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**Jennifer Thomson, *The Wild and the Toxic: American Environmentalism and the Politics of Health* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019)
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Introduction by Keith Makoto Woodhouse, Northwestern University

Health is among the more flexible and capacious frameworks we use to understand the world. Even within the confines of environmental thought, “health” remains a protean term, applied to the entire planet as easily as to ecosystems, species, and individual bodies. It is, **Jennifer Thomson** writes in *The Wild and the Toxic*, “the substrate for contemporary conversations about the environment in the United States.” (1) In her important new book, Thomson explains how environmental thinkers and activists borrowed notions of health from conservation biology, medical science, and nuclear physics in the service of grassroots activism, political reform, and environmental theory. Whatever its particular application, Thomson points out, the idea of health always did political work. After reviewing its many manifestations in recent decades, Thomson finds health as insufficient for pursuing environmental activism as it is essential for understanding environmental thought.

The Wild and the Toxic examines the role of health in environmental politics through four case studies. It considers Friends of the Earth campaigns against nuclear power and pesticides in the 1970s, in which grassroots activism gave way to insider negotiation; the fight against toxic waste in Niagara Falls, New York and how local activists relied on a zero-sum nativism in the 1970s and 1980s; biocentrism and civil disobedience and the pitfalls of using human disease as a metaphor; and the concept of planetary health from James Lovelock to Bill McKibben, and how a reliance on centralized management too easily played into the interests of the fossil fuel industry.

Over these decades, Thomson argues, health remained a widely used term even as its implications narrowed. Environmentalists began to invoke health almost exclusively in reference to human bodies and communities, at the same time as they allowed private industries and public agencies to foreclose collective action by defining health in terms of expert knowledge and individual behavior. By the twenty-first century, Thomson suggests, health signaled less than it precluded.

The Wild and the Toxic is a smart and sophisticated work of history, but Thomson writes not only and maybe not even primarily as a historian. She thinks about the past with the present and the future always in mind, and she writes “in the service of present-day liberation.” (130) Health remains a deeply resonant term today, one that may lead contemporary readers to think in terms of crises: climate change, a global pandemic, a withering economy, and a society rent by the state-sanctioned violence of racial hierarchy. Thomson would no doubt encourage this range of associations. But she would also urge us to think as creatively and as ambitiously as possible about alternative visions and metaphors. “Excavating the history of the environmental politics of health,” she writes, “is necessary in order to move beyond it.” (134)

Natasha Zaretsky begins this roundtable by praising Thomson's thoughtful and wide-ranging consideration of how health has functioned in the environmental movement. Zaretsky also appreciates the ways that Thomson contextualizes late-twentieth century environmentalism and health within a wider discussion of political change. At the same time she wonders whether Thomson's critique of mainstream environmentalists and organizations today overemphasizes some concerns while downplaying others—particularly the provocative claim that metaphors of planetary illness have bolstered a belief in centralized global management and so benefitted the fossil fuel industry as much as the environmental movement. While it is true that Bill McKibben and many well-known climate activists stress the need for scientific expertise and centralized policymaking, Zaretsky asks, isn't that what is needed to address climate change? Is the greater threat that of disempowering and defunding the experts who are shedding light on the problem? Finally, Zaretsky asks whether environmentalists, rather than pushing past health as an organizing principle, might reclaim it.

David Stradling places *The Wild and the Toxic* among a handful of books exploring the connections between health and environmentalism, and as part of a recent move towards questioning the reflexive admiration of long-hallowed figures. Stradling notes the ways in which Thomson revealingly connects familiar environmental events to a much broader political context, particularly in the case of toxic pollution in Niagara Falls. Given Thomson's critiques of mainstream environmentalism, he wonders about the relationship between the stories that *The Wild and the Toxic* explores and the analysis it offers. How confident can we be, Stradling asks, that Friends of the Earth could have achieved more if it had eschewed the conventional politics of reform, and how should we measure relative success? Conversely, he wonders, is it possible that many alternative conceptions of environmentalism have always existed, and that historians have simply not done enough to tell those stories?

Josiah Rector admires Thomson's intellectual ambition as well as her interest in connecting the history of environmentalism to the history of U.S. politics more broadly. *The Wild and the Toxic*, Rector notes, deftly uses health to trace how the post-Earth Day environmental movement gained political clout by constraining its sense of possibility and exchanging a varied and decentralized grassroots moment for a pragmatic and efficient lobby. Rector asks just how sustainable that early burst of variety was, however, and whether the many strands of environmental thought and practice that Thomson identifies could be effectively braided together, as well as with other social movements. Like Zaretsky, Rector also wonders whether Thomson's skepticism towards technocratic expertise glosses over the ways in which attacks on expertise have played into the hands of oil companies.

Conevery Bolton Valencius applauds Thomson's intellectual agenda and appreciates the many insights about health and environmentalism that *The Wild and the Toxic* provides. Valencius enumerates these particular insights in detailed discussions of each of the book's chapters, at the same time as she asks for greater

historiographical or narrative explanation regarding specific subjects or themes. Overall, she considers the idea of health in *The Wild and the Toxic* to be a useful scaffolding but not developed enough as a central concept. Further, Valencius questions how Thomson chose the four case studies that make up *The Wild and the Toxic* and whether more discussion of countervailing tendencies and contemporaneous critiques might have bolstered the book's narrative. (Readers should look closely through Valencius's footnotes, which on their own constitute an entire bibliographic essay).

In her response, Thomson stresses one of her book's key implications: that some environmentalists' relatively privileged positions and access to a wide audience magnified their influence as well as their myopia. This, she explains, is part of why she wanted to interrogate their stories. Thomson stresses that *The Wild and the Toxic* is a beginning point, from which she hopes others will expand on the possibility of "more-than-human ecological liberation" and new, more meaningful considerations of health and environment. As tantalizing examples, she points to various instances of spontaneous and democratic order and nonhierarchical conceptions of life on earth. These are some of the ideas that once were connected to health, Thomson explains, and that must be remade in a different form.

Thanks to all of the roundtable participants for taking part.

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Comments by Natasha Zaretsky, University of Alabama at Birmingham

In an era of sharpening economic inequality, health is a resource possessed by some and denied to others. It is a dividing line between the haves and have-nots. On one side are those with access to medical care, clean air and water, organic foods and supplements, and wellness routines. Today, the status of “being healthy” is about much more than staving off illness, aging, and death. The cultivation of health among the privileged signals their commitment to self-optimization. On the other side of the divide are the eighty-two million Americans who have inadequate or no health insurance, and the forty million Americans who live at or below the poverty line, where clean air, water, and food are harder to come by, wellness culture remains out of reach, chronic pain is an epidemic, and average life expectancies have declined for the first time in over a century.

Health may divide us as a society, but even the privileged can’t escape its fleeting nature. For as anyone who possesses a body knows, each of us is only one accident or diagnosis away from being stripped of it forever. Unlike an identity like race, then, the status of being healthy or able-bodied is temporary. As Susan Sontag put it, “Illness is the night side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify as citizens of that other place.”¹ In a society that relentlessly preaches that people make their own luck or that everything happens for a reason, illness is contingent, random, ruthless, and unsparing.

Jennifer Thomson should thus be commended for casting a critical eye on the politics of health in her new book *The Wild and the Toxic*. A historian of the modern environmental movement in the United States, Thomson asks how and why health became a keyword of environmental activism after 1968. Early twentieth century environmentalism centered on the conservation of nature. But by the late 1960s, environmentalists were turning to how toxic assaults on air, land, and water threatened the biological health of humans and animals. What emerged within post-1968 environmentalism was the concept of an ecological body that possessed a porous relationship to its outside and that could be jeopardized, perhaps even fatally, by things like radiation, pesticides and insecticides, toxic and hazardous waste, and industrial carcinogens. Simultaneously, in a move that reflected an emergent planetary consciousness in an era of globalization, environmentalists began to imagine the planet itself as a sickened body whose organic balance was being upended by human activity. Sometimes, the human body emerged as a barometer of environmental degradation. At other times, humans themselves were cast as a pathogen infecting the earth. At the center of contemporary environmental

¹ See Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1978).

politics was thus a complex, multidirectional relay between bodily, eco-systemic, and planetary health.

On its face, this turn to health had the potential to make environmental politics more capacious and diverse. By focusing on assaults on biological health, for example, both the environmental justice and toxic waste movements changed the face of environmental activism, since within those arenas, women and people of color have led the charge. But Thomson compellingly argues that this turn to health has also constrained the environmental political imagination over the last five decades. Within organizations like Friends of the Earth, a growing emphasis on health tracked a turn away from radical action and toward a heightened emphasis on individual consumerist choices. At places like Love Canal, local activists demanded that health be recognized as a citizenship right, but often in ways that affirmed rather than challenged their community's fundamental political conservatism. And intellectual giants of environmentalism like James Lovelock and Bill McKibben have often diagnosed planetary health and sickness in ways that register a deep ambivalence about collective action.

Thomson makes these arguments by scaling out and assessing environmentalism within the context of the larger transformations underway in the United States by the late 1960s and early 1970s, when conservatism displaced liberalism as the dominant ideology, neoliberal markets began to take hold, and the political left came apart. Too often, scholars treat the environmental movement as discrete and sealed off from these wider transformations in the political and social economy of late capitalism. This is unfortunate. For one, it makes it hard to discern the contradictions, tensions, and ambiguities that animated environmental politics after 1968. At the same time, the recent history of environmental activism productively complicates many of our assumptions about post-Vietnam US political culture. For example, the near-ubiquitous claim that this culture was becoming increasingly polarized was belied by environmental activism, which often attracted strange bedfellows and combined elements of "left" and "right" in ways that made the movement defy easy political categorization. Indeed, the history of environmentalism over the last five decades suggests that these political categories, rather than sharpening, have been dissolving and recombining.

By tracing the emergence of health as a keyword within environmental politics, Thomson illustrates this very point by showing how the concept mutated and circulated as the country's political center of gravity shifted rightward. She correctly points out that the growing attention to health within environmental activism did not emerge in a vacuum in the late 1960s. Rather, it was one component of a larger politicization of health taken up by women's and Black health activists who called out gender and racial discrimination within the postwar medical establishment, challenged the legitimacy of Cold War scientific authority, and sought to address healthcare needs within their own communities. But over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, leftwing social movements were marginalized, political dissent was repressed, and market-based solutions took hold. The quest for

health became depoliticized and increasingly associated with green consumption practices, the relentless valorization of choice, and a fetishization of the individual body over any larger commitment to political resistance. In other words, if activists in the 1960s first mobilized the concept of health in order to critique structural inequality, by the early twenty-first century, the concept was performing a very different kind of political work. Moreover, in one of the book's more provocative claims, Thomson argues that environmental metaphors of planetary illness have, somewhat perversely, augmented the power of the post-Cold War surveillance state and the fossil fuel industry, who together insist that they alone possess the expertise to serve as crisis managers over a rapidly warming planet.

My one critique of Thomson is that at times she is too heavy-handed in her critique of contemporary environmental politics. For example, at the end of the book, she takes Bill McKibben and his organization 350.org to task for foregrounding the accurate communication of scientific data about carbon emissions throughout their work, a move that in her view lionizes expertise and curtails collective action. But this critique strikes me as peculiarly outdated. If the social movements of the 1960s took aim at the cult of scientific and technocratic authority that had emerged out of the Cold War security state, today we are confronted with a very different problem: the wholesale rejection of scientific authority, particularly when it comes to the overwhelming scientific consensus surrounding carbon emissions. With Trump and other authoritarian leaders throughout the globe marginalizing climate scientists, defunding research, and sowing climate change denial, a commitment to the communication of accurate scientific data strikes me as a meaningful and even courageous political act. While I commend Thomson for refusing to romanticize activists like McKibben (who it is all too easy to approach hagiographically), it sometimes feels that she is throwing the baby out with the bath water. How, one wonders, can contemporary environmental activists avoid the ideological traps and cul-de-sacs that Thomson outlines in the book? What precisely is she calling for?

At the end of her book, Thomson concludes pessimistically that within contemporary environmental politics, health now functions as a largely empty signifier. But does Thomson think environmentalists can again reclaim the term, and if so, how? As the entwined crises of neoliberalism and petro-capitalism speed up, health is again the subject of real political contestation. Public support for Medicare for All is growing, and healthcare access is increasingly being recognized as a fundamental human right. Human bodies remain the barometer for the failures of our current system—whether in Flint, Michigan, Louisiana's cancer alley, or opioid-ravaged communities. If neoliberals captured the category of health in the closing decades of the twentieth century, the time has arrived for the left to repossess it. For contemporary environmental activists who want to move forward, one lesson of Thomson's smart, provocative book seems clear enough: that repossession will require a frontal, unapologetic critique of capitalism every step of the way.

Comments by David Stradling, University of Cincinnati

How Might We Inspire and Unite a Broader Constituency?

Historians have struggled to develop a definition of environmentalism that fully captures the movement that gathered strength in the 1960s and has significantly influenced public policy at the local, state, and national levels ever since. Environmental activists have taken up so many disparate problems using a wide variety of political strategies, and they have been animated by so many different and sometimes conflicting philosophies, that scholars may reasonably conclude that despite the flurry of activity from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, environmentalism wasn't a movement at all.¹ Historians now regularly employ the plural "environmentalisms" to reflect this multiplicity, to make room for wilderness advocates, pure air activists, antinuclear protesters, population control zealots, etc. While divining the boundaries of environmentalism and determining who counts as environmentalists may seem to be unnecessary, even futile exercises, most historians who have examined environmentalism have a practical if presentist goal: increase the effectiveness of current environmental activism, especially by articulating an inspiring and unifying theme.

This is certainly one of Jennifer Thomson's goals in *The Wild and the Toxic: American Environmentalism and the Politics of Health*. In a remarkably compact and effective 134 pages of prose, Thomson makes a major contribution to our understanding of environmentalism by exploring the role of health in environmental rhetoric in the 1970s. Her much broader goal is to advance "present-day liberation," by which she means justice for both human society and the non-human world. (130) Clearly Thomson is up to much more than offering an extension of Christopher Sellers's *Hazards of the Job: From Industrial Disease to Environmental Health Science* (1997) and Linda Nash's *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (2006), seminal works in the connections between health and environmentalism.

Ostensibly a critique of capitalism, or more specifically neoliberalism, *The Wild and the Toxic* takes aim mostly at other critics of capitalism, from David Brower to Bill McKibben. Thomson hopes to decenter venerated environmental leaders by "foregrounding the limitations, contradictions, prejudices, and oftentimes provincialism of their politics." By pointing to their flaws—particularly the limits to their philosophies—Thomson hopes to "clear space for more integrative and critical analyses of late twentieth-century politics." (13) One might question the strategy of decentering "lionized figures" by putting them at the center of your work, but Thomson has no difficulty finding flaws in the thoughts and actions of her subjects. Some environmentalists have been distressingly imperialist; many have been self-

¹ I titled my primary source reader *The Environmental Moment* (University of Washington Press, 2012), rather than *Movement*, for this very reason.

absorbed, concerned less with social justice than with their own lives and those of their families; and the vast majority have been anthropocentric. It is this last sin that most energizes Thomson's critique and her hope, as expressed in the end, that somehow humanity might develop "a practice of radical more-than-human democracy." (134)

Thomson analyzes a diversity of subjects, adding to our understanding of some familiar actors, including Lois Gibbs, Gary Snyder, Dave Foreman, and James Lovelock, measuring them by their conceptions of health's role in environmental protection. These figures, and increasingly many other environmentalists, defined environmental harm in terms of adverse effects on human or ecological health—or both. The development of biocentric philosophies in the 1970s raised the possibility that humans might conceive of environmental health in a way that no longer privileged the adverse human health effects of environmental degradation. As Thomson writes, "Environmentalists, often in collaboration with scientists and medical doctors, used health to describe ecosystems and the wild and to conceptualize the planet as a single living entity whose health was increasingly imperiled by human activity." (8) This conception of health never supplanted the anthropocentric concerns of most environmentalists, leaving Thomson to write a book that "rebukes the hegemonic, exclusive association of health with humans." (8)

As much as I admire Thomson's faith in democracy—both human and more-than-human—I wonder if the faltering of biocentric politics can be laid even partly at the feet of her subjects. Thomson's description of Friends of the Earth's reliance on data and a language of individual rights as a capitulation to neoliberalism, and her disappointment in the pragmatism of the Group of Ten generally (which seems like fair criticism to me), raises the question: Could different philosophies and tactics have resulted in more successful political projects? In other words, while "foregrounding the limitations, contradictions, prejudices, and oftentimes provincialism of their politics" might help us understand the motivations of environmentalists, does it help us understand the limits of their political influence? Thomson may be justified in her disappointment with the pragmatism of some of her subjects, as well as with their incrementalism and their emphasis on individual responsibility rather than systemic criticism, but do we know enough about the political and cultural contexts in which her subjects operated to conclude that their conservatism, pragmatism, or anthropocentrism impeded their political projects?

I should note that I am probably much more impressed with the success of environmental activists than Thomson, who writes that after the highwater mark of environmentalism in the 1970s, "the Reagan administration quickly and systematically gutted existing legislation and regulation." (38) While Reagan's administration elevated an anti-regulatory, anti-government rhetoric, a rhetoric that has clearly persisted, both government-sponsored ecological research and the environmental bureaucratic build-out continued, even during Reagan's administration. Thomson is hardly the first environmental historian to bemoan the shortcomings of environmental activists, both in their philosophies and their impact,

but the strength of this theme today makes me wonder if historians' diminution of the successes of environmentalism is likely to depress today's activists rather than inspire them.

The Wild and the Toxic is both dense and highly readable (a rare combination), but it may provide Thomson with too little space to fully explore the complicated ideas she presents, particularly since part of her goal is to situate "environmental politics in the larger history of the United States from the 1970s to the present" in order to explain why some conceptions of health and the environment thrive and others fade. (5) Much of the work focuses on the evolution and articulation of ideas in the 1970s, but the book carries on to the troubling Trump administration, as it must. In her attempt to cover more than fifty years of political and cultural change, Thomson may have been overly ambitious. Still, she does provide effective contextualization of some aspects of her story. She deftly explains the national political context of the Love Canal crisis, for example. On the other hand, the plight of the Love Canal families remains largely theoretical, perhaps too distant from the precarious reality in which they struggled. Maybe the contrast of their visceral activism with the more philosophical approach of Lovelock, and many of her other subjects, left me wanting more of their human story.

Following Chris Sellers, Thomson says a bit about industrial hygiene and occupational medicine in the early twentieth century, but when she traces the origins of her story, revealing the roots of the environmentalism she is most interested in, she heads back to John Muir and the Sierra Club. In reading this passage in chapter one, I couldn't help but think about the perennial handwringing at the American Society for Environmental History conference about the lack of diversity in our field. It is apparent to me that the narrowness of the field's concerns, especially in the privileging of the American wilderness movement, makes the conference less attractive to many scholars who define the environment—and environmentalism—differently. The trouble with putting wilderness at the center of the story is that it ties our field's central narrative to racist and classist projects, as Thomson conveys in her own telling of the story. It also keeps the field bumping up against the exceptionalism of the American story despite the globalizing tendencies of the profession and the clearly global reach of environmentalism itself. Thomson's vision for environmentalism leaves me asking similar questions. If the movement adopts biocentrism as an animating philosophy, and more-than-human democracy as a goal, would environmentalism be even further ensnared in these problematic themes?

Thomson's work is part of a wave of excellent work on environmentalism, much of which asks us to expand our understanding of the movement, to focus on more than the "lionized figures." This includes the work of Chad Montrie, who has spent his career exploring working-class environmental activism. His latest book, *The Myth of Silent Spring: Rethinking the Origins of American Environmentalism* (University of California Press, 2018), describes environmentalism largely as a reaction against the depredations of industrialization, from the early New England

Mills through Walter Reuther and Olga Madar's work with the UAW in the post-World War II decades. While that book arrived too late to influence Thomson's work, Montrie's first book didn't. In *To Save the Land and People: A History of opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Montrie began his exploration of the interrelated environmental and social justice movements. How might environmental history evolve if we moved such human stories from the margins of our field?

In *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), Christopher Sellers locates the origins of environmentalism in the sprawling but green suburbs of New York City and Los Angeles, far from the Sierras and farther from the "Satanic Mills" of New England. Sellers concludes that a revived environmental movement might usefully shed the term "environmental" altogether, just as environmental activists in the 1960s shed "conservation" in favor of a more inclusive language. "Maybe we require an alternative rhetoric and agenda that can inspire and unite a broader constituency," he wrote. [*Crabgrass Crucible*, 295.] Perhaps, but I'd make a simpler request: that we create a bigger tent. Everywhere you scratch in the late 1960s through the late 1970s you'll find environmentalists at work—from the coal fields of Appalachia to the troubled African-American neighborhoods of Cleveland's east side. The field should continue to analyze and theorize about environmentalism and work to create a definition that gives them all space. Undoubtedly this would do little to create a more-than-human democracy, but it might help revive human democracy. (Which could use the help.)

Comments by Josiah Rector, University of Houston

Jennifer Thomson's *The Wild and the Toxic: American Environmentalism and the Politics of Health* is a boldly original, provocative, and unsettling book. In four chapter-length case studies, Thomson demonstrates that health has been a key conceptual framework for U.S. environmentalism since the 1970s. From the anti-nuclear and anti-pesticide campaigns of Friends of the Earth to Love Canal homeowners' anti-toxics activism, and from Earth First! direct actions in defense of the wild to contemporary climate activism, environmentalists have frequently used health as a framing device for politics. Many have focused on environmental hazards to human health; others have also (or exclusively) sought to protect plants, animals, and the Earth itself from humans. As Thomson makes clear, rhetoric about health has been ubiquitous in recent U.S. environmental politics, despite its "radical lack of specificity" (2). From metaphors of environmentalism as land medicine and land healing, to the Earth as having a fever (or even cancer in the form of humans), to the wellness promises of green marketing, health is rarely far below the surface in U.S. environmental discourse.

But *The Wild and the Toxic* is more than an intellectual history of health in environmental politics. Thomson uses health as a lens to critically examine the recent trajectory of U.S. environmental activism, from the heady possibilities of the 1970s to the bitter defeats and deepening planetary crisis of subsequent decades. In its sharp judgments and openly stated political commitments, *The Wild and the Toxic* is likely to generate strong reactions and debate, both within and beyond the academy. In the first part of this review, I will briefly summarize Thomson's core arguments and how she substantiates them in her case studies. I will follow this with a series of comments and questions about the book's framing, some of Thomson's specific claims, and the implications of her analysis for environmental historians.

Thomson begins *The Wild and the Toxic* with a declensionist political narrative. Thomson argues that whereas health was integral to "collective political projects" among environmental activists in the 1970s and 1980s, because of "the dissolution, state-sponsored decimation, and cooptation of these collective projects, health became a vehicle for furthering the individualism and depoliticization integral to the neoliberal project of the late twentieth century" (1). Thomson emphasizes the diversity and creativity of 1970s environmentalism, arguing that it was "suffused with participatory democracy, decentralized decision-making, networking across fields of expertise, experimentation with a wide range of tactics, and a high level of interconnection between activists with very different political ideologies" (9). But between the late 1970s and the 2000s, in her view, mainstream environmental organizations became more organizationally hierarchical and strategically myopic, adapting to but not fundamentally challenging ecologically destructive state and capitalist power structures.

This argument is not entirely new. Journalists Christine MacDonald, Heather Rogers, and Naomi Klein, sociologist Andrew Szasz, and historians Ted Steinberg and Finis Dunaway have all argued that the U.S. environmental movement became more corporatized and individualistic in the late 20th century.¹ But several features of *The Wild and the Toxic* make Thomson's intervention unique: her use of health as an organizing framework, her close readings of environmental activist texts, her critique of activists' engagement with the state (not only with corporations), and her examination of both biocentric (or, to use Keith Woodhouse's term, "ecocentric") and anthropocentric environmental organizations.

In Chapter 1, Thomson demonstrates that Friends of the Earth (FOE) was neither a purely "top-down" nor "grassroots" environmental organization in the 1970s. FOE contained tendencies toward decentralization, community organizing, and disruptive protest politics, but also others toward centralized bureaucracy, Beltway insider politics, and green consumerism. In Thomson's telling, the latter tendencies won out between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. FOE's environmental health politics once entailed a combination of government lobbying and militant protest against corporate and state polluters, exemplified by the work of activists like Lorna Salzman (a self-described "radical decentralist") and Pamela Lippe. Increasingly, it prioritized political access in Washington, D.C. and partnerships with business (22-42).

Chapter 2 situates environmental activism in the political context of the Carter years in a different way. In a revisionist take on the well-known story of Love Canal, Thomson shows how New Right ideological framings of immigration, welfare, taxes, and government regulations influenced some Love Canal residents' political activism. Evacuees compared themselves to "boat people," and asked (sometimes using stridently racist language) why the federal government was admitting Southeast Asian and Cuban refugees while failing to provide safe homes for U.S. citizens (57-70). If Love Canal was part of the emerging environmental justice movement in the late 1970s, it also revealed that conservative ideas influenced some working- and middle-class white anti-toxics activists on the eve of Reagan's election.

In Chapter 3, Thomson analyzes the development of biocentrism in the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on the careers of prominent bioregionalists like Gary Snyder and Stephanie Mills, and the direct action militancy of Earth First! Among U.S.

¹ Christine MacDonald, *Green, Inc.: An Environmental Insider Reveals How a Good Cause Has Gone Bad* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2008); Andrew Szasz, *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Heather Rogers, *Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy is Undermining The Environmental Revolution* (New York: Scribner, 2010); Ted Steinberg, "Can Capitalism Save the Planet? On the Origins of Green Liberalism," *Radical History Review* No. 107 (Spring 2010), 7-24; Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 191-229; Finis Dunaway, *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of Environmental Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

environmental activists in this period, Thomson argues that “biocentrism was the most diverse in imagination and intentionally experimental in tactics” (74), although she critically documents their propensity for misanthropy and insensitivity toward social justice movements (81-83, 91-97). She also shows how they became increasingly marginalized by the 1990s and 2000s, due to their own ideological contradictions, state repression of direct action, and the dominance of more anthropocentric and reformist strains of environmentalism (93-95, 127-128).

For Thomson, the career of Bill McKibben and his climate advocacy organization 350.org epitomizes the latter tendency. In Chapter 4, Thomson traces the history of the Gaia hypothesis from the research of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis to McKibben’s writings, from *The End of Nature* to his more recent career as a highly visible climate activist (101-116). Thomson argues that despite their apparent antagonism, multinational oil corporations, climate scientists working with United Nations agencies, and prominent climate activists shared anthropocentric and technocratic assumptions about the manageability of Earth by humans (116-128).

The Wild and the Toxic raises a plethora of issues for potential discussion and debate. Here, I will focus on just two: the relationship between environmentalism and other social movements, and activists’ engagement with scientific expertise and state power. First, Thomson argues in the Introduction that environmentalism’s fortunes waxed while those of other social movements (such as Black Power, New Left, and anti-war activism) waned in the 1970s. Environmentalism’s “relative success” came at the cost of losing its radical edge (10-11). The key exception was Earth First!, whose “tactics derived primarily from social justice activism,” even as its members “assiduously disavowed this connection” (87).

One consequence of the divide between environmentalism and other social movements, Thomson shows, was environmental activists’ tendency to ignore or endorse inequalities among humans. She notes that in 1959, the Sierra Club (led at the time by David Brower, who would found FOE a decade later) hosted the South African ecologist Raymond Cowles, who compared “uncivilized” Asian and African peoples to infectious disease (20). Two decades later, Love Canal activists like Carol Mrak and Eva Lynch applied similar rhetoric to refugees, at one point drawing a parallel between “Cuban refugees and the toxic wastes” that had infiltrated their homes (62). The bioregionalist poet Gary Snyder had a “troubled relationship with settler colonialism” (82), and Wendell Berry’s holistic bioregionalism was “deeply indebted” to health activism in the civil rights, Black Power, and women’s liberation movements in ways he failed to recognize (83). Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman opposed U.S. aid to Ethiopia on neo-Malthusian grounds, and other members (like Reed Noss) flirted with quasi-eugenicist arguments (91-92). Thomson observes that radical biocentrists like Foreman and the Gaia theorist James Lovelock—otherwise profoundly different figures—both pathologized

humans as a cancer (92, 110-111).²

Thomson cites numerous other scholars who have explored similar themes, including Dorceta Taylor, David Pellow, Lisa Sun-Hee Park, and Thomas Robertson.³ One of her novel contributions to this literature is to show how racism, xenophobia, and other inegalitarian ideologies extended beyond wilderness conservation into other parts of the environmental movement, including anti-toxics activism.⁴ Another is a counterfactual argument embedded (at least implicitly) in the book's narrative: environmentalists could have done more to acknowledge their intellectual and political indebtedness to social justice movements, and they could have been more inclusive and open to coalition politics.⁵ While this is clearly true, it begs the question: how compatible *were* the strands of environmentalism Thomson examines with social justice movements? Were the goals of white bioregionalists not inherently in conflict with indigenous struggles for sovereignty? Could biocentric anarchism ever be reconciled with the environmental justice movement, which did not only resist state repression, but also demanded that the state provide some forms of protection and public services to disproportionately vulnerable human populations?

Thomson's discussion of the role of science in environmental politics raises other questions. She explains how grassroots anti-nuclear activists like FOE's Lorna Salzman collaborated with dissident nuclear scientists (28), and renegade conservation biologists played an important role in Earth First! (90). In the case of climate activism, however, Thomson is more critical of the role of climate scientists in public communications and protests (126-127). Drawing on Timothy Mitchell's *Energy Democracy*, she argues that "[k]ey features" of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis (partly based on research funded by Shell Oil) "were intimately tied to a global governance hegemony that cared greatly about the creation of "the environment" as something to be managed by a cadre of elite experts" (116-117).

² Keith Woodhouse has noted the critical reception of this misanthropic line of thinking on the environmental left, notably including then-anarchist Murray Bookchin. See Keith Makoto Woodhouse, *The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 196-202.

³ In addition to the works Thomson cites, other important entries in this genre include Miles Powell, *Vanishing America: Species Extinction, Racial Peril, and the Origins of Conservation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Jonathan Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington: University of Vermont Press, 2008); Jessica Leann Urban, *Nation, Immigration, and Environmental Security* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2008); and Gray Brechin, "Conserving the Race: Natural Aristocracies, Eugenics, and the U.S. Conservation Movement," *Antipode* 28 (1996), 229-245.

⁴ Elizabeth Blum (who Thomson cites) has also documented these tendencies among Love Canal activists, including "exclusionary" rhetoric about refugees. See Elizabeth D. Blum, *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism* (Topeka: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 49-51. But Thomson provides the fullest account available of this dimension of their thinking.

⁵ At the end of the Introduction, referring to the "diverse environmentalisms" of the recent past, Thomson writes: "The task of the historian is to enliven and reinhabit these alternate worlds in order to understand both what could have been and how the present came to be." (15) She is thus not only critiquing what environmentalists did, but suggesting what they could have done.

The Gaia hypothesis, Thomson maintains, profoundly shaped the worldview of both climate scientists and mainstream climate activists in the early 21st century (99, 115-116, 123-127). She challenges “the standard framing of oil corporations and environmentalists as fundamentally antagonistic,” concluding that they shared a technocratic vision of “planetary management” by scientific experts (123).

Thomson concedes that “fossil fuel corporations [...] donated heavily to electoral campaigns and successfully fomented public doubt about climate change” (123), and she cites the influential work of Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway (166 n. 108). But she might have also noted that climate denialists, based in think tanks and lobbying groups funded by fossil fuel interests, do not only foment doubt. They also systematically vilify climate science, and conflate expertise with elitism and regulation with authoritarianism. Writers like Iain Murray and Christopher Horner (based in the Competitive Enterprise Institute) specifically claim that climate experts and environmentalists hubristically seek to “manage” the planet through “global governance.”⁶ If fossil fuel interests subsidized Lovelock’s research, and participated in UN environmental conferences, they also funded campaigns to discredit climate science, and to undermine the legitimacy of technocratic-managerial solutions to environmental problems. More importantly, they successfully lobbied to defeat federal and state limits on greenhouse gas emissions and even weak, non-binding international climate agreements. Would grappling more with these developments have complicated Thomson’s argument about “global governance hegemony”? Whatever Maurice Strong believed in 1972, it is not clear that a coherent “planetary environmental protection system” ever truly emerged (122).

But these are relatively minor criticisms. *The Wild and the Toxic* is a major contribution to the historiography of environmental politics in the United States from the 1970s to the present. Many first academic books offer slight variations on familiar arguments. This book takes risks, and promises to genuinely reorient thinking about health in environmental politics. In the Introduction, Thomson writes that *The Wild and the Toxic* “integrates environmentalism into the political culture of the 1970s to the present” (10). Thomson achieves this aim, and in the process, she opens up overdue conversations about the relationship between environmentalism and contemporaneous developments in politics more broadly. As

⁶ On the first page of his book *The Really Inconvenient Truth*, Iain Murray asserts: “Environmental ‘leaders’ do not want to lead by example or persuasion—they want to *manage*.” Iain Murray, *The Really Inconvenient Truth: Seven Environmental Catastrophes Liberals Don’t Want You To Know About—Because They Helped Cause Them* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2008), 1. His colleague Christopher Horner warns readers that “the dream of the environmentalists is global governance,” and repeatedly quotes Jacques Chirac’s use of the phrase. Christopher C. Horner, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming and Environmentalism* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2007), 6, 193, 298, 300. On fossil fuel industry funding for the Competitive Enterprise Institute and similar think tanks, see Maxwell Boykoff and Justin Farrell, “Climate Change Countermovement Organizations and Media Attention in the United States,” in Núria Almiron and Jordi Xifra, eds., *Climate Change Denial and Public Relations: Strategic Communication and Interest Groups in Climate Inaction* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 121-139.

Thomson notes, political historians often ignore or give scant attention to environmentalism (137-138, n. 40), while environmental historians too rarely ask how their narratives fit into larger debates within and beyond their discipline. In this context, Thomson's intervention is welcome and necessary.

Ultimately, Thomson's arguments about environmentalism and health extend well beyond historiographical debates into larger political and philosophical questions about anarchism and statism, biocentrism and anthropocentrism, and democracy and technocracy. How readers respond to *The Wild and the Toxic* will depend as much on their answers to those questions as on their interpretation of her specific case studies. But no reader can use the words "environment" and "health" uncritically in the same sentence ever again.

Comments by Conevery Bolton Valencius, Boston College

In this 2019 volume, environmental historian Jennifer Thomson argues that health is central to our environmental conversation in the U.S. today, and that we would thus do well to understand the historical roots of this form of analysis and advocacy. Like many other middle-class Americans, I am daily bombarded with ads for planet-healthy products, felt myself moved by grade-schoolers' Climate Strike posters of an ailing earth at recent demonstrations, and am intrigued by the proposition that my eating more oysters would improve the planet's health by helping level out our release of greenhouse gases.¹ I'm also a fellow environmental historian who has written about nineteenth-century understanding of health and environment, as well as about how people endeavored to change their health by traveling to different places with different environmental influences.² I am, in other words, all in.

¹ Amazon now has a "Planet Healthy 101" product page of personal care and toiletry items featuring anti-wrinkle cream and products made out of dead krill (<https://www.amazon.com/s?i=merchant-items&me=A38P7JET1EIP6A>

accessed for the first and I hope last time 14 Oct 2019); I was inspired by signs at the Climate Strike in September of 2019 at Boston City Hall; and I noted oyster recommendations on Twitter and followed them back to Rhode Island Sea Grant, @rhodeislandsg, 11 Oct 2019: "In a new study by Sea Grant-funded researchers @FulweilerLab, if Americans replaced 10% of their meat consumption w/ oysters, the greenhouse gas savings would = keeping nearly 11 million cars off of the road.": <https://seagrants.gso.uri.edu/oysters-reduce-greenhouse-gas/>

² One path into the history of places, health, and bodies: review and synthetic articles (all in this footnote in reverse chronological order): Linda Nash, "Beyond Virgin Soils: Disease as Environmental History," and Nancy Langston, "New Chemical Bodies: Synthetic Chemicals, Regulation, and Human Health," in Andrew C. Isenberg, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Paul S. Sutter, "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History," *Journal of American History* 100 (June 2013): 94-119, along with the response by Gregg Mitman, pp. 128-130; Susan D. Jones, "Body and Place," *Environmental History* 10, no. 1 (Jan 2005): 47-49; Christopher Sellers, "Thoreau's Body: Towards an Embodied Environmental History," *Environmental History* 4, no. 4 (Oct 1994): 486-514. Some key works: Kathryn Olivarius, "Immunity, Capital, and Power in Antebellum New Orleans," *American Historical Review* 124, no. 2 (April 2019): 425-55; Melanie Kiechle, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2017); Urmi Engineer Willoughby, *Yellow Fever, Race, and Ecology in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, *The Natural World of the Gulf South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017); Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Warwick H. Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham, NH: Duke University Press 2006); Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty: Environmental Politics, Technoscience, and Women Workers* (Durham, NH: Duke University Press, 2006); Gregg Mitman, Michelle Murphy, and Chris Sellers, eds., *Landscapes of Exposure: Knowledge and Illness in Modern Environments*, *Osiris* 19 (2004); Christopher Sellers, *Hazards of the Job: From Industrial Disease to Environmental Health Science* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). My work on bodies, health, travel, and place: Chapter 4, "The Quaking Body," in *The Lost History of the New Madrid Earthquakes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Peter J. Kastor and Conevery Bolton Valencius, "Sacagawea's 'Cold': Pregnancy and the Written Record of the Lewis and Clark Expedition," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82 (Summer 2008): 276-310; "Chekhov's Sakhalin Island as Medical Geography," in Michael C. Finke and Julie de Sherbinin, eds., *Chekhov the Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon* (Bloomington:

I read a book with fascinating and useful insights, but one which ultimately left me unsatisfied. I fully agree with Thomson's questions, but wish that the book were less telegraphic in the answers. *The Wild and the Toxic* is more a book about certain moments in the history of mid-to-late twentieth-century U.S. environmentalism than a book about the history of health and environment. I would be very interested in seeing Thomson's questions push further both of those fields.

Thomson argues that "the reason we apply health to the environment now is the direct result of collective political projects of the 1970s and 1980s." (1) In a variety of ways, American advocates—drawing at times on international movements and ideas—used health and well-being to argue for environmental action. Yet by the late twentieth century, Thomson argues, "health" became limited, "unmoored," individualized—and co-opted by neoliberal capitalism, surveillance, and consumer-oriented self-regulation (1).

How did this happen? Thomson zeroes in on the political utility of arguments about health as a key element in a reductionist approach to well-being, reflected most obviously in toxicology's separation of exposure from environment (as well, I would add, as its one-substance-at-a-time understanding of risk analysis) (6).³ Thus we need to understand, she posits, "how environmental activists and many others built political projects around health in the last decades of the twentieth century." (4) To trace this history, Thomson analyzes the arguments of four groups: Friends of the Earth, whose broad-based critique she argues devolved into consumer-based "petitioning of the state" through entrenched lobbyists (12); the Love Canal Homeowners' Association, whose unexamined assumptions nonetheless led into environmental justice critiques of "environment as a conduit for disease" (12); the poets and activists leading a San Francisco-based movement for biocentric activism and bioregionalism whose world view soon shaded into misanthropy; and advocates for the once-scorned Gaia hypothesis which brought understanding of the Earth's holistic systems into present-day arguments for climate action.

Thomson presents a clear and compact introduction to Friends of the Earth (FOE), whose political schisms and disagreements with other organizations can make its history hard to render. Thomson credits FOE with broad-based environmental arguments, but points out the dangers of broad linkages, noting for instance the long association between health and racial exclusivity in the Sierra

Slavica Press, 2007): 299-314; "Gender and the Economy of Health on the Santa Fe Trail," in Mitman, Murphy, and Sellers, eds., *Landscapes of Exposure*, 79-92; *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); and "Histories of Medical Geography" and "The Geography of Health and the Making of the American West: Arkansas and Missouri, 1800-1860," in Nicolaas A. Rupke, ed., *Medical Geography in Historical Perspective* (London: Wellcome Institute Trust for the History of Medicine, 2001).

³ Evan Hepler-Smith, "Molecular Bureaucracy: Toxicological Information and Environmental Protection," *Environmental History* 24: 3 (July 2019): 534-560.

Club, especially in California (18). Thomson argues that Friends of the Earth's over-reliance on expertise led to a narrowing of perspective in which, for instance, pesticides would become "a lifestyle choice" (35) and political action would be defined as formal lobbying. "[B]y the close of the 1970s," Thomson concludes, "FOE's definitions of both environmental health and legitimate political action had narrowed significantly." (40)

This analysis sheds light on both past and present advocacy, but could have gone deeper. Thomson's emphasis on Friends of the Earth as the only substantial environmental organization opposing nuclear power provides helpful background given the resurgence of pro-nuclear arguments among many environmental advocates recently (24).⁴ Such contextual analysis is missing from other aspects of the group's history: my students likely need—and many historians might need, too—more analytic structure (really, more feminism) to understand why, in the political culture of the late 1970s, Lorna Salzman, a woman, would be dismissed as "too strident" and excluded from organizational decision-making (32, 39). What cultural forces shaped or constrained environmental advocacy?

In the next case study, Thomson argues for the significant impact but un-examined frameworks of an equally energetic although more tightly focused group: the Love Canal Homeowners' Association (LCHA). This group of a few hundred residents of a town near Niagara Falls suffered from pollution that followed both an early-twentieth-century hydropower scheme that left a large canal partly dug and subsequent twentieth-century industrial production that left hazardous wastes buried in that canal. Beginning in the early 1970s, adults in Love Canal began to investigate and document a variety of health problems among their children, as well as pregnant women and other community residents. They traced the cause of those problems to the barrels of oozing waste often quite literally in their backyards and ultimately brought their arguments about causal connection and their demands for action to a national stage.

Love Canal is an interesting example of environmental activism highly visible across the country—I remember sitting at the kitchen table as a kid watching nightly news coverage on a small TV perched on top of the fridge, while my mother cooked dinner and offered anxious commentary about how those children had been put at risk—but (as Thomson points out) largely ignored by larger environmental organizations at the time (63). Since then, pollution at Love Canal and residents' ultimately successful activism have been central to analysis of environmental

⁴ In a recent presentation on the Boston College campus, James Hansen, the NASA climate scientist whose 1988 Senate testimony helped raise awareness within the United States about global climate change, forcefully argued for the resumption of nuclear power development in the U.S. Afterwards, many of the undergraduates with whom I spoke had questions about the history of environmental groups' advocacy for or against nuclear power. Jim Hansen, "Shape Your Future: Energy, Climate Change & Human Rights," 17 Sept 2019 talk in the Climate Justice series sponsored by the Environmental Studies Program along with other Boston College partners.

movements in the latter twentieth century: after all, a small group of working-class people, led by stay-at-home mothers, got the federal government to buy out their polluted homes and spurred the passage of “Superfund” legislation.⁵ Important to understand!

Thomson frames this investigation around “health as a right of citizenship” (44). Why and how could that argument about health be a usable lever for the scrappy homeowners of Love Canal? Thomson makes the case that LCHA activists took their rubric of citizenship from the contemporaneous influx of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees and of Cubans of the Mariel boatlift (45-6). (I ate bowls of cereal watching these arrivals, too, along with political resistance to them.) LCHA activists argued that they themselves had been made refugees in their own country, and that they deserved at least the same rights as did newcomers to American shores (61). Thomson thus adds foreign policy as an important context for Love Canal activism against insidious pollution of domestic, often intimate spaces, while also tracing the incipient nativism of a movement framed around the civic belonging of native-born, white American families. Rarely do I find myself yearning as a reader for more historiographic discussion, but here I could have used more explicit guide-posts: how might Thomson help me understand—and help my undergraduates understand—how Love Canal has been framed in conflicting ways in the history of U.S. environmentalism? What is new about this approach?

Thomson then draws readers’ attention from a well-defined local activist group to an important but amorphous movement of biocentrism, a movement whose origins and spread she traces from the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco to the rural counties of California and beyond. Biocentrists, she argues, drew from “primitive” peoples’ conceptions of interconnection, but posited enlightened activists as “doctors” to a sick earth (71-72). Thomson shows how ecological activists framed “the wild” as an active rather than passive agent, and framed humanity as only one protagonist among many. The analysis demonstrates how American activists helped shape international conversations on environments, especially through the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) in Stockholm in 1972 (77). Thomson’s analysis foregrounds the importance of Beat poet Gary Snyder in the history of American environmentalism and underscores the importance of communes and communal homesteads for the larger political arguments of bioregional environmental critique (71, 74). This chapter is curiously almost as local as the Love Canal segment: I found myself wondering as I read about California back-to-the-landers: where are the Ozarks? Alaska? Appalachia? Eventually, the Ozarks did get mentioned, on p. 86, as did efforts in Michigan—but the approach overall seemed a strangely place-less history of land return. Isn’t there both a larger national story and more regionally-specific history to the bioregionalist back-to-the-land movement that this book might have pointed interested readers toward?

⁵ Formally, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980.

In the final element of this four-part book, Thomson traces the impact of the Gaia hypothesis, formulated in 1975 by physicist James Lovelock and microbiologist Lynn Margulis to describe the Earth as organism and atmosphere as circulatory system. In a particularly valuable portion of this chapter, Thomson emphasizes the participation of multi-national oil companies in the creation of the Gaia theory. Oil executives were happy to “participate in the creation of the planetary environment as something whose crisis required it to be brought under a global governance regime.” (121) An organismic state that needed proper management was a good candidate for management by large corporations: Lovelock, she argues, maintained that Shell Oil, one main sponsor of his work, should “participate in the maintenance” of an optimum planetary environment.⁶ His work, she concludes, “provided a not-so-subtle apology for fossil fuel combustion.” (119) As with the work of Friends of the Earth in her first chapter, Thomson contends that environmental arguments for the Earth’s sickness called upon and created a need for expertise and authoritative guidance. She expresses skepticism about the nature of that guidance and whether, for instance, a multinational corporation was the best source (127). Drawing on the frameworks of Timothy Mitchell in *Carbon Democracy*, Thomson asks, “What was to be gained from investing in the design of a planetary environmental protection system that synthesized bureaucracy with scientific and technological expertise?” (122)⁷ This book usefully casts the oil and gas industry as part of environmental conversations with academic experts and the larger society, not outside looming like a large, shiny, impenetrable black box.⁸

⁶ Thomson emphasizes that Lovelock was transparent about the grants and support he received throughout much of his key work on Gaia in the 1960s from Shell Oil, as well as his other major funders NASA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), Hewlett-Packard, and the British Ministry of Defense (116-7).

⁷ Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2013).

⁸ “Black box” is a concept originating in the MIT Radiation Laboratory and other wartime planning and design during World War II and which was introduced into wider use by William Ashby’s 1956 *Introduction to Cybernetics*. A “black box” provides a way to imagine a machine into which a user provides an input and receives a reliably-related output, but has no idea what process produces that output. A “black box” is essentially a real-world mathematical function, one in which the user neither comprehends nor feels the need to comprehend the details of the function itself. I might for instance view my automobile as a “black box”: I turn a key and it propels me, without my having to enquire too closely what flows of hydrocarbons or political authority, what expert engineering or product design produce or constrain my mobility. When all goes well, my minivan’s functioning is something I can rely upon without examination: it is a black box whose opacity helps me ignore my relationship to greenhouse gas emissions, global wars, or the rising seas near me, or to the creation of educational systems and valued expertise that produce the conditions of possibility for my afternoon drive to the grocery store. The concept of “black box” was introduced into science studies in the 1980s, notably in the introduction to Bruno Latour’s 1987 *Science in action: how to follow scientists and engineers through society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) and has gained wide currency throughout the history of science and related fields, as well as in other cultural conversations such as business, management, education, and finance. In environmental history, see, for instance, Joseph E. Taylor, III, “Knowing the Black Box: Methodological Challenges in Marine Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 18, no. 1 (Jan 2013): 6-75. In the original WWII usage, planners might define the function of a “black box” device before designing it: more often now it refers to an end-user’s experience. On the history and limits of this powerful explanatory construct, see Peter L. Galison,

Yet *The Wild and the Toxic* launches this discussion of the Gaia hypothesis with a stunning claim: “Currently, Gaia forms the conceptual framework for international climate change research....” (99) I was struck by this: Yes, recent fires in South America have brought widespread discussion of the Amazon as the “lungs of the planet,” which is a very late-Gaia organ-system-specific understanding, and global climate change has certainly adopted some language of the Gaia theory (as Thomson notes in footnote 8)—but can one sentence do justice to that relationship?⁹ I would skeptically surmise that, like Margulis, current science has ditched Lovelock’s insistence on the Earth as an organism in a literal or traditional sense, while incorporating basic insights about interactive, circulating, mutually influencing systems. What more nuanced insight might Thomson have brought had the book dug deeper into this claim for the influence of Gaia frameworks on current science? I felt a similar frustration reading the critique of Lovelock’s oil company funding. Could she have drawn on further evidence to make the critique more robust? Again, I thought of my undergrads: what can I give them to understand the complicated relationships between fossil fuel companies and basic research in the 1960s—and how that had changed by the 2000s or 2010s?¹⁰

At times, the analysis is curiously presentist, as when Thomson comments on Lovelock’s “correct diagnosis of threats to Gaia” (108). Such pronouncements seem to privilege an early twenty-first century understanding of what is right and what is not, a privilege I am not entirely sure we have earned (or that I think we should at least acknowledge as still partial and unfolding). Throughout the analysis of Lovelock and the Gaia framework, as well as Friends of the Earth, Thomson emphasizes advocates’ insistence upon the role of expertise. The analysis of *The Wild and the Toxic* seems to be pointing to a conclusion not quite reached. Is expertise necessarily antithetical to health? Or to environmental advocacy? As with

“The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision,” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 228-266, esp. 247, and Philipp Von Hilgers and William Rauscher, “The History of the Black Box: The Clash of a Thing and its Concept,” *Cultural Politics* 7, no 1 (2011): 41-58.

⁹ For instance, Sara M. Moniuszko, “Leonardo DiCaprio, Madonna, more stars send prayers, call for action in Amazon fires,” *USA Today*, 23 August 2019, explains that DiCaprio and other funders have launched The Amazon Fund “to help repair the Brazilian rainforest, called ‘the lungs of the planet,’” <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2019/08/23/amazon-rainforest-fires-leonardo-dicaprio-madonna-call-to-action/2099009001/>.

¹⁰ I draw here on my own research, in which, for instance, geophysicist and digital seismology pioneer Sven Treitel, who worked at oil majors and has been a leading figure in the Society for Exploration Geochemistry for decades, spoke with me passionately about his and his colleagues’ freedom to perform and to publish basic research applicable across many fields early in their careers, and expressed frustration about subsequent pressures on publication by company researchers. The relationship of fossil fuel companies to research is not as simple as Thomson’s brief discussion implies—but is an important and complex question to explore, especially in classrooms of students who will go on to work in, for instance, marketing, administration, finance, and science roles in and supporting fossil fuel companies and other large research-funding corporations. I would like to have more classroom resources with which to equip them to ask good questions at job interviews and shape their own subsequent intellectual—and political—lives. (Interview with Sven and Renata Treitel, 12 April 2017, Tulsa, OK).

the comment about the ways Lovelock is “correct,” Thomson’s own assumptions seem insufficiently acknowledged. As reader, I would have appreciated a deeper critique of expertise or a more complex politics of knowledge. How might recent literature in the history of science have helped push this analysis into a more broadly-applicable exploration?¹¹

¹¹ Audra J. Wolfe, *Freedom’s Laboratory: The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018) is not a source that Thomson could have taken into account, because it came out just as *The Wild and the Toxic* was in press, but it is a recent and helpful introduction for readers of this Roundtable interested in the creation of the ideas of scientific freedom and scientific autonomy in the twentieth-century United States. Questions about historically contextualized ways in which knowledge and expertise carry political power or social authority represent a central theme of the history of science and medicine over the last thirty years. I am grateful for many writings, conversations, debates, and conference presentations that have helped me think through these questions. A few works that have particularly shaped my thinking include: Allan M. Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product That Defined America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007); Brandt, “The Cigarette, Risk, and American Culture,” in *Sickness and Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health*, edited by Judith Walzer Leavitt and Ronald L. Numbers (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997): 494-505; Deborah R. Coen, *The Earthquake Observers: Disaster Science from Lisbon to Richter* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Coen, *Climate in Motion: Science, Empire, and the Problem of Scale* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018); Benjamin R. Cohen, *Notes from the Ground: Science, Soil, & Society in the American Countryside* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, translated by John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Brian Frehner, *Finding Oil: The Nature of Petroleum Geology, 1859-1920* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Peter Galison in many works but perhaps most accessibly in “The Ontology of the Enemy” (1994); Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, translated by Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty*; Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, *Agnology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Paul Lucier, *Scientists and Swindlers: Consulting on Coal and Oil in America, 1820-1890* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Linda Nash, “The Changing Experience of Nature: Historical Encounters with a Northwest River,” *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 4 (2000): 1600-1629; Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); Martin S. Pernick, “Politics, Parties, and Pestilence: Epidemic Yellow Fever in Philadelphia and the Rise of the First Party System,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 29, 3rd ser., no. 2 (1972): 559-86; Martin J.S. Rudwick, *The Great Devonian Controversy: The Shaping of Scientific Knowledge among Gentlemanly Specialists*, Science and Its Conceptual Foundations (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) and his two-volume set, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (2005) and *Worlds before Adam: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Reform* (2008) (both from The University of Chicago Press); Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), John Harley Warner, *The Therapeutic Perspective: Medical Practice, Knowledge, and Identity in America, 1820-1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*, Hill and Wang Critical Issues (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

“[H]ealth,” Thomson concludes, “now functions within environmental politics as an empty signifier.” (129) This book chronicles a narrowing of richer meanings once present within multiple streams of environmentalism of the 1970s through the early 1980s. The consequences of this narrowing, she argues, may be severe: climate change is already pushing toward concentrations of power, and environmental organizations or movements in the U.S. seem ill-equipped to shove back (132-3).

Current politics, Thomson contends, require imagination beyond the human form: individual health is not the only way to understand well-being. The book launches with Thomson’s argument for *Silent Spring* as consistent with suburban, atomistic fears for health. Thomson contends that this focus on individual health was not the only potential outcome of cultural conversations: many other envisionings of “health” were contemporaneous and possible (15). Such analysis is needed and useful. How might further historical context challenge or expand Thomson’s argument? Early modern European miners may not have argued that the Earth has a fever, but they did imagine a vital Earth possessing veins like their own, but that ran with precious metals. Up through the late nineteenth century, common and educated understanding of the Earth in western tradition often figured passageways coursing with vapors and gasses whose movement helped balance the whole—and whose explosive discharge might variously cause earthquakes, volcanoes, or the fertility of fields.¹² How did late-twentieth-century advocates draw on, or ignore, or unwittingly recapitulate these much older arguments? What characterized the new elements of their imagining?

In the end, I found *The Wild and the Toxic* an uneasy political and intellectual history—in which “health” is at times a prism but is not developed sufficiently to be a key concept. Thomson’s main inquiry seems not concerned with health, but instead with asking how powerful environmental critiques narrowed and options became more limited, over the late twentieth century. Indeed, as Thomson concludes: “This book is equally as invested in mobilizing historical analysis in the service of present-day liberation as it is in recuperating the fullness of meaning that health once had for environmentalism.” (130) There may be a cart and horse issue here. I appreciate liberatory goals, but does *The Wild and the Toxic* offer enough historical analysis to support them? When historians have scholarly and political aims, which is foundational? I sympathize here with presses under enormous financial squeeze, and with authors engaged with the—valuable! much-needed!—effort to write books of a length that can be assigned in the scope of a busy undergraduate semester.¹³ But I gnashed teeth encountering fascinating arguments

¹² Chapter 1 in David Oldroyd, *Thinking about the Earth: A History of Ideas in Geology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) and chapter 5, “Vernacular Science,” in Valencius, *The Lost History of the New Madrid Earthquakes*. (I draw the emphasis on the fertility of fields from Boston sermons about the 1755 Cape Ann earthquake I’ve been reading recently).

¹³ I wonder too at lack of editorial support by a press in places such as p. 93, which discusses the Redwood Summer but does not make clear that it was the summer of 1990, or p. 44, when the Superfund Act is mentioned, but no year of passage given.

I would have been glad to follow if spooled out at more convincing depth—as well as potentially interesting arguments given short shrift in footnotes.¹⁴ *The Wild and the Toxic* raises excellent points, but needs more context and more discussion fully to convince and satisfy.

I began reading *The Wild and the Toxic* as a historian of health and environment in the U.S. By the time I finished, I realized that perspective may have less to say about the ultimate goals of the book. I read it also as an American with now a half-century of lived experience, some of which overlapped with the history Thomson tells. As a very young child I lived around some of the alternative communities she describes in the San Francisco/Berkeley/Oakland area. As a kid, I occasionally spent time in back-to-the-land countercultural households, mostly in the south, that lived out some of the philosophies the book describes (I have a vivid childhood memory of being trapped on top of a doghouse by an angry sow and getting the pretty clear idea that the adults around me did not have the agricultural expertise to deal very well with the situation). As a young adult in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I lived in several cooperative communities with roots in the eras and movements that Thomson chronicles.¹⁵ Throughout my reading of this book, I kept wondering what those people—the idealistic haybale-house-builders, the sunbathe-in-the-nude Southern hippies, the college students seeing shared kitchens and shared decision-making as one way to build toward safer, healthier, more just communities—would draw from Thomson’s arguments. Many other people—my age and of many different generations—have experiences far more central to the movements that Thomson narrates, but the ways in which my personal story touched the story of this book made me wonder: Would this book articulate ideals of communitarianism, bioregionalism, critiques of the mainstream and hegemonic that would make sense to the people I’ve visited, chosen to live with, or stared up at as a little kid? I don’t mean to suggest that our inquiry must be constrained by what is understood contemporaneously: historians often need to draw connections not obvious to those living at the time. Rather, I wondered as I read whether this book would enable the people I encountered, if they have time-traveled along with me over the last five decades, to see their arguments, passions, critiques, or activism with different or sharper focus. Does this book capture essential threads of what tied together cultural movements and scientific critiques? The concise nature of Thomson’s arguments makes them readable—that is always helpful in popular

¹⁴ For instance, p. 156 note 6: why has our environmental history scholarship so ignored Beat poet Gary Snyder? How (p. 157 note 34) did intrepid marchers actually sing whale sounds when the sound system failed at a UNCHE protest: did that just sound silly, or was the tone of the event somehow somber? What does the analogy made by Margulis and Lovelock between their work and the research of William Harvey on the circulation of blood (p. 161 note 2) have to say about the utility of health arguments to environmental thought—the main topic of this book?

¹⁵ I don’t have many useful specifics to give as evidence about my early experiences as the child of a well-educated, peripatetic family moving variously 1969-1974 in Wisconsin, Illinois, and California, with a brief stop in a summer encampment along the way, and eventually coming to rest in central Arkansas, but I lived as an undergrad 1987-8 in what was then named Theta Chi Co-op (since 2012 “576 Alvarado”) at Stanford University, as a young adult 1990-2 in the Group W cooperative house in San Francisco, and 1993-5 as a graduate Resident Assistant at Dudley Co-op at Harvard University.

conversation. Yet does the narrow scope of this book constrain its reach? Given Thomson's interest in questions that touch a wide audience, I wonder whether *The Wild and the Toxic* would help those I've lived around understand their experience in a different perspective. What are they to take from Thomson's rendering of the last half-century of environmental activism?

A central unexplained context is why to frame the book around these four groups. In one sentence of the introduction, Thomson situates the central structure of *The Wild and the Toxic*: "This book deliberately engages with activists who constitute the mythology of Anglo-American middle-class environmentalism." (13) Thomson situates this book as an attempt to stop lionizing those figures, and start critically understanding them. Yet I needed more context to consider what that choice meant, or how Thomson as author framed it. Why those groups? Why not others? As reader, I kept wondering about 1970s and early-80s activism, "Where are the churches?" "Where are the unions?" "Where are the farmworkers?" and "Where are the Black people?" Stewardship of God's blossoming creation has long resonated in conservative as well as liberal religious communities. When and how did creation-care come to be articulated, and when connected with human well-being? A San Francisco exodus may have brought activism to the California countryside, as Thomson argues (74), but in coal country rural activism, much of it health-based, has a long history. Did that advocacy similarly shift in the 1970s? Certainly, the health of people picking in California's fields was (and remains) a central element of their social and environmental activism: how might Thomson see those forms of political argument functioning in her story? Black Power advocates—some based in the same Oakland/Bay Area regions as the bioregionalists Thomson chronicles – criticized the white supremacy of health care. Were those critiques connected with their searing indictments of residential racism? No book can do everything—nor should it. But because important structural choices were left unexplained, this book left me to figure out on my own why these movements and not others tell us something important.

Throughout my encounter as reader of *The Wild and the Toxic*, I kept feeling as if I were watching the 1969 film *Easy Rider*—that I was in the midst of a work that both critiqued and was wholly in the midst of a certain cultural moment.¹⁶ Both works demonstrate certain holes in a beguiling narrative, but seem also entranced with that narrative's power. There was no question in this book but that Wendell Berry is convincing and important. The book seemed addressed to those already convinced that his work was both. *The Wild and the Toxic* asserts the cultural power of commune culture's bioregionalism. What about the alienating sexism and ill-examined, self-referential white privilege? Thomson does critique her leading figures—for instance, p 90, in a discussion of David Foreman's penchant for self-aggrandizement—but there is little sense in the book, of, for instance, powerful

¹⁶ *Easy Rider*, directed by Dennis Hopper (Columbia Pictures, 1969). Roger Ebert's film review, originally published 18 Sept 1969, gave me insight into the movie's dual role as embodying and criticizing its era: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/easy-rider-1969>.

feminist critiques of the limits of this era's activism. Such discussion would not diminish the power of the book's central claims: quite the contrary, how might they have made them more convincing? *The Wild and the Toxic* asked excellent questions and had insights from which I learned. Ultimately, though, it seemed caught up in the narrative rush of a particular, charismatic historical moment. I would be eager to read future work in which Jennifer Thomson might give us more insight by roaring along the journey at slightly slower speed.

Response by Jennifer Thomson, Bucknell University

The Wild and the Toxic began over a decade ago with a present-facing question. Why was health so ubiquitous in contemporary conversations about the environment? As I contemplated the matter, it seemed increasingly clear how pervasive yet unmoored from any historically specific meaning the language of health was. And before long it seemed that everywhere I turned, from yogurt containers to the State of the Union, I encountered a claim about the health of the environment. Or the planet. Or humans. Or the wilderness.

The Wild and the Toxic grew from my desire to know from where this language of health had come, and to understand the nuances of its various expressions. This curiosity led me to research four discrete case studies of historical actors integral to the articulation of the environmental politics of health: Friends of the Earth and the health of the environment; the Love Canal Homeowners' Association and the environmental health of humans; bioregionalists, Earth First!, and the health of the wild; and James Lovelock, Bill McKibben, and the health of the planet. My aim in each case study was to track these actors' engagements with health while also embedding their actions within larger transformations in late twentieth century American political culture. Although far more remains to be written on the language of health within environmentalism, *The Wild and the Toxic* provides readers with four conceptually distinct explorations of environmentalists' engagement with health.

I appreciate the careful attention which each reviewer devoted to *The Wild and the Toxic*, all the more so given our field's notorious skittishness towards engaging with contemporary politics. Josiah Rector, David Stradling, Conevery Bolton Valencius, and Natasha Zaretsky each recognized the book's ambitions for what they were, brought their own research commitments to bear on the task of illuminating what they found meaningful in the book, and asked pointed and provocative questions for further exploration. In many ways, their responses affirm Rector's observation that readers' reactions to the book will derive in no small measure from their answers to larger questions about "anarchism and statism, biocentrism and anthropocentrism, and democracy and technocracy." I am grateful for their time, attention, and thoughtful critiques, and to Keith Woodhouse for assembling such a dynamic set of readers. Thank you all.

Josiah Rector, a historian of late twentieth century United States environmental politics and environmental justice, focuses on two themes raised by *The Wild and the Toxic*: "the relationship between environmentalism and other social movements, and activists' engagement with scientific expertise and state power." He rightly asks whether the environmentalisms I analyze really could have engaged with other social movements. In other words, how justifiable is the book's claim that certain environmentalists should have been more responsive to and

cooperative with other social movements? In my read, he is asking the book to more clearly articulate its subtextual claim that environmentalism remained separate from, and by the 1970s more successful than, other forms of social activism precisely *because* of its difference, a difference largely stemming from the social privileges enjoyed by its protagonists. Re-thinking the book through his analysis, I wish I had stated this more clearly. The successes of certain environmentalists—most notably Friends of the Earth, the LCHA, and Bill McKibben—stemmed not purely from the content of their arguments, but from the systemic access and voice they had within a profoundly hierarchical society. Indeed, to take this line of analysis to its logical conclusion, these environmentalists' arguments, their stance towards health and political expression, and their relative deafness to other social activism, arose from their comparative access to power and audience.

In thinking through Chapter 4, Rector asks me to consider the extent to which oil corporations' climate change denialism, and their vilification of environmentalists as global managers, interrupts the book's analysis of the involvement of fossil fuel interests in the development of global environmental governance structures. Frank Zelko raised a similar question in his recent review of the book.¹ *The Wild and the Toxic's* analysis of the relationship between fossil fuel corporations (oil companies in particular) and the emergence of structures of international environmental governance departs from the consensus within both scholarship and activism that oil corporations were inherently opposed to the health of the planetary environment. Rather, the evidence suggests that they were very much dedicated to the articulation of the environment as a singular object to be managed by scientific and technological experts. In my current book project, *Against Planetary Management*, I connect their actions to the broader emergence, by the early 1970s, of a disposition towards planetary environmental management through expertise shared by finance capital and neoliberal policymakers.

David Stradling, a historian of urban and environmental history, hones his attention on *The Wild and the Toxic's* dialogue with present day activism. Asking in his title how we (presumably referring to environmental historians) might inspire and unite a broader constituency, he incisively questions whether the book's critical stance towards environmental activists may in fact exert a depressing influence on activist-minded readers. This is a fair critique in its own right, and more so for a book that orients itself towards the present day. Although Stradling and I likely disagree on the legitimacy of what he describes as "pragmatism" in environmental politics, I found great value in his asking "could different philosophies and tactics have resulted in more successful political projects?" Another rendering of this question is whether any politics negating settler colonialism could have gained a hearing, much less traction, within the national politics of the United States. Certainly not, and I believe the same holds for many environmentalisms. Without a fundamental transformation in material, economic conditions, any politics premised

¹ Frank Zelko, "Review: *The Wild and the Toxic: American Environmentalism and the Politics of Health*," *Journal of Social History* (January 3, 2020).

on the reworking or eradicating of capitalism—as were those of Earth First!, bioregionalists, and even Friends of the Earth in its early years—were doomed to fail. That is, if we are in the business of judging failure. *The Wild and the Toxic* aims not to rank the ultimate impact of different environmental politics, but rather to trace the inter-relationship between larger changes in political culture and environmentalists' varied engagements with health.

Conevery Bolton Valencius, a historian of health and environment in the nineteenth century United States, wishes for a less "telegraphic" book. Her critique raises a plethora of questions left unanswered by *The Wild and the Toxic*. Most of these concern the cultural forces shaping and constraining environmental activism. Her most generative question, in my read, concerns how an explicitly feminist analysis might better illuminate Lorna Salzman's life. I agree: Salzman's career deserves a book-length treatment in its own right, and the field of environmental history remains far behind in critically engaging gender and feminism. Valencius also invites me to provide a more nuanced discussion of the relationship between oil corporations, science, and environmental activism. While that project lies outside of the scope of *The Wild and the Toxic*, I wholeheartedly agree that it is time for scholarship (and activism) to move beyond an axiomatic assumption that oil corporations were diametrically opposed to the planetary environment, and endeavor to understand exactly how they asserted their influence over the definition of the environment. Oftentimes, this involved the simultaneous production of reputable scientific data and promotion of popular skepticism towards science.²

Early in her critique, Valencius writes "*The Wild and the Toxic* is more a book about certain moments in the history of mid-to-late twentieth century environmentalism than a book about the history of health and the environment." Yes. That is what it was intended to be. Perhaps in wishing the book to be something other than itself, Valencius overlooks the reality of what it does offer. I'll address just two mislaid criticisms. First, Chapter 2 provides substantive discussion of the significance of foreign policy to understanding Love Canal, as well as of the various ways environmental historiography has addressed the case. Second, Chapter 3 isn't simultaneously "place-less" yet rooted in California; it is quite conscious of place, in both the text and the footnotes, and offers readers ample secondary literature concerning bioregionalists' dialogue between local and global. Like Valencius, I too would like to read comprehensive and complex histories of health and the environment in the twentieth century, and in her review she offers many exciting suggestions for research pathways that might be explored. *The Wild and the Toxic*, in providing four nuanced, focused, and deeply researched cases of the politics of health and the environment, played one important role in this exploration.

² Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes, "Assessing ExxonMobil's Climate Change Communications (1977-2014)," *Environmental Research Letters* 12 (2017).

Natasha Zaretsky, a historian of the cultural and political history of the late twentieth century United States, centers her review on the power of health within a radically unequal consumerist society. Following an incisive commentary on health's present status as a commodity, a possession to be cultivated and curated, she notes how it once had the potential "to make environmental politics more capacious and diverse." It did, and that potential is a key aspect of what drew me to this project. Zaretsky critiques the book for being too heavy handed in its treatment of contemporary environmentalists. This is certainly a sentiment which other readers share, as Stradling's review illustrates, but one which ultimately comes down to a difference of political interpretation. She then asks two provocative and inter-related follow up questions: What exactly am I calling for? And, can environmentalists reclaim health? I appreciate her holding me accountable for the book's present-day engagements.

To answer her first question: We might envision a response to planetary climate crisis rooted not in control or management, but instead in dialogue and a practice of more-than-human democracy.³ In such a project we could take guidance from Ursula Heise's call for developing "a new kind of ethics in which nonhuman species are no longer resources so much as agents, interlocutors, and partners in relationships that cannot be taken for granted," from Gary Snyder's proposition for a Village Council of All Beings able to give a voice to all creatures of a bioregion, and from Jane Bennett's imagination of a "parliament of things" in which non-humans are respected as political actors capable of shaping the affairs of humans.⁴ Concretely, we can see the manifestation of such a response in the spontaneous mutual aid organizing of Occupy Sandy and Far Rockaway residents in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, the disaster relief efforts of Puerto Ricans following Hurricane Maria, and the commitment of Standing Rock water protectors to a politics of co-existence in service of humans, the land, and the water alike.⁵

³ As Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz argue, "Instead of 'masters and possessors of nature,' we find ourselves each day a bit more entangled in the immense feedback loops of the Earth system." Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us* (New York: Verso, 2017), 20-21.

⁴ Jane Bennett, "In Parliament with Things," in *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack*, eds. Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006): 133-48; Ursula K. Heise, "Reduced Ecologies: Science Fiction and the Meanings of Biological Scarcity," *European Journal of English Studies* 16 (2012): 102; Gary Snyder, *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 74-81.

⁵ Alan Feuer, "Occupy Sandy: A Movement Moves to Relief." *The New York Times*, November 9, 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/nyregion/where-fema-fell-short-occupy-sandy-was-there.html>>; Naomi Klein and Elizabeth Yeampierre, "Imagine a Puerto Rico Recovery Designed by Puerto Ricans," *The Intercept*, October 20, 2017, <<https://theintercept.com/2017/10/20/puerto-rico-hurricane-debt-relief/>>. For a longer history of collective responses to disaster see Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2009).

With respect to Zaretsky's second question, I think environmentalists can reclaim health, but only to protect human bodies. Zaretsky is correct that it is time for the left to "repossess" health, but prior meanings and possibilities can't so easily be returned to a concept. Arguably, health could never have been sufficiently unmoored from human physiology to encompass the planet or the wild. Yet as I wrote in the book's conclusion, I firmly believe that neoliberalism and climate change have rendered health incapable of carrying forward a project of more-than-human ecological liberation. I agree with Zaretsky that the left, along with some environmentalists, are currently mobilizing health to advocate for marginalized and dispossessed communities. As illustrated by Flint, Michigan, that project is still wide open for reclamation and rejuvenation, and I couldn't agree more with her final observation that the left's repossession of health "will require a frontal, unapologetic critique of capitalism every step of the way." It will. It will also require an equally unflinching dismantling of settler colonialism.

I appreciate the time and attention each reviewer devoted to *The Wild and the Toxic*. They pointed out important areas for further research, held the book responsible for its presentist engagements, and allowed me the opportunity to further engage with the book's central themes and aspirations. Ultimately, I believe that the pursuit of what was most poignant about the environmental project of health—its recognition of ecological entanglement and mutual dependency, and its placement of healing at the heart of a liberated society—must from now on necessarily take a different form, one not originating with or bounded exclusively by human politics or physiologies. I look forward to seeing where others might take that proposition.

About the Contributors

Josiah Rector is an assistant professor of 20th Century American Urban History at the University of Houston. His research focuses on urban environmental history and the history of the environmental justice movement.

David Stradling, Zane L. Miller Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati, is the author of several books, including with Richard Stradling, *Where the River Burned: Carl Stokes and the Struggle to Save Cleveland* (Cornell University Press, 2015). He has recently begun work on a global history of dredging.

Jennifer Thomson is an associate professor of history at Bucknell University. Her book, *The Wild and the Toxic: American Environmentalism and the Politics of Health*, was published in May 2019. She is currently working on an article about the connection between oil corporations and international environmental governance, and her next book is tentatively titled *Against Planetary Management*.

Conevery Bolton Valencius writes and teaches at Boston College, in the Department of History and the Program in Environmental Studies. She is at work along with science journalist Anna Kuchment on a book about earthquakes and contemporary energy systems. She appreciates questions from historian Emily E. Pawley and Boston College Undergraduate Research Fellow Andrew T. Ritter in honing approaches to this review.

Keith Makoto Woodhouse is an associate professor at Northwestern University, where he teaches in the History Department and directs the Environmental Policy and Culture Program. He is the author of *The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism*.

Natasha Zaretsky is a Professor of History at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She is the author of *No Direction Home: the American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007) and *Radiation Nation: Three Mile Island and the Political Transformation of the 1970s* (Columbia University Press, 2018).

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