

Performing Diverse Environmentalisms Expressive Culture at the Crux of Ecological Change



Screenshot from "You Can Build A Garden"
music video by Ecosong
Minnehaha Creek Watershed District
Photograph courtesy of Ecosong



"Unusual Fauna" by NoExit Performance
Save the Dunes 2016 Festival
Indiana Dunes National Lake Shore
Photograph courtesy of NoExit Performance



Healing ritual at sacred spring,
near Otavalo, Ecuador.
Photograph by Patricia Glushko

Symposium
March 3-5, 2017
Indiana Memorial Union
Bloomington, IN

Hosted by:
The Diverse Environmentalisms Research Team (DERT)
and the IU Department of Folklore & Ethnomusicology

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Friday, March 3, 2017

Approaches to Diverse Environmentalisms

Friday, 1:30 - 5:30 pm. Room

Chair: Sarah Osterhoudt, Anthropology, IU

- 1:30 pm Welcoming: Larry Singell, Executive Dean for the College of Arts & Sciences
- 1:45 pm Opening: John H. McDowell, Chair of the IU Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology
- 2:00 pm “Diverse Ecomusicologies”
Aaron S. Allen, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- 2:40 pm “The Eco-poetics of Place: Reclaiming Finfinne, Past and Present (Oromia, Ethiopia)”
Assefa Dibaba, Indiana University
- 3:20 pm Break
- 3:30 pm “Culture-making in the Anthropocene: Participation and Diverse Environmentalisms”
Rory Turner, Goucher College
- 4:10 pm “Linking Nature and Culture through Environmental Discourse, Heritage Practices, and Protection Projects in China”
Sue Tuohy, Indiana University
- 5:00 pm Concluding Discussion
- 5:30 pm Session Ends

Saturday, March 4, 2017

Applied Projects

Saturday, 9:00 am - 11:45 am, Room

Chair: Jennifer Robinson, Anthropology, IU

- 9:00 am “‘We Live in the Lake’: A Case Study in Applied Ecomusicology”
Mark Pedelty, University of Minnesota

- 9:40 am “Considering the Folklorist’s Responsibilities for Environmental Stewardship and Cultural Sustainability in South Louisiana’s Atchafalaya Swamp”
K. Brandon Barker, Indiana University
- 10:20 am Break
- 10:30 am “Storying the Landscape in Southeastern Ohio: A Project of the Center for Folklore Studies, Ohio State”
Katherine Borland and Cassie Patterson, Ohio State University
- 11:10 am Concluding Discussion
- 11:45 am Session Ends, Lunch Break

The Sacred Environment

Saturday, 1:30 pm - 5:00 pm, Room

Chair: David Stringer, Second Language Studies, IU

- 1:30 pm “Haiti’s Drums and Trees: Facing Loss of the Sacred”
Rebecca Dirksen, Indiana University
- 2:10 pm “The Sacred Geography of Songs in the Columbia Plateau”
Chad Hamill, Northern Arizona University
- 3:00 pm “‘No Whale, No Music’: Climate Change and Cultural Resilience among the Iñupiat of Arctic Alaska”
Chie Sakakibara, Oberlin College
- 3:40 pm “Performing Diverse Environmentalisms in the Andes: Ecopedagogy and Ecospirituality”
John H. McDowell, Indiana University
- 4:20 pm Concluding Discussion
- 5:00 pm Session Ends

Sunday, March 5, 2017

Managing the Environment

Sunday, 9:00 am - 11:45 am, Room

Chair: John Galuska, Foster International Living-Learning Center, IU

- 9:00 am “Mobile Pastoralists, Acoustic Engagement and Ecological Knowledge in Western Mongolia”
Jennifer C. Post, University of Arizona
- 9:40 am “Carnival and the Cost of Drought in Brazil: Neoliberalism and Cultural Policy in Times of Environmental Crisis”
Michael Silvers, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- 10:20 am Break
- 10:30 am “Standpoint Species: Thresholds to Contending Environmental Imaginaries on a Resource Frontier”
Mary Hufford, Virginia Tech University
- 11:10 am Concluding Discussion
- 11:45 am Symposium Ends

Performing Diverse Environmentalisms: Abstracts

Aaron S. Allen, “Diverse Ecomusicologies”

How do we make a difference through studying expressive culture in the context of ecological changes and environmental crises? Social justice work, political activism, and applied ethnomusicology are certainly relevant. Another path is liberal arts education. In this paper, I focus on ecomusicology as a representative of diverse environmentalisms, and I argue that diverse ecomusicologies are a fruitful way to pursue an environmental liberal arts education. The field of ecomusicology is best understood as a plurality — as ecomusicologies — due to its diversity in genesis, conception, and expression. Ecomusicology and other pluralistic ecocritical and environmental historical pursuits operate in the sphere of the environmental humanities, which together consider the cultural roots and solutions to environmental problems. Political ecology shares that concern and pluralism; although based more in the social sciences, it offers promising avenues for ecomusicology and diverse environmentalisms. All these fields are part of the long-standing interdisciplinary realm of environmental studies, which has the natural and physical sciences at its core, especially via the systems-thinking science of ecology. Despite the divergent disciplines involved, ranging from the arts and humanities to the social and natural sciences, these environmental fields share common ground in the liberal arts. Ecomusicology is one way to bridge these disciplines, and in so doing we can pursue transformative education — an education that develops, in the words of David Orr, “a whole person” who stands to make a difference in the face of environmental crises.

K. Brandon Barker

“Considering the Folklorist’s Responsibilities for Environmental Stewardship and Cultural Sustainability in South Louisiana’s Atchafalaya Swamp”

Since 2011, I have worked as a folklorist with the Evangeline Area Council (EAC), Boy Scouts of America’s upstart High Adventure Camp, Swamp Base—which promotes environmental and cultural sustainability in and around the 1.2 million acres of wetlands that make up the Atchafalaya Basin (www.bsaswamp-base.org). The Atchafalaya constitutes a major distributary for the waterways of 41% of the contiguous U.S. mainland; it diverts 30% of the Mississippi River. Like many southern wetlands, however, the Atchafalaya is suffering massive environmental damages due to upstream water pollution, oil and gas dredging practices, and coastal erosion. This environmental degradation also threatens local Creole, Cajun, and native cultures that have thrived in the area for centuries. Swamp Base brings hundreds of Scouts into the swamps of south Louisiana for 6-day/5-night, 65-mile paddling treks every summer. Outsiders are introduced to local expressive cultures, including Cajun and Creole music and foodways as well as native Chitimacha hunting traditions. Swamp Base’s lesson: If you appreciate this music, these foods, and our outdoor traditions, we need everyone to do a better job caring for our water-ways. My talk examines the possible roles of the folklorist in the service of large-scale sustainability programs like Swamp Base. I will specifically address: (1) cultural translation as a central component of environmentally aware outreach, (2) ethnographic method as a guide for community negotiations and large-scale capital campaigns, and (3) folklorists’ obligations to youth-serving organizations.

Katherine Borland and Cassie Patterson, Ohio State University

“Storying the Landscape in Southeastern Ohio: A Project of the Center for Folklore Studies, Ohio State”

The Center for Folklore Studies is currently embarking on a multi-year exploration of diverse environmentalisms in Southeastern Ohio. In this presentation we will share preliminary work comparing forms of place-making in the Little Cities of Black Diamonds, a micro-region about an hour and a half south of Columbus, and in Scioto county, which borders Kentucky along the Ohio River. In both places, mines and farmland have returned to forest, as industrial and extractive economies have given way to economic stagnation, outmigration, and blight. Residents attempting economic revitalization through heritage tourism and the arts are simultaneously engaged in combatting the problems of rural pollution. Paradoxically, however, the heritage impulse to commemorate a thriving industrial past works to obscure more recent histories of environmental cleanup and protection. We will discuss experiments in storying the landscape that amplify current heritage discourses to include citizen actions for postindustrial, environmental repair.

Assefa Dibaba

“The Eco-poetics of Place: Reclaiming Finfinne, Past and Present (Oromia, Ethiopia)”

Some folksongs are close to the core of who we are in the world. A song may play with slippages in time to connect us with a place past and present, making connections that may seem to transcend time and place and thereby memorialize historical loss. The song to be presented in this study comes from a repertoire of Oromo folksongs about the dispossession of land and land resources in and around Finfinne, renamed Addis Ababa, in the last-quarter of the nineteenth century. The song engages us with the environment across a history of exclusion, exploitation, displacement, pollution, and forced exile on one hand, and unceasing resistance, resentment, and lamentation of the unresolved historical loss, on the other. In response to the ongoing youth-led wave of protest in Oromia, Ethiopia, since November 2015 in opposition to the expansion of Addis Ababa, the capital, this historical song of place, I posit, gives Oromo people today a sense of their history and culture by evoking a deep sense of ecospace, that is, a rooted connection to environment habitats. I intend this talk as a contribution to eco-poetics, an analytical model based in artistic verbal expression and oriented to the ethically challenged human relationships with the environment, and ethnoecology, an overarching interdisciplinary approach to human environmental cultures that is receptive to the genres of environmental folklore.

Rebecca Dirksen, IU

“Haiti’s Drums and Trees: Facing Loss of the Sacred”

For Vodouizan and for the Haitian population more broadly, the *tanbou* (drums) are routinely imagined at the center of Haitian experience and provide necessary access to the spiritual forces of the universe. Tanbou are the instruments “in whose beat is heard the voice of the gods” (Herskovitz 1937). They are the objects to which “the greatest degree of independent divine power is attributed” (Deren 1952). They take “the tangible form of a divinity” (Métraux 1959). And yet the materials from which these sacred drums are made are seriously threatened: rapid, centuries-long deforestation and the effects of readily perceptible climate change have meant

that mahogany—once the preferred wood of drum makers and drummers (as well as of carpenters and lumber exporters)—is no longer available, and the replacement woods—trumpetwood, breadfruit, gommier, and the like—are increasingly hard to come by. In this presentation, I draw on an ongoing ethnographic study of a drum maker and his family living in the rural Artibonite department of Haiti to explore what happens when shifts in the environment trigger shifts that irrevocably alter a form of cultural heritage that many regard as a crucial element of Haitian society. Perhaps more importantly, in conjunction with my Haitian collaborators, I consider possible ways forward for both tanbou and trees, especially in terms of mitigating loss of the Sacred.

Chad Hamill, Northern Arizona University

“The Sacred Geography of Songs in the Columbia Plateau”

Throughout the Columbia Plateau region (interior northwest US), there is a sacred geography of songs that connect the people to the land. These songs, like the sacred foods that have sustained indigenous communities for thousands of years, emanate from the natural environment, contributing to “resonating place-worlds” (Basso 1996) in which the ancestral past folds into the present. In this way the songs, and the places they reference and embody, have strengthened Native ways of knowing oneself, both in the context of one’s community and the landscape in which it sits. This spiritually based ecological mindset has been critical to establishing and maintaining a correct and sustainable relationship with place (Cajete 2000), a relationship threatened by climate change and the global consumer mindset (Wildcat 2009) increasingly worming its way into Native communities. Drawing on the traditional knowledge of contemporary culture-bearers in the Columbia Plateau region, this presentation will examine the potential for song ecologies to reinvigorate long held indigenous values rooted in a reciprocal and balanced relationship with the land.

Mary Hufford, Virginia Tech University

“Standpoint Species: Thresholds to Contending Environmental Imaginaries on a Resource Frontier”

In this talk I focus on species that are sites of enunciation of and struggle over diverse environmentalisms in the coalfields of southern West Virginia’s Big Coal River Valley. Drawing on the political ecology of Richard Peet and Michael Watts, and on the standpoint theory of second-wave feminism, I consider examples of species that pivot between official and vernacular imaginaries. In conversational storytelling about things that happen on the land, local species like ginseng, hickory, locust, and trout become markers of a local land ethic that contrasts sharply with the values embodied in state and federal resource management practices. This contrast falls along lines drawn by Michael Bell, who (supported by Mikhail Bakhtin) distinguishes between grotesque and bourgeois ecologies. Grounding human and more-than-human identities in relational epistemologies and ontologies, environmental discourse on Coal River illuminates a continuing history of class struggle.

John H. McDowell, IU

“Performing Diverse Environmentalisms in the Andes: Ecopedagogy and Ecospirituality”

In this talk I profile mythic narrative and ritual practice in the south of Colombia and the north of Ecuador as forms of expressive culture manifesting an indigenous ecological consciousness that enables Andean peoples to address threats to the environment. Mythic narratives in this zone of the Andes describe an interconnected continuum of living beings within a spiritual landscape, and in this setting, time-tested ritual practices are employed to insure a secure footing for human society. Thus, Sibundoy Valley myths in Colombia provide instruction on maintaining balanced relationships with the natural world, and ritual practices among the Otavaleño Runa of Ecuador effect a respectful connection with Taita Imbabura, the mountain deity that towers over the Runa settlements and secures their fortunes. External forces constantly threaten these relationships and connections, and Andeans draw on these expressive repertoires to understand environmental disturbances and respond to them. I propose to explore this activist Andean environmentalism using the rubrics of *ecopedagogy*, cultural ecological teachings, and *ecospirituality*, the sense of ecological interconnectivity.

Mark Pedelty, University of Minnesota

“‘We Live in the Lake’: A Case Study in Applied Ecomusicology”

In this presentation I will show how “lessons learned” in fieldwork were applied in community music and media projects. Specifically, I studied environmentalist musicians in Canada, the United States, and Mexico, and drew ideas from my informants to produce music video projects with community partners back home in Minnesota. Instead of scholar as critic, I placed myself in the position of student, learning from accomplished experts like Dana Lyons, the Raging Grannies, and Musqueam MC Cecilia Point. Back home in Minnesota I worked with fellow musicians and a talented media production crew to produce music videos for community partners. For example, the Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance is working to restore their namesake lake, trying to stop one third of the lake from disappearing as rates of sedimentation accelerate. It is an issue related to climate change, industrial agriculture, and habitat loss. In this presentation I will show how lessons learned in fieldwork were directly applied in the “We Live in the Lake” project and another music video, “You Can Build a Garden” (Ecosong.net). As will be explored and explained in this presentation, the field informants’ emphases on humor, inclusivity, environmental justice, identity, genre, audience, clear policy objectives, and high production values influenced our community projects in very specific ways.

Jennifer C. Post, University of Arizona

“Mobile Pastoralists, Acoustic Engagement and Ecological Knowledge in Western Mongolia”

My musical research with Kazakh mobile pastoralists in western Mongolia has introduced me to the diverse ways that these herders connect acoustically with the lands and landscapes in a location they consider their homeland. Kazakh engagement with sounds, and their narrative forms shared at social gatherings, demonstrate an active involvement in the serious business of managing scientific, social and cultural information in order to

maintain a way of life in the steppes. In addition to a keen sensitivity to biophonic and geophonic events that they use in decision-making on a daily basis, their vocal and instrumental music offers commentary on the significance of the land and its resources and the adaptive behaviors that have occurred, or are needed, due to climate change and land degradation. As ecologists, their knowledge of biological systems and resources and their historical perspective on land change should qualify them to work with the Western scientific communities now developing management strategies in the rangelands and mountains of Mongolia and the broader Altai Sayan Ecoregion. In this talk I discuss the significance of sounds to the Kazakh pastoralists in Mongolia, demonstrate how sound and musical production in conjunction with other activities affects their planning and management, and propose methods for collaborative engagement in the steppes of western Mongolia.

Chie Sakakibara, Oberlin College

“No Whale, No Music’: Climate Change and Cultural Resilience among the Iñupiat of Arctic Alaska”

Research on the human dimensions of global climate change should consider the way populations that are at risk confront uncertainty through cultural practices. This is a vital point for indigenous peoples around the world but particularly for those in the Arctic region where the effects of climate change are most dramatic. The Iñupiat of Arctic Alaska are especially susceptible to climate and associated environmental changes because they rely on sea ice to hunt the bowhead whale. Employing a humanistic approach, this paper illustrates how collective uncertainty tied to the effects of climate change is expressed and managed in Iñupiaq practices and expressive culture. Together they show how the human dimensions of climate change, cultural resilience, and identity politics are integrated in the Arctic. In so doing, this study demonstrates how the Iñupiat reinforce their cultural relationship with the bowhead whale to better cope with an unpredictable future.

Michael Silvers University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

“Carnival and the Cost of Drought in Brazil: Neoliberalism and Cultural Policy in Times of Environmental Crisis”

In 2014, 2015, and 2016, an ongoing drought of historic magnitude led the governor of Ceará, a state in northeastern Brazil, to redirect state monies intended for Carnival to more urgent drought-relief efforts, effectively cancelling state-sponsored Carnival in three consecutive years. Engaging conversations about the ecological cost of large-scale music events, I examine the cost of Carnival celebrations in Ceará in an era of economic austerity and environmental crisis. Discussions among policymakers, Carnival revelers, and media pundits, as well as budget reports and public grant narratives, show a range of perspectives on the role of government in assuaging drought and maintaining Carnival practices. Concerns about corruption, mismanagement, and the meaning of local cultural heritage underpinned many of the responses, which, in total, point to an increasing neo-liberalization of culture in Brazil in the wake of a period of optimistic and ambitious cultural policy. This study is based on fieldwork in Ceará conducted in 2015 and 2016.

Sue Tuohy, Indiana University

“Linking Nature and Culture through Environmental Discourse, Heritage Practices, and Protection Projects in China”

In this paper I explore diverse approaches to promoting environmental consciousness in the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau region in Northwest China, an environmental hot spot and a region of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity. Over the last three decades, various individuals and groups living and working in this region have developed projects aimed at environmental protection, the preservation of bio-cultural diversity, and sustainable development. Many such projects forge links between “nature” and “culture” by establishing nature reserves and cultural protection zones as well as natural and cultural heritage sites. Their proponents advocate promoting traditional Chinese philosophies —and, more recently, traditional ecological knowledge—that emphasize the interconnections and harmony of nature and people. Here I examine case studies to illustrate the ways that expressive culture is framed and performed as a form of ecoaesthetics and ecospirituality to foster an “aesthetic consciousness” and an appreciation of the environment, as well as of traditional practices and indigenous philosophies. Among the cases to be explored are: ecotourism activities that encourage tourists to follow pilgrimage paths and to participate in traditional Buddhist practices; the performance of public wedding ceremonies in an urban center in a way that connects the natural environment of Qinghai to both traditional and contemporary Chinese life; and a geology park that emphasizes the connections between the soil/earth, humans, and the cosmos. For some participants, these projects are intended not only to teach particular forms of environmentalism and senses of place but also to advocate for greater collaboration between the state and the diverse groups living within the region.

Rory Turner, Goucher College

“Culture-making in the Anthropocene: Participation and Diverse Environmentalisms”

Vernacular expressive culture provides an invitation to situated, information rich, and engaged access to human adaptation and response to environments. The symbolic means and processes of expressive forms are performative in shaping actions and understandings of nature and culture, and of our ethical relationships to the human and more than human communities that sustain us. I argue here that in a time where fundamental orientations to nature and human values are in question, attention to expressive culture in the academic and applied humanities could contribute to the emergence of new forms of culture-making and solidarity. Engaging with the world-shaping and meaning-making activities of those we study can remind us that we too are world shapers and meaning makers in our roles as scholars and public professionals. If so, how can our work proceed in partnership with sites and traditions of expressive environmental response, and invite those we perform with (students, audiences, policy makers, etc.) to reframe their own environmentalisms? The more that we can foster critical empathy, deep participation, and intersubjective dialogue through ethnographic encounter, projects, and the experience of the forms and people themselves, the more likely that our work is transformational for those we serve, and generative of the deep, diverse, and connected environmentalisms so needed as we face global ecological crisis and destabilization.