Diamond Mountain were suspended in July 2008 by the South Korea's Unification Ministry when Park Wang-ja was killed by a North Korean soldier when she walked into a fenced-off military zone near the resort in the early morning of July 11, 2008. Choe Sang-Hun, "South Korea to heed North on quick exit from resort" International Herald Tribune 11 August 2008.

30. Kwi-Gon Kim and Dong-Gil Cho, 'Status and Ecological Resource Value of the Republic of Korea's Demilitarized Zone,' online publication 19 March 2005 © International Consortium of Landscape and Ecological Engineering and Springer-Verlag Tokyo 2005.

31. Mark Tran, 'The Most Dangerous nature Reserve in the World,' The Guardian 20 June 2008 at http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jun/20/conservation.

32. Choe Sang-Hun, 'N. Korea Scraps Accords With South,' New York Times 30 January 2009 at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/31/world/asia/31nkorea.html?_r=1&emc=eta1.

33. Ke Chung Kim, 'The DMZ Conservation in Global Climate Change,' International Conference on Korea's DMZ Conservation: Science and Impact Assessment, (Seoul: conference proceedings, 4 June 2007), K1-5.

34. Ted Steinberg, 'Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and Power in History,' American Historical Review, 107/ 3 (June 2002), 798-820.

35. J. R. McNeill, Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 20.

36. Whether or not the world is seamless is itself a point of contention. A comparison of historians and physicists on the issue of totality and a unified theory would be most interesting.

37. Brian Fay, 'Environmental History: Nature at Work,' History and Theory, Theme Issue 42 (December 2003), 1.

38. Michael Lewis, 'Transformative Environmental History,' Environmental History 10 (January 2005), 5.

39. J.R. McNeill, 'Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History,' History and Theory, Theme Issue 42 (December, 2003), 11-12.

40. There are some notes of caution in these special issues. Historian of Japan William Tsutsui warns that "as the field becomes more established, it may well grow more narrow and, eventually, ossified; like so many other topical slivers of the historical profession, environmental history runs the risk of becoming fixated on a limited range of time-honored debates..." William Tsutsui, 'Where the Grass is Always Greener,' Environmental History 10 (January 2005), 102.

41. Other scholars have also noted environmental history's relative lack of engagement with cutting-edge work, most especially in the social sciences. I agree that environmental history has yet to "identify its core problem" but here I focus on the formal issue of representation. Sörlin Sverker and Paul Warde, 'The Problem with The Problem of Environmental History: A Re-

reading of the Field,' Environmental History 12/1 (January 2007), paragraph 28. <http://www.historycooperative.org.proxy.library.nd.edu/journals/eh/12.1/sorlin.html> (accessed 30 January 2009)

42. The first chair of history was founded at the University of Berlin in 1810. France followed suit in 1812, and England, belatedly, joined the movement with Oxford's Regis Professorship of History in 1866. It was not until 1875 that English undergraduates could read for a degree in historical studies. See Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973) 136. In Japan, Tokyo Imperial University invited a German historian, Ludwig Riess, to hold the first chair of history, meaning non-Japanese history, in 1887. Two years later, in 1889, a department of Japanese history was established. See Jiro Numata, 'Shigeno Yasutsugu and the Modern Tokyo Tradition of Historical Writing,' in W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank, eds., Historians of China and Japan (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 278.

43. Space does not permit me to trace this development in full, but I cannot resist a reference to one of the earliest articulations of history in this sense: a charming essay by Jean Bodin, Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem from 1566, where he writes, "Of History, that is, the true narration of things, there are three kinds: human, natural, and divine. . . . In accordance with these divisions arise history's three accepted manifestations– - it is probable, inevitable, and holy - - and the same number of virtues are associated with it, that is to say, prudence, knowledge, and faith." After many recondite elaborations, Bodin places his bets on human history and probability. The agents historians should focus on are human. Historical narratives

in tracing the wisdom or folly of human choices will accord neither with the inevitable script of natural necessity nor the providential randomness of miraculous intervention. Instead of knowledge or faith, says Bodin, we end up with a prudent grasp of probabilities. History, importantly, is the territory of limited free will. Jean Bodin, Method for the Easy Comprehension of History translated by Beatrice Reynolds, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1945), 15.

44. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses,' Critical Inquiry 35 (Winter 2009) analyzes the intertwining themes of environmental and other forms of history, suggesting, most interestingly, the possibility of a 'negative universal history.'

45. William Cronon, 'A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,' The Journal of American History 78/4 (March 1992), 1368.

46. Cronon, ibid., 1375.

47. Cronon, ibid., 1367.

48. Cronon, ibid., 1375.

49. Nancy Langston, 'AHR Conversation: Environmental Historians and Environmental Crisis,' American Historical Review 113/5 (December 2008), 1441.

50. Cronon, ibid .

51. Christopher Pearson, Scarred Landscapes: War and Nature in Vichy France (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 8.

52. Richard C. Hoffman, 'AHR Conversation: Environmental Historians and Environmental Crisis,' American Historical Review 113/5 (December 2008), 1442 and 1446.

53. The transformation in agency and the redefinition of human and animal is happening not only in historical research but in law and society more generally. Spain passed a limited bill of rights for primates in July 2008. http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1824206,00.html

54. Brett L. Walker, 'Sanemori's Revenge: Insects, Eco-System Accidents, and Policy Decisions in Japan's Environmental History,' Journal of Policy History 19/1 (2007), 119.

55. Brett L. Walker, "Animals and the Intimacy of History," unpublished paper. [emphasis mine.] I am grateful to Professor Walker for permission to quote from his paper.

56. Daniel Lord Smail, On Deep History and the Brain (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

57. R.G. Collingwood argues that the human being is "the only animal who thinks, or thinks enough, and clearly enough, to render his actions the expressions of his thoughts." This is why "historians habitually identify history with the history of human affairs." Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 213.

58. E. LeRoy Ladurie, The Territory of the Historian, translated by Ben and Sian Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 15.

59. E. H. Carr examines and excoriates this view in Carr, What is History? (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 13-20.

60. Stephen J. Pyne, ‘Firestick History,’ The Journal of American History 76/4 (March 1990), 1139.

61. Steve Pyne, ‘Environmental History without Historians,’ Environmental History 10 (January 2005), 72.