

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe. ---John Muir

Consider the following statement: Act local, think global.

I would like to talk to you today about the work that I do and a program I teach to college students. I am first going to talk about the ways we perceive ourselves in the world and then talk about another way of perceiving and acting – the way of the program that I teach. Then I will discuss the concepts that can bring about a new way of creating Place.

Most people are here today because they *care*....

You are here to share and learn and question and simply enjoy the experience of being together. Such an event allows us to learn about how we can live more responsible lives. How we can make the best possible choice not only for ourselves, but for others.

These are experiences of engagement:

Most often this experience is referred to as CIVIC Engagement. What does civic and civic engagement really mean?

IF *Civic* – pertains to citizenship, and civic duties to a particular community, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT is the “connection one feels with their larger community.”

We typically think of civic engagement occurring in urban environments. And if one wants to feel a part then one must go to the city.

This is the case because of the paradigm we live in and construct our reality through, and because of this condition the activities of engagement, the economic development and the infrastructure that supports such an identity of civic engagement, are focused on more populated environments.

From forums to plazas and oratory halls to market places our urban environments have been enriched and our societies have gained a sense of community and wholeness from gathering in such places.

Certainly these places accomplish an honoring of community through repeated activities of gathering or gatherings that express solidarity – such as the gathering of 10 of 1,000s of American citizens that gather when an official wins an election, or the looser sense of community when participating in the same activity– such as attending a weekly farmers market.

The primary intention of the civic structure or place in our cities is to provide context for honor and value of humankind and the community of human beings.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

I would like to consider civic identity in **relation** to where we are today. I imagine most of you live in Larimer County, According to the national standard for classifying rural and urban populations, is primarily rural.

A town is still considered to be “rural” with a population under 200,000. Ft. Collins is approaching “urban” , but not quite yet. Even so, perhaps the people of Ft. Collins are working on redefining what we think of when we think of URBAN.

And Larimer county is definitely rural, with the dispersion of people across the county in small land holdings in ranchettes and out of town populations or smaller towns, such as Estes Park, that has a populations of about 6500 people. There are many conditions that contribute to the qualities that make Larimer county feel the way that it does,

But there is one particular condition that I think about, and that is the large amount of public land (**over 50%) out of 2,640 sq miles. .**

Land that is public and protected as National Forest, Wild and Scenic River, National Grassland and National Park. (Roosevelt National Forest, Pawnee National Grassland, Rocky Mountain National Park, Poudre River)

These places not only provide for great enjoyment and unique experiences for us, they also provide a home to thousands of other species. (rocky Mountain national Park is 415 square miles)

The rural – is most often not recognized with qualities or activities of civic engagement. Because a conventional urban “center” is difficult to locate in today’s rural environments - Finally, funds are scarce for such infrastructure, due to the economic conditions of rural counties. The human inhabitants of today’s rural environments such as there here are a mix: ranchers and farmers, entrepreneurs, independently wealthy, working families, and creative dreamers.

Where and how do these rural dwellers experience sense of community? Unique to their urban counterparts these people interact almost every day with the landscape in which they live. In thinking about the conditions of this area, (Larimer County, Ft. Collins, and preserved public Lands, makes me think about civic engagement.

What I wonder is if it is possible for people living in these rural environments with more distance from each other than urban counterparts to experience civic engagement? A sense of belonging to a larger community? What are the limits , what defines the extents of a community?

It is this concept of civic as community and the question of extents that brings all sorts of questions into my head. Is community defined by political boundaries? Or physical qualities? Is community a mindset or a sensual experience?

And finally, in considering these places – the larger experience of the land that provides profound experiences of belonging an identity of place I wonder –

Is *Community* species specific?

This last question is particularly interesting to me when we are thinking about civic engagement of rural environments in the 21st century.

And the question may seem strange considering that over the past 500 years we have managed to physically, intellectually and emotionally separate ourselves from the rest of the world. Yet I believe we are now prepared to

recognize that the community we are a part of – (and especially experience in places that have large rural and wildland interfaces - experience community through multi-species interrelations.)

In other words, I am hopeful that we stand at the “metaphorical” edge of adopting what Aldo Leopold called “LAND ETHICS”

To paraphrase Leopold, *All ethics rest upon the single premise that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. We typically view ethics as human to human membership.*

Leopold expanded the concept of community to include: souls, water, plants, and animals : The Land.

Leopold believed that we needed to begin to shift our perception way from the land as resource to LAND _ and all its parts being a fully interdependent community, with us a part of the community. Each with inherent value.

Where do we most sense and experience this interdependence?

Within Larimer county a physical interface between rural and wild exists – where the immediate “human” habitat meets with the “other” Habitat is worth recognizing: 148,000 acres of “environmental ribbon” rub up against one another. Sharing “habitat” /home, with the other creatures we live with, temporarily borrowing their places to explore, recreate and enjoy.

TRANSITIONING FROM HUMAN CENTERED TO INTERRELATED

If, historically we have considered Civic Engagement to be engagement and relations with Human Kind. And we can agree that for the most part we have behaved, lived and set up “conditions and rules” for considering only humankind

How do we behave differently when we believe and sense that our community extends beyond human kind?

First, we understand that we do not make choices only for ourselves.

If we are making more holistic choices – more integrated, the concept of sustainability becomes comprehensive extending beyond our own needs to survive and encompasses a duty to support the survival of all.

How do we put into practice such a belief system?

I think we are beginning to explore and put into action such beliefs. But often, because we are still living within the industrial / economic framework, these practices can be difficult to recognize. Primarily because we practice through financial terms, But sometimes we can easily recognize the activities of this belief system:

FOR EXAMPLE:

- The adoption and application of the Endangered Species Act and the Wilderness Act.
- Bridges and tunnels built specifically for wildlife to travel through and across landscapes with roadways without harm.
- Removing pesticides from farming and gardening.
- Signage on roads warning of hawks and owls flying low around a riparian area.
- Signage on sidewalks and gutters that make us aware that the water that flows into the nearby streams goes into the habitat of aquatic species.

These examples suggest that we are on the way to a redefined understanding of CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – recognizing that we are a part of a community that extends beyond humankind.

However, for a truly redefined engagement to occur our lifestyle and choices must continue to evolve and change – become widespread into all aspects of our lives and work.

How do we inspire and enact change? From our own experiences for sure. But also through Education.

ARTEMIS INSTITUTE

It is because of my belief in sharing knowledge and gaining wisdom that I founded Artemis Institute. An **educational non profit** based on Montana.

A primary premise of Artemis Institute-is that there is a valuable relationship that exists between nature and culture.

And when we recognize and draw from this relationship our lives along with the things we make, result in overall positive cultural activities.

For over a decade I have been teaching a college level program for students studying design that I developed called Remote Studio.

As you may have guessed, Remote Studio is not a typical program of architectural education.

It is a holistic and integrated course of immersion education for college students that relies on first hand experiences and knowledge to help students understand two conditions:

1. How the natural world inspires their creativity
2. And consequently with an understanding of this inspiration, that we must take responsibility for the natural world as we are a part of it, and in order to retain the potential for our inspiration.

From this context the students embark on a semester long program that includes the design and construction of a rural community project that begins about 1/3 of the way through their semester.

I chose to establish Artemis Institute in the Rockies because of its unique condition of large interface of wild and rural landscapes which are rapidly developing.

This interface is a terribly unique condition that should not be over looked when thinking about the rural development in the West.

Most specifically because “on other side” of the development of private lands there remains a lot of wild places in the Northern Rockies that brush up against the rural – such as the 148,000 acres of wildland interface in Larimer County - places that need careful consideration in respect to our developments – not just the place of the developments, but the DESIGN of the structures.

If we recognize that our communities extend beyond human kind, than We must also ask ourselves what we want our communities to be like in the future in order to develop more experientially and truly inclusive environments.

Such places of engagement will be different from what we provide in urban environments, because they are altogether different places. Not only because the “environment” is different, but because the potential community engagements will be different.

We are on the way to such engagement when we understand what is required to become a sustainable society and what “civic” engagement means in the 21st century. **If civic engagement is the connection one feels with their large community, perhaps we are ready to recognize what Neil Carter calls an ecological citizenship.**

Carter believes that if we are to fully transition to a sustainable society we must not only restructure our institutions, but fully transform our beliefs, attitudes and behaviors about what makes a community and defines citizenship.

Beliefs and behaviors are best transformed not through abstract notions or lessons, but through real-world experiences and practices that occur in “places” that support such activities.

We need to provide places that encourage engagement through built environments found in rural / wildland interfaces to expand an extended sense of community while at the same time sustaining and preserving wild places and the creatures that live in these places.

Ultimately, these places extend our sense of community beyond humankind.

What would such places be like? And how do our structures become a part of the place where they are built?

This is the questions I ask of my students_____

The results are artifacts that blur the boundary and perception between building, landscape, places that lie at the interface between wild and rural.

While there is typically a practical program for the structure - public restroom, a pavilion, a learning center or visitor center – these successful structures are not mere shelter, but help us know and experience the worlds in a new way. They transform our assumptions, provide experiences of beauty and awe. They place us in the world.

While the forms and functions of the work of remote studio differs I have come to recognize **6 concepts** that seem to grow from this expanded sense of citizenship.

With the intention of realigning our sense of belonging to something greater than humanity – these structures extend the sense of community to the larger world.

The successful structure accomplishes more than the simple practical use. (Something that makes it the place seeps into us as we experience it.)

CONCEPTS

- 1.structures that move beyond romantic and nostalgic visions of “wild“ and “wilderness”, they are not places of idyll escape, but places of timely engagement.
2. provide built sense of being in a particular place.
- 3.they may offer “primitive” alternatives to the more modern expression – less refined materials and expressed responses to the phenomena – wind , rain, snow...to encourage an experiential bridge between “untrammled nature and where we live our everyday lives.
4. Anticipate and provide places of shelter for creatures beyond ourselves.

5. significance to cosmic reality. (marking time. Stonehenge, and labrynth)
6. how they teach about environmental conservation through sensitive use of natural resources and sustainability.

These constructions will **provide context for an expanded sense of civic engagement** not only by **what** they are, but **how** they are placed and given place with the land.

What I have been speaking about seems so simple – but if it is simple – why isn't there more architecture and places like I am describing?

I believe we had not fully transitioned to a larger sense of civic engagement – we have not yet arrived to an **ecological citizenship**. But we are certainly on the way. We are learning....

EXAMPLE:

Let me give an example of how such constructions can support experiences that we belong to a larger community.

Over a decade ago I taught the first Remote Studio program in West Texas. The community project was to design and build a **Quail Watching "station."** When the structure was near completion and we had left for the evening a visitor in the campground went to explore the pavilion and watch the quail in the evening. What he told me of this experience was that

“ he sat in the pavilion as the sun was setting to wait for the quail to come down the hillside. When sitting in the carved out space and looking at the surrounding land at eye level he said he felt that he was a part of the place.”

The visitor's experience of the pavilion was not of how pretty or well constructed the pavilion is, but how he felt that he belonged to the place.

It is this sense of belonging that provides an engagement with a larger community. Engagement with community provides a sense of value and necessity for something other than ourselves. It can move us into Aldo Leopold's practice of a LAND ETHIC – that we are all interrelated.

These experiences engenders a sense of responsibility and CARE.

CONCLUSION

Architectural works that are built within the rural / wild interface have the ability to transform our sense of self extend the understanding of the civic engagement beyond humankind and into the larger world we all belong to.

This sense and experience is critical if we are to move from a people who reside over the world to one that belongs to the world.

A people who no longer dominate, but respect and care for a larger community. It will be from this cultural transformation that we will evolve a truly sustainable society.