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Cover Page Footnote

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Ecojustice, Religious Folklife, and a Sound Ecology

Jeff Todd Titon

In the midst of an environmental crisis that disproportionately affects the poor and people of color, a crisis signaled by climate change, rapidly intensifying weather extremes, a warming planet, hazardous waste, habitat loss, and accelerated species extinction, a few thoughtful people have wondered if Indigenous ecological knowledges about nature and the place of humans within nature offer any hope for social and environmental justice and for our collective survival. One hundred and fifty-seven years ago, Thoreau gestured away from the anthropocentric and toward the ecocentric when he wrote that he wished to regard the human being “as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society.”¹ Taking Indigenous ecological knowledges seriously requires a willingness to entertain an ecological rationality that treats the forces and beings of nature, plants and animals and landforms, as if they deserve the respect that governs, or rather should govern, relations among all beings.

In this essay I claim that folk, traditional, and Indigenous ecological knowledges have a significant role to play in ecojustice; and I bring to bear a case study in the traditional ecological knowledge among one of the religious communities with whom I have spent several decades, illustrating how they embody the main principle and three fields of an ecological rationality. Ecological rationality stands in contrast to economic rationality, a branch of instrumental reason exemplified by what economists call rational choice theory.² An ecological rationality is based in the principles of connection,

relation, engagement, cooperation, and interdependence, in contrast to the economic rationality of separation, distance, individualism, and self-interest.³ I conclude with a gesture to my current project of a sound ecology, a thought experiment in which sounds rather than texts or objects enable the connections that lead to sound experience, sound communities, sound economies, and a sound ecology. A sound ecology embodies an ecological rationality aimed at who we think we are, how we know what we know, and what we can do to bring about ecojustice in a sustainable world.

For millennia, travelers and scholars have documented Indigenous peoples’ beliefs about nature, but until recently they have either denied their truth, or they have bracketed—that is, temporarily set aside—their truth claims, while emphasizing that they are pragmatic and consequential among the people who hold them. Yet, as John Grim writes, “Religious concepts and practices [among Indigenous peoples are] both culturally differentiated and cosmologically integrated. . . . religion should not be studied as separated from other indigenous social expressions, structures, practices, symbols, rituals, cosmologies, and ethical behaviors.”⁴ The same can be said about the customary beliefs and practices of traditional groups, communities, and societies that have long been the object of folklife studies, especially among European folklorists. Insofar as we are coming to realize that the techno-scientific lifeways and instrumental rationality of the developed world may not be so well adapted to survival and justice after all, we may wish to reconsider the

truths of Indigenous and folk ecological knowledges. If, for example, we come to believe that all beings are related—that, as Grim puts it, “kinship extends from human communities into biodiversity, bioregions, and stars and planets”—then we may set ourselves on a path toward ecojustice and an ecological rationality based in collective rights and responsibilities.⁵

An ecological rationality that turns on the relatedness of all beings is congruent with the fundamental principle of ecological science; namely, that all beings-in-place are interconnected, and that a change to any one effects change in every one. In 1866, four years after Thoreau died, Ernst Haeckel invented the science of ecology and defined it as the study of organisms—that is, beings—and their relations to each other and to the surrounding environment.⁶ Deriving from this fundamental ecological principle of interconnected relation are, in my view, three important fields of action in an ecological rationality: one, the *community* of interrelated beings; two, the ways the beings *participate* in that community or place; and three, the *relations* of nature and the nonhuman world to humans and human nature. An ecological rationality requires a relational ontology and epistemology—that is, a relational way of being and knowing.

Keeping in mind the principle of interconnected relation and the fields of community/place, participation, and nature/human nature, I will argue that for humans the problem of ecojustice in a sustainable world is more than a problem of science and technology, more even than a problem of ethical behavior toward other beings. Ultimately it is an ontological (being) problem as well as an epistemological (knowing) problem. I resist any simple equation of this ontology with identity, or

this epistemology with the darkening of the once bright line between nature and culture. The problem of ecojustice in a sustainable world isn't merely a problem of what to do; it rests more deeply in how we humans locate our beings—and the beings of others—in that world. The problem of ecojustice rests in who we think we are and how we come to know ourselves and our relations with other beings in the world. An ecological rationality of interconnectedness and collective well-being must come to replace our current economic rationality of personal self-interest, growth, and the maximization of material wealth if we are ever to help bring ecojustice and survival to a sustainable planet. For ecojustice, an ecocentric, rather than an anthropocentric, framing is required.

Ecojustice, as defined concisely by Dieter Hessel, combines ecological responsibility with social justice.⁷ For Hessel, social justice means fair treatment for all beings, human and otherwise. Like ecofeminists, ecojustice advocates claim that environmental injustice is inseparable from social and economic injustice. Karen J. Warren writes, “Ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other.”⁸ The term “ecojustice” was coined by American Baptist Association leaders Richard Jones and Owen Owens, in 1973, but the movement is ecumenical, as it draws proponents from among Jews, Catholics, and most mainline Protestant denominations, while it reaches out to other major religions in the world. Even some conservative denominations, like Southern Baptists, have environmental programs and initiatives. In that same year, 1973, the

Ecojustice Project and Network arose at Cornell, coordinated by William Gibson. In 1985 Gibson defined ecojustice as “the well-being of humankind on a thriving Earth.” This meant a sustainable planet

productive of sufficient food, with water fit for all to drink, air fit to breathe, forests kept replenished, renewable resources continuously renewed, nonrenewable resources used as sparingly as possible so that they will be available [to future generations] for their most important uses. . . . On a thriving earth, providing sustainable sufficiency for all, human well-being is nurtured not only by the provision of these material necessities but also by a way of living within the natural order that is fitting: respectful of the integrity of natural systems and of the worth of nonhuman creatures, appreciative of the beauty and mystery of the world of nature.⁹

Ecojustice plays an important role in divinity schools and theological seminaries, where it usually takes the form of a program, center, institute, or forum on religion and ecology, as it does for example at both Yale and Harvard. Confusingly, the prefix “eco” in “ecojustice,” and the word “ecology” in the formulation “religion and ecology,” point toward the environment rather than toward ecological science; however, this conflation of ecology with environment is common today in the environmental movement and in public discourse.¹⁰

To compound the terminological confusion, ecojustice is sometimes taken to mean environmental justice. Environmental justice is a progressive political movement for social justice and in opposition to environmental racism, a shorthand for unjust impacts of environmental hazards on the poor and people of color. Ecojustice is more inclusive; it is ecocentric, not

anthropocentric. To achieve ecojustice in a sustainable world, Hessel argues that humans must do several things, among which are these: protect the commons against pollution and enclosure; carefully steward scarce resources and fairly distribute their benefits; preserve biodiversity; achieve social and political justice; *and* deliver environmental justice to the vulnerable.¹¹

In extending the idea of ecojustice to the earth and all its beings, the ecojustice movement might do well to consider these beings—including plants, nonhuman animals, landforms, and so forth—as *persons*, with the justice and rights that persons deserve.¹² Needless to say, this is not how we in the modern, Euro-American world usually think of justice. We extend only limited rights to beings outside the human world, as for example in our laws against *excessive* cruelty to the higher animals. According to Roman law, from which Euro-American law derives, and in particular according to the Codes of Justinian, justice renders every person and group what they are due (that is, what they deserve or what they are owed). That remains the legal sense of justice in the Euro-American world. Distributive justice considers the way goods, benefits, and harms in a society are distributed. But people differ over what is justly deserved. Conservatives tend to think of justice as the law of the State, the power structure that citizens in a state are required to obey. Progressives think in terms of redistributive or corrective justice, in which goods, benefits, and harms are distributed to members of society based on the ethical principle of fairness. For progressives, justice (often termed social justice) is informed by John Rawls’s “difference principle”: namely, that social, cultural, environmental, and economic inequalities should be arranged for

the greater benefit of the lesser advantaged. And so justice is both a legal term and an ethical term—one speaks, for example, of a moral law, or higher law of conscience. When considering mass incarceration, for example, progressives speak of moral rights and natural rights, as well as legal ones. The ecojustice movement is progressive and works toward social justice; but in its ecocentricity it extends moral and legal rights to the natural environment as a whole, proclaiming that justice and human well-being are impossible without the well-being of the environment and all of its creatures—animals human and nonhuman, plants, landforms, and the earth itself.¹³

Although the ecojustice movement appeals to many environmentalists, members of mainline religions, and academics—these are not exclusive categories—the movement has failed to galvanize the Euro-American public as a whole. There are at least four reasons why. First, climate change is remote from most people's daily lives, except when environmental disasters intrude. Second, many in the ecojustice movement romanticize nature. They are welcoming toward Indigenous ecological knowledges, but in thinking of nature as a metaphor for the uncorrupted, or in treating Indigenous thought as spiritual wisdom, ecojustice leaders underestimate the practical applications of traditional ecological knowledges, those that enabled Indigenous populations to sustain themselves and adapt to changing habitats for millennia. Third, although the ecojustice movement draws environmental wisdom from all the major religions of the world, the ecojustice movement does not engage effectively with Christian conservatives and evangelicals with whom they might have a lively discussion over Christian history and

doctrine and its relation to the environment. For example, what is meant in Genesis when God directs humans to have dominion over the other creatures of the earth? Does having dominion mean to subdue and dominate them? And has this interpretation of Genesis served to rationalize the history of Euro-American exploitation of nature, as Lynn White argued in a famous 1967 article?¹⁴ Or, on the contrary, does having dominion carry with it the responsibilities of stewardship, as good rulers are good stewards of their lands and subjects? --as some liberal theologians argue? And fourth, the people who comprise the ecojustice movement have not engaged as effectively as they might with rural inhabitants who make their living in the outdoor world and who have a direct economic stake in its sustainable future. These are people whose work brings them daily into intimate relations with natural resources such as water, trees, and the land; and among them are coal miners, timber cutters and loggers, ranchers, oil and gas drillers, farmers, foresters, construction workers, and those who fish for a living, as well as the families and communities they support. Many of these people and communities feel frustrated and left behind by the global economy. They blame the mammoth corporations, the government, the media, the liberals, the intellectuals and, last but not least, the environmentalists. It is incumbent on the ecojustice movement to engage with these constituencies and see where all can find common ground—not by arguing endlessly over facts they refuse to believe, like evidence for anthropogenic climate change; but by appealing to their sense of who they are. After all, urbanites who live “green” lives do so partly because that is the kind of person they want to be. In fact, most of those rural inhabitants are

well aware of the effects of environmental pressures, and many endorse and practice their own kinds of environmental conservations. The ecojustice movement would do well to pay attention to them, to their traditional ecological knowledges, and to folklife specialists who have worked with these folk groups for many decades, and who know something about collaboration and partnership, as well as their traditional knowledges and practices.

Normally, where scarce natural resources are concerned, conservation is pitted against economic development. Local stakeholders vote with their pocketbooks, resenting outside experts and government regulations. But when the debate is reframed to admit local, place-based ecological knowledge, citizens are empowered and the conversation about problems may move toward a solution. Public ecology is one name for sustainable planning that elevates local knowledge of folk groups to expert status. Environmental resource management as practiced by tradition-bearing stakeholders counts for a great deal in public ecology. Two examples will have to suffice. The small Italian forest that produced the spruce and maple to build Stradivarius violins has been managed sustainably for nearly 300 years, by a coalition of violin makers, local businessmen, and foresters, each bringing expert knowledge to planning.¹⁵ A more extended example involves the fishery commons off the coast of Deer Isle, in East Penobscot Bay, Maine. It is managed by a coalition of stakeholders including fishermen and women along with state and federal experts and regulators. Dragging the ocean bottom for scallops off the coast disturbs the lobster breeding grounds, and must be managed for the benefit of both the lobster and scallop industries. When the state regulators

managed by severely limiting the scallop catch, the scallop fishermen were put out of work. A local fisherman and citizen scientist, Ted Ames, decided a different approach was needed. He interviewed tradition-bearing elders to learn the locations of the richest lobster breeding grounds. He found that the best information came from stories that the elders told in connection with these places, in what Hufford calls a narrative ecology.¹⁶ When the narrative ecology Ames gathered was input into the planning process, instead of the severe general limitation on the scallop catch, only those rich lobster breeding areas were placed off limits to scallop draggers. This resulted in better harvests and a more sustainable fishery for all. Ames later received a MacArthur “genius” grant to further his research into the fishery.¹⁷ Here, then, are two examples of citizen input of place-based ecological knowledges from folk groups that resulted in sustainable management of resource industries. Instead of pitting the ecocentric against the anthropocentric, a successful public ecology was able to serve both ends of ecological responsibility and social justice – that is, in combination, ecojustice – to the extent that the forest in Italy and the fishery in downeast Maine have thus far been able to survive and support the local populations. As Mary Hufford and Betsy Taylor emphasize, public ecology is a collaborative and “multi-sectoral approach to the study and management of complex socio-ecological systems,” one that is reframing expert-driven environmental research and decision making.¹⁸

Cultural sustainability is the name many folklorists now employ for the conservation of traditional expressive cultural ecosystems. My sustainability epiphany came in 2004 when the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association’s (MOFGA)

Common Ground Country Fair invited me to bring friends and neighbors to demonstrate an old-time string band jam session. MOFGA then advertised this event, which attracts some 80,000 visitors over a three-day weekend in September each year, as a “celebration of sustainable living.”¹⁹ Our music, which we play at home for our own enjoyment, is a renewable resource. Every year since then, we have demonstrated it there alongside the livestock, produce, and crafts exhibits. Besides, in most years since 1981 I have grown and maintained a large organic vegetable garden and apple orchard. Organic gardening starts with building and sustaining the soil; and whether it be garden soil, cultural soil, or life itself, the ecological principles are much the same. In that epiphany I realized sustainability might offer some advantages over conservation as a way to think about the futures of traditional music and expressive culture. Sustainability, I understood, looked to the future; conservation was anchored in the past. While spending my sabbatical in 2004–05 researching sustainability in economics and conservation biology, I developed the concepts of musical and cultural sustainability; and in 2006 I introduced them to my colleagues in folklore and ethnomusicology.²⁰

Although this work on behalf of cultures is analogous to work in sustaining natural ecosystems, its philosophical underpinnings remain undertheorized. Environmental philosophy in the United States starts from Thoreau’s ecocentric premise that humans are inhabitants of nature, not merely inhabitants of civil culture or society. A hundred years later, Aldo Leopold developed what he called his “land ethic.”²¹ Leopold’s land ethic is an early version of ecojustice and is often cited by environmentalists. He

argued that humans are not only citizens of a village or city, state, and nation, but also citizens of the land or environment as a whole, with the responsibilities, rights, and obligations in relation to the environment that citizenship entails. In the twenty-first century, Leopold’s land ethic has become realized as ecological citizenship, in which the health of the ecosphere, not the economy, is paramount.²² Compare Thoreau, 155 years earlier, in his essay “Wild Apples”: “There is thus about all natural products a certain volatile and ethereal quality which represents their highest value, and which cannot be vulgarized, or bought and sold.”²³ But how do humans learn to feel this sense of responsibility, not only toward one another but also toward the environment?

In a forthcoming essay, Rory Turner writes that a foundation for cultural sustainability work rests in participation and empathy.²⁴ Culture, normally conceived of as a property of social groups, for Turner becomes instead a field of participation, one that may be characterized by care and empathy, or by violence and neglect. Only the former leads to mutual sustainability—culture sustains us as we sustain culture. Turner invokes the place/community and participation fields of an ecological rationality here. In my view, an ecocentric reframing will extend sociability, empathy, and care along with citizenship and responsibility to all beings in the environment. The twentieth century gave humanists the idea that nature is a socially constructed category. Timothy Morton’s book *Ecology without Nature* is one logical outcome of that way of thinking.²⁵ And in the twenty-first century an ecological rationality blurs the distinctions between cultural and natural in an ecocentric reframing, one based in connection, empathy, and a sociability

that includes everyone and everything in the environment.

I turn now to the traditional ecological knowledge of a group I've visited with for more than 25 years, Old Regular Baptists in southeastern Kentucky. As Christians they ought to be of interest to the ecojustice movement. This is not the same group of Baptists who were the focus of my collaborative works titled *Powerhouse for God*.²⁶ That group was Arminian in doctrine. The Old Regulars are a different denomination, with a Calvinist heritage, overlaid with pietism and the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Like the Primitive or Old School Baptists, they adopt the grace covenant of the Synod of Dort (1618–19). Nevertheless they reject the Primitive Baptist doctrines of limited atonement and double predestination. Instead, they affirm that God offers a universal atonement, and yet God requires human beings to answer God's call, one way or the other. God also calls ministers, but they retain the tradition of unpaid worker-preachers and do not have seminaries. "Send a man to the seminary, might as well send him to the cemetery," Elder Ivan Amburgey told me, meaning that seminaries kill the Spirit. Nor do they support missions, at home or abroad. They do not have tracts, periodicals, Sunday school literature, or Sunday schools. Adults and children are seated together at their worship services. Televangelism makes no sense to them. They baptize outdoors in flowing bodies of water, and they practice an annual communion with foot washing.²⁷ In total they number around 15,000. Their churches are found in the coal-mining regions of central Appalachia, chiefly in southeastern Kentucky and southwestern Virginia. I met some in 1979 at a conference

on rural hymnody that took place at Berea College; then in 1990, when I was a visiting professor of Appalachian studies at Berea, I spent most of my Sundays with them, learning about their ways of singing, praying, preaching, and being. At the request of their Association moderator (elected head), Elwood Cornett, we collaborated in subsequent years to help preserve their tradition of lined-out hymnody.²⁸ There is the oldest English-language religious music in continuous oral tradition in the United States, a way of singing that is thought to derive from the English parish churches in the 1500s.²⁹

In their lifeways and beliefs, Old Regular Baptists exemplify an ecological rationality. Recall the principle of interconnected relations. They are unwilling to evangelize, for example, except among people with whom they already are connected: friends, family, neighbors, and townspeople. They frequently use organic metaphors for interconnection when they speak. So, for instance, individual churches cannot legitimately spring up as entirely new entities; instead they must be "armed off," as they say, from other churches. In a videotaped conversation [AV example 1]³⁰ with John Wallhausser and me in 1990, Elwood Cornett and I. D. Back expressed it this way:

Back: ". . . I think every church ought to have, it ought to come from somewhere. I don't much like this jumping off and running out and building a church without any foundation. . . ."

Cornett: "Of course inherent in that is that very obviously, I'm sure, is that we believe that there needs to be a chain, or there needs to be a history, or there needs to be a relationship back to a solid trunk."

Back: "We're a branch of a tree, a trunk."

Branches on the trunk of a solid tree, armed off, these are rooted in a community with a history and tied to place, a particular physical location. Each family has, or had, a “home place,” a common expression for ancestral home, emphasizing that the home is rooted in a “place” that carries emotional weight as well as spatial location. Elders Cornett and Back spoke to us about the relation they feel between place and community this way [AV example 2]:

Cornett: “I was born in that house right there [points to home place 50 feet away]. That’s not to say anything negative about any other place or particularly about our kind of churches in other places. I’ve really enjoyed being at some of them. But there is something about place for me. There’s a kind of a camaraderie or fellowship that we feel among our people that I don’t really see everywhere. And I’ve got neighbors around that don’t go to church and when trouble comes, they are right here, you know.”

Back: “They’re the first ones to us.”

Place and community comprise the first field of an ecological rationality. The second is participation, and here I contrast the participatory with the presentational, drawing on Thomas Turino’s distinction between the two, an old idea for folklorists, certainly: the ideal folk group is a participatory community, sharing a commons of traditional knowledge and praxis.³¹ Among the Old Regulars, as with other groups descended from the Dissenter wing of the Protestant Reformation, participation is important. Cornett explained it this way [AV example 3]:

Cornett: “Worshipping the Lord is a participatory kind of thing. It’s not for us to stand up there and these folks to sit down here and keep their mouth shut and so forth and we’re to tell them how

it is. That’s not the way it is. We’ve got a job, they’ve got a job. Everybody at Blackey today had a job to do. They sang. Hopefully they prayed for us. And that place, that sense of place, and that sense of community comes back into play with that. On television you don’t have the place and you don’t have the community, nor the communion back and forth. I use the word ‘communion’ there to talk about the relationship back and forth, between different people, whether it’s the preacher or whoever.”

Cornett links participation with relation and place, and with community and communion. I would extend it to commons. And certainly the Old Regular Baptists’ worship meeting is a field for participation and care, to return to Turner’s delineation. The third field in an ecological rationality concerns nature, including plants, animals, and landforms, and their relation to human nature. The regional economy in central Appalachia where Old Regulars live has depended for more than 100 years on the natural resource of coal. It is difficult to imagine a more intimate and sublime relation with nature, beautiful and terrifying, than the daily experience of going into the earth and mining coal. Many Old Regular Baptists hunt game and some gather medicinal plants in the surrounding mountains. Kenzie Ison, an Old Regular Baptist preacher I came to know, was part of a cooperative ginseng-gathering and -exporting operation. Cornett and Back said this about nature and human nature [AV example 4].

Cornett: “Well, certainly, if you look out and see the trees today, and think that from somewhere water is falling, to quench the thirst of the earth, there’s a part of nature that is directly the handiwork of God. You hear the birds singing, there? That touches my heart

and at least reminds me that God's got control of it all. So there is that element of nature, I guess, if you want to call it that, and I guess most people would look at it in that way, that is a very positive thing. On the other hand, there was a man and a woman in a garden one time who had a nature or the nature revealed itself of transgressing God's law. And there's a nature about me that says, 'Don't be subservient to anything, the Spirit or anything.' And that gets in my way. And I think that's the same thing that Paul was talking about with the thorn in the flesh. That nature is the nature that we're going to leave in the grave. That's the nature that makes it difficult for us to get up into the stand and try to preach. And that's the nature that would cause us all the trouble that we have. So there's different words that have more than one meaning, and I think that's one of them."

Back: "And nature is human nature, and that's why we cry, that's why we laugh, that's why we love. In human nature, and as long as we live in this earthly house we'll have that human nature."

Old Regular Baptist ecological rationality turns on their understanding of nature and human nature. Their devotion to heaven puts the earthly world in perspective: nature may be fallen, but it is also a provisional place that God has gifted to them on earth. Old Regular Baptist ecological knowledge is heaven-centric, at the intersection that they find between expressive culture, or the human; the sacred, or the divine; and nature, or the environment. As expressed by these beloved and representative elders, their ecological knowledge is governed by their belief in the relation between their hoped-for home in heaven and their life on earth. The correct human response toward nature is therefore stewardship, not ownership. This is a call for ecojustice

on behalf of both the human community and the environment, one that combines ecological responsibility with social justice. But it would be wrong to conclude that their views of the environment are ecocentric, like those of Thoreau, who considered human beings as inhabitants of nature, or Leopold, who proposed that humans think of themselves as citizens of nature. Traditional and Indigenous ecological knowledges need not be ecocentric.

I conclude by gesturing toward my sound ecology project. Sound plays a critical role in the ecological knowledge of the Old Regular Baptists. Sound, they say, has a drawing power. The sound of their preaching and praying is musical. In the United States, this is unusual outside of certain traditional African-American Baptist and pentecostal congregations. The peculiar, sacred sounds of this peculiar people are comforting to them. They say the sound of their worship has a "drawing power" that keeps them together and brings them back home if they must outmigrate from Appalachia temporarily, for better wages. The sound of their worship is both ontological and epistemological: a way of being in the world and knowing the world. It is also a way of connecting with one another. Elwood Cornett described it this way: "It seems to me that there's something innate about the sound that we have in the way that we sing. There's some kind of a special connection . . . and somehow that's released by that sound."³²

As is well known, the dominant epistemology among modern Euro-Americans derives from the separation of self from object in which the thinking being contemplates the external world. The separation has enabled humans to engineer the world, but this instrumental rationality

has come at the expense of our full sensory connection with it. And in the absence of feeling and knowing that humans are a part of nature, humans have done the planet and its beings, including ourselves, great harm. Furthermore, an instrumental rationality not only exploits the natural world, but by especially identifying women and people of color with nature, toxic Western masculinity takes license to exploit them as well.

A sound ecology asks, what happens when the world is known through sounds? What, in other words, are the epistemological implications of starting with sound-worlds rather than object-worlds or text-worlds?³³ To put it yet another way, what happens if for the moment we abandon the idea that we humans are thinking subjects experiencing a separate, external world of objects, as many scientists and engineers do? And what if we abandon the idea that we are thinking subjects experiencing the world as texts or performances to analyze and interpret, as many academic humanists do? What if for the moment we consider ourselves to be sounding subjects experiencing the intersubjective world of sounding beings? For sounding beings are interconnected, both viscerally through sound vibrations, and metaphorically in a personal relation. If we start with sound-worlds, how might the resulting communities, economies, and ecologies differ from those as humans conceive them at present? Is it thus possible to erect a just alternative to the alienated communities, neoliberal politics, neoclassical economies, and struggle-for-existence ecologies that drive humans toward injustice, and the planet toward extinction?³⁴ I think it is possible. I think doing so puts us on a path of sound ecological rationality which I trust will lead every being to ecojustice in a more sustainable world.

Briefly, then, here are the principles of a sound-centered ecology. One, sound is experienced as presence in the world; sound says, “Here I am” and “There you are.” Two, sound connects. Sound connects beings bodily, because when one being sends a sound signal and another being receives it, they vibrate at the same frequency. Sound connects beings throughout the plant and animal world to facilitate communication among them, from the simple sonic signals of honey bees to blueberry plants to enable pollination for their mutual benefit, to the complex symbolic, metaphorical, and ambiguous signals of human languages including music. Three, a sound connection among beings establishes copresence, mutual awareness, and a personal relationship among cobeings. This copresence leads to a community of beings, connected to one another. When one body sets another in motion through sound, physicists call the phenomenon sympathetic vibration. Taking sympathetic vibration as a metaphor, it is a short step from sympathy to empathy, the basis for a sound community and a sound economy based in personal responsibility. A sound economy of empathetic beings is a far cry from the neoclassical economic conception of rational, self-interested beings competing to maximize personal wealth, while entering into economic contracts governed by the laws of the state. That is a politically conservative interpretation of justice. Ecojustice, on the other hand, is based in ecological responsibility. We may understand this to mean that all beings are connected. In rituals, sound establishes the connections between the human and spirit worlds, whether among Indigenous peoples singing for power, or among pentecostals speaking in tongues, or Old Regular Baptists singing their sermons and prayers, or the

black preacher whooping in the spirit of God while the congregation responds in the same spirit. Thinking of the world as texts or objects does not seem to bring us directly into copresence and community quite the way sound does.

To conclude: If all beings are connected, then all are related; that is, all beings are our kin. As Grim notes, this idea is characteristic of Indigenous ecological knowledges as well as many religious traditions.³⁵ We are all responsible toward one another – this

is ecological responsibility. Being in the world and knowing the world through sound connects us and opens a space for empathy, sociability, and participatory public ecology. Instead of holding foremost the personal rights and obligations of liberty and property, we elevate the rights and obligations of connection, kinship, and mutual responsibility and recognize that they extend to all beings in the world.³⁶ This is the essence of ecological citizenship and ecojustice.



Earth in Full View from Apollo 17, 1972. Image Credit: NASA. Public Domain. Image retrieved from: https://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/image_feature_329.html.

NOTES

1 Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" (1862), in *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems*, sel. Elizabeth Hall Wetherell (New York: Library of America, 2001), 221.

2 Rational choice theory models behavior based on the assumption that individuals always make choices by evaluating costs versus benefits consistent with their goals and personal preferences, usually expressed as self-interest. In neoclassical economics, rational choice theory aligns with *homo economicus* (economic man), whose personal preference is to accumulate material wealth and happiness. Opposed to *homo economicus* is *homo reciprocans* (cooperative human), whose preference is for the health and well-being of the entire community.

3 I have written in more detail about ecological rationality in "The Nature of Ecomusicology," *Música e cultura: Revista da ABET* 8/1 (2013): 8–18, and in "Exhibiting Music in a Sound Community," *Ethnologies* 37/1 (2015): 23–41.

4 John Grim, syllabus for "Indigenous Religions and Ecology," School of Forestry and Environmental Studies 876, Yale University, <http://fore.yale.edu/education/resources/syllabi/grim2/> (accessed Dec. 5, 2019).

5 Ibid.

6 Frank N. Egerton, "History of Ecological Sciences, part 47: Ernst Haeckel's Ecology," *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America*, July 1, 2013: 226, <https://doi.org/10.1890/0012-9623-94.3.222> (accessed Dec. 5, 2019).

7 This brief history of ecojustice is derived from Dieter Hessel, "Eco-justice Ethics" (2007), <http://fore.yale.edu/disciplines/ethics/eco-justice/> (accessed Dec. 5, 2019).

8 Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xi.

9 William E. Gibson, "Ecojustice: New Perspective for a Time of Turning," in *For Creation's Sake: Preaching, Ecology, and Justice*, ed. D. T. Hessel (Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1985), 25.

10 Strictly speaking, ecology (or ecological science) is the study of organisms, their behavior and relations with one another, and also with their environment. Derivatives such as cultural ecology, political ecology, and ecological economics study individuals and groups, their behavior and relations with one another, and with the environment. One reads of "ecological loss and grief," but ecology cannot be lost any more than chemistry can be lost.

11 Hessel, "Ecojustice Ethics."

12 This point is controversial because the ideas of rights and personhood in Euro-American law differ from their counterparts in many Indigenous societies. Rather than bring the earth and all its beings under the discipline of Euro-American laws developed for human beings, some argue that Euro-American law ought to apply Indigenous ecological knowledge when extending these rights to plants, nonhuman animals, landforms, etc. Nevertheless, it is important to understand where ecojustice lies within the current debates over justice within Euro-American law and philosophy.

13 To further explore ecocentrism and an ecocentric worldview, see the issues of *The Ecological Citizen*, a peer-reviewed ecocentric journal whose motto is "Striving for harmony with the rest of nature": <https://www.ecologicalcitizen.net/> (accessed Dec. 5, 2019).

14 Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, n.s. 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203–07. Note that White also wrote "ecology" where he meant "environment." This confusion is not new.

15 Aaron S. Allen, "'Fatto di Fiemme': Stradivari's Violins and the Musical Trees of the Paneveggio," in *Invaluable Trees: Cultures of Nature, 1660–1830*, ed. Laura Auricchio, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, and Giulia Pacini (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), 301–15.

16 Like my sound ecology, Hufford's narrative ecology is a project in progress. See her description of it as "the transdisciplinary, multi-sectoral study, critique, and stewardship of places as narrative climax systems. In a narrative climax system, conversational genres are germinal in establishing and renewing membership in communities of land and people" at <https://artsandsciences.osu.edu/news-events/events/mary-hufford-public-lecture-witness-trees-revolt-folklores-invitation-narrative> (accessed Dec. 5, 2019).

17 A summary of Ames's work to 2005 may be found at <https://www.macfound.org/fellows/750/> (accessed Dec. 5, 2019). A 2011 interview with Ames is at <http://community.bowdoin.edu/news/2011/03/macarthur-genius-award-winner-ted-ames-at-bowdoin-works-on-plan-to-restore-fisheries/> (accessed Nov. 17, 2019).

18 Mary Hufford and Betsy Taylor, "Edgework and Boundary Crossings: Assessing Foundations for Public Ecology in the Appalachian Region," in

Environmental Considerations in Energy Production, ed. John R. Craynon (Englewood, CO: Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration, 2013), 100.

19 Today MOFGA advertises the fair as a celebration of rural living: <http://www.mofga.org/The-Fair/General-Information> (accessed Dec. 5, 2019).

20 In the Nettl Lecture at the University of Illinois, in a conference paper for the American Folklore Society, and in organizing a panel on music and sustainability for the conference of the Society for Ethnomusicology. The papers from that panel were published in a special issue of *The World of Music* 51/1 (2009); see my “Economy, Ecology and Music: An Introduction” (5–6) and “Music and Sustainability: An Ecological Viewpoint” (119–37). In 2013, cultural sustainability was the main theme of the American Folklore Society’s annual conference. My most recent statement on the subject is “Sustainability, Resilience, and Adaptive Management,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*, ed. Svanibor Pettan and Jeff Todd Titon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 158–96.

21 See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

22 “Our journal’s title is a nod to Aldo Leopold’s epically incisive comment that ‘A land ethic changes the role of *homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it. . . . Using the economy to frame the whole world, upon which economies are completely dependent, is allowing the tail to wag the dog, and the end is the death of the animal.’” Patrick Curry, “The Ecological Citizen: An Impulse of Life, for Life,” *Ecological Citizen* 1/1 (2017): 5–6.

23 Henry David Thoreau, “Wild Apples” (1862), in *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems*, 447.

24 Rory Turner, “Critical Radical Empathy and Cultural Sustainability,” in *Cultural Sustainabilities*, ed. Timothy J. Cooley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 32–42.

25 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

26 Jeff Todd Titon and Kenneth M. George, *Powerhouse for God*, two 12-inch LP recordings with booklet (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982; reissued 2013 as Smithsonian Folkways CD SFS 600006); Jeff Todd Titon, *Powerhouse for God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988; 2nd ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018); Barry Dornfeld, Tom Rankin, and Jeff Todd Titon, *Powerhouse for God*, 58-minute 16mm film, 1989,

distributed by Documentary Educational Resources, Watertown, MA; also streaming over <http://www.folkstreams.net>.

27 More detailed information on Old Regular Baptist doctrine and history may be found in the free pdf of the liner notes to *Old Regular Baptists: Lined-out Hymnody from Southeastern Kentucky* (Smithsonian Folkways SF 40106), at <https://folkways.si.edu/indian-bottom-association/old-regular-baptists-lined-out-hymnody-from-southeastern-kentucky/american-folk-sacred/music/album/Smithsonian>.

28 One of the results of this ongoing collaboration was a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts enabling them to undertake a self-documentation project. Other outcomes include two Smithsonian Folkways CDs from my field recordings, chosen for preservation in the National Recording Registry, as well as an appearance at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, two conferences on lined-out hymnody at Yale University, and a small number of published articles. To access the Smithsonian Folkways CDs, please follow these links: <https://folkways.si.edu/indian-bottom-association/old-regular-baptists-lined-out-hymnody-from-southeastern-kentucky/american-folk-sacred/music/album/smithsonian> and <https://folkways.si.edu/songs-of-the-old-regular-baptists-vol-2-lined-out-hymnody-from-southeastern-kentucky/sacred/music/album/smithsonian>

29 Nicholas Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34/3 (1981): 511–44.

30 To access the AV Examples, please follow these links:

AV Example 1 -

<https://vimeo.com/374694250/6eaa1d1994>

AV Example 2 -

<https://vimeo.com/374697918/1372a47afc>

AV Example 3 -

<https://vimeo.com/374698464/4330849f0d>

AV Example 4-

<https://vimeo.com/374699203/d727e8ceb2>

31 Tom Turino, “Four Fields of Music Making and Sustainability,” *World of Music* 51/1 (2009): 95–117.

32 Elwood Cornett, spoken on *Songs of the Old Regular Baptists: Lined-Out Hymnody from Southeastern Kentucky*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways CD SFW 50001, 2003), track 27.

33 In what follows I take an anthropocentric viewpoint, but a sound ecology also asks what the experience of sounds is like to nonhuman animals and plants.

34 Darwin wrote that he used the term “struggle for existence” in “a large and metaphorical sense including dependence of one being upon another... a plant on the edge of the desert is said to struggle for life against the drought, though more properly it should be said to be dependent on moisture.” Darwin evidently already anticipated that his famous term would be misused to mean that “nature is red in tooth and claw,” whereas his intention is to indicate ecological interdependence. The quotation is from *The Origin of Species and the Descent of Man* (New York: Modern Library, 1936), 52.

35 See Grim, syllabus.

36 One of the landmark moments for the environmental movement occurred when the 1972 “blue marble” photograph of the earth, taken from space, was widely circulated. In an ecocentric worldview, the abiotic (nonliving, inorganic) world also consists of beings. Thus, the earth itself is alive. It was not until around 1990 that these images showed themselves noticeably green—ironically, on account of the greenhouse effect (see https://create.adobe.com/2016/4/18/the_whole_earth_the_story_of_an_image_that_changed_the_world.html).

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