



EUGENE MIHAESCO

cobwebs, cats, moldering harnesses and vertical shafts of light. They had barnyards patrolled by chickens, the emotional weathervanes, ready to panic with the passing of a shadow or a sudden noise, but for the most part pensive and philosophical, muttering chicken profundities, "Weelll, but, but but... Ahhhh, wellll... but, but." Within a grove of white oaks and Douglas fir you would find a corncrib, hogpen, barn, tool shed, chickenhouse, miscellaneous sheds and shacks in different stages of disrepair. They grew feedcorn for the hogs, hay for the cows, and a cash crop of grain. There would usually be an orchard and often a few acres of berries. I don't think many people got rich, but diversification made it hard to fail as long as people were willing to work. And they were nice places to raise kids. These farms had a charm that was lost in the transition to agribusiness. They smelled better too. I guess it was the combination — a smidgen of chicken-shit, a dash of hogmanure mixed with mud, and the large manure pile against the side of the barn. As much straw as manure, you could walk on it in the summer when it developed a crust. The combination was a wholesome, earthy pungence that some Madison Avenue type could probably sell as aftershave. And down beyond the lane that led to the pasture, a woods and maybe a creek. I remember walking down a lane on my uncle's farm, through old growth fir woods to the Abiqua River, watching salmon holing up in deep water. I remember the awareness of seeing into their world and feeling a yearning for something for which I had no name.

Well, that's all long gone now, replaced by the Hog Farm, the Dairy Farm, the Thousand Acres of Broccoli Farm. Ever smell a jillion tons of broccoli being processed at a giant mega-food glurper factory? Ever visit Elsie the Cow at a modern, efficient fly-infested, shit-encrusted, up-to-your-ass-in-cowshit-slurry dairy farm? Drive by a hog farm, a half mile downwind? Ever see, hear, smell a modern chickenhouse? (Visualize a hundred thousand chickens trussed in tiny iron maidens squawking out their brief, miserable lives under a totally noisy environment where there is no sun, no grasshoppers to chase, where their feet will never touch the ground. Try to

THE DEATH OF NATURE

BY JACK SCHARBACH

I can't think of anything as dispiriting as the death of nature: hills terraced in endless paddies of rice, vast fields of wheat with long-shadowed, undulating hills, checkerboard fields and tidy farmhouses, a doublewide road stuck under a solitary tree surrounded by 10,000 acres of scarred stubble, clearcuts running from mountaintop to water's edge, plumes of smoke seen from 200 miles above the tropics. Increasingly, we see the hand of man no matter where we look, or at what scale. From Antarctica to Point Barrow, from midocean ridges to the surf, our failure to integrate humanity with nature is evident.

Even at this advanced age of environmental awareness, we seem unable to conceive of a world in which the activities of man and nature do not conflict. If we must have nature, it must be packaged like a jar of pickles. Discriminating customers will look for the word "Pristine" on the label. Nature must be kept "out there" at a safe distance. We love nature, though. We watch it on TV, and we feel damn mad when we see images of dead fish on the beach of a polluted river, oily birds flopping out their last on

an Exxon shore, smoke rising from what used to be a forest. We chalk it up to greed and ignorance and take what solace we can in our innocence. We might even recycle our trash and cluck about the evils of littering.

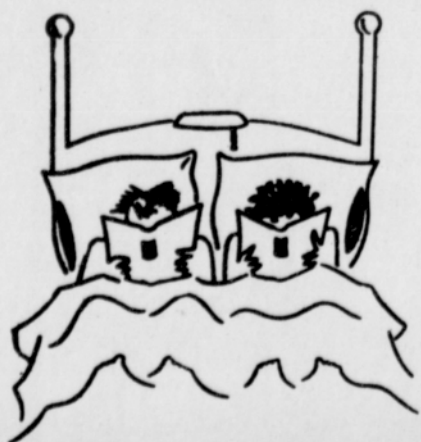
It isn't that man and nature are diametrically opposed. It isn't that nature must be pristine. Litter doesn't offend me. Imagine that you somehow found a forest forgotten, and in it, deep in its interior, an ancient junkyard replete with '79 DeSotos, SuperBeetles upholstered in spagnum, vine-rich Toyotas, and under an upturned Cadillac the den of a black bear, with a packrat in the glovebox. Offended? Now imagine a stretch of even-aged "super" trees growing around the blackened remains of a natural forest. The alder, willow, vinemaple that would like to grow there are hacked and sawed and sprayed into oblivion. A network of "forest access roads" insures that you will never be far from the sound of a motor.

I grew up along the eastern edge of the Willamette Valley in western Oregon. It was an area of small family farms; forty acre plots, farmers in bib-overalls, wooden barns full of

imagine the combined voices of 100,000 hens who have nothing but complaint to express.) Farms have become animal hell.

In the mountains the natural forest gave way to managed forest — "managed" as in clear-cutting, napalming the slash, burning off the humus and topsoil, or scraping it off (scarifying) with heavy machinery, and replanting with "improved strains." From then on you must prop up this inherently unstable system with defoliants, artificial fertilizers, the trapping and hunting of "excess" populations of various animals, and finally, a public relations department to grind out a stream of soporific half-truths. It's hard, but the profits are more than adequate and the public easily gulled. It's the death of nature.

The plains were like an ocean whose depths of complexity and mystery were contemplated and traversed by beings who found not only their living there, but also their way of life. It was a monumental job to demolish that universe, but we did it, species by species, four-footed and two, then began on the trees and rivers and grasses in a large spiral toward



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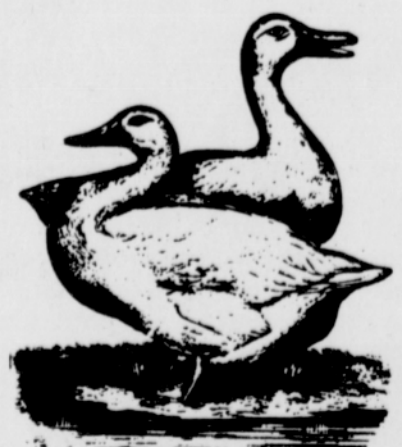
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