

the
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*all ideas and opinions are those of the authors
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On the cover: "Reading Room" by Katherine Yurica. Acrylic on masonite.
24 X 20 inches, 1987. Cat. No. 16



he says she says holiday book issue
by *Peter Kareiva & Tosha Comendant*



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Does Conservation Care About People?

Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger. 2007. *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility*. Houghton Mifflin Company.

In 2004, Nordhaus and Shellenberger created a stir throughout the NGO world with their essay entitled “Death of Environmentalism”. They are back now with a full length book that sharpens their initial arguments and broadens their attack to include such sacred activities as conservation of the Amazonian rainforest. Do not get me wrong - Shellenberger and Nordhaus would like to protect the Amazon just as much as any red-blooded conservationist does. Their issue is with our (TNC and most of the conservation movement’s) presumed disdain for the mainstream concerns of people. Just look at where we get our Brazilian environmental heroes - we have hijacked Chico Mendes, who was a labor and community organizer, and propped up his martyrdom as an act of environmental heroism - when in fact Mendes did not care about saving the forest for the sake of the environment. Mendes mainly wanted a decent life for rubber tappers. According to Nordhaus and Shellenberger, the reality is “*that the destruction of the Amazon is, to the vast majority of Brazilians, far less alarming than the fear of losing their jobs, their life savings, or their lives on the mean streets of Rio de Janeiro.*” The book unforgivingly paints Tom Lovejoy and John Terborgh as either hypocrites or colonialists, and as a result of that harsh treatment, conservationists are likely to rally around their comrades and reject Nordhaus and Shellenberger outright as some evil duo. That would be a mistake. The biggest challenge facing conservation today is not how to design and manage protected areas – our biggest challenge is deciding how we as conservationists can relate to the broader concerns of people. Nordhaus and Shellenberger have thrown down the gauntlet. Only new thinking and perhaps even a wholesale paradigm shift in conservation can meet their challenge.



Scott E. Page. 2007. *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*. Princeton University Press.

If you are interested in the concept of diversity and its power to improve problem solving and predictions, listen to this great interview with Scott E. Page, a professor of Complex Systems, Political Science, and Economics at University of Michigan (37 minutes): http://www.theinvisiblehandpodcast.com/The_Invisible_Hand_Episode_47.mp3. The book is very quantitative (OK, I admit it - I love graphs and tables). This book was originally called the Logic of Diversity, but the publisher changed the title arguing it would sell better. The first title would have been more informative because Page’s contribution to the existing work on diversity is to extend thinking beyond ‘identity’ diversity (race, culture, sex, etc.) to include ‘cognitive’ diversity. He breaks down the logic of decision making and prediction and applies mathematical rigor to analyzing the conditions under which diversity trumps ability. For example, his model would predict that if you put the ‘top’ 10 economist in a room together and asked them to solve problems and make predictions they would perform less well than a group that was composed of 10 ‘randomly selected’ economists. The ‘top’ group of economists may think too much alike

because of the way they code problems (based on perspectives, interpretations, heuristics - he spends chapters defining these terms and processes). In the example with the economists, the model results (diversity trumps ability) hold when all of the economists are good problem solvers, the pool you selected economists from contains diversity, the problem is difficult, and the working group sizes stay small (the result doesn't hold when you get group sizes into the thousands). In the podcast, he suggests that, when hiring and evaluating staff, it is important to both look at who scores the highest but also who got answers right that others typically missed. The challenges in conservation are both difficult and varied, and after reading this book, I feel even more strongly that we are shooting ourselves in the foot by hiring practices that so often ask if the person will fit in with TNC culture.



Why conservation will succeed – because it is a global movement of people who care about justice and the environment?

Paul Hawken. 2007. *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being*. Viking Penguin Press.

Paul Hawken is a dreamer and an optimist. He is also a very good story-teller and romantic interpreter of history and society. He sees the origins of conservation to be upper-class, white society. The Nature Conservancy and World Wildlife Fund are valued for their effectiveness, but they are also labeled as “the establishment.” Hawken’s rosy future does not lie with the establishment, but is seen as an organic outcome of a more radical and multicultural movement than conservation NGO’s represent. Anyone who can connect the popularity of the television series Baywatch with the allure of capitalism and self-interest is ingenious. I loved the anecdotes and cultural observations of this book, although I do not piece them together in the same way that Hawken does. The entire book is written to conclude with the idea that the only way the green movement is going to succeed is if it joins with the social justice movement. If only. The union of social justice and conservation that Hawken thinks is already upon us is not the reality I see. Nonetheless, this is a terrific read that juxtaposes unlikely stories about everything from the origin of the word sabotage, to ExxonMobil forbidding the use of the word ‘sustainability’ in all internal or external communications, to the movement in India against Coca-Cola because of its high pesticide residues. Although Hawken does not come out and say it outright, he implies that big and global is bad, whereas small and local is good. This strikes me as simplistic. However, the stories and information in this book over-rode my annoyance with Hawken’s naiveté and preachy tone.



Richard A. Lanham. 2007. *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. University of Chicago Press.

This is a super heady book that has crept into my thinking almost daily since I finished it. Richard Lanham argues that we are in transition from an economy based on ‘stuff’ to an economy based on ‘information about stuff’ or intellectual property. But unlike ‘stuff,’

information is not in short supply - precisely the opposite – we’re drowning in it. Lanham argues that what we lacking is the human attention needed to make sense of it all. We need to process information faster and express it in a more immediately intuitive way. He quotes the former chairman of Citibank, Walter Wriston, “*when the world’s most precious resource is immaterial, the economic doctrines, social structures, and political systems that evolved in a world devoted to the service of matter become rapidly ill suited to cope with the new situation. The rules and customs, skills and talents, necessary to uncover, capture, produce, preserve, and exploit information are now mankind’s most important rules, customs, skills, and talents.*” Lanham argues that attention is regulated by stylistic devices and to demonstrate this point in chapter 3, he has you working through some incredibly creative examples on his website (<http://www.rhetoricainc.com/eofa>). One of the best features of the book (and something all science books should consider doing, in my opinion) is that he divides each chapter into ‘the argument’ and the second half contains ‘background conversations’ – or the place you go if you want to read the details on the history of rhetoric, for example. I enjoyed the discussion of his C-B-S communication theory – clarity, brevity, and sincerity (don’t you wish) and his analysis of the spectrum of signals, receivers, motives, and reality. Minus the whacked chapter titled, “Barbie and the teacher of righteousness” (how do social scientists get away with just pasting in random lectures in the middle of books?) this book was powerful, and relevant to our task of making conservation mainstream.



Have Economists Been Leading Us to Hell?

Bill McKibben. 2007. *Deep Economy. The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future.* Times Books.

Bill McKibben is convinced that economists have been leading us to Hell with their religion of self-interest above everything else. There is proof: a famous Cornell University experiment gave money to groups of graduate students representing different academic disciplines. The grad students in economics distinguished themselves from all other groups of grad students by being unwilling in this experiment to put money into a public pool where interest would be earned and divided. Instead the economics grad students chose at a much higher rate to hoard the money to themselves although it meant less wealth would be generated and that they would individually each end up with less money in the end. I love those types of experiments.

If you liked *Tipping Point* and *Blink*, you will like this book - it is not quite as cohesive as Gladwell’s books, but it is filled with the same collection of polling statistics, off-beat academic studies, and cocktail party facts. Just to entice you, here are some of my favorites. You have all heard about how few Americans believe in evolution or understand anything about science. Let’s ask similar questions about religion and the Bible. Only 40% of American Christians can come up with more than 5 out of the 10 commandments; 12% think that Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife. Maybe we Americans are so ignorant about the Bible, because we never have time to read it -- McKibben also reports that we Americans work 35% more hours per week on average than German workers, and we have less vacation time. McKibben clearly has an axe to grind - so before I take his statistics and facts too seriously, I will want to look at the original sources. McKibben uses these facts to argue that we should run our economy in a different way - in a way

that wastes less energy, consumes less and relies more on local foods and goods. There is a split in the environmental community regarding how our economy must change if we are to address global warming and long term sustainability. Some argue that new technologies, increased efficiency and simply being smarter will be enough to address global warming and other major environmental threats. Others, like McKibben, preach reduced consumption and more local consumption - and promise that not only will this new economy save the environment, it will increase human happiness.



Sarah Igo. 2007. *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public*. Harvard University Press.

In the United States, there was a time when there was no such thing as public opinion – only in the years after the first World War did mass surveys tell Americans ‘who they are,’ ‘what they want,’ and ‘what they believe.’ Sarah E. Igo argues that over the following decades, the process of social science inquiry (polling) transformed the public domain. This book catalogues American’s encounter with modern surveys, the surveys’ bid for legitimacy, their popular diffusion, and their cultural power. How and why did these survey technologies come into being when they did? She details the scientific, institutional, commercial, and cultural convergence that permitted survey data to take on a new prominence in the twentieth-century United States. She provides background on several formative surveys in the first half of the century: Robert and Helen Lynd’s Middletown study (1929; 1937); George Gallup’s and Elmo Roper’s public opinion polls beginning in 1935; and Kinsey’s sexual behavior reports (1948; 1953). The new surveys were the subject of widespread fascination but also generated conflicts, surprise, and suspicions. One reason I liked this book is because she exposes how African-Americans, immigrants, and poor people among others were systematically excluded from these emerging statistics and how the nation surveyed was always a partial one. Although, I think this book could have been shorter (geez peeps, get to your point!), overall, I was fascinated by her argument that the methods of modern survey technique played a role in forging a ‘mass public’ in America and that we will continue to interact in a world shaped by and perceived through survey data.



Or Will Economists Lead Us to the Promised land?

Partha Dasgupta. 2007. *Economics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford Press

Normally we think about economics in terms of supply and demand, discounting, GDP, stock market and so forth – econometrics and cold mathematical topics. Dasgupta talks about economics from the perspective of two ten-year old girls: Becky in the Midwestern USA and Desta in southern Ethiopia. How did their lives become so different and what are the local and global forces that will shape the futures of these girls? This is a provocative book with a gentle

touch. The chapter covering sustainable economic development is the most thoughtful essay on the topic that I have ever read. Dasgupta unabashedly announces that economic growth is a good thing and that it usually improves the quality of life. The challenge is to make sure the right prices are paid and that there are no hidden subsidies. A poor country whose government issues timber concessions will see more cash in the short term, but likely under-prices the timber because no one has estimated the costs of erosion and downstream flood risk that follows deforestation. Effective rule of law and democratic governments are seen as crucial prerequisites for sustainable development, and perhaps for economic growth period. Among poorer nations, the rate of economic growth over the last four decades has been positively correlated with the degree of democracy in the country. The book is not glib or simplistic, or simple to read. It will make you think. The prose is so graceful, however, that the thinking you do will be relatively painless.



Jennifer Ackerman. 2007. *Sex Sleep Eat Drink Dream: A Day in the Life of Your Body*. Houghton Mifflin Company.

The title, a reference to the single with the same title by the band, King Crimson, takes us through our body's physiological cycle during a typical day. Jennifer Ackerman is a gifted writer who translates complicated research (cited in the notes section) into widely accessible and engaging prose by interlacing in personal observations and experience. She gives a scientific explanation for why the most astonishing as well as mundane things happen. One fascinating finding that is explored throughout the book is that the human body possesses a whole slough of internal clocks that measure out our lives. These timekeepers consist of a "master" clock in the brain and individual clocks in cells – our circadian rhythm affects everything from the time we wake up to the accuracy of our afternoon work, our evening jogging speed, the strength of our handshake at an after-hours party, to how well we handle our alcohol. We are treated to simple explanations of how caffeine lifts us out of our morning stupor (binds adenosine receptors – it isn't actually a stimulant, rather it prevents down regulation), how those billions of microbes we host (an estimated 2 lbs of them) help us digest, and not surprisingly, how stress can wreak havoc on our system. Take some time off this holiday season...read a book!



An Oral History of the Zombie War

Max Brooks. 2007. *World War Z*. 2006. Three Rivers Press.

For a certain kind of person, this is the best stocking stuffer book on the market this holiday season – an amazingly original book about the world war between zombies and us sometime in the near future, played out in Indonesia, Montana, Micronesia, Ireland, China, Israel, Australia, India, and so on. It is creative, clever, thrilling and a masterful tour of national governments around the world and how they would respond to such a crisis. The narrator has just completed a report to the United Nation's about the zombie war that he felt had been stripped by bureaucracy

of all humanity and opinion. So he turned his thousands of pages of field notes into a journalistic tour of survivors and their stories. And you thought climate change was scary. It is available in paperback - if you do not enjoy this book, then you are probably an MBA or lawyer. If you are a scientist and do not like his book, there is something so hopelessly earnest about you that you should be worried. I am not kidding. Do not be biased by your genre stereotyping - this is a really good book if you are not too offended by macho dialogue and sometimes gory descriptions of battles - after all this is a book about zombies. Each chapter introduces a different memorable character, and each chapter tells some story about how a country or community responded to the appearance of a zombie epidemic. Think about it - what would your local town or city or state do if a zombie epidemic got started. And this is not one of those epidemics that make no sense in the George Romero movies - this is an epidemic with rules of transmission that can be understood and used to banish the disease. If zombies appeared, what freedoms would be sacrificed? What prejudices would be exposed? What heroes would be created? What fortunes would be made?



My husband's pick

Hofstadter, Douglas. 2007. *I am a Strange Loop*. Basic Books

Who am “I”? Psychologists, neuroscientists, anthropologists, philosophers and others have dedicated careers to answering this question (let’s also not forget actor Daniel Stern, the familiar voice on “The Wonder Years”). And now, Douglas Hofstadter offers a new approach. Have you ever taken a picture of yourself in a mirror? The image reflects or loops onto itself *ad infinitum*. This is the analogy that Hofstadter uses to describe “I” as a strange loop or “a paradoxical-level crossing feedback loop.” Huh? Like M.C. Escher’s *Drawing Hands*, in which the right hand appears to be drawing the left and vice versa, Hofstadter posits that consciousness derives from emergent, abstract patterns (separate from microbiological interactions). Hofstadter argues that “an ‘I’ loop...is an abstraction...that seems immensely real, almost physically palpable,” just like pressing a handful of envelopes together feels as if there is a marble inside. Heady enough? How about this: Once in the “I” loop, memories of things and people continue to exist in a shared consciousness. Don’t fret. Hofstadter guides the reader through even the most complex, abstract theories from mathematics, philosophy, and physics with easy to understand narratives and analogies. Hofstadter, currently a Professor of Cognitive Science at Indiana University, won a Pulitzer Prize for *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1979), and *I am a Strange Loop* continues his quest to understand human cognition. The reader will be compelled to approach perspective and scale in new ways. And, for the red wine drinkers, the Ravenswood logo introducing one of the chapters is a welcome sign. If you are looking for a mind bend, then look no further.



My Daughter's Pick

Philip Gourevitch. 1998. *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*. Picador Press.

Every December, I ask my daughter what was the best book she has read in the course of the year. In 2006, it was *Glass Castle*, and when I then read it, I found it was the best book I had read as well (and I put it on last year's *Science Chronicles* holiday list). My daughter's 2007 selection is Gourevitch's astonishing reporting on the Rwanda genocide. The book is now ten years old - but you can find it in every decent bookstore. And once again, my daughter has picked an amazing book. This is not the somber and depressing book one might expect from the Rwanda tragedy. But it is a condemnation of institutions and governments that failed to do their jobs. The tone is more ironic and sarcastic than heavy-handed when it points out that the UN troops in Rwanda who never did fire a shot to stop the slaughter, ended up shooting dogs on sight - so much so that in the aftermath of the genocide Rwanda was also a dogless country. "After months during which the Rwandans had been left to wonder whether the UN troops knew how to shoot, because they never used their excellent weapons to stop the extermination of civilians, it turned out the peacekeepers were very good shots". The book asks how could humans do this to one another? And, how could institutions and governments allow them to do it? By focusing on the survivors, the author allows us to also see how survivors rewrote history and dealt with the crimes that took place in Rwanda. This is the most haunting book I have read since the *Glass Castle*.



Richard Russo. 2007. *Bridge of Sighs*. Alfred A. Knopf. New York.

I envy you if you haven't already read all or any of Richard Russo's novels - you have hours of reading pleasure ahead. Russo won the Pulitzer Prize in 2002 for his novel, *Empire Falls* - and with his latest book, *Bridge of Sighs*, he further chronicles the postwar economic decline of the American Northeast. He is a humorous, emotional, and patient writer who focuses on the 'ordinary' yet manages to pull readers into the complex loves, losses, and rivalries of local families. The *Bridge of Sighs*, set in Thomston, New York, is centered on the family life of Lou C. Lynch (his middle initial unfortunately resulting in the lasting nickname "Lucy"). The narrative, which spans more than 50 years, is also told through the eyes of Lucy's boyhood friend, Bobby Marconi, and Sarah Berg, an artist who Lucy marries. The lives of the Lynchs, Bergs, and Marconis are expertly weaved together, each family facing its share of woe and challenges living in a socio-economically and racially segregated town. Lucy, writing about himself and his declining, blue-collar town, thinks that "*the loss of a place isn't really so different from the loss of a person. Both disappear without permission, leaving the self diminished, in need of testimony and evidence.*" As with other of Russo's books, the costs of unregulated industry (in this case, the local tannery polluting the river with rainbow-colored carcinogens) are silently paid by the local people. Although I didn't grow up in the Northeast, I felt as though I was transported inside this community by Russo's deeply humanistic style and rich character development. If you haven't read any of his books yet - start with *Straight Man* and prepare to be caught laughing out loud.



SPECIAL ELECTION YEAR HOLIDAY BONUS

Mark Halperin. 2007. **The Undecided Voter's Guide to the Next President.** Harper Perennial Press.

If you are a political junkie, you will want to own this book. All of the major candidates and most serious minor candidates are treated: Giuliani, McCain, Romney, Thompson, Brownback, Gingrich, Huckabee, Paul, Clinton, Edwards, Obama, Biden, Dodd, Kucinich, Richardson, Bloomberg. The format includes the following sections: resume, stand on major issues, and well-written narrative/story about the candidate, areas of potential controversy, why X can win, why X cannot win, the best case for X as a president, the worst case for X as president, what to expect if X is president, X's own words, what X's supporters say, what X's critics say, and a few more sections. If this were just a boring political almanac with these sections filled in, it would be a good book. But the author is Mark Halperin, senior political analyst for *Time* magazine and ABC News. Halperin has twenty years of experience working for ABC News and has covered five presidential elections. He knows what he is talking about, and writes it down in an engaging way. I picked it up thinking I would use it as a "reference" while I watched the presidential race, and then I ended up reading it cover to cover. I enjoyed reading about all of these candidates in one sitting and wondering what kind of people go after this job?

announcements

The Conservation Learning Unit and HR will be awarding 15-30 science internships for summer/fall 2008. A description of the program and application forms are available at: http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/Science_Intern_Workspace/Resources_for_TNC_supervisors/2008_Sci_intern_announce_and_application/view For more information, Contact:

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Please send in any citations (that have not already appeared in *the chronicles*) for papers you have published in 2007 so we can complete our publication list for this year.

Happy Holidays!

