

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University

All Together: Connecting to Place & Cultivating Ecological Citizenship

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
The Alfred University Honors Program

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Under the Supervision of:

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It is no secret that the planet is undergoing a colossal transformation due to climate change, the consequence of humanity's ongoing decisions about resources and the value of non-human life. Whether we overhaul our current system or not, we will soon inhabit a vastly different world, if we inhabit the world at all. This knowledge looms large over any speculation about the future, which tends toward the apocalyptic, assuming that it's too late to change anything and that humanity will be wiped out.¹ It may be too late to reverse climate change, and a massive extinction is indeed underway, but the likelihood that humanity will be entirely destroyed in an epic disaster is slim.² We do not know what will happen in the future, and I believe that the responsible (if optimistic) reaction to this awareness of climate change is to do everything and anything to be a better citizen of the world. If we want the future world to be a more balanced, or less devastated, place to live in, there's every reason to start that transformation now, through "small, unilateral steps toward peace in everything we do"³. Indeed, 2017 is not even close the starting point for environmentalism – the contemporary environmental movement is around half a century old – but it has not yet achieved the goal of shifting society away from ecological destruction once and for all. As a new generation of people enter adulthood and the next generation is becoming aware of the world, we have an opportunity to change the way we exist on this planet.

In an age of such chaos and widespread anxiety, the role of the artist is to go beyond the representation and become more directly involved in shaping the future. To be meaningful and effective, art must function as "not merely a conservation of *what we were* or a reaction to *what we are*, but a proper commitment to *what we could be*... the material formalization of the

¹ Julian Cribb, "Can humanity survive the 21st century?", *The Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere*, last modified September 20, 2016. <https://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/humanity-survive-c21/>

² Jean-Luc Nancy and John Paul Ricco, "The Existence of the World is Always Unexpected," in *Art in the Anthropocene*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities, 2015), 89.

³ Petra Kelly, *Thinking Green!* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1994), 37.

possible”.⁴ My studio practice is focused on the relationships between humans and other living things, addressed through printed and sculptural material in a way that is poetic, quiet, and reflective. While I am happy with this direction, I feel that I must also do more to make my work a catalyst for social change. The Honors Thesis project became an opportunity to branch out beyond my typical practice and work on a more didactic and socially engaged project. My goals were to first understand ecological citizenship myself, and then encourage it in others. This took the form of two iterations of a workshop in Alfred, and then of a zine which will be distributed both within and beyond my immediate community.

The research for this project began slowly in my second year of college when I came across a few foundational texts by accident. The first was Mitchell Thomashow’s *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist*, which I happened upon in a used bookstore. I had been loosely involved in Green Alfred for a year but wanted to dig deeper into environmentalist theory and how I could apply it to my own life, so I picked it up. This book turned out to be an important resource for planning the “Ecological Citizenship” workshops, as it is a collection of Thomashow’s methods for teaching ecological identity work. The second book that put me on the path towards this project was Gary Snyder’s “Four Changes”, an essay in the back of *Turtle Island*, which a friend lent to me thinking I would enjoy the poetry. I certainly did, but this essay was particularly captivating because it joins global political activism with personal consciousness raising in a way I had never seen before. The final accidental text that set me on this path was *The Environmental Handbook*, a collection of essays having to do with environmental education and activism. I found this book literally sitting outside in the rain, an abandoned part of someone else’s art project. “1970s – THE LAST CHANCE FOR A FUTURE

⁴ Fabien Giraud and Ida Soulard, “The Marfa Stratum: Contribution to a Theory of Sites,” in *Art in the Anthropocene*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities, 2015), 179.

THAT MAKES ECOLOGICAL SENSE” is emblazoned on the back, a rather ominous statement to read in the 2010s. While it is a theoretical text, it is also truly a handbook for creating change, and the authors’ uncompromising passion is palpable. I went on to read much more than these three books, but I bring them up because they laid the groundwork for this project in my mind. None of them mentions the term “ecological citizenship”, but together they perfectly sum up the core of the concept – reshaping individual identity to include obligation to the planet, then connecting individual responsibility to community-wide or even global efforts to remedy ecological problems.

I have spent my senior year doing more intensive (and intentional) research into the topic of ecological citizenship to clarify its meaning for myself. The theory is generally attributed to British political theorist Andrew Dobson. I was never actually able to find his original text, but his work was referenced in nearly everything else I read on the subject. As a form of citizenship, it is non-territorial and non-contractual, meaning that it is not linked to any one governing body, and there is no written set of laws by which ecological citizens must abide. Rather, the individual or the community recognizes their membership in, and therefore obligation to, a broader ecosystem.⁵ Responsibility is emphasized over rights, though if this framework were actualized on a significant scale, I believe the rights of humans would be improved, along with the rights of non-humans and the land.

As an offshoot of ecology, ecological citizenship goes beyond scientific analysis of the ecosystem and focuses on how humans can consciously improve their role. Before one can practice ecological citizenship, one must first understand ecological principles and have at least a loose working knowledge of one’s environment. Educator David W. Orr writes that “ecology,

⁵ Katelyn Stenger, “Citizenship and Environmentalism,” *Earthzine*, last modified February 6, 2009. <https://earthzine.org/2012/02/06/citizenship-and-environmentalism/>

like most learning worthy of the effort, is an applied subject. Its goal is not just a comprehension of how the world works, but, in the light of that knowledge, a life lived accordingly.”⁶ He argues that when ecology is left out of most subjects in education, students learn that it is its own separate subject and not intertwined with everything else. Reading this, I realized that before I talked about making citizenship more ecological, I would have to talk about what ecology is in the first place and how people can learn about it. Beyond formal education, I think the best way to learn about the environment (and, coincidentally, the best way I come up with ideas for my art practice) is listening and paying careful attention to one’s biome over time. This is addressed a bit further in the final zine than it was in the workshops.

I have led two hour-long “Ecological Citizenship” workshops so far, first with an Environmental Research Procedures class, and then with the public at the Judson Leadership Center. These workshops are centered on deconstructing our ideas about ecology, community, and citizenship, and talking about how our environmental footprint is related to the other things that are important to us. It was also a way for me to crowd-source information to continue the project. The workshops ran as such:

1. Introductions – everyone says their name and a place that is important to them
2. Discussion of “community” – list what communities you’re part of, talk about what it means to be part of a community...
3. Drawing idea webs – one group for “Ecology” and one group for “Citizenship”
4. Discussion of idea webs, coming up with an expansive definition of each term
5. Slides - what “ecological citizenship” means, history of the term
6. Discussion of how to be an active ecological citizen
7. Discussion of habits of mind – do you see yourself as an agent of change in your community? Do you feel obligation to the non-human parts of the planet? Do you feel committed to the place where you live?⁷

⁶ David W. Orr, “Ecological Literacy,” in *Ecological Literacy: Education and Transition to the Postmodern World* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), 87.

⁷ Michael B. Smith, “Local Environmental History and the Journey to Ecological Citizenship,” *Taproot* 23, no. 2 (2014): 12-20. <http://ezproxy.alfred.edu:2053/docview/1729956221/abstract/B05061DE85B2460DPQ>

8. Slide – ways of improving ecological literacy – discussion of when and where people learned about the natural world
9. Brainstorming potential concrete lifestyle shifts, leading into open discussion

The most surprising thing that I took away from the workshops was the lack of efficacy in the participants, even those who had strong feelings about the environment. I asked everyone if they view themselves as agents of change in their community, and I was met with mostly “no”, head-shaking, and a few who offered reluctant “maybe’s”. This was even after everyone had taken time to consider the communities they are a part of, down to their smallest social groups. Beyond dealing with ecology, this is a problem for young people in all areas of our life. If we do not even believe that we can create change, then we will never try to do so.

These workshops were a valuable step in my own development because it was my first time leading a workshop that was based on conceptual discussion rather than a practical activity. In the future I’d like to organize variations on the same theme, which would of course look different depending on the audience, time frame, and location. The events that already happened were successful in examining preconceived notions about ecology and citizenship, but were lacking in that there was not enough discussion devoted to developing environmental action or constructing personal identity around ecology. These are the elements that get people excited, and given a similarly short period of time, I would put the most emphasis on the latter.

A more comprehensive version of this workshop could take the form of longer sessions over a few days, involving small group activities and one-on-one discussion in addition to group conversations, with personal reflection happening on one’s own between the days. Moving the workshop outside, whether in an urban or rural environment, would also give more meaning to the term “ecosystem community”. In an urban environment, there might even be more to talk about. Walking between several locations can be a tool to exemplify the effects of different kinds

of land use or simply to practice the kind of critical looking necessary to understand one's environment. With a more dynamic plan and appropriate time devoted to each activity, people may be more inclined to open up and share their ideas, and the conversations could lead to more practical conclusions. Facilitating a longer workshop such as that would likely involve teaching collaboratively with others who are familiar with ecological education or social change leadership.

I am most familiar with working with college students, and the intellectual format I've been working with is best suited for a group of adults. To reach younger people, the workshops would definitely have to involve more moving and hands-on activity, and these subjects would be addressed a more casual and positive way. Several short workshops or activities, each creating an engaging and fun way to learn about ecological processes, could be built into an existing summer or after-school program in collaboration with the teachers.

If I still only had an hour to reach a broad audience, I would opt toward simply leading a walk than organizing a sit-down discussion-based workshop. People of all ages can participate in a walk, and depending on the terrain, it can include those who can't walk as well. The act of observant walking, alone or with a group, is a simple embodiment of the main points I'm trying to convey through this work – connecting to place by being mentally present and fostering care for that place and the things that live there.

To settle the project for now, I produced a zine titled *All Together: a primer for connecting to place + cultivating ecological citizenship*. I knew I wanted to make a zine from the very beginning because of the format's flexibility. Self-publishing allows an author to bypass the accepted conventions for writing, design, and publishing, and zine-making is a prevalent mode of communication between young creative people. Of course, zines tend to lack the "finish" of

traditionally published booklets, but I believe that the do-it-yourself aesthetic makes the content even more approachable. *All Together* is made up of text typed on a typewriter, bits of found text, lined and graph papers, and background images from magazines and books. Each page was collaged together by hand in the haphazard style of zines from the 1990s, then scanned individually and laid out for printing. Initially the project was started in InDesign, but I eventually scrapped that version because I prefer to ideate an entire page at a time rather than treat text and image as separate elements. This production method is more intuitive for me than digital design and stays true to the reasons I wanted to make a zine in the first place. Copies will be available first at my BFA thesis show, in as many libraries and distros as I can get them to, and online as a free PDF file.

All Together is a forty-page guide that contains questions and exercises designed to lead the reader on a path of investigating their ecological community and their engagement as a citizen. It is similar to the framework of the workshop, beginning with community and ecology and moving into citizenship and action, but with more depth and specificity. Several of the questions were inspired by a quiz I encountered called “Where You At? 30 questions to elevate your awareness and literacy of the greater place in which you live.”⁸ This questionnaire is a fantastic tool, but is formatted in a way that is (perhaps intentionally) overwhelming. I was also inspired by another zine, *Towards an Anarchist Ecology*, which is fairly similar to my own project. At the end of the introduction, the authors say that they “want to let go [of] this idea of arriving at some point at which we no longer need to strive.”⁹ Similarly, I made it clear that my zine was not a packaged solution or endpoint by any means, but a tool for starting to understand one’s role as an ecological citizen.

⁸ Kevin Kelly, “Where You At?” *Alliance of Artist Communities*.

⁹ Knowing the Land is Resistance, *Towards an Anarchist Ecology* (2014), <https://ia902307.us.archive.org/1/items/TowardsAnAnarchistEcology/towards-anarchist-ecology.pdf>

My Honors Project has been an exciting amalgamation of numerous ideas that have bubbled up during my undergraduate career. Though this particular project may be complete, there is still endless work to do and there will always be a need to strive. I closed out the zine with a snippet from a magazine: “We must not succumb to the idea that because things are a particular way not, those conditions are natural, inevitable, and permanent.”¹⁰ This sentiment is the basis for all social change efforts, and to me, is the reason to make art – to imagine different worlds and cross the boundaries that say those worlds aren’t possible.

¹⁰ Jesse D. Palmer, “Don’t Cop Out! Calling for a Climate Uprising,” *Earth First! Journal*, Yule 2015.

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**ALL
TOGETHER**

a primer for
connecting to place
+
cultivating
ecological citizenship

first edition

Introduction

If you haven't been living under a rock, you may have realized that climate change is drastically affecting life as we know it on Earth, and faster than anyone initially thought. If you've been paying a bit more attention, you know that communities all over the world are engaged in conflicts over environmental destruction, from industrialized agriculture to mountaintop removal mining. It is clear that corporations and governments will not take responsibility for the environment without extreme pressure, and people (much like the climate) are turning up the heat.

All of this information can be incredibly overwhelming, especially when our media feeds are a constant barrage of alarming headlines. It is understandably tempting to check out and bury your head in the sand when things seem hopeless, or to give up when there seems to be no place to start.

I would like to propose that although the future will certainly be chaotic, all is not lost, and serious action taken by a critical mass of people on a grassroots level will add up and drive significant social change. It may be too late to undo climate change, but we can still build a future worth living in. Everything is at stake, but we have everything to gain by trying.

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The environmental movement has evolved significantly since the conservation conversation began in the 1800s, and I recently became deeply interested in the concept of "ecological citizenship" as the logical next step in that history. We are dealing with global-scale concerns, which require a perception of one's interdependence with the rest of the planet - but also the understanding that the work begins in one's own immediate community.

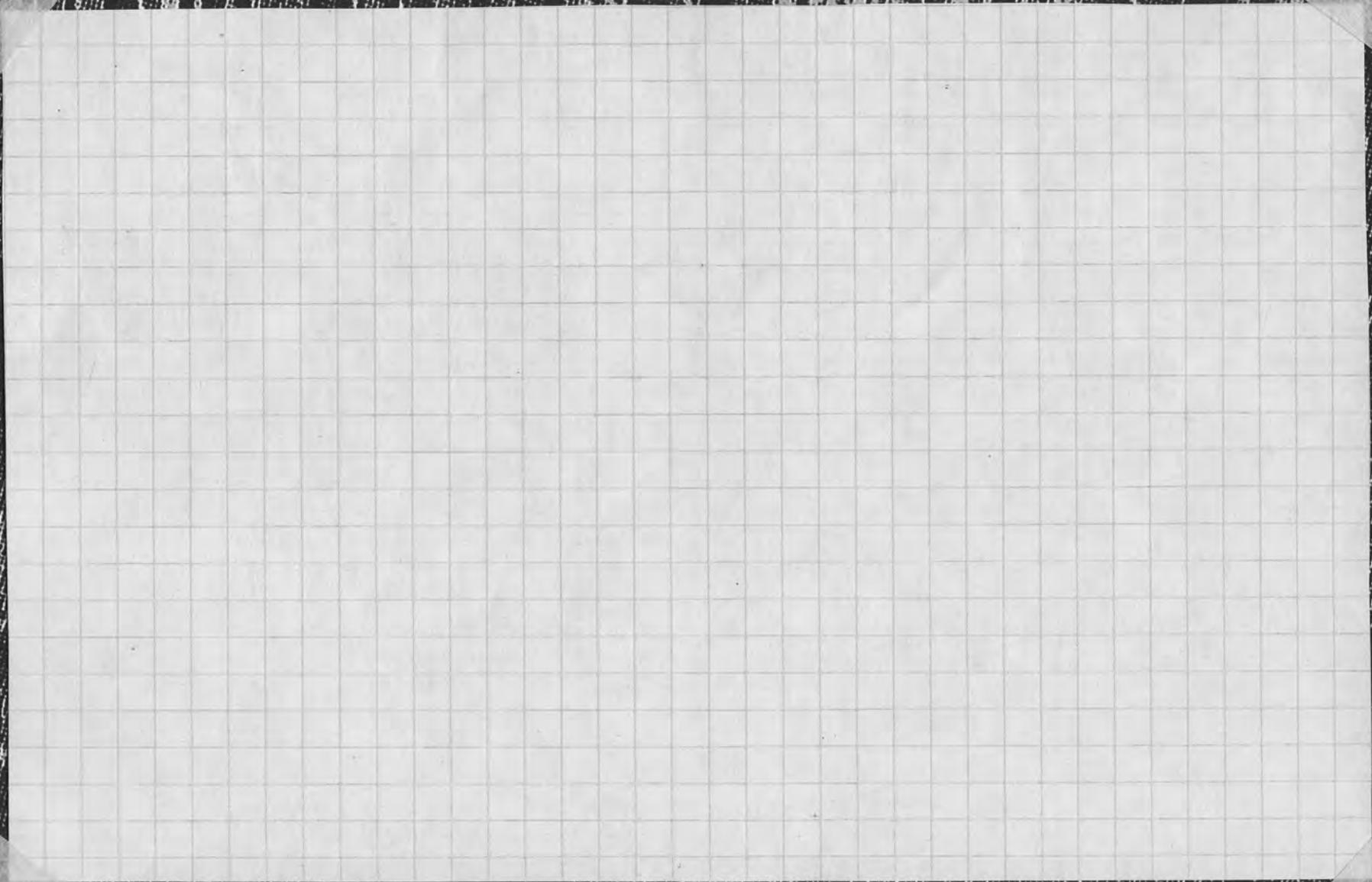
This book is a starting point for understanding the ecosystem in which you live, solidifying your ecological identity, and developing effective ecological citizenship. It contains more questions than answers, but I hope you find it to be a helpful guide nonetheless. There are as many ways to act as there are people on earth, and I'm figuring out what my role is too.

"The phrase 'health of the environment' is not a literary convention. It has real biological meaning, because the surface of the earth is truly a living organism. Without the countless and immensely varied forms of life that the earth harbors, our planet would be just another fragment of the universe with a surface as drab as that of the moon and an atmosphere inhospitable to man."

—René Dubos, *Limits of Adaptability*

THE ENVIRONMENTAL HANDBOOK

A *Community* is a group of individuals who share something in common, like location, values, beliefs, occupation, identity, interest, or another characteristic. In biology, a community is an interacting group of species that share a location. What communities are you part of and how are they connected?



ENVIRONMENT

Think about the place where you

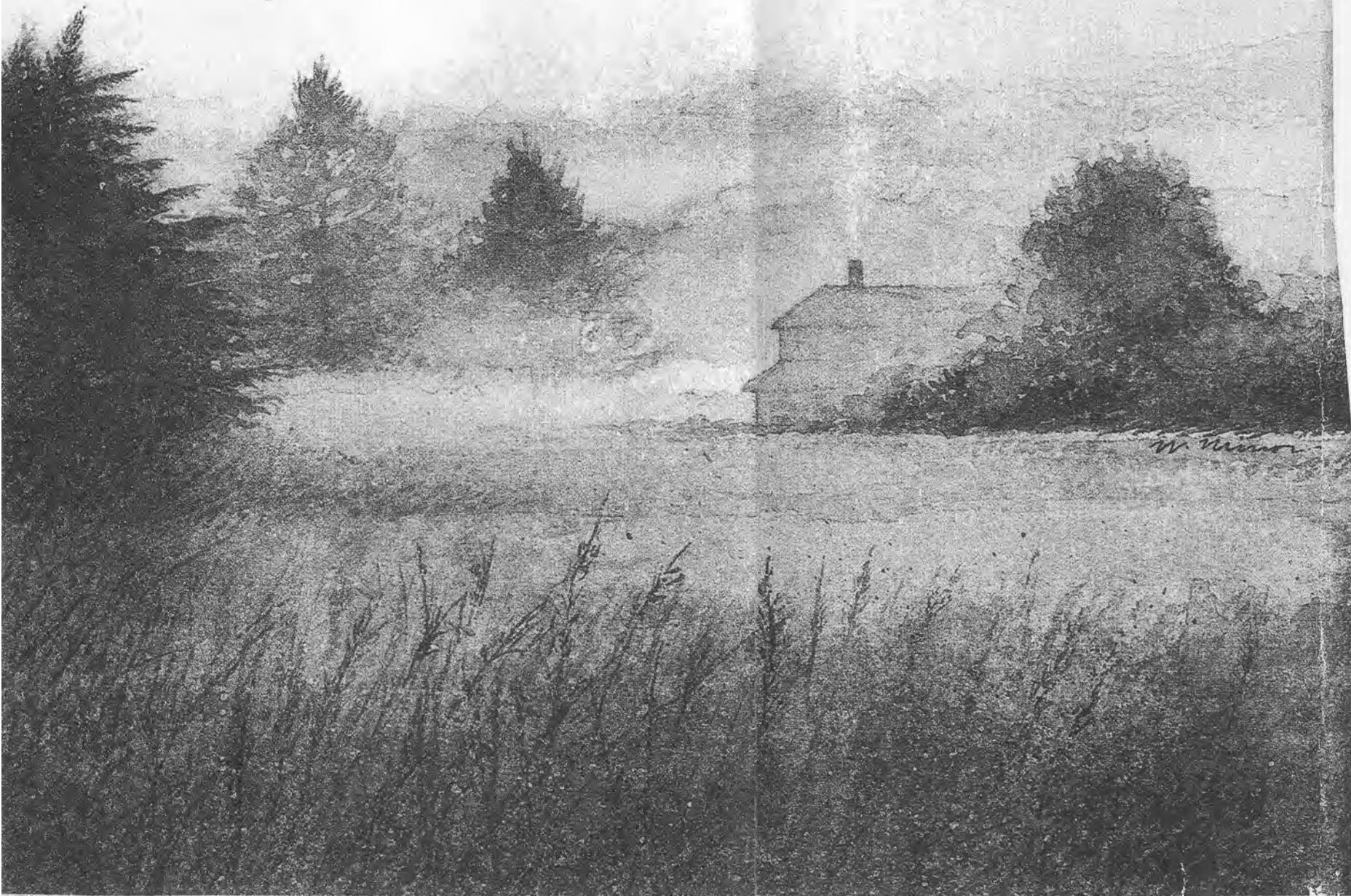
live and spend most of your time.

What makes this place what it is?

Think about the place that
is most important to you.

What makes it so special?

Are these two places the same place or different?



What does "ecology" mean?

↖ ↗ ↘ ↙
What directions does your mind go

when you think of this word?

↖ ↗ ↘ ↙

Ecology

Draw a web of your thoughts:

Education and Ecology

Think about where and when you learned about how the natural world works. For most young people today, ecological education happens on a basic level in grade school, but this information is often not applied to the real, familiar world. Many students are even given scientifically inaccurate information about climate change, evolution, or even their own bodies.

"Ecology" is the study of living things and their environments - which means, in a way, everything that exists on the planet. Understanding ecological principles and relationships should hardly be limited to experts in a specific discipline.

What if ecological analysis was incorporated into all subjects at all grade levels? What if everyone in college and professional training learned about how the field they're going into relates to ecology, and not just scientists?

Improving the way ecology is taught in formal education is certainly key to encouraging ecological citizenship in the next generation. However, the best opportunities to learn about the environment usually lie outside the classroom, and learning from direct experience happens throughout all stages of life.

The next several pages offer simple exercises for familiarizing yourself with the place where you live, no matter where that happens to be.

Exploring

Draw a map of a route in your neighborhood
that you can walk every day,
as long or short as you'd like.

Walk this route every day for thirty days.

Keep your senses open and take notice
of what's going on around
the place where you live.

Record your observations...

Identify five **Plant** species that grow
wild where you live. Where do they

tend to grow, and why do you think they

thrive in that space?

Are they native to the region?

Or were they introduced from elsewhere?



Identify five **ANIMAL** species that live nearby.

Where do they make their homes?

Where and when can they most commonly be seen?

Are they native to the region

or introduced from elsewhere?



What watershed do you live in within?

(When a drop of water falls on the ground,

what body of water will it eventually flow into?

What body of water will that flow into?)

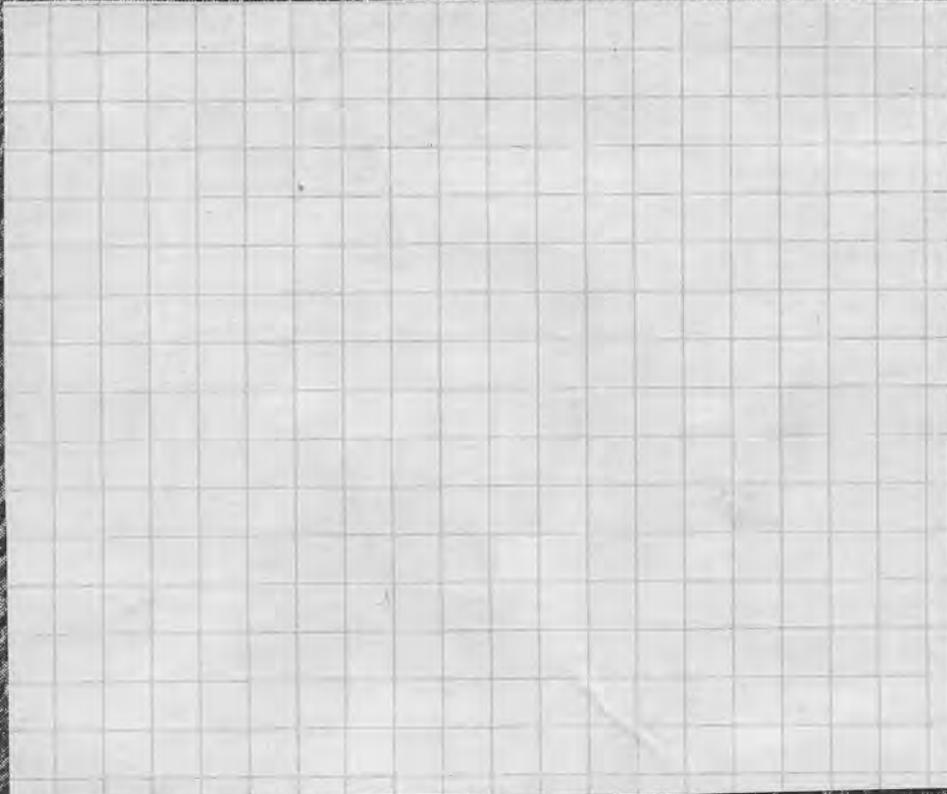
Draw the boundaries of your watershed here:

the Land

Soil is more than just "dirt" - it's full of nutrients and life, and it holds the story of everything that's ever happened in a place.

Dig a small hole in the ground and take a look at the soil. Does it have visible layers?

Does it seem generally moist or dry? Is it mostly clay, peat, sand, or silt? What color is it?



To learn more, you can obtain a simple soil test kit to find out the pH, nutrient levels, and potential contaminants in your soil.

CLIMATE

How would the general climate of your area be described?

On average, how much rain does your area get annually?

When is the first frost? When is the last frost?

How many hours of sunlight does your location get on the summer & winter solstices?

What were the average high and low temperatures last year in January? In July?

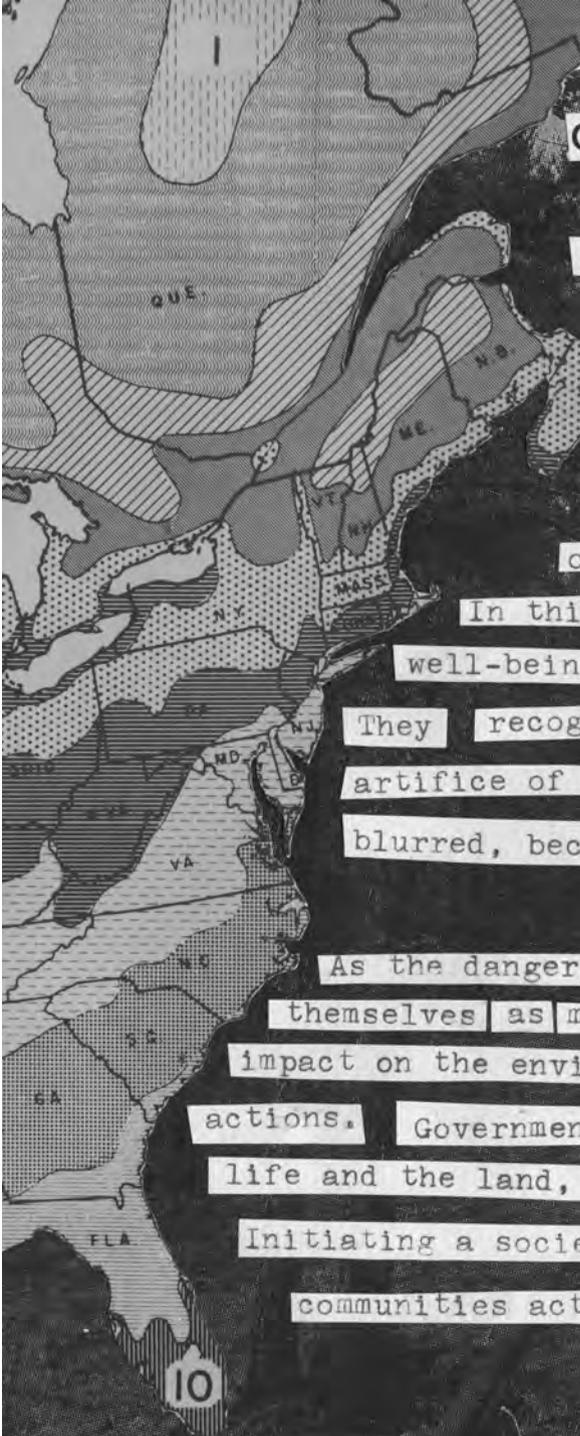
What were the average high and low temperatures thirty years ago in January? In July?

What comes to mind when you think about being a citizen?

What does "citizenship" mean?

Citizenship

Draw a web of your thoughts!

A map of the Eastern United States, showing state boundaries and abbreviations. The map covers parts of Quebec, New Brunswick, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The number 10 is in a circle at the bottom left.

Traditionally,

CITIZENSHIP means
vested
of that place. It is
arrangement in
powers that be and

An **Ecological** view of
on the individual's

In this worldview, a citizen
well-being of their community -

They recognize the interdependence
artifice of national borders.
blurred, because individuals'

As the dangers of **climate change**
themselves as members of an ecosystem
impact on the environment, and holding
actions. Governments can certainly
life and the land, but this kind of
Initiating a societal paradigm shift
communities acting from personal

being a recognized member of a nation or state
with certain rights and subject to the laws
a mostly private, passive, and contractual
which one is only responsible to the political
the social order of the human community.

citizenship is more expansive and places emphasis
responsibilities moreso than rights.

is an active participant in ensuring the
meaning the whole ecosystem community.

of all the world's living things and the
The line between private and public life becomes
personal decisions affect the environment too.

become palpable, more people are beginning to see
community, taking initiative to lessen their
themselves and others accountable for their
regulate how people interact with non-human
citizenship goes beyond political structures.
begins with the roots, with individuals and
obligation to attain ecological balance.

WHO REPRESENTS YOU...

...in the federal government?

...in your state's government?

...in your local government?

How can you contact your representatives?

When are elections for each level of government?

When and where does your local government meet?

Are there opportunities for the public to express their concerns?

WHO PROTECTS*...

...the water from pollution?

...the air from pollution?

...the soil from contamination?

...native species from decline?

...endangered species from extinction?

...parks, public land, and wild places from development?

...food from contamination?

...the public from dangerous or ill-conceived development projects?

...people + animals from industrial toxins?

...water sources from drying up?

*or is supposed to protect

**RESOURCE
CONSUMPTION**

Though the "developed" world contains a minority of the world population, its people consume far more resources than people in the rest of the world. For example, the USA is home to 5% of the world population, but uses 25% of the world's fossil fuel resources.*

Identifying the resource networks you are connected to and the sources of what you consume is a first step to reducing personal consumption.

Where does your tap water come from?
How many people rely on that water source?

How is your electricity generated?

How is your home heated?

How do you transport yourself from place to place?
Where does the fuel for that transportation come from?

How many products that you use on a regular basis are disposable?

How many things do you own that are made of plastic?

If you have a cell phone, where was it made?
What is it made of?
Where did that material come from?
How often do you replace your phone?

Where were your clothes made? What are they made of, and where did that material come from?

Draw a map / diagram of how the food you eat gets to your plate:

calls to action

WHAT CAN I DO?

There are countless ways to change your lifestyle to reduce your personal impact on the environment. These are a few.

Don't feel like you have to do everything or everything all at once - not everyone can.

But everyone can do something. Start with one change and hold yourself to it.

Tell everyone what you're doing if that helps you stick to your plan, and it might even get them to follow your lead.

Then keep going!

- Walk, ride a bike, carpool, or use public transit whenever possible.
- Eat animal products less often, or not at all, especially red meat.
- Use items until they are completely worn out instead of buying the newest thing.
- Use reusable containers instead of plastic bags/wrap.
- Eat food grown locally.
- Eat food grown without pesticides or genetic modification.
- See if your energy provider(s) have an option to switch to renewable energy, either partially or entirely. If they don't, see if there are other energy providers in your area who do.

- Don't litter.
- Compost your food waste.
- Recycle or reuse as much waste as possible.
- Bring a reusable bag to the store.
- Bring a reusable cup to the coffee shop.
- Stop using plastic straws.
- Grow your own food.
- Plant trees.
- Plant native drought-resistant groundcover in the place of grass.
- Don't use chemicals on your garden or lawn.
- Support politicians with genuinely earth-friendly agendas.
- Support public transit initiatives in your area.
- Support informed, consensual family planning.
- Push your representatives to take action on climate change and other ecological problems.
- Don't buy products with excessive packaging.
- Take shorter, cooler showers.
- Support urban farming and community gardening.
- Support habitat restoration.
- Avoid mechanized recreation.
- Buy "used" whenever possible.
- Use as little as possible.
- Protest, picket, boycott, march, monkeywrench... Be deliberate.

This is, of course, an incomplete list.

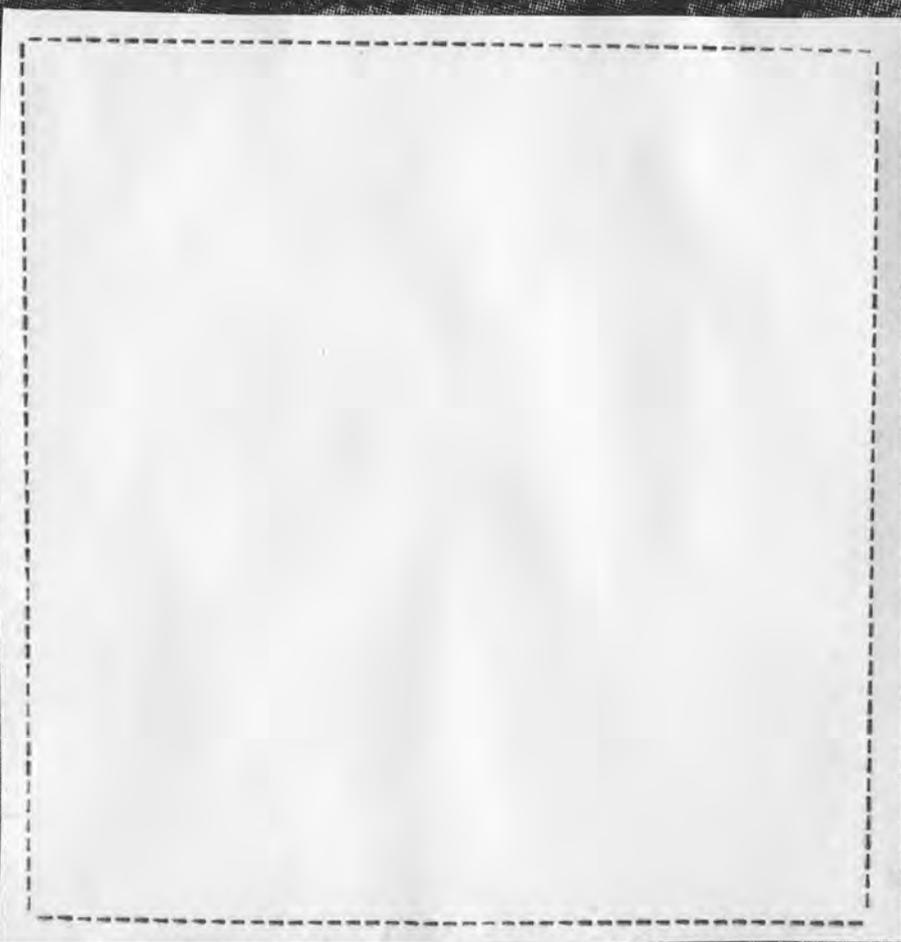
Most of the changes people think of right away are minor steps, and that's a great place to start, but the bigger the changes you can make, the greater the impact you'll have.

CONVERGE

Everything we do is connected in some way to our relationship with other life forms and our environment.

What are you already really passionate about?

How can that passion intersect with concern for the ecosystem?



HOW DO I LEARN WHAT'S GOING ON?

If there's a threat to your local environment, chances are that the initiators will try to present what they're doing in a positive light

or keep things under wraps to avoid criticism and opposition.

Here are some suggestions for how to stay aware...

-Pay attention to your local environment and make note of any unusual changes. Look into what the causes could be.

-Sign up for updates from environmental organizations.

-Find reputable news sources and check them.

-Pay attention to releases from environmental regulatory agencies.

-Talk to your neighbors, friends, acquaintances, family, and strangers.

Think critically about the information you take in. Who is it coming from? What are their sources? Who do they answer to? Do they have biases or a hidden agenda?

Identify five Organizations in your region working on environmental protection, research, advocacy, activism, or education.

The more local the better.

What does each group focus on?

Do they hold meetings, events, or information sessions? What ways do they suggest for getting involved?

When it comes to making a change in your community or your country, it's often unnecessary to start from scratch. There might already be others out there tackling the issue who need your help. If you're really the first one to bring it up, there are certainly other people you can get on board. There are also probably people in your area or elsewhere who have done something similar and have valuable lessons and information to share.

Everyone has the potential to create change, though not everyone realizes it.

There is power in numbers, and collective action begins with one person speaking up and reaching out.

**THINK OF HOW
MUCH WE CAN
ACCOMPLISH
TOGETHER**

THE BIG CHANGES

There is no magic solution to humanity's unhealthy relationship with other living things and the environment. All I know is how to live my own life in a way that is ever-increasingly considerate of other life. No one knows exactly what the future will hold, but there will need to be some major changes in how we exist on this planet if we want to stay here, and those changes need to happen soon.

Instead of seeing the current ecological crisis as a catastrophe to hide from, let's think of it as an opportunity to fix the problems that have been festering for so long. Some may think this point of view is too optimistic, and the consequences of failure (already underway) are indeed dire. But doing nothing won't change anything, and to make a better future we must first be able to imagine that it exists. I hope this zine has provided some inspiration to begin building that future through your own life - there's no time like the present to start!

We must not succumb to the idea that because things are a particular way now, those conditions are natural, inevitable, and permanent.

Jesse D. Palmer

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