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Book Review: Encyclopedia of world environmental history

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I am also left with three major questions: First, who is to communicate this radical way of engaging doggie–human relationship, one that does not conflate all dogs with dogs used as ‘pets’ (‘...many pets and pet people deserve respect’ although ‘being a pet seems to me to be a demanding job for a dog, requiring self-control and canine emotional and cognitive skills matching those of good working dogs’ p. 38). My question is salient given that the vast majority of the burgeoning doggie-loving masses support non-radical, mushrooming ‘pet’ industries antithetical, I suppose, to Haraway’s project: witness the proliferation of doggie bakeries, doggie parks, doggie bedding, couture and perfumeries, doggie magazines, doggie insurance plans and the like. Those who buy into these industries do not treat their dogs simply as ‘furry little children’ (e.g. pp. 11, 38, 95). These are actors caught up in post-industrial commodity domains of desire and consumption enmeshed in highly mobile, post-industrial ‘family’ formations in which children are often optional and dogs provide all kinds of alternative functional convenience and affection (you can put them in kennels or the SPCA). Given that Haraway’s meta-knowledge about significant otherness does not travel easily alongside commodity chains, it appears that we would need meta-training schools to teach humans how ethically to engage and think about (only working?) dogs as nodes of much larger historical and material processes (‘Dog people need to learn how to inherit difficult histories in order to shape more vital multi-species futures’, p. 63).

Secondly, if the majority of dog-owners are deeply enmeshed in commodity circuits divorced from the embodied practices Haraway describes, why does she find working dogs to be particularly compelling vehicles for teaching humans about intersubjectivity, trust, and respect – a group of dogs largely inaccessible and unknown to 95 per cent of those living on the planet? Is it only because she happens to own dogs and to engage them in agility training? Is she arguing that dogs hold potential for being the ultimate(?) ‘companion species’ because they are common? Because they’ve been around in history for a long time? Because they are physically engaging, active creatures? Because, unlike birds or turtles, they are proxemic? Thirdly, if we (who the ‘we’ is, is unclear) learn her radical way of knowing dogs, will the world be saved? (‘[In agility training] – both dog and handler have to be able to take the initiative and to respond obediently to the other. The task, is to become coherent enough in an incoherent world to engage in a joint dance of being that breeds respect and response in the flesh, in the run, on the course. *And then to remember how to live like that at every scale, with all the partners*’ (p. 62)). The conservative in me wants to ask how counterhegemonic or recuperative this text is when the level of investment in pet-dogs, especially in post-industrial contexts of privilege soars while the gap between the wealthy and impoverished widens; and the expensive art of agility training remains a largely feminized, ‘white’ and elite one.

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Encyclopedia of world environmental history. Edited by Shepard Krech III, J.R. McNeill and Carolyn Merchant. New York: Routledge. 2004. 3 vol; 1429 pp. \$495.00 cloth. ISBN: 0 41593 732 9.

From 'acid rain' to 'zoos', the 1500-page, three-volume *Encyclopedia of world environmental history* attempts to chronicle the human impact upon the 'natural' world (and vice versa) on a global scale from prehistory to the present. It does this through over 500 entries, ranging from geographical regions to animals and plants, environmental problems, and prominent figures in the history of environmental conservation. This collection will be a valuable first stop for undergraduate and graduate cultural ecology and physical geography research projects. The entries are concise, usually between one and five pages, and each concludes with a 'further reading' section (quite possibly the most useful part of the entire encyclopedia).

For the sake of most readers of *Cultural geographies*, it is necessary to discuss a little of what the *Encyclopedia* is *not*. This collection is *not* a work that attempts to engage with 'critical' approaches to the social sciences. Notable missing index entries include 'political ecology', 'globalization', 'the agrarian question', 'landscape', 'the social construction of natural', 'discourse', 'post-___' (you fill in the blank, they're all absent) and, perhaps most egregiously, 'gender'. It is not that gender is totally overlooked. Indeed, in the introduction we are informed that "it is important to environmental history because the nature of male and female interactions with the natural world has changed over time" (p. xii). Many readers of this journal no doubt will wince as, in one sentence, gender is conflated with biological sex and the (sexed) genders carry out 'natural' interactions with the 'natural' world.

To be fair, however, the *Encyclopedia* is not a wholly uncritical project. Garret Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' theory, for example, is succinctly debunked in the entry on 'Law: land use and property rights'. Mercifully, human population is not causally linked to environmental degradation. Max Oelschlaeger's entry on 'wilderness' at least acknowledges recent critiques of the wilderness idea. The *Encyclopedia* does, in other words, steer clear of the worst crimes of neoliberal environmentalist boosterism.

In sum, most critical geographers will likely spend little time between the covers of the *Encyclopedia*. At nearly \$500, few faculty and even fewer students will be moved to purchase the set. That being said, it is an impressively crafted reference work. Any geography department with a physical or nature-society component would benefit from having a copy on hand in the departmental library.

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