Environment, Technology, and Society

POINT—COUNTERPOINT DISCUSSION

Welcome to the first E&T point—counterpoint discussion. This column was envisioned to focus debate in a public forum, allowing E&T members to share and develop diverse viewpoints, and providing a starting point to engage others in debate. The column will run periodically, as willing authors collaborate and contribute. (Contact me with your ideas for future installments.) Our first question, aptly posed by Steve Kroll-Smith (University of New Orleans), concerns how we, as sociologists, think about the environment. Kroll-Smith provides one answer in his "point" and Bill Freudenburg (University of Wisconsin) gives another in his "counterpoint." The debaters welcome your comments, as well. Of course, responses should be constructive and add to the debate. Please send your comments to me for possible inclusion in a future issue.

First Topic: **Dancing With The Devil: Sociology and the Physical-Organic World**

Environmental sociologists dance with the devil, though always with some awkwardness. A few of us attempt a bold embrace, a clutching, clumsy slow dance. Most of us, however, acknowledge our wicked partner with barely a nod, dancing at a safe distance, as if we came to the dance alone. The devil is, of course, the environment. At once physical, organic and symbolic, environments maliciously torment many of us who worry about where sociology ends and biology, ecology, atmospheric science, and physiology, among other "non-social" disciplines begin.

The question that bedevils many of us in sociology is simple to pose: Is the first, second or third person plural at the bottom of everything we think or write about environments? Or, do environments exist independently of thinking and language? Answer "yes" to the first question and you are a "social constructionist," or perhaps, less kindly, a "fuzzy-headed idealist." Answer yes to the second question and you are likely to be charged with sociological nihilism. After all, what makes us sociologists is our steadfast belief in the inviolate connection of the social with the social. How can (or should) sociologists dance with this devilish partner?

Point: Steve Kroll-Smith

The question of how environmental sociologists should think about the physical and organic is also an inquiry into what passes for truth in sociology. The fact that we are still asking this question after two hundred years reminds me of why I enjoy this discipline. But I admit to enjoying the company of people who prefer to be uncertain about what is true.

With some modification of the language Rorty (1982) uses to investigate the truth claims of philosophy, we can discern two types of sociological truth. One type assumes a correspondence between valid sociological knowledge and the world as it is actually organized. Assumed here is the idea that, at its best, sociology is able to formulate sentences that lock on to the real nature of society and environment relationships. Thus, a *correspondence approach* offers an ocular vision of truth as discernable with the trained eye. True sociological knowledge makes *real* society, culture, politics, environments and so on transparent, visible to the interested (and presumably educated) reader.

Competing with this realist version is an idealist or textual version of truth. A *textual approach* to truth assumes that what is *real* about societies and environments are the words and gestures people use to make sense of their lives with one another and with organic and inorganic matter. Sociological truth is found in the way things are said and done as opposed to the way things "really are." Truth, in other words, is a collection of words that take their meanings from other words rather than arguing that they somehow make the real world transparent. Truth as correspondence is roundly and justly critiqued by the textual theorists, many of whom, however, would replace one reductive stance with another. To wit, there is only the text!

Embedded in these two versions of truth is the unresolvable "it is," "it isn't" debate. I don't believe it is necessary to frame the question of sociological truth into an "it is", "it isn't" argument. For that matter, there is little to be gained by the "society and environment are objective facts," "society and environment are text" debate.

IN THIS ISSUE...

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NOTES FROM THE EDITOR...

Welcome to the Spring 1999 ET&S!
In this issue, we begin a point-counterpoint series. The first installment, from Kroll-Smith and Freudenburg, continues the recent discussion of how we struggle with definitions in and about our field. Please feel invited to build further on this discussion by sending your responses to me. Depending on the level of response, I may include some of them (or portions of them) in a future issue.

In addition, I received the following responses to my column last time on the marginality of environmental sociology. Michael Lee, of the Oregon Research Institute, wonders why we sociologists don't do more research in well-funded institutes, such as the one where he works. (The ORI is made up mostly of psychologists.) Gene Rosa, of Washington State and a consulting editor of the *American Journal of Sociology*, reports that there is a growing number of manuscripts dealing with the environment in some form being submitted to *AJS*; the quality of these manuscripts is steadily improving, and, we can look forward to the publication in *AJS* of some of these articles. He notes, "While we must continue to push for the central relevance of our topics in the mainstream of the profession, there are clear signs of progress on this front." I think that the comments of Kroll-Smith and Freudenburg echo this sentiment--things are serious, but we shouldn't get carried away in our seriousness and forget why we got interested in this field in the first place.

Last time, one of the papers from the 1998 Teaching Environmental Sociology Workshop at the ASA Annual Meetings was included here. As promised, the entire paper is now available on the web. The site is the same one where our listserv archives are located: **csf.colorado.edu/envtecsoc.** Currently, the Roberts paper and my paper are posted. Additional papers from the workshop will be included as I gather the materials.

The website is still under construction, so I am taking recommendations on useful resources to include. I may be able to post responses to the point-counterpoint discussion here as well, depending, again, on whether I receive any responses!

The next issue is our pre-conference issue. As usual, I will include a program schedule of sessions and activites of particular interest to E&T members. Any other articles of special relevance to members planning to attend the Chicago meetings would be very welcome! Other news, publications, and so on, are welcome as usual. Please be sure to observe the deadline-- this one is firm, since I want you to have your copy before you head to Chicago!

The Environment and Technology Section on the Internet:

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What I find useful is a version of sociological truth that is not committed to one or the other standard versions and is willing to risk imagining other versions. What I have in mind, following Kenneth Burke, is a *pluralistic approach* to sociological truth (see Burke 1989:26, 115). It starts from the simple assumption that the correspondence and textual theories of sociological truths about environments and societies are, in fact, both true.

Each version is a particular cluster of words that directs attention to one of several sociological truths about environments. Avoiding the foundationalist tones of both the correspondence and textual approaches to truth, pluralism encourages investigators to be circumspect and cautious, to be aware of where their particular version of truth stops and another begins. The pluralist position acknowledges that a sociological truth is both a selection from a possible range of truths and also a deflection from other plausible versions.

From this vantage point, truth is more like a tolerance for difference that opens up possibilities and keeps them open. Its focus is not on whether a particular version of truth is true or false, but whether or not its particular terminology or vocabulary works to intelligibly frame the particular interests of the investigator. Stripped of its claims to universality, truth becomes "a tool which helps us cope or make sense of the world" (Rorty 1979: 11).

Finally, a pluralistic version of truth suggests the possibility of additional truths, such as the critical-realist version that would join both the physical, organic and the social into coherent sentences. But that must wait for another discussion. My counsel? Dance with the devils, but don't fall hopelessly in love with any one of them.

Counterpoint: Bill Freudenburg

Dancing, Diving, or Dealing with the Environment: A Devil or a Deep Blue Sea? In developing my counterpoint, I consi-der both the main question posed above, involving the relationship between sociology and the physical-organic world, and Editor Roschke's column in the Winter 1999 *ET&S* concerning the question of "where we place our work," in the tiers of our discipline.

In his comments, Steve Kroll-Smith demonstrates his erudition in the process of outlining a two-way typology of "correspondence" versus "textual" theories of "sociological truth." My own remarks will come in two sections, the first of which will offer a relatively simple point in response to the comments from Dr. Kroll-Smith, and the second of which will present a somewhat more complex point in response to what I take to be the central challenge for this debate.
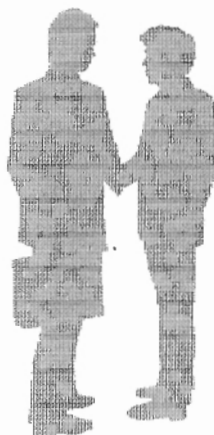
Good Idea, Bad Poetry First, the simpler point. In his remarks, Steve Kroll-Smith notes that a disagreement over "correspondence" versus "textual" theories can quickly turn into "an 'it is,' 'it isn't' argument." Drawing on his elegant formulation, he suggests that we avoid such an argument, because the two theories "are, in fact, both true." I endorse his recommendation that we avoid such arguments, albeit for slightly different reasons. In my view, the "correspondence" and the "textual" theories are not just "both true," but in an equally important sense, also "both false."

To put the matter more straightforwardly, I believe that the truth or falsity of such arguments will always need to be judged in light of yet another model—I wouldn't dare call it a "theory"—which differs a bit from either of the options that Steve identifies. In general, I believe that any field is most likely to advance through a process in which our theories are seen not as sheer truth, not as sheer words, and also not simply as straightforward syntheses of the two. Instead, our theories—any theories—should represent the best we've been able to do, so far, in a larger process sometimes known simply as "successive approximation." Perhaps the most succinct summary of this basically good idea is provided by a bit of bad poetry, which (if memory serves) was initially put forth by Piet Hein:

The way to truth is simple
and easy to express:
To err, and err, and err again
but less, and less, and less.

Do our theories correspond to whatever may be the "real" truth of the universe around us? Under favorable circumstances, they may be reasonably close—perhaps even "close enough," at least for now—but they will probably never reach perfection. Yet that actually gives us all the more reason to try them out, and to try to improve them. The true value of a theory can only be seen if at least some of us find it sufficiently promising that we use it as at least a provisional guide for our expectations, whether in our work or in our lives. The more often and the more seriously a theory is "tried out" in such ways, the sooner we will encounter the cases and the contexts where it proves not to be such a useful guide—and at that point, at least if we are sufficiently rigorous in our thinking, we have the opportunity to learn, and to improve, leaving others as well as ourselves in a position of being able to "err again," but maybe by just a bit less.

What the Devil? That's it for the simpler point. Now I'd like to turn to the somewhat more complex one, which goes back to what I take to be the central question—that of understanding the relationship between (what we take to be) "social" and "environmental." For the remainder of my remarks, I will be stealing freely from work with my colleagues Scott Frickel and Bob Gramling (see especially Freudenburg et al. 1995, 1996; Gramling and Freudenburg 1996).

Perhaps the first thing to be said about understanding the social/environmental relationship is that the very question leads us back to Editor Roschke and others' recent discussions of where we stand with respect to the discipline of sociology. In some ways, in other words, "Environmental Sociology" is a subfield or a specialized area within the "larger discipline" of Sociology, but in other ways, it is broader than all of Sociology; it includes essentially everything the discipline has traditionally defined as being within its own purview, and then some, adding the biophysical world, as well. It may be precisely for that reason that we would need to worry about the relationships between everything that has traditionally been thought of as "social," on the one hand, and what has generally been understood as the separate biophysical environment, on the other. It may also be for that reason that a group of sociologists might think about the very process of worrying about that relationship as involving a dance with a "devil," and an awkward dance at that.

The second step is to proceed to the more direct question—"Do environments exist independently of thinking and language?" I can provide an equally direct answer. "Yes." It is possible to be particularly clear on that point if we accept the widespread assumption that "thinking and language" are things that people do.

According to geologists' interpretations of the geological record, for example, "environments" (complete with swamps, volcanoes, plants, dinosaurs, primordial ooze, and more) clearly *did* exist, for roughly a jillion years, before the presence of any critters we would recognize today as "people." For those who, unlike me, are unwilling to accept the geologists' accounts as being at least reasonable approximations of what might ultimately be called "truth," another jillion examples are provided by any location in what we call "the known universe" where no human beings are present, which is to say most of the known universe. Again here, I am willing to accept, at least until better evidence comes along, the arguments of astronomers and others that the rest of the universe really does exist, and that it has long existed, even for the thousands of years before any of us on planet earth knew that it went that far out. Either of these examples would be more than sufficient, in my view, to meet the philosophical standard of "existence proof"— anything that exists is possible.

The tougher challenges arise, of course, when we try to grapple with questions that lie just beneath the surface of the central challenge, and that concern many Environmental Sociologists on a more or less daily basis. Those questions have to do not just with the *existence* of the biophysical world, but with its importance in human affairs. In the interest of keeping my remarks on this point reasonably brief, I will be ignoring the two most extreme points of view, which I take to be basically silly—one being the argument that the biophysical environment is absolutely irrelevant for human and social life, and the other being the claim that there's absolutely no difference between social and biophysical/environmental processes.

In between these illogical extremes, I believe, there seem to be four main logical possibilities for conceptualizing the relationship between the social and the biophysical. All have been taken quite seriously at one time or another, but the one that I have argued to be most helpful (here as elsewhere, doing so with my colleagues Scott Frickel and/or Bob Gramling) is one that tends to have received perhaps the least attention to date.

The first of the four logical possibilities, which seems to be the first instinct of almost every western-trained academic, involves *analytical separation*—the drawing of distinctions, such that one item is deemed to be "social," while the next is physical or "environmental." This kind of typologizing, to be sure, offers

certain advantages in terms of logical simplification, but it has its weaknesses, as well.

One of those weaknesses shows up as soon as we consider what may be most academics' second tendency, namely the tendency to grant *analytical primacy* to one side of that logical dividing line or the other. Some of us, in other words, decide that our true calling is to focus on the social, while others decide to focus on the environmental. Soon, in what may be a peculiarly male form of behavior, we start to attack those who dare to emphasize the "wrong" side of the line. Once this process gets started, it seems to take on a life of its own, perhaps in part because of what Bob Gramling and I (Freudenburg and Gramling 1994; cf. Coleman 1957) have called "the spiral of stereotypes." That's our term for what happens when the partisans on one side of a battle stop talking to the folks on the other side—but not *about* the folks on the other side.

Having decided to focus with ever-increasing precision on "*strictly* social variables," for example, the first set of purists may go so far as Stanley (1968: 855), arguing that "the main accomplishment and direction of the social sciences to date" should be seen as involving "the progressive substitution of sociocultural explanations for those stressing the determinative influence of physical nature." In response, other card-carrying sociologists (those who *do* see important effects of "physical nature" on human behavior, or vice versa) may respond by noting that reactions such as Stanley's show a curious form of hypervigilance—a tendency to level the charge of "environmental determinism" toward analyses that might "suggest that biological or environmental factors have *any* degree of influence upon human affairs" (Dunlap and Catton

1983:117, emphasis in original). Perhaps, such authors suggest, the real problem is "sociocultural determinism" on the part of some of the hypervigilant sociologists. Once this process gets started, of course, it can become just as entertaining as professional wrestling, but at least in my view, it tends to have just as little to do with genuine intellectual progress.

. Sooner or later, however—and it generally seems to happen only "later," after the wrestling match has long since lost most of its entertainment value— there can come a time when most spectators, if not the wrestlers themselves, will be able to hear a message from someone who, like Steve Kroll-Smith, may be able to say, "Stop! You're both right!" (Such a person clearly needs to have a certain breadth of vision, but it also seems to help if he or she also has a reasonably high level of credibility within the field. Things may be even better if that distinguished colleague can use suitably impressive terminology, as in referring to "correspondence" versus "textual" theories, but we need further research on that last point.) Scott, Bob and I refer to this third approach as involving a *dualistic balance*, in honor of my colleague Fred Buttel, who was among the first scholars within the field of environmental sociology to refer to humans as a "dualistic" species—being influenced/ constrained by environmental realities, just as other species are, but at the same time being "unique among the animal kingdom in their capacity for culture and symbolic communication" (Buttel 1986: 338).

As may already be clear, my colleagues and I see the emphasis on a balanced or dualistic approach as having considerable strengths. Still, even this third approach shares with the other two

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approaches a naturalized or taken-for-granted tendency to view the physical and the social as being separate and distinct. The fourth and final approach, by contrast, emphasizes the extent to which (what we take to be) the physical is influenced by (what we take to be) the social, and vice versa. In essence, while the first three approaches all start with the assumption that the physical and the social need to be separated—or that, "in reality," they already are separate—the fourth and final approach completes the circle. It reminds us that the initial process of analytical distinction—the act of drawing a line to separate the social from the biophysical—was itself a human act, and an act of choice. The separation may well have been pursued in the interest of analytical usefulness and/or convenience, but ultimately, that act of separation is also capable of leading to battles that are anything but useful or convenient.

The basic assumption of the fourth and final approach, in other words, has to do instead with *mutual contingency* or *conjoint constitution.* According to this fourth approach, what have commonly been taken to be "physical facts" are likely in many cases to have been shaped strongly by social construction processes, while at the same time, even what appear to be "strictly social" phenomena are likely to have been shaped in important if often overlooked ways by the fact that social behaviors often respond to stimuli and constraints from the biophysical world.

Many of my colleagues have difficulty with this argument, claiming that it is excessively complex. My response is that it is actually quite simple, and that if it is difficult to understand, that may simply reflect the power of taken-for-granted assumptions. Having "learned" that the earth is flat, we can have difficulty "unlearning" that belief. As Charles Perrow has noted (1984:9), "Seeing is not necessarily believing; sometimes, we must believe before we can see."

In the interest of a straightforward, relatively concrete illustration, consider the example of technology. If we are forced to render a verdict that technology is *either* physical or social, the likelihood of coming up with a sensible answer may be quite small—if only because of the presuppositions that are hidden within the framing of the question. On the one hand, technology is *inherently* a social product. It is the result of human ingenuity, manipulation, exertion, creativity, blind spots, and other human strengths and weaknesses, and it is often capable of changing what we understand to be "the" physical limits of a system. On the other hand, technology is *also* inherently physical, shaped by biophysical factors that are sometimes likely to be taken for granted and at other times to be taken as problematic, but that in practice can rarely be ignored with impunity—as illustrated by everything from "human" flight, to habitable buildings near the north and south poles, to the electronic transfer of documents that physically remain in their initial locations. In the absence of fuel or properly working engines and wings, heavier-than-air transportation devices can and do fall out of the sky; except for traditional dwellings of the Inupiat and other indigenous peoples, habitable buildings in polar regions depend on the importing of energy and insulating materials; and even the electronic transfer of documents can only take place through the physical flows of electronic currents through appropriately designed circuits and across space. So is technology social, or is it physical—or is it both? At least in my view, it is one of those aspects of human existence that lies at the confluence of the physical and the social; it is inherently and inevitably shaped by both.

What the Dickens? Note that I am not making an argument that there is "no difference" between social and biophysical variables. Instead, I am characterizing the belief in "strictly" social (or biophysical) variables as a special kind of academic myth. Like many myths, this one is not entirely false, and its simplifi-

cations can even be useful—but only up to a point. Its usefulness is that it can help us to understand one set of factors better by freeing us, for a time, from the complexities of needing to consider others; its limitation, paradoxically, is that it can seduce us into believing that we can be safe in forgetting about those non-considered factors, as when we simply forget about supposedly "non-social" variables. In the process, this initially useful assumption can ultimately help us to misunderstand both sets of factors, in part because of the very comfort provided by the erroneous belief that, as the "correspondence" theory summarized by Dr. Kroll-Smith might have it, the "two" worlds truly *are* separate from one another.

In the "real" world, by contrast, what are often assumed to be separably social and physical phenomena can instead prove to be conjointly constituted—connected with one another as much as are the opposing poles of a magnet. When we try to saw the magnet in half, what we produce is not a separation of the north pole from the south, but a pair of magnets, each having its own north and south poles. One response to such "resistance" (cf. Pickering 1993) from the world we study, of course, is to saw the magnet again and again, hoping that we will ultimately achieve the purity of separation we originally expected. Unlike the process of successive approximation in science, however, I would argue that such sawing of magnets is destined to be little more than the creation of ever-smaller pieces—the successive approximation of nothingness.

The other approach, which is the one I advocate, is to take a step back, and to reconsider the way in which we have chosen to divide our concepts, as well as our magnets. In the end, I believe, not just "environmental" sociologists but *all* sociologists may need to recognize that our ability to understand socially significant outcomes will ultimately depend not on the *separation* of the physical and the social, but on our capacity to recognize the extent to which each is a fundamental part of the other. Like the magnet, they may best be understood in terms of their dynamic interrelationships with one another and their mutual contingency—not so much in terms of their "need" to be separated, but in terms of their ultimate inseparability.

As Scott, Bob and I have put it, with apologies to Dickens, academics have the best of minds, but also the worst of minds. One of the most important positive characteristics of the academic mind, in other words, is the ability to spot patterns that evade the awareness of others, and then to construct mental models to describe those patterns—all while taking the models quite seriously, as when we systematically analyze the ways in which one aspect of a model, for example, may mesh or interact with another. At the same time, however, one of the *worst* characteristics of a typical academic mind is the accompanying tendency to take the mental models a bit *too* seriously—so seriously that we forget the original purpose, which was to help us to understand the empirical world around us.

At least as I understand the task before us, accordingly, our challenge is to build on our strengths, which involve the best of minds, while coming to grips with the challenges inherent in the worst of minds. That challenge is complex, multifaceted, and at least in my view, most usefully approached through a process of successive approximation—to err, and err, and err again, but less, and less, and less. *In* that process, one of the key requirements for academic sanity may well be that we give ourselves permission to enjoy the ideas, and sometimes even to enjoy the wrestling matches. An even more important requirement, however, both for our own sanity and for the value that our work can have to the people and the world around us, is that we remain alert as well to what may be the greatest risk of the academic mind—the risk of becoming prisoners of our own perspectives.

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WHO SAID THAT?

Can you name the authors of the quotes below?
Answers are at the bottom of the page.

1.   "If humanity gives maximum carrying capacity precedence over problems of cultural carrying capacity, the result will be universal poverty and environmental ruin."

2.   "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

3.   "The environmental crisis is an outward manifestation of a crisis of mind and spirit. ...[T]he crisis is concerned with the kind of creatures we are and what we must become in order to survive."

4.   "In wildness is the preservation of the world."

5.   "Solid wastes are only raw materials we're too stupid to use."

6.   "A weed is a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered."

7.   "We do not have an environmental crisis; we have a crisis of civilization."

8.   "If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part of it is good, whether we understand it or not."

9.   "The crux of the problem is that the mainstream environmental movement has not sufficiently addressed the fact that social inequality and imbalances of social power are at the heart of environmental degradation, resource depletion, pollution, and even overpopulation. The environmental crisis can simply not be solved effectively without social justice."

10. "What was at stake in the old industrial conflict of labor against capital were positives: profits, prosperity, consumer goods. In the new ecological conflict, on the other hand, what is at stake are negatives: losses, devastation, threats."

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DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

Providence College

Steve Zavestoski, Department of Sociology

Students at Providence College electing to focus on the human dimensions of environmental problems have a broad array of courses from which to choose. The 300-level environmental sociology course introduces students to the notion that environmental problems are ultimately the outcomes of human behaviors that are influenced by the values, attitudes and beliefs embedded in social institutions. The course provides an overview of the complexity of the social factors influencing human uses of the environment through the use of case studies, role-playing, and field trips. Environmental sociology is an elective for sociology majors, as well as for students majoring in Providence College's newest major--environmental studies. Environmental studies majors work toward a Bachelor of Arts degree that reflects the true interdisciplinary nature of environmental issues. Courses range from those with a physical science emphasis (Ethnobotany, Tropical Biology, Ecology, and Environmental Chemistry, for example), to those with a social science emphasis (Environmental Economics, Environmental Philosophy, Epidemiology of Health and Disease, Politics and the Environmental Movement, and Environmental Sociology). Finally, students who desire to enter the field of public service can choose to major in Providence College's unique Feinstein Institute for Public Service. The Institute, which aims to strengthen human communities by modeling an ethos of service through the integration of public and community service into the liberal arts curriculum, offers an "environmental problems track" which allows students to explore how environmental issues are addressed by community organizations. In both the Environmental Studies and Public Service programs, majors complete their studies with a senior seminar in which they are required to conduct a research project reflecting the culmination of their studies.

MEMBER NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Michael E. Lee, of the Oregon Research Institute, is a co-Principal Investigator on a grant from the National Cancer Institute (National Institute of Health). The grant, to study issues of radon and social class, has recently been renewed for four years for $1.5 million. Other researchers on the team include Principal Investigator Ed Lichtenstein, Sarah Hampson, and Russ Glasgow.

Zsuzsa Gille will join the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the Fall of 1999.

Gene Rosa, Professor and Chair of Sociology at Washington State University, and Edward R. Meyer Professor of Natural Resource and Environmental Policy in the Thomas S. Foley Institute of Public Policy and Public Service will be a visiting professor at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria for the summer session 1999. He will teach a course on the "Risk Society."

Check out an on-line tour of "Ecolage," an exhibition of art by **Gene Rosa** that was displayed at the Museum of Fine Arts at Washington State University last Fall. You can get there by clicking on the designated hyperlink from Rosa's website at **http://soc.libarts.wsu. edu/rosa/**. Once you reach the exhibition you can get a closeup of each sculpture/assemblage by double clicking on it. *(Editor's note: See the artist's statement in the Fall, 1998 issue of ET&S.)*

John K. Thomas received the *Excellence in Teaching Award* presented by the Southern Rural Sociological Association at its 1999 meeting in Memphis, TN. Professor Thomas teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on environmental sociology at Texas A&M University.

SYMPOSIUM ON ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION AND MANAGEMENT

The **Natural Resource Research Group** of the **Rural Sociology Society** will hold a Post Meeting Symposium, co-sponsored by the **Environment and Technology Section** of the **American Sociological Association** on "Environmental Regulation and Management" on Sunday August 8th. (The symposium will take place at the Ambassador Hotel in Chicago, overlapping with the ASA Meetings.)

Session One 9:00-10:15: "Agriculture and Environment: Regulation and Resistance." Organizers: Clare Hinrichs and Rick Welsh, Participants: Larry Busch, Michigan State University, Sonya Salamon, University of Illinois, Fred Buttel, University of Wisconsin, Lourdes Gouveia, University of Nebraska—Lincoln.

Session Two 10:30-11:45: "Implementing Environmental Regulations in Developing Countries." Organizer: Tom Rudel, Participants: Susan K. Jarnagin, Iowa State University, "Mexico;" Max Pfeffer, Cornell University, "Honduras;" Tom Rudel, Rutgers University "Ecuador;" David Sonnenfeld, University of California—Berkeley "Southeast Asia;" John Sydenstricker-Neto, Cornell University "Brazil."

Session Three 1:30-2:45: "Human Dimensions of Ecosysten Management." Organizer: Lynn G. Llewellyn, Participants: Gary E. Machlis, National Park Service Washington, Jean C. Mangun, Southern Illinois University, William R. Mangun, East Carolina University, Cynthia Manning, U.S. Forest Service.

Session Four 3:00-4:15: "Environmental Regulations, Rural Communities, and Environmental Justice." Organizer: Bob Gramling, Participants: Timmons Roberts, Tulane University, Maria Toffolon-Weiss, Tulane University, Debra Davidson, University of Wisconsin, Stella Čapek, Hendrix College.

MEMBER PUBLICATIONS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

Ali, S. Harris. 1999. "The Search for a Landfill Site in the Risk Society." The *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 36, No.1 pp. 1-19 (February).

Bell, Michael M. 1998. *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*. Newbury Park, CA: Pine Forge Press (Sage).

Espeland, Wendy Nelson. 1998. *The Struggle for Water: Politics, Rationality, and Identity in the American Southwest*. University of Chicago Press.
> This book analyzes a controversial decision about building a dam in central Arizona. Proposed by the Bureau of Reclamation, the dam would have forced the mostly Yavapai residents of the Fort McDowell Reservation from what remained of their ancestral land. I show how differing conceptions of what it means to be rational, and different ideas about how to represent the value of important resources, shaped the politics and identities of those who participated in in this decision.

Espeland, Wendy Nelson and Mitchell L. Stevens. 1998. "Commensuration as a Social Process," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 24:313-43.
> This article describes why commensuration, the comparision of different entities according to common metric, is a neglected and fundamental social process that warrents more systematic attention. Since commensuration is at the heart of debates over how to value natural resources, and since values that are hard to measure are often excluded from analyses, unpacking commensurative processes is important for those who study development and environmental politics.

Howell, Susan M. and Brent K. Marshall. 1998. "Crime and Trust in Local Government: Revisiting a Black Empowerment Area," *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 33(3).

Kitts, James. 1999. "Not in Our Backyard: Solidarity, Social Networks, and the Ecology of Environmental Mobilization." *Sociological Inquiry*.

Marshall, Brent K. 1999. "Globalization, Environmental Degradation, and Ulrich Beck's Risk Society," *Environmental Values*, vol. 8.
> This paper outlines contemporary political economic approaches to understanding the structure of the global economic system. Specifically, it is suggested that the current structural configuration of the globe is a transitional phase between the spatially-bounded configuration hypothesized by world-system theory and the configuration hypothesized by globalization theorists. The contemporary problem of environmental degradation is situated in a global structural context, suggesting that to do otherwise under specifies the causal role of global capitalism. An outline and critique of Ulrich Beck's theory of the 'Risk Society' is presented to illustrate the increasing inadequacy of nation-state centric theories in explaining the dynamic linkage between global capitalism and local environmental degradation.

Thomas, John K., Joseph S. Kodamanchally, and Patricia M. Harveson. 1998. "Toxic Chemical Wastes and the Coincidence of Carcinogenic Mortality in Texas." *Society and Natural Resources* 11:845-865.

Greener Management International, Issue 23, is a special theme issue: "Getting Real: The Business of Sustainable Development" edited by Christopher Sheldon (Green Inck, UK) and Philip Sutton (Green Innovations, Australia). The issue takes a close look at business research associated with sustainable development and what it means for the commercial organisations of the future. The papers are firmly focused on practical experience in the field and, though all authors acknowledge the tenatative nature of their findings, all describe significant movements from rhetoric to pragmatic action.

The papers in the special issue demonstrate that sustainable development is coming of age. For industry, what has been an ill-defined idea is now changing into a rite of passage, and as a result something solid is emerging from the fog of hyperbole. Perhaps not before time.

Contents:

Editorial. Christopher Sheldon, Green Inck, UK.
"Backcasting: A Natural Step in Operationalising Sustainable Development." John Holmberg, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden.
"Discovering Sustainability: A Case Study of Learning through Environmental Scenarios." Lars Strannegard, Gothenburg University, Sweden, and Rolf Woolf, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark.
"The Sustainability-Promoting Firm." Philip Sutton, Green Innovations Inc., Melbourne, Australia.

"The Business Case for Sustainable Development." Robert M. Day and Mathew B. Arnold, World Resources Institute, Washington, DC, USA.
"A New Deal for Sustainable Development in Business: Taking the Social Dimension Seriously." Maria Sillanpaa, The Body Shop International, Littlehampton, UK.
"Sustainability Through Incremental Steps? The Case of Campus Greening at Rensselaer." Steve Breyman, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY, USA.

A limited number of individual copies of this special issue are available for purchase at the price of £25.00/$45.00. Postage is gratis. To order, please contact: Janet Spittlehouse, Greenleaf Publishing Ltd, Aizlewood Business Centre, Aizlewood's Mill, Nursery Street, Sheffield S3 8GG UK; Tel: +44 114 2823475; Fax: +44 114 2823476; http://www.greenleaf-publishing.com
Abstracts of all articles included are available on request as a PDF document.

✈ **FYI.** AskJeeves.com and The Concise Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, (Third Edition, 1994) define *technology* as follows: "the application of scientific discoveries to the production of goods and services that improve the human environment. It includes the development of new materials, machinery, and processes that improve production and solve technical problems... Technology has also created such problems as technological unemployment and environmental pollution."

☞ *Coming in the next issue: The 1999 Annual Meetings Environment and Technology program schedule.* ✍