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CULTIVATING WILDNESS

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## ABSTRACT

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### Cultivating Wildness

Chairperson: Dr. Christopher Preston

The thesis discusses wildness within the context of agriculture. Wildness can be characterized as autonomous, innate and Other. As autonomous, wildness can never be fully controlled. Because it is innate, wildness is inborn in human beings and inherent in the Other-than-human world. As Other, wildness cannot be fully understood. Because wildness is Other, our only avenue to knowledge is experience of the Other-than-human world through which wildness is present.

Our ultimate concern is the wildness inherent in humans. By experiencing manifestations of wildness, we provide ourselves with opportunities for co-creation. Co-creation requires humans to be receptive to the Other-than-human world and refrain from attempting to control Other-than-humans and humans alike. Co-creation helps humans attune to our innate wildness, which causes ripples in the rest of the wild community. Thoreau is a model for agricultural co-creation with manifestations of wildness.

Problematically, technology disrupts our co-creative relationships with wildness because it removes us from experience of the land and tends to economically and morally commodify Others. By doing so, we lose context for our relationships and begin to regard Others with ownership. After broadly discussing agricultural technologies and the soil community we look at a central Indiana commodity corn, soybean and corn seed farm to contextualize the problems of technology in modern agriculture.

To amend the problems of technology, we look at the work of Martin Heidegger. Calling upon his notion of 'Das Ding,' we see how our notion of focal farming can re-establish relationships with the Other-than-human world and help to resolve moral commodification. We see that community is an essential part of restoring the story to commodified Others. The story of Buffalo Bird Woman provides a final historic example of how we can more fully engage the human community and how focal farming evolves within a tradition.

To end, I suggest that seed-saving is an extraordinarily focal practice and can act as Heidegger's Das Ding, helping farmers to renew intimate relationships with the Other-than-human world and attune to their inborn wildness. However, seed-saving is only a suggestion, each person needs to find their own autonomous avenue to cultivate wildness.

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## **Cultivating Wildness: A Prelude**

Wildness is provocative. The definition of what it means for something to be wild has been increasingly discussed in recent years, particularly after the 1964 Wilderness Act became law. In 1967 Roderick Nash devoted an entire book to the notion of wilderness in *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Nash claims that wilderness is a construct of the mind. In our present epoch of climate change, Emma Marris (2013) and others argue that wilderness cannot exist because everything is influenced by humans in some way. They say we live in the Anthropocene.

Regardless of the extent of human impacts on the natural world, wildness exists. Not only does wildness exist in the natural world, but it exists in the human world as well. Contemporary society lives a largely sedentary, largely agrarian existence. Therefore, in the following pages we investigate human and other-than-human wildness within an agricultural setting.

We will see that humans are wild, but our technological lifestyle tends to sever our connection with that innate aspect of our humanity. We will discuss the inherent wildness in Nature and see that, by understanding ourselves as a part of the complex web of evolutionary communities that comprise the natural world, we can recognize our innate human wildness. To make a living under our current paradigm of industrial agriculture, we note that many farmers are required to engage the land in a commodifying way. Problematically, commodification obscures our understanding of our place in the larger community and removes us from our experience of wildness. Engaging in focal farming – a method of farming that requires us to slow our pace and mindfully interact with the natural world – provides a means by which we can re-establish our ties to wildness. However, despite characterizing wildness and defining the problems of technology in agriculture, I offer only guideposts to follow. I do not provide a silver bullet to solve those problems. The extent to which people actively works to re-forge their connection

with wildness depends on the priority they place on autonomy, community and egalitarian relationships.

Chapter 1 begins our discussion with a theoretical foundation of wildness. Chapter 2 finds us as a fly on the wall in Thoreau's cabin at Walden. Through his bean farming he becomes an archetype for the appropriate way to engage wildness in an agricultural setting: with respect, through experience, and over a long time scale. In chapter 3 we investigate technology's impact on wildness. The agricultural context provides the canvas to paint a picture of how technologies tend to sever relationships and diminish our connection with wildness. We move to remedy the technological void in Chapter 4 by understanding how Thoreau's farming methods translate to a more communal and contemporary context. We find the seeds of our resistance to technology's alienating tendencies in the slightest of Things<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "Thing" is capitalized because it is a proper term used by Heidegger that we will expand upon later.

## Chapter 1 – What is Wild?

### I. *Wildness, an Etymology*

In the Prologue of *Wilderness and the American Mind* Roderick Nash chronicles the etymology of wilderness. Nash helps us to see the historical foundation for characterizing wildness as “autonomous” and “Other”<sup>2</sup>. Nash points out that wilderness is not represented by any “specific material object” (1); rather, it “designates a quality that produces a certain mood or feeling in a given individual and, as a consequence, may be assigned by that person to a specific place” (1). So for Nash wilderness is categorized based on subjective interpretations of, or personal projections onto, places.

Wildness is not a place. Still, Nash’s etymology of wilderness helps us to examine wildness. His insight that wilderness produces emotional responses is significant for our treatment of wildness. It implies an interaction between what is human and what is wild. Because I regard wildness as autonomous Otherness, I view the human interaction with wildness as a relationship. Our current culture tends to impose relationships of domination on Others. We will see that relationships ought to engage Others with respect and appreciation.

In part because it provokes human feeling, Nash allows that wilderness eludes definition. Human feelings are largely subjective, so wilderness possesses a symbolic meaning that varies between individuals (Nash 1967, 1) and changes over time. By using Nash’s etymology to characterize wildness as ‘autonomous Otherness’, we shall begin to see why we experience wildness intimately, as an extant Other in a dynamic and personal relationship.

Nash (1967) opens his etymology with a definition from an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: “*Wild-deor...n. A wild animal, wild beast,*” (1). His initial definition allows us to attach “wild” to the

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<sup>2</sup> Terms that I use for two of the three characterizations of wildness that we revisited throughout the paper.

Other-than-human<sup>3</sup>. Then, from the Teutonic and Norse origins, Nash tells us that *wild* is rooted in “will”; as in, “self-willed, willful, or uncontrollable,” (1). In fact, the adjective “wild” originally derived from “willed” (1). So Nash’s etymological work allows us to further characterize that which is wild as autonomous.

The Oxford Universal Dictionary (Hawkins 1981) defines *Autonomous* as: “self-governing” and “conforming to its own laws only.” By calling manifestations of wildness autonomous, we recognize that they are beyond human control. They possess self-governing mechanisms that conform to self-imposed laws, biological mandates, or are constrained by laws of physics. We cannot expect to successfully impose anthropocentric aims on wildness. Nature dictates that rocks fall, wolves kill elk and acorns grow into oak trees. These laws are imposed by evolution and physics, not humans. They come from within, not without.

The Oxford Universal Dictionary also defines *Autonomy* as: “personal freedom;” and “a self-governing community.” Importantly, wild communities also possess autonomy. They behave according to given communal structures, whether we are talking about ecosystems or villages. The individuals within those communities are able to possess autonomy within the bounds of the communal structure. I address the notion of community more thoroughly in Chapter 4; for now it is enough to see that these are the senses in which I view “autonomous Others.”

Because our investigation ultimately addresses what wildness means for the human, we need to consider the affect that Other-than-humans have on us as an extension of their autonomy. They influence us both physically and psychologically. Nash’s etymology helps to further this discussion. In addition to possessing roots in a self-willed sort of autonomy, Nash (1967)

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<sup>3</sup> I use the nomenclature “Other-than-human” to discuss non-humans throughout this paper. I refrain from using the phrase “more-than-human” because, for me, more-than-human suggests a hierarchy. Because I deal with relationships, I refrain from implying hierarchy at any level. Other-than-human suggests just that: not human. Other-than-human does not imply more-than or less-than-human. As we shall see from the work of Tom Birch, Otherness is essentially undefinable so I attempt to leave the Other-than-human open to be expressed autonomously.

explains that the word *wild* originally conveyed “being lost, unruly, disordered, or confused” – *bewildered* [italics added] (1). Regarding wild in this sense allows us to continue to characterize wildness based on the human relation to the Other.

A key component of human wildness relates to the internal impact that external forms of wildness have on humans. When we are lost, our sense of the self in relation to the outside world is confused – a phenomenon that Nash points out occurred most frequently in wilderness settings (1967, 1); settings where Otherness is most prevalent and is most able to affect us. For our purposes, Other-than-human Otherness is “Nature”: plants, mountains, rocks, bodies of water, weather events and the like. This view is in the spirit of Nash’s wilderness settings.

Often, what is wild does not meet our expectations in predictable ways. As a result, human confusion and disorder might arise. Nash relays that in Old Swedish “wild derived from the figure of boiling water” (1967, 1) due to its “ungoverned or out of control” nature (1). Surely Old Swedish speakers did not call boiling “wild” because they were uncertain if it would boil. The dynamic process of boiling is the predictable result of heating water. Instead, the ungoverned out of control aspect they referred to is the trajectory the boiling follows. The process of boiling itself appears chaotic. If we extend this boiling analogy to wild processes in the natural world, it is not the existence of the wild Otherness that surprises us. Rather, in calling manifestations wild, we acknowledge that we cannot manipulate or control natural processes such as hurricanes and tornados. We can only bear witness to them and interact with them as Others.

Eventually the use of *wild* “was extended to Other life-forms” (Nash 1967, 1). In Old English *deor* means animal (1). So, to describe animals not under human control, *deor* was added to *wild*, resulting in *wildeor*; a word that Nash explains transformed into *wilder*, then eventually

*wilderness* (2): *wild-deor-ness* – “the place of wild beasts” (2). So *wild* became a descriptor for non-domesticated animals.

The salient aspect is control. Acknowledging our lack of control is the first step to granting respect and extending appreciation to wildness. We must acknowledge Others’ autonomy beyond our will. Failure to do so, whether because of ignorance or hubris, might result in personal (or communal) confusion, disorder, frustration or misfortune.

Thus far Nash’s etymology helped to characterize plants, rocks, rivers, climate cycles and animals as autonomous. We have glimpsed the importance of acknowledging that autonomy. For our pursuit of a sufficient characterization of wildness, it proves fruitful to continue to follow Nash’s account of the etymological development of wilderness. As he progresses through the etymology, we see how historical definitions and connotations of wilderness more closely link the idea of wilderness to Otherness.

The etymological roots of “wilderness” are restricted to northern European countries. Therefore, Nash (1967, 2) claims that the idea of wilderness relates to forested land. In German, *wildis* is a cognate and *wildor* means wild game (2). Of course, in old-world Germany wild game lived in the forest – a place outside of human understanding and control; a place of Otherness. Nash also notes the relation between the Old English words for forest, *weald or woeld*, and wild (2). He implies that wilderness, as the habitat of wild beasts, is largely absent of man (2). Forests are dark, mysterious and foreign. Nash claims that during times of the word’s roots, people venturing into wilderness were exposed to a foreign world they regarded as fundamentally Other.

If we think of wilderness as being largely absent of man and as primarily composed of wild things – a place where wildness dwells – then it fits our characterization of wildness as Otherness. Wilderness is composed of wildness: the Other-than-human. Otherness is important

for our discussion of wildness and deserves thorough treatment. For now, we finish the exegesis of Nash's etymology before deepening our conception of Otherness with the work of Birch.

When Nash (1967) continues his discussion of wilderness, he asserts "The image is that of a man in an alien environment where the civilization that normally orders and controls his life is absent" (2). Here, through his treatment of progressing historical notions of wilderness, Nash depicts wilderness as lacking societally dictated framework. This leads to a kind of freedom from western culture that accompanies time spent in the wilderness. By referring to wilderness as an "alien environment," Nash supports the notion that what is wild is Other. It is not necessarily *opposed* to civilization, yet it does exist as separate from civilization because it is outside of human control. I suggest that if wildness is brought under human control then it loses something significant. Moreover, those encountering subdued wildness also lose significant interactions otherwise present in the relationship. With human control comes a loss of the Other's autonomy and a consequent lack of reciprocity in the relationship.

Advancing through history, Nash (1967, 2-3) references translations of the Bible, dictionaries from 1755 and the mid-1900s, and a novel written by Henry Adams in 1880. From these sources Nash describes wilderness as "uninhabited, arid land of the near east," (2-3) a "treeless wasteland," (3) "a desert; a tract of solitude and savageness," (3) and "Uncultivated and Otherwise undeveloped land" with no humans and only wild animals present (3). So again, wilderness, inhabited by wildness, is essentially Other-than-human and outside of human control. Though Nash portrays wilderness as benign or even detrimental to humans, we will see how manifestations of wildness can promote our goals even while remaining beyond our control.

We are characterizing wildness because we are concerned about the human/Other-than-human interaction. While autonomy and control are two issues that arise during that interaction,

contact is an essential requirement to properly engage wildness. To these ends we should indulge Nash further because, though he does not explicitly make this point in his etymology, Nash's wildernesses are places where it is impossible for us to avoid gross and essential contact with wildness as a legitimate and omnipresent Other.

If we are deep in a German forest or lost in a desert, there are no bastions of culture to distract us or subvert our interactions with Otherness. The sheer quantity of manifest wildness is overwhelming. We cannot help physical and emotional interaction. When we inhabit spaces where wildness is less apparent, we need not lose interaction. Wildness still exists. The significance of our relationship with its manifestations depends on our manner of engagement.

Our engagement with Otherness is important. As mentioned, Nash points out that wilderness produces feelings in people (1967, 3). He cites the Grimm Brothers' use of *wildnis* to show that wilderness is regarded with two types of emotions. The first is negative: wilderness is seen as "inhospitable, alien, mysterious, and threatening," (4)<sup>4</sup>. The second is positive: wilderness is considered "beautiful, friendly, capable of elevating and delighting the beholder" and as a "sanctuary" and "respite" from civilization (4). What these conflicting emotional responses indicate is the variety of ways we might interact with wilderness. They also signify the different ways we might engage with and react to wild things.

Because of the stark differences of emotional responses, it seems plausible to conclude that wildness comes in a variety of types, that we interact with it in a number of ways, and that those interactions end with different results. Put another way: wildness is autonomous and humans do not have purchase over truly wild things. We are subject to unpredictable interactions and engagements with manifestations of wildness. Agricultural operations are rife with Other-than-

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<sup>4</sup> Birch (1990) claims these are typical manners of regarding the Other under our present worldview (10, 12).

human forms of wildness. Therefore we must investigate how to appropriately engage Others before we discuss these interactions in an agricultural setting.

## II. *Innateness of Otherness*

We used Roderick Nash's etymology to show that wildness has been historically characterized as autonomous and Other. In doing so we delved into the meaning of those characterizations and understand that our interactions with manifestations of wildness are crucial. While Nash's etymology carries force, skeptical readers might prefer an exact definition of wildness over a dual-characterization.

Unfortunately, because wildness is essentially Other, it eludes definition. As Thomas Birch (1990) writes in *The Incarceration of Wildness*:

By definition wildness is intractable to definition (...) Wildness itself, to the mind of the lawbringing imperium, is lawless; it is the paradigm of the unintelligible, unrepentant, incorrigible outlaw (...) (448) (...) the essence of Otherness is wildness. If any Other is to preserve its (his, her) identity as Other, as Other in relation to another person, society, species, or whatever, then it must at bottom resist accepting any final identity altogether. An Other cannot *essentially* be when it is objectified, defined, analyzed, legislated, or understood to be if it is to be and remain an Other. (451)

So Birch lends force to Nash's etymology. Though wildness is essentially unknowable, we can still offer a third characterization that helps to triangulate its location more precisely. This way, when we go in search of experiences with wildness, we know where to focus our attention.

The third and final characterization of wildness is innateness. Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (2003) defines innate as:

**1.** existing in one from birth; inborn; native: *innate musical talent*. **2.** inherent in the essential character of something: *an innate defect in the hypothesis* (...)

Both definitions convey aspects of wildness that we address. Wildness exists in humans; it is inborn. At the very least, even skeptics can agree that we have primal urges. It is inherent in the essential character of Nature and exists to some extent in domesticated animals. Often the house-

cat brings home a chipmunk and sometimes *Canis familiaris* runs away and returns home hours or days later covered in mud with a rabbit in her mouth. Nature's innate wildness is evident in plants, dirt, rocks and weather. We observe testimony to this wildness because life goes on in a grand, dancing, dynamic biotic community. A daisy pokes through a sidewalk crack and Earth processes such as earthquakes, volcanoes and hurricanes cannot be stopped. They often surprise us; but only because they do not follow the imperium's laws. Instead they follow the laws of physics and evolution. They follow Nature's laws – the laws of Birch's "incurable outlaw."

Our characterization of wildness as innate is reinforced through the work of Morrison, Ridder and Birch. According to Keith Morrison (2002), wildness is "a noun referring to the generic quality of being wild which is potentially present in each individual" (2001). Ben Ridder (2007) further describes wildness as a behavior that is "instinctive" and "spontaneous." But Ridder does not restrict wildness to living creatures. He believes an area is wild if its life-forms behave with wildness (2007). His definition implies that land impacted by humans can still express wildness. Indeed, the plants and soil that comprise the land are innately wild. Ridder's characterization gives a better sense of the multitude of situations in which wildness might exist.

Birch pushes the notion of innateness further, implying it is ubiquitous, when he explains why wildness can never be fully vanquished, only detained momentarily:

All the usual attempts to subdue wildness by destroying its manifestations fail, although wildness may be driven into hiding for awhile, or, more accurately, maybe be lost sight of for a while (...) Although the forest and the bison and the Indian may be exterminated, this does not affect wildness itself. In the case of wildness itself, there is nothing there to aim at and shoot. As what we might call the "soul" of Otherness, wildness is no usual sort of Other. To take the manifestations of wildness for the thing itself is to commit a category mistake. Wildness is still very much there and will not go away (...) Wildness cannot be ostracized, or exterminated, or chastened into discipline through punishment, reward, or even behavior modification techniques. (1990, 449)

Birch's notion of wildness is significant because in addition to supporting Nash's etymology, it leaves us with the understanding that wildness is irrepressibly "there" and cannot be

"exterminated." Instead, wildness can only be "lost sight of for a while." Calling it the "soul of

otherness,” Birch decouples wildness from its visible manifestations and leaves the door open for wildness to exist innately anywhere.

He also claims that, even in the absence of its manifestations, wildness remains outside of human control. We noted examples of uncontrollable natural disasters that manifest from seemingly nowhere because they are innately sewn in to the fabric of our world. We will see agricultural examples of wildness remaining outside of human control in Chapters 2 and 3.

Characterizing wildness as innate is important for several reasons. First, it allows us to see that an anthropogenically altered landscapes do not necessarily lack wildness. Wildness is inherent in the land. Second, it forces us to consider our inborn wildness and envision ways to cultivate it. This innate or inborn, yet latent, wildness can be recognized and cultivated through relationships with manifestations of wildness. As we learned from Nash and Birch and as we will see more definitively through Bekoff, wildness is inherent in Nature, which includes: plants and animals; organic and inorganic matter such as soil, rocks and water; and dynamic processes such as climate cycles, seasonal cycles, daily rhythms and moon cycles. Wildness is innately present, as Birch’s Other, with an autonomous existence outside of human control.

To provide an illustration for our third characterization, consider that we can assert our domination over wild animals by caging them. Yet as Ridder claims, though contained they can still behave wildly. We do not *know*, nor are we able to predict with probable certainty, how the wild animal will behave, even in a cage. It is still Other. It remains wild. Only by taming it or killing it does our domination squelch that particular manifestation of wildness<sup>5</sup>.

But our domination suppresses wildness nonetheless. Associating with wild Others provides the circumstances by which we can recognize and attune to wildness – both externally and

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<sup>5</sup> We will see an extension of this domination in the agricultural realm during our treatment of agricultural technologies in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 will also help us to understand what we lose along with the experience of the various manifestations of wildness.

internally. By caging the wild animal, even though it remains wild, we limit our experience of it. We limit what we might learn about the animal by engaging it on mutual terms. We also lose what we might learn about ourselves from that engagement.

To attempt to dominate wild Others is, by extension, domination of the self. Though we cannot destroy wildness, when we subvert its manifestations instead of appropriately interacting with them, we subdue our own potential wildness. Like the wild animal, wildness is still innately within us. As Birch (1990) says, “Wildness is still very much there and will not go away.”

The uncontrollable nature of wildness forces us to consider how to rightly relate to it. That right relation is a focus as we move through our discussion. By understanding the pervasiveness of wildness we can more fully recognize the manifestations of wildness with which we interact. Acknowledging manifestations of wildness is the first step to appropriately engage them.

Appropriate engagement is important because, while wildness might be innate in the manner that Ridder suggests, we need to interact with these manifestations to engage our own innate wildness. By openly interacting we become aware of the autonomous nature of the Other. We can then afford the Other a level of relational respect. This newly afforded respect has the potential to cause corresponding emotional and behavioral changes in us.

Having given a tri-characterization of wildness and a sense of why it is important to humans, I briefly turn to the usefulness of wildlands for helping us grasp wildness through direct interaction. Because of its innateness, wildness can be recognized virtually everywhere. Still it is probably more easily noticed by humans in wilderness partially because of our cultural tendency to regard nature and society as separate. This tendency leads us to create both mental and physical distance between our natural areas and our cultural areas. The physical removal from wilderness imposes psychological distance from wildness, causing manifestations of wildness to

pass unnoticed in everyday life. Yet, the absence of human culture in wilderness allows the sheer magnitude of manifest wildness to confront us more apparently than in the everyday. This is significant because it indicates why physical closeness with manifest wildness is necessary for real knowledge to be gained. Wildness is an experiential and relational phenomenon.

### *III. Appropriate Relationships with Otherness*

At this point, the reader might feel a tension escalating based on the suggestion that humans need to form a relationship with autonomous Others. The case goes something like this: how can an autonomous human interact with autonomous manifestations of wildness, and each participant in the relationship simultaneously maintain autonomy? It should not be counter-intuitive that individuals can be in a relationship and also possess autonomy. In some sense, we are all in relationships with Others perpetually. Yet, few would argue that we lack autonomy because of these relationships. Rather, we acknowledge some level of personal autonomy while simultaneously participating in a plethora of relationships that take on differing levels of intimacy, responsibility and dedication. The two are not mutually exclusive and I later argue that relationships are, in some ways, required for autonomy. For now Mark Bekoff and Kristin Armstrong Oma to help guide us through these contentious waters.

Bekoff (2003, 911) asserts that we are best understood in relation to Others. He believes that humans and Other-than-humans are all citizens of Earth and as such we need to form intimate, reciprocal and beneficially peaceful relationships (911). For Bekoff (912) the fundamental relationship between humans and the natural world is one of wonder, beauty and intimacy. Healing society goes hand in hand with healing our personal elemental connection with the

natural world (Bekoff 2003, 913). He views water and air as beings (913) – Others in the Birchean sense – that are worthy of our respect and proper engagement.

While we do not need to imbue water and air with the same metaphysical significance that Bekoff does, we can still view them as Others and work toward forging connections with them. They are physical entities. They touch us. They influence us and change us. If it is windy and rainy we might put a jacket on or tilt our head to the sky, smiling with an open-mouth and out-stretched arms because this is what it feels like to be alive in a wild world.

Viewing our world as worthy of respect and proper engagement is, quite frankly, advisable for the survival of the community of life on Earth. For Bekoff (2003, 913) proper engagement requires a relationship of awe rather than domination. Still, discussing the proper engagement of Other-than-human existences, including water and air, might seem difficult at first blush precisely because of their precarious metaphysical ground. To help bridge the cultural chasm I introduce Kristin Armstrong Oma's discussion of the more familiar human relationship with animal Other than humans.

To tackle the issue of inter-species relationships, Oma (2010) addresses social contracts between humans and farm animals. She regards barnyard animals as Other-than-human beings, which permits her work to transfer to our discussion of Otherness in an agricultural setting. Oma views humans and farm animals as "*partners in the agro-ecosystem*" [italics mine] (178). Because our concern is forming a relationship with wildness, we can regard all Others present in the agricultural situation as partnered with humans in a complex agro-ecosystem.

If the farmer or her plants interact with a manifestation of wildness such as a thunderstorm or groundhog, we are interested in the relationship the farmer has with that manifestation. We participate in interactive, dynamic communities. Appropriate relationships result in interactions

that are as co-creative as possible. Oma's suggestion is that humans and farm-animals engaging in appropriate relationships should interact in a manner such that each is influenced by the Other.

Significantly, Oma concedes that humans are the more dominant partners so, for her, communication rather than equality is the most important component of the relationship (2010, 179). Communication involves an exchange of information that is interpretable by each party (179). Therefore each party is impacted in some way. So in agricultural instances, even domesticated farm animals influence human action. Perhaps that influence is merely because farmers are responsible for meeting the animals' needs: food and water. In any event, Oma argues that humans and Other-than-humans influence one another in mutually beneficial ways.

When the farmer opens herself to animals voicing their needs, she listens to what the Other-than-human says and responds accordingly. In these situations we can say that the farmer engages in relationships appropriately. In Chapter 2 we see how such receptivity to the voice of Otherness translates to Thoreau's bean patch. We examine his right relationships with various forms of wildness; including soil, plants, climate and animals.

Before we can understand how seemingly passive Other-than-humans, such as soil and plants, can influence farmers we must briefly refocus our attention on animal-human interaction. Oma expounds on the idea that the farmer and Other-than-humans are engaged in mutually beneficial relationships. By giving animal-Others agency "by way of their ability to act upon the world as living, sentient beings," Oma characterizes the relationship as "a co-creation of behavior" resulting in "mutual becoming," (2010, 179). Though people possess more power in their relationships with farm-animals, the behavior and emotions of humans are still altered. Even if their influence is only on the psychological, rather than physical level, manifestations of wildness are able to co-create with humans by impacting present and future thought and action.

Oma is correct to say that humans generally have more power in the on-farm animal-human relationship. However, it is important to note that humans do not always hold more power in relationships with Other-than-humans. Remember, wildness arose in part because what is wild is largely separate from human control. So in the case of an impending rainstorm, humans hold less power in the relationship. To be open in a co-creative way, means we will change our actions because of the rain storm. We had better listen to the voice of Otherness and prepare for rain in whatever way is most appropriate for our situation: close the windows, ready the umbrella, or make sure the water catchment systems are in working order. By being receptive to the information contained in the character of the wind and color of the clouds, we are able to catch water from the sky, helping us to grow future vegetables co-creatively with Nature.

Viewing the human/Other-than-human interaction as a co-creative relationship raises the ethical question of how we ought to interact with Otherness in a co-creative manner. I wish to attend to that question before moving on so that we have a foundation for our practical engagement. By ethical co-creation, I mean responding to Otherness in a way that supplants acts of human-domination with more careful, respectful forms of engagement: those that acknowledge and respect the autonomy of wildness. Graham Harvey (2006) discusses ways of behaving that respect Otherness. But what does respect mean for Harvey? How do we respect Others?

He asserts that we need to regard the world non-anthropocentrically: the world is composed of a community of persons; both human and Other-than-human (12). He insists that the world consists of a complex web of give and take relationships (12) and that “it is the responsibility of all persons to care for the land and specific places and all who live as part of such lands and places” (13). To these ends, echoing Oma’s invitation to co-creation, Harvey calls for humans to

participate in the world rather than dominate it (16). He contends that casual everyday practices and expressions help us respect Others (16). We can compost our food, save seed, plant gardens, pause to silently watch deer in our yard or enjoy thunderstorms. We will delve into casual everyday practices in Chapter 4 when I offer ways to heal relationships wounded by agricultural technologies. For now, we continue our conversation about right relation.

When discussing our relationship with Other-than-humans, Harvey does not say that humans cannot use Others for our ends. Still, he is in line with Bekoff's call to step back from the domination of Otherness. For example, even in human cultures that require taking the life of Other-than-humans as part of a necessary existence (such as hunting), Harvey believes the Other-than-human can be regarded with respect (2006, 15). Respect can keep our domination in check. Respect can involve saying a word of thanks to the animal or engaging in meaningful community celebration of the animal and the life that springs from its death. Respect might also mean using as much of the animal as possible to meet daily human needs of tools, clothing and food.

Harvey's ideas translate to agricultural situations. He asserts that the proper engagement of Otherness is founded on human "expression[s] of humility" and a "willingness to wait patiently" for Others to speak to us in their own way (2006, 17). Harvey calls for the human/Other-than-human interaction to be imbued with respect through humility and patient waiting. His notion of respect aligns with Oma's manner of engaging the Other through receptivity and co-creation. We can be partners in a dance instead of generals giving marching orders. The impact of co-creation is both mental and physical. Based on the reaction of our partner we might move differently on the next step or next dance. We might smile and engage the world differently when we leave the dance hall. The general commands troops without regard for their autonomy – the tenor of his

orders remain static from year to year and platoon to platoon. Co-creation cuts against such dominance by requiring us to change our mental and/or physical states from the interaction.

In Chapter 2 we see how Thoreau's agricultural practices exemplify respecting Other-than-humans. He values the beans as individuals outside of his own existence and co-creates with them. Oma sets necessary conditions for receptive co-creative interaction to take place. For Oma (2010), spatial proximity provides a foundation for building appropriate relationships between humans and Other-than-humans (180). Farming provides an avenue by which we can cultivate wildness precisely because it requires us to be close to the Other-than-human world every day. By living so closely with Others, we "come to attune" to Otherness (Oma 2010, 180).

Oma's language is consistent with Birch's notion of Otherness: since we cannot fully know Others, attunement is a relative proxy. But incomplete understanding should not discourage our interactions. Though we can never fully know Others, we still flourish from co-creative relationships. Long-term attunement is part of the charm of relationships. For example, significant Others attune to one another over the course of long relationships. While they may understand one another on intimate levels, no one can claim to fully *know* every intricacy and experience of their significant Other. Hence, they are significant to one another and still fundamentally Other. In most relationships attunement results from physical closeness.

Oma (2010, 181) asserts that human-animal rhythms exist in agricultural settings due to the consistent nature of the daily interactions that arise through shared life space. In this sense, the farm is an almost ideal location for "as much physical contact as possible" (181-182) between the human and Other-than-human. It provides the setting and context for the casual everyday practices that Harvey insists help us to respect Other-than-humans. Importantly for people, an

essential part of the physical interaction with Other-than-humans requires “enjoy[ing] their presence in the here and now” (Oma 2010, 181).

Engaging the Other-than-human world in the here and now includes connecting temporally with natural rhythms. Syncing with the natural rhythms, such as weather patterns and light cycles helps us participate with the Other-than-human world more naturally. Bekoff believes this type of intuitive intimate relationship can be achieved because nature affects us deeply, evoking primal feelings and causing physiological responses (2003, 913).

For instance, when Bekoff (2003) claims that animals, trees, water, rocks and soil speak to him (914), he is not necessarily claiming that he talks to trees and trees talk back. Perhaps it is more fitting to view his sensory experience with animals, trees, water, rocks and soil as a practice of deep mutual engagement that impacts Bekoff in significant emotional ways. He certainly seems to enjoy their presence. Bekoff views natural sounds as Nature’s voice (914). Because we are co-creative and co-nourishing beings on this planet (916), listening to Nature is important. Agriculture allows precisely these types of close relationships with Nature. In Chapter 2 we will see Thoreau engaging in co-creative farming. Bekoff’s insights on right relationship, as well as his claims of conversing with manifestations of wildness, will become clearer.

#### *IV. Living the Broad Margin, Regardless of Place*

In terms of developing relationships with Other-than-humans, Oma showed the need for physical closeness to respectfully co-create with animals. Bekoff and Harvey helped extend Oma’s co-creation and respect to additional manifestations of wildness, including climate cycles. We then noted the temporal aspect of deep relationships. Thus, Oma asserts that “the encounter between humans and animals is a discursive process that forms the relationship” (180).

Similarly, the interaction between humans and all natural, autonomous Otherness, such as wind and water, takes place as a discursive process. For example, consider an information exchange: thick white fading to deep gray cumulus clouds, visible as far as the eyes can see, roll east through the Missoula valley on a windy day in late March. If we give the Other a voice, then we interpret these clouds as impending rain. The more we listen to the voice of Otherness through repeated, time-spanning engagement, the more intimate we are with the words of the Other. We come to know that this particular wind with this particular cloud hue means rain by nightfall. Whereas another manifestation might mean rain tomorrow or no rain at all.

Turner (1996) explains that physical closeness with manifestations of wildness, such as natural rhythms, enables us to attune to wildness on a human scale – over the course of biological time. Through co-creation we can deepen our practice of right relation to Otherness, but we cannot expect immediate results. Much like the development of all healthy, meaningful and substantial relationships, attuning to the Other-than-human world takes time. This is partially the reason Harvey calls for patient waiting. If we consider Thoreau’s conception of wildness in the overall scope of his work, particularly given the slow manner by which he investigated wildness made apparent in his eight year in-the-making Magnus-opus, *Walden*, then we need to acknowledge that temporality plays a role in our experience of wildness. For Thoreau, we must experience the natural rhythms and cycles of Earth to know wildness more intimately. On such long timescales it is evident that Thoreau believed discovering wildness is a slow, drawn-out experience requiring one to become lost in the moment – subject to the autonomy of Otherness.

Jack Turner (1996) internalizes Thoreau’s call for living a “broad margin,” (2004, 108) – the invitation for slowing down and appreciating Nature. In *Abstract Wild*, Turner claims that we need to be “far away from the road” (p.85) – far from civilization – to have a wild experience.

He argues for our immersion in wilderness for an extended period of time, because if we do not remain in wilderness for an extended time, then:

(...) the mind remains saturated with human concerns and blind to the natural world, the body bound to metronomic time and ignorant of natural biological time (...) a long stay is fundamental to seeing ourselves as part of the biological nature, for the order of nature is above all a rhythmic order. (85)

Turner's message here is correct – it is important to pay attention to the rhythms of the natural world and manifestations of wildness so that we understand our place in the integrated community Bekoff speaks of. Turner is also correct to claim our attention needs to be based in biological time. But he appears to miss at least one important point by believing that we *need* to be immersed in the woods to see ourselves as part of Nature.

As indicated earlier, paying attention to the Other-than-human world can occur in a number of circumstances in modern life and does not require us to retreat to wilderness. In fact, Thoreau only resided miles from town and within view and hearing distance of the train tracks, yet he felt a deep kinship with the natural world. A mountain runner might feel herself to be part of nature because she passes the same crow in the same tree at the same time every day, even though she does not run more than 10 miles from her home. A fly-fisherman might feel himself to be part of nature. Even though he is within eyesight and earshot of the road and despite his adversarial relationship with the manifestations of wildness that is the fish, the fisherman is literally immersed in the natural world – water. He must be receptive to water temperatures and insect populations if he is to succeed in his endeavor. When we engage wildness co-creatively, we need to be receptive to the information conveyed by Other-than-humans for our own success.

As we have seen, wildness is everywhere. In the agricultural realm, farmers often rise with the sun and some even plant by the moon calendar<sup>6</sup>. Certainly they are running on the sort of

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<sup>6</sup> A practice known today in the new farming traditions as “biodynamic farming.” In old farming traditions, such as those in Pagentro, Italy, the same practice was simply the way it was done from time immemorial.

“natural biological time” that Turner claims many people are ignorant of. Turner is correct that an extended stay in the wilderness helps us to see ourselves as part of biological nature, but he is overly strict. We have also seen that we can attune to wildness in our back yards, in our gardens, and on our farms – if only we are receptive to its multitude of manifestations.

Whether we acknowledge them or not, planetary cycles are manifestation of wildness that humans and Other-than-humans experience daily. Like Turner and Thoreau, for Bekoff (2003) contact with natural cycles is important. Seasonal cycles matter because our engagement with Otherness needs to be one of inhabitation (Bekoff 2003, 918). Traditional knowledge occurs over long periods of time (918). Because seasonal cycles help us attune to biological time, they also attune us to our inborn wildness. Bekoff claims that the cycles of nature are “with us and within us” (914), echoing Ridder’s assertion that wildness is “instinctual”. By recognizing, respecting and attuning with natural cycles, we cultivate the inborn wildness that Ridder and Bekoff believe is instinctually engrained in us. We can recognize our evolutionary unity with manifestations of wildness. In doing so we embrace our own wildness through relational attunement.

Before we continue our investigation of wildness within the context of agriculture, we should note several critical assertions and discoveries we have made in this chapter. First, wildness is innate, autonomous and Other. As an ethical imperative for our appropriate engagement in the Earth community, we must respect Otherness, which includes refraining from dominating manifestations of wildness. Further, because of the undefinable nature of Otherness, direct, intimate, prolonged experience is the most effective way to gain some understanding of Other-than-human manifestations of wildness. Climate, weather and diurnal rhythms provide everyday opportunities for attunement. The longer and more deeply we experience wildness, the more we

will attune with manifestations of wildness and behave in co-creative ways. This behavior is salient for cultivating Other-than-human wildness and our innate human wildness.

In Chapter 2 we visit Thoreau's bean patch as a case study for the appropriate engagement of wildness. We see a prime illustration of how to enjoy autonomous Other-than-humans in the here and now. He models co-creation with manifestations of wildness that impact the farmer both positively and negatively. Thoreau provides an example of how, partly through gross physical contact, an intimate and deeply intuitive relationship with the Other-than-human world can develop – even in light of manifestations of wildness that impact the farm in possibly adverse ways. Thoreau's engagement gives substance to Oma's claims (2010, 183-184). Despite the possibly conflicting goals between the farmer and Other-than-human manifestations of wildness, through Thoreau's example we see how humans can understand and act with the natural rhythms of the Other-than-human world.

## Chapter 2 – The Focal Thoreau

### *I. Introduction*

In Chapter 1 we characterized wildness as innate, autonomous and Other. Because wildness is autonomous, manifestations of wildness do not adhere to human will, law or desire. Instead manifestations of wildness behave according to, what we might call, their own preferences, needs or trajectories according to internal compulsions or physical laws. Without respect for wildness we set ourselves up for surprise when manifestations of wildness exercise autonomy out of line with our goals. Despite our attempts, ultimately we cannot control manifestations of wildness. This is one reason it behooves us to respect wildness.

Because wildness is Other, it eludes ultimate definition and is fundamentally unknowable. Wildness is also innate. As such it is inherent in the natural world around us, is inborn in all living beings and is an internal characteristic of our humanity. We are all wild at the core. So, although wildness is fundamentally unknowable, we can learn about ourselves and the world by engaging with manifestations of wildness with respect. Such engagement provides us with a starting point for the formation of a more intimate relationship with Otherness.

Part of respecting wildness means refraining from dominating its manifestations. We cannot experience Others fully if we engage them domineeringly. Instead of domination, we should favor relationships that promote communication between humans and Other-than-humans. Our communication should open us to the messages of the Other-than-human world. We can respond by respectfully adjusting our actions. I refer to this manner of relating as “co-creation.”

Forming respectful relationships with autonomous Other-than-humans is one potential way to cultivate human wildness, provided we maintain those relationships. Forming and strengthening

relationships is a matter of practice. In Chapter 4 we dig deeper into the meaning of focal practices, which help to create a center-piece for such relationships.

We departed Chapter 1 with a theoretical foundation for interacting with manifestations of wildness. Now our particular concern is the formation of relationships in an agricultural context. As an authoritative voice on wildness, Henry David Thoreau stands as a model for how we might cultivate our relationships with Other-than-humans. His work grounds our conversation about right relation in a tangible, historical account of what I call focal farming<sup>7</sup>.

Thoreau provides us with examples of respectful, experiential co-creation. He shows how drawn out interactions with manifestations of wildness help to make the human participant in the relationship more wild. We will see that as the relationships become deeper, Thoreau more deeply appreciates the Other-than-human world with which he co-creates. His bean cultivation also provides illustrations of the different types of manifest wildness with which we interact.

## *II. Co-Creation: Respect, Appreciation, Time and Experience*

At first it seems counter-intuitive that a man so interested in wildness decided to cultivate two and a half acres of vegetables, mainly beans, during his two-year period living in the woods. However, Thoreau intended for his agricultural pursuits to help him cultivate an intimate connection with Nature. As Thoreau quips, “I was determined to know beans,” (2004, 156). So, Thoreau regards beans as an Other that he must form a relationship with in order to “know.”

By recognizing beans as autonomous Others with their own existence he makes the first important step toward engaging Nature intimately and cultivating his own wildness. Though he planted them, Thoreau does not take outright ownership of the beans. Instead he wants to know

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<sup>7</sup> Using the work of Paul Thompson, a more detailed discussion of focal farming occurs in Chapter 4. For now it suffices to know that Thoreau’s methods of farming are an example of focal farming.

them on their own terms. We can see Thoreau's respect through his acknowledgement of the beans as Others with their own needs and preferences for right growth.

But respect is only the starting point of a co-creative relationship. Beyond his recognition of their autonomy, we can note Thoreau's receptivity to the beans' message: "indeed they were not easily to be put off" (2004, 150). He is receptive to their needs. Thoreau indicates the beans' preference: they prefer to be hoed. In fact, they are "impatient to be hoed" (150). While critics might claim Thoreau is merely anthropomorphizing the beans, this need not be the case. Instead, we can view him as being attentive and attuned to an information exchange. He is receptive to the beans as Others with legitimate needs. Their lives nag at his conscience.

Thoreau's recognition of their autonomy is the first step toward appreciating them. His receptivity to their message is the next step. In fact, by acknowledging the beans' autonomy and being receptive to their needs, Thoreau "came to love" the beans (2004, 150). He admits: "I cherish them (...) It is a fine broad leaf to look on" (150). Thoreau's farming methods require him to interact on an intimate level with the crops. His appreciation stems from respect, receptivity and, as we discuss next, slow observant experience.

In addition to requiring respect, intimate relationships require time to cultivate. In Chapter 3, we see that this is one reason industrial agriculture falls short and one of the means by which we should amend it. As we saw from the work of Oma, Turner and Bekoff, temporality plays a significant role in meaningful engagement with Otherness.

Thoreau declares that the slow pace with which he worked required more intimacy than the standard farming methods of his time permitted (2004, 152). Thoreau was determined to know beans. He came to know them through a slow process:

It was a singular experience that long acquaintance which I cultivated with beans, what with planting, and hoeing, and harvesting, and threshing, and picking over, and selling them, - the last was the hardest of all,- I might add eating, for I did taste. I was determined to know beans. When they were growing, I

used to hoe from five o'clock in the morning till noon, and commonly spend the rest of the day about other affairs. (2004, 156)

Notice Thoreau's wording here. He describes his experience as "singular." He simultaneously acknowledges the uniqueness of the experience and regards it as one continuous event. Thoreau views his engagement with beans as a "long acquaintance." Significantly, he states that he "cultivated" that long acquaintance "*with* beans" [italics added]. His language suggests a cooperative communication with a friend, rather than a one-way manner of knowing an unfeeling, mechanistic and inanimate product of his work.

As a co-creating farmer, Thoreau plants, hoes, harvests, threshes, checks the beans for market quality, tastes them and sells them. And tellingly Thoreau admits that selling beans was the hardest part. While Thoreau's difficulty selling beans might be due in part to an anti-capitalist bent, surely his difficulty also stemmed from the relationship he cultivated with the beans. Thoreau claimed to love his beans. He invested time and effort into their cultivation. He appreciated his experiences in the field because they provided a platform for engaging with manifestations of wildness.

Drawn out temporal relationships are necessary for increased, though always incomplete, recognition of Otherness. We know that Thoreau believes recognition is important because he conveys the minute details of color, texture and sound to his readers. He appreciates natural and co-created sounds so much that he often speaks of them in a musical manner. That Thoreau conveys them to the reader shows just how significant he believes them to be.

When I paused to lean on my hoe, these sounds and sights I heard and saw any where [sic] in the row, a part of the inexhaustible entertainment which the country offers. (2004, 154)

Thoreau's sentiment shows the deep appreciation he has for Nature, as well as the exquisite attention he affords to his immediate reality. He finds "inexhaustible entertainment" all around. Thoreau is so attuned to, and appreciative of, his surroundings that everywhere he looks, and in

everything he perceives, he finds deep satisfaction. If he attempted to control wildness by subverting its manifestations, the deep satisfaction Thoreau finds in everything would be impossible. Instead of finding entertainment to appreciate, Thoreau would find problems to attend to.

Even during his descriptions of battles with the “weedy dead” Thoreau seems to unearth satisfaction from hoeing. He remorsefully understands he is subduing wildness, but like other subsistence communities Thoreau shows respect. Hunting and farming are ancient, time-tested human acts and many people find them pleasurable while still respecting the Others they necessarily subdue. Thoreau happily understands that he will hoe for seven more hours the next day and he does not begrudge the weeds for that.

Though he finds entertainment in his experiences with manifestations of wildness, Thoreau’s esteem of Other-than-humans is not necessarily an anthropocentric valuation. He is receptive to Other-than-humans. As Bekoff and Oms indicate, an appropriate relationship with the Other-than-human world is one that affords Other-than-humans a voice. It is a receptive relationship that arises from respect, is nurtured through time-tested experience, tends to include appreciation of the Other and results in acts of co-creation.

A good analogy for this process is the making of music. As musicians know, creating music with Others requires the players to be receptive to one another. Particularly if they are not following a score and instead play in an impromptu manner. They listen to and read one another. They feed off one another. They open space and take space when it is open. In many ways, music is a conversation. Good musicians recognize the autonomy of their playing partners and respect one another’s musicianship, while simultaneously acknowledging the common ground they must reach to create cohesive music. Additionally, playing partners become more receptive

to and understanding of one another with time. They form an appropriate intimate relationship to the extent that, though they are actively co-creating and respecting one another as individuals, they might appear to be acting as one voice.

In an instance of musical co-creation, Thoreau discusses how his farming methods result in a form of intimate interaction with Nature:

When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans. (2004, 154)

We must take Thoreau literally on this point: the interplay of his hoe and the stones created sounds that he perceived as music and, significantly, “that music echoed to the woods and the sky.” Because we are concerned with Thoreau’s co-creative relationship with unfettered Nature, his perception that music results from his experiential *interaction* with Nature is crucial.

The rocks and his hoe create music and the forest participates in the echo. Co-creation is the group effort of a wild community. Thoreau feels engaged as both the co-creating being of the initial sound and the appreciative beneficiary of the echoed sound produced by Nature.

Taking his assertions of intimacy and co-creation further, Thoreau says that his “hoe played the *Rans des Vaches*” for his beans. The *Rans des Vaches* is a Swiss pastoral song whereby the herdsman call their cows to the milking in the morning. These are cows left to their own wild devices: grazing freely until milking time, at which point the cows autonomously choose to engage the herdsman in an act of co-creation. The sentiments communicated by the choral score are those of respect, love and tender affection. That Thoreau claims to play the pastoral song with his hoe is an expression of the kind of intimate communicative relationship between autonomous beings that he has with the beans and other manifestations of wildness. The kind of relationships Oma and Bekoff suggest we cultivate: those of co-creation, intimacy and respect.

### *III. On-Farm Manifestations of Wildness*

We have seen how Thoreau's respect for beans as autonomous Others leads to appreciation and co-creative interaction with them. We also noted that respect for Others is important, so we are not surprised by any manifestations that adversely impact our human goals. While we will see that manifestations of wildness can be beneficial for the goals of the farmer, Thoreau concedes that wildness can be an enemy as well: "My enemies are worms, cool days, and most of all woodchucks" (2004, 150).

Each of the three enemies Thoreau mentions above represents one important sphere of wildness. Worms represent one of the dynamic biotic participants in the web of soil wildness, which is part of the inherent wildness of the land. Cool days are a manifestation of wildness inherent in weather patterns and Earth processes. Woodchucks account for the wildness of animals on and around the farm. Rounding out his interaction with the different manifestations of Other-than-human wildness on the farm, Thoreau mentions his Trojan war against weeds in a separate passage. Here he tips his hat to plant wildness, which works together with soil wildness to comprise the inherent wildness of the land. It is easy to see how these different spheres of wildness overlap and are co-creators amongst themselves. Their inter-workings promote an increase in the vitality of the wild biotic community as a whole. Wildness is everywhere and its manifestations sometimes help humans achieve goals and often conflict with human aims.

Thoreau shows us how manifestations of wildness are innate. They tend to be ubiquitous and pervasive, as Birch alludes to when he mentions the "soul of wildness." For instance, even at Thoreau's admission that he disrupted the groundhogs' herb garden, he implies that these wild indigenous herbs – "johnswort and the rest" – might return to the area. He admits to merely breaking up the herb garden, not destroying or erasing it. He understands that the autonomous

drive of the St. Johns Wort implies its eventual return<sup>8</sup>. With his understanding that Johnswort might return, Thoreau acknowledges the autonomy and ever-present existence of wildness as part of Earth's systems. In doing so he relinquishes typical human illusions of control over these manifestations of wildness. Again, the relinquishment of control is important because, in this instance, Thoreau's frustration at the continuous return of weeds is mitigated. When we do not expect to control every manifestation of wildness, we can appreciate them and engage co-creatively rather than combatively.

Because he engages in appropriate co-creative relationships and attunes to wildness, Thoreau still respects the autonomy and Otherness of his "enemies." We will see that the co-creation taking place is as much about Thoreau's personal cultivation of innate wildness as it is about the growth of beans. He realizes the presence of these enemies is contrary to his goal of raising beans, while he simultaneously recognizes and appreciates them as Others with their own reasons for being.

Because he respects them, Thoreau does not hold his goals in priority over those of wild Others. His insistence on maintaining a stance of egalitarianism is a necessary step for embracing Otherness through intimate connection. For example, Thoreau follows his accusations of an antagonistic enemy by saying:

The woodchucks have nibbled me for a quarter of an acre clean. But what right had I to oust johnswort and the rest, and break up their ancient herb garden? Soon however, the remaining beans will be too tough for them and go forward to meet new foes. (2004, 150)

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<sup>8</sup> They will return provided future conditions are appropriate, conducive, and receptive for wildness. If we go to Walden Pond today, surely we can say whether "Johnswort and the rest" returned. Thoreau acknowledges the chance of Johnswort returning because he implicitly acknowledges the prior and future human impacts on the land and views himself as part of the temporal undulation between nature and culture. This is further evidence of Thoreau's understanding of himself as part and parcel of a dynamic biotic community. Johnswort grows from rhizomes. This means that even though Thoreau chops and breaks up the plants, their roots lay dormant under the surface, waiting for appropriate conditions to grow. Even compacted below the sea of concrete at Walden, pieces of Johnswort might lay dormant waiting for the proper conditions so that they may spring forth and assert themselves.

This is the sort of respectful engagement we need to have as wild farmers. Thoreau understands that groundhogs inhabited the area before him and even before the “extinct nation” that “anciently dwelt” (2004, 150) there. He expressed frustration with the groundhogs and admits to breaking up their “ancient herb garden” that they tended to and consumed (150). Thoreau somewhat playfully refers to them as his enemies, because their wild actions are contrary to his goals of raising beans. He respects the groundhogs’ while expressing frustration that their actions are contrary to his goals. However, though he displaces their indigenous food source, he empathizes with the groundhogs’ needs as Others and understands the effects of his farming endeavors on the land.

By now we have seen how Thoreau’s respect extends to Others whose objectives are contrary to his. However, one of our aims for this project is to show that wildness and farming are not at odds with one another. In fact, manifestations of wildness are sometimes beneficial to the focal farmer’s goals. We will briefly discuss several examples of Thoreau’s co-creation with more amiable manifestations of wildness, which will lead to a discussion of Thoreau’s own wildness.

As our exemplar focal farmer, Thoreau pays exquisite attention to the community of wildness with which he co-creatively tends to the beans. He acknowledges, “My auxiliaries are the dews and rains which water this dry soil, and what fertility is in the soil itself (...)” (2004, 150). Using his description as a starting point, we can more thoroughly examine how the farmer co-creates with wildness on the farm.

First, Thoreau addresses what I refer to as inherent wildness present in climate cycles. He states that dews and rains are helpful to his agricultural efforts because they water the soil. We will see in Chapter 3 that climate cycles are one of the major manifestations of wildness that

industrial agriculture partially severs us from. However, like Thoreau, we will also learn that ignoring such manifestations as cool days is to the farmer's detriment.

The second Other-than-human manifestation of wildness inherent in the land is soil wildness. Thoreau acknowledges it by expressing respect and appreciation for the fertility already present in the soil. Respecting soil autonomy, Thoreau claims that the soil possesses a certain magnetism and turning it by hand, rather than with a plow, helps soil fertility (2004, 157). Hand-tilling is a minimally manipulative method of engaging soil wildness so that it maintains its dynamic communal life-supporting potential. We discuss why below and in Chapter 3.

Thoreau's contention that soil possesses certain magnetism is echoed in Lowenfels and Lewis' book *Teaming with Microbes*. Lowenfels and Lewis (2010, 23) explain that the soil food web is composed of a diverse array of organisms that thrive as part of a dynamic community of life and death: "When any member of a soil food web dies, it becomes fodder for other members of the community." In death, the bodies of community members are suspended in the soil. This provides a more stable food source for living members of the community. Harsh tilling methods destroy soil organisms that compose the dynamic biotic web. Lowenfels and Lewis (27) explain that manipulating soil with more extreme methods than hand tilling "destroys soil structure and eventually saps soil of necessary air." Turning the soil via mechanical methods destroys necessary fungal hyphae, worms and arthropods. Lowenfels and Lewis convey how machine powered methods eventually sterilize soil of its life. Machine powered methods subdue the wild, co-creating organisms that live dynamically with one another. They point out, "Any chain is only as strong as its weakest link: if there is a gap in the soil food web, the system will break down and stop functioning properly" (27). If farmers wish to avoid using a plethora of soil amendments, they should pay heed to Lowenfels and Lewis and follow Thoreau's example.

Thoreau shows the depth of his respect by refraining from manipulating the soil in significant ways. He claims that other farmers add “leached ashes or plaster” to their soil (2004, 153). But Thoreau prefers the brown thrasher’s co-creative “topdressing” (2004, 153). In fact, Thoreau even quips that his reluctance to alter soil composition with chemical amendments is because he is “squatting” (52, 62) on the land. Thoreau’s double entendre shows his personal and intimate interaction with the soil. He is in fact adding soil fertility in a very natural way: by embracing his innate wildness. Through this most basic act of co-creation we see he is living wildly, as “part and parcel of Nature” (Thoreau 1975, 592). Through slow attunement, Thoreau aligns his acts with those of a wild animal – the brown thrasher.

As co-creative components of the land’s inherent wildness, soil wildness improves the wild vitality of the beans<sup>9</sup> (plant wildness) by promoting their contact with, and attunement to, a dynamic biotic community of wild soil life. The beans become more wild because they gain autonomy from slow, attentive and attuned cultivation. Due to Thoreau’s hand-working of the soil, the beans can survive more independently of his actions. Because they are participating in a more integrated way with the dynamic biotic community of soil wildness, they gain resilience.

Moreover, human wildness arises from Thoreau’s method of interaction. In the case of bean farming, Thoreau (2004, 150) proclaims, “They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus.” Here, Thoreau refers to Antaeus, a giant in Greek mythology who gained strength from touching Earth, because Earth was his mother (Cramer 2004, 150). Thoreau cultivates this connection, in part, because of the seven miles of beans he planted. Through prolonged, daily mental and physical engagement with manifestations of wildness, Thoreau slowly attunes to his inborn wildness.

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<sup>9</sup> For their part, beans are a legume and fix nitrogen into the soil. The nitrogen feeds mycorrhizae, bacteria and the web of life in the soil.

Co-creation is a method of attunement, particularly in an agricultural setting where the focal farmer must adhere to and respond to daily rhythms. Importantly, this co-creative engagement is such that Thoreau also becomes more wild – more in tune, accepting and acquiescent to Otherness. We see his relinquishment of control over manifestations when he disregards the advice of other farmers and hoes the bean field early in the morning “while the dew is on,” (2004, 151). He attunes to adverse daily temperature fluctuations by inhabiting the morning coolness, because “later in the day the sun blistered [his] feet” (2004, 151). Instead of putting on shoes and restricting his experience of manifestations of wildness, Thoreau responds to blisters on his feet by altering his daily rhythms. The typical practice for vegetable farming is to refrain from entering a wet field because water acts as a conduit for spreading numerous bacterial and fungal plant diseases (Hagerdorn and Inglis 1986). So, while a neighbor farmer cautioned Thoreau to alter his farming practices (Cramer 2004, 152) to avoid these diseases, Thoreau declined because he considered both his beans and himself in their engagement with wildness<sup>10</sup>. Instead, he altered his practices to foster a more cordial relationship with wildness.

Thoreau’s method of hand-cultivation is the kind of intimate relationship with the wild community that aids our appreciation of wildness. In a display of focal farming, Thoreau’s care and willingness to expend intimate physical energy, as a result of his appreciation of wildness, is truly reciprocal in the physical world. His methods cultivate wildness in the soil. That soil wildness cultivates life in the plants. The subsequent reinforcement of these farming practices propel Thoreau, or any farmer, to continue to engage manifestations of wildness in similarly respectful ways. And that engagement impacts the farmer. This is an example of how a wild community reinforces itself.

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<sup>10</sup> Lowenfels and Lewis would contend that Thoreau’s methods are sound, because his overall farming practice promote resilience. So the beans will not be as susceptible to disease.

With appropriate practices the farmer can cultivate wildness in herself, in the plants and animals she raises, in the soil and in the biosphere encompassing her farm – including the non-agricultural plants, animals and water. She co-creates within the context of a matrix of wildness. We must keep in mind the reciprocal relationship that remains between the farmer and wildness: any wildness the farmer opens conditions for<sup>11</sup>, in turn increases the amount of wildness the farmer interacts with. By increasing the amount of intimate engagement between himself and manifest wildness, Thoreau was more receptive to cultivating his own wildness.

From our discussion so far we can infer several key components of human wildness. First, we must keep in mind our discussion of Thomas Birch: wildness is “inarticulable” [sic]. However, the theme of interaction and co-creation with manifestations of wildness is crucial. When we become wild, we recognize our interconnectedness with, as Thoreau says, “Nature,” and we embrace intimate relationships with manifestations of wildness.

To engage our own wildness, first, we must regard Nature as a free and autonomous being – as the embodiment of ‘Otherness’ as defined by Thomas Birch. Next, by acknowledging the autonomy of Nature as an Other, we can recognize our lack of control over Nature. Because we cannot control autonomous Others, we must regard wild Others with respect as called for by Harvey. By respectfully approaching wildness as Otherness, we open ourselves for a co-creative communal experience that enables the human partner in the relationship to become more wild through her attunement to manifest wildness. This is the part of the co-creative exchange that the wildness in Nature bestows on the human partner in the relationship.

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<sup>11</sup> By ‘opening conditions for wildness’ in an agricultural setting, I simply mean practices that promote more life within the context of a dynamic biotic community rather than practices that reduce life. So to go a step beyond our tilling example, composting opens conditions for wildness because, not only is the act of composting creating conditions for aerobic and anaerobic bacteria to flourish, but the use of that compost creates conditions for soil life and plant life to flourish as well. Whereas the use of fertilizers reduces the interaction and overall life of biotic communities by adding salts to the agroecosystem that are harmful to soil life (Lowenfels and Lewis, p.148, 149).

#### *IV. Concluding Remarks*

We have developed a characterization of wildness, generated appropriate ways of interacting with wildness, and witnessed Thoreau's engagement with wildness in an agricultural setting as our human archetype for focal farming. We now move to discuss contemporary agricultural technologies to determine if and how they might be appropriately used to maintain a responsible engagement with wildness. For this task I turn to Heidegger to investigate the impact of technology on human engagement with the world. In Chapter 4, I will return to Thoreau's method of bean cultivation and show how it illuminates the idea of focal farming, something that provides a good antidote to the industrial farming of today.

### **Chapter 3: Technology and the Distancing of Relationship**

#### *I. Introduction*

Thus far we have discussed wildness. Using the work of Birch and Nash we characterized wildness as autonomous and Other. As such, Bekoff, Birch, Oms and Turner helped to show that an appropriate way to relate to wildness and promote human-wilding involves experiential, respectful, close, prolonged and attentive contact with the various manifestations of wildness. In Chapter 2 we cast Thoreau's manner of engagement as a mold for what I refer to as "focal farming." Thoreau's practices include farming methods that require us to place the Other-than-human world near our center of concern rather than regarding Other-than-humans as mere resources for our goals.

Not all agricultural practices meet the criteria for this kind of farming. In the contemporary agricultural landscape heavy mechanization is prevalent on all inhabited continents. Therefore, to address wildness in the context of modern agriculture, we need to look at how our modern agricultural technologies<sup>12</sup> impact our relationships with the Other-than-human world. By "modern technology" I mean technologies that supplant human physical engagement with machine and chemical power as well as replace human mental engagement with information technologies. We shall investigate modern technology using the work of Heidegger. We will tend to the problem of how our agricultural technologies influence our respect for and connection with manifestations of Other-than-human wildness. Ultimately, we will see the impact of our altered relationships on the wilding of the farmer.

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<sup>12</sup> In this paper I use the word 'technology' synonymously with 'modern technology'.

## *II. Modern Technology and Commodification*

During the Bremen Lectures of 1949, Heidegger discusses the essence of modern technology to give an account of its impact on the world and on humans. One of the consequences of modern technology that Heidegger (2012) repeatedly visits is “distancelessness.” He means that our technologies allow us to communicate with humans around the globe in an instant; or travel in a day over distances that would have taken our ancestors years to traverse. Heidegger claims that although our technologies allow us to master distances, such metric dominance does nothing to bring us into a more intimate connection with the world. Instead Heidegger believes that modern technology has the effect of removing humans from an intimate connection with the world despite giving us the ability to disregard space and time as obstacles.

Now we can fly over weather systems and outrun the sunrise at speeds well beyond human scale. We interact with our cell phones in waiting rooms instead of interacting with the people sitting next to us. We can send an email to our grandmother instead of writing her a letter. These technological removals occur on a spectrum. But each step along the spectrum further subverts the sort of relationships we described in Chapter 1 and witnessed Thoreau cultivate in Chapter 2.

Our lives have become enmeshed with technology since Thoreau’s time. Technologies offer us services. That is why we adopt them. As Heidegger’s distancelessness alludes to, they also decrease our physical and mental interaction with the planet and one another. We are concerned about our relationships with Others in a contemporary agricultural setting, so we need to examine why our technologies alter our mental engagement with the world. Albert Borgmann’s work proves helpful for exploring this further.

In his 2006 book, *Real American Ethics*, Borgmann discusses the nature of commodities and distinguishes between economic and moral commodification. Economic commodification means monetizing a good, service or event. It is the type of commodification we normally think of. When we sell apples grown from a tree in our backyard, we have commodified them economically. When large agricultural operations sell bulk soy beans and corn to granaries, they are economically commodified as well.

Moral commodification is the more insidious form of commodification. It is the form of commodification that might more easily go unnoticed and is more germane to our conversation. Borgmann indicates that moral commodification makes something comfortably available, while removing elements of time, space and community from the morally commodified thing (2006, 153-154). The story surrounding the morally commodified thing becomes obscured. Borgmann's idea of moral commodification pushes Heidegger's notion of distancelessness further.

The apples grown in our community are not morally commodified to any large extent. They are perishable and only available during a particular window of time. We often say they are "in season." As local consumers we can understand that their growth is connected with weather specific to our place. Perhaps the apples are sold in a neighbor's front yard or at the local farmers' market. They are economically commodified, but they are not divorced from their land-base or community to any large extent.

They are also still imbued with a sense of community. The consumers of the apples exchange money and conversation with the person who tends to the apple tree and picks its fruit. Engaging in such communal interactions allows consumers and farmers to discuss a particular storm that broke a branch of the tree or the crow that caws while pecking the fruit every morning. These communal conversations add further depth and rootedness to the story of the apple – they ground

it in its place. The relationship we form with the farmer helps to inject significance into our experience of the apple. In turn we acknowledge the apple as a wild Other that participates with the community of wild Others. We also understand our position in the community more deeply.

However, the soybeans and corn sold to the granary and in turn sold to large distributors and processors are morally commodified. They are partially removed from time, because they often sit in granaries and distributors for months or longer. Once processed, their shelf life is close to indefinite. They are removed from location because distributors ship them far and wide to be processed. They are shipped again after processing. The result is that any product containing corn or soybeans could have been grown on any commodity-crop farm virtually anywhere in the world. As consumers we really cannot know much about them. Consequently we are ignorant to, tend to forget, or take for granted our food's connection to particular land-bases. The result is that we forget *our* connection to the land. For similar reasons, agricultural crops grown by such methods are divorced from a sense of human community. In any event, we cannot attach a communal story to the goods produced from these commodified crops.

By removing the story surrounding the object, moral commodification via technology takes away our ability to consider the object's existence beyond our uses. It also removes our ability to be affected by the object. In essence, technology tends to remove the autonomy of Others through objectification and conscription for future use. We cannot respect Others if we fail to recognize their autonomy. Moral commodification, made more prevalent by technology, helps to sever our relationships with Others by blinding us to their existence as Others.

With regard to the loss of relationship, Heidegger (2012, 27-28) states, "where distancelessness reigns we are really no longer approached concernfully by anything at all." Concernful approach can be thought of as a product of the relationships that we attempt to

cultivate with the Other-than-human world. Opening ourselves to the message of Others and engaging them with concerned approach can provide a foundation for intimacy: for mental and physical engagement.

Because our engagement with others occurs on a personal level we need to examine what happens when that personal engagement is severed. For Heidegger, the human interaction with technology is essential to consider. Heidegger asserts that modern technology is not a value-neutral tool to be used by the human for human ends. Rather, humans are conscripted by the essence of technology in the same manner as is the remainder of Nature.

Technological conscription occurs because of the tendency of technological devices to continually order reality into discrete, homogenous pieces. These pieces are then available to further the purpose of the device. Conscription occurs on an almost psychologically subterranean level. Our technological devices, what they do and what they are used for, have subsisted as part of the background to our lives for so long that we are desensitized to their effects. With that primer we can understand the endless chain of requisitioning that takes place in the world of modern farming when soil is conscripted as a resource rather than regarded as a medium for a dynamic biotic community to take root.

### *III. Soil Commodification and Community Wildness*

The dynamic biotic soil community is composed of bacteria, fungi, algae and slime molds, protozoa, nematodes, arthropods, earthworms, gastropods, reptiles, mammals, birds and, of course, plants. Healthy soil teems with co-creative lifeforms that rely on one another to maintain a dynamic biotic existence. Each of these manifestations of wildness contributes to the nutrient cycle of the soil in some way. Arthropods eat organic matter. Mycorrhizal fungi keep nematodes

at bay. Plants help move water through the system thus enabling the other members of the soil community to thrive in their dynamic existence. It is an organized chaos that maintains life. A chaos we can refer to as wild, even as it promotes overall community stability. Every co-creative participant in the soil community helps to keep it stable, even though the organisms are dynamic.

Lowenfels and Lewis (2010) highlight the constant change that occurs in the soil food web. They devote an entire book to the intricate balance of organisms consuming and being consumed by one another; feeding and being fed by one another; working together in life and death to promote life and death. Lowenfels and Lewis explain how plants secrete exudates, such as carbohydrates and proteins. The exudates attract other manifestations of soil wildness so that the dynamic biotic community can take hold and flourish:

every single plant you are seeing [above the ground] produces exudates and attracts microbiology to its rhizosphere. This community in turn attracts micro- and macroarthropods, worms, mollusks, and the rest of a complete soil food web. It is a natural system, and operates just fine without interference from man-made fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. (179)

Not only does the soil community function “just fine” without these readily available chemical technologies, but it actually can only thrive without them. Pesticides, herbicides and fungicides are designed to kill life. The food chain always starts at the bottom. So, the farmer who cultivates soil wildness needs to avoid chemical inputs that suppress the dynamism of the soil community. When the farmer uses life-suppressing chemical technologies, he severs his co-creative ties with manifestations of soil wildness. His understanding of the community with which he works is obscured by morally commodified chemical inputs.

At the time of the Bremen Lectures, both nature and chemicals were thought of as standing reserve (Heidegger 2012, 42-43). Today agricultural technicians<sup>13</sup> regard soil components nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (N-P-K) as standing reserve. The agricultural

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<sup>13</sup> For now we can understand agricultural technician to mean industrial farmer. In the next section I elaborate on my use of this specific terminology.

technician understands that as long as there is enough N-P-K in soil with the proper pH, his crops will grow. Because agriculture is thoroughly absorbed into the technological paradigm, if the farmer does not have the appropriate amount of nutrients in his soil, he can simply buy nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium and pH altering chemicals. These nutrients and chemicals, known as “amendments,” are part of the commodified agricultural resources sold by agribusinesses. They are readily available from commercial agriculture companies: always ready to easily use, delivered in uniformly quantified bags on pallets and standard enough to fit any tractor PTO<sup>14</sup> attachment designed for them. They have been requisitioned in the Heideggerian sense.

The requisitioning tendency of modern agriculture permits minimal room for Thoreauvian engagement. Thoreau engaged the soil slowly, recognizing the autonomy of weeds and worms. He paused to appreciate and deepen his relationship with the manifestations of wildness that contribute life to that community. Agricultural technicians work as much land as they can, as quickly as possible, and follow the formulas provided on the bags of their commodified soil amendments. Like most of us, to make a living, they do what they have to.

By engaging in this Faustian deal, the farmer’s relationship with the soil is altered in two major ways. First, it changes because he views the soil as an economic commodity to be objectified and used for his ends. Second, the farmer also morally commodifies the soil. By using chemical soil amendments his relationship with soil is reduced from one of respect to one of ownership and manipulation. He takes the community of life in the soil for granted. The farmer has become an agricultural technician. His chemicals and fertilizers do not improve the dynamic biotic community. They destroy it. The agricultural technician’s methods do not respect the land’s autonomy or, what Thompson (2010, 115) deems, the land’s “expectations.”

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<sup>14</sup> PTO stands for “Power Take-Off.” The PTO is the spinning implement on the back of the tractor that takes power from the engine, typically through a shaft-driven connection, and allows engine power to be used on different farming implements such as sprayers, rototillers, seeders, etc., that attach to the back of the tractor.

By losing our relationship with the land and failing to be receptive of Otherness, humans are resources. We are part of the cycle of requisitioning. As Heidegger (2012, 30-31) states, “requisitioning has wrested away all that presences and placed it into complete orderability (...) even the human belongs to the carrying out of such a requisitioning.” That is, the use of technological devices makes an instrument out of the human (61), accentuating the distancelessness of which Heidegger speaks.

While we started at the ground level, with the requisitioning of the community of soil wildness via chemicals, we shall see how further requisitioning occurs when machines are used on the farm. We focus on tractor technologies because they are virtually ubiquitous in agriculture. However, first we briefly illustrate how machine technologies tend to requisition and alienate the human participant. This provides a broader context from which to view farm technologies and to contextualize the idea of an agricultural technician.

#### *IV. Technicians: Humans Requisitioned*

As a piecemeal academic I recently took on work bottling at a local brewery. One might think that bottling beer at a small, local brewery involves some sort of beer brewing knowledge – some sort of engagement with the craft. However, the machinery requisitions the bottlers into little more than technicians. They must know how to fix the mechanized bottle washer, the mechanized bottle filler and the mechanized bottle capper. Bottlers need to maintain a steady stream of bottles flowing onto the bottle washer. They need to lift bottles off pallets and load them onto a conveyer at the pace required by the machinery for optimal efficiency. After the machine washes and fills bottles, technicians must keep their eyes on the conveyer belt to be sure bottles are labeled because the machine sometimes malfunctions. Finally, technicians stack filled

cases of beer onto pallets for shipment. Again bottlers must work at the pace required by the machinery. All of this enables the next step in the requisitioning process, shipping, to take place.

When it reaches the level of filling bottles and cans, the modern micro-brewery is no longer the Trappist-monk style brewery that we envision. The story surrounding the beer washes away. The workers never practice the art of brewing and they most likely never see the outside world during their shift. They certainly do not see the barley, malt, yeast or water that went into the beer. Surely, the now economically and morally commodified barley and malt came from some field, some place, and grew during a particular season. However the workers are divorced from that thought. They are requisitioned. The multiple dimensions surrounding their assembly line positions are closed from view. Their removal from the world is such that even if it rains the bottlers might know only because their cars are wet when they exit the building.

Thus, a danger is that when we use machinery, the machinery uses us. We must adhere to its pace – whether fast or slow. A slow computer makes our thoughts wait for it to process and causes anxiety at times. A fast bottling machine requires the assembly line workers to move more quickly than a human-scale pace. Consequently the workers' thoughts turn to the processes of the machine. The workers concern themselves with the way in which they must use their bodies to interact with the machine. There is no time to process other stimuli.

In very real ways, the engagement of mind and body by our devices is the disengagement of the mind and body from a world of Otherness. The varying dimensions of the Other-than-human world cannot concernfully approach us because we are not open to the information it has to share. Distancelessness blinds us. However, while the machinery engaged my body and mind

during the bottling experience, it is obvious that I remained autonomous in my thoughts. At the least, I remained autonomous enough to reflect at times on my engagement with the machinery<sup>15</sup>.

In a sense, thinking is personal autonomy. We witnessed Thoreau stop to contemplate and appreciate Otherness during his daily hoeing. Our thoughts permit us to engage a situation in ways we choose, even if that situation takes place in a sterile and mechanical environment. However, the faster the machine moves, the less time we have to think autonomous thoughts. Instead we must mind the machine in all of its intricacies. We must concentrate on our physical actions as they pertain to the machine and let our receptivity to the wild world fall away.

Likewise, when our machines become more complex we must pay attention to more moving parts and intricacies and attend to our thoughts outside of the machine less. That is to say, the more thoroughly the device engages us, the less autonomy we have to be entertained by our own thoughts or to experience the wild world beyond us and within us. Our increased engagement by the machine results in our increased conscription by the technological world. We are less autonomous and more standardized – more orderable and beholden to the needs of the machine.

I recognize that my labor at the bottling factory was assembly line labor. As a consequence I should expect to engage machines to a large degree. However, on the farm most people expect a different type of experience. Farms are settings that people typically regard as natural and idyllic. They are the sort of place you might find Thoreau hoeing beans. On idyllic farms such as these, self-directed, autonomous thought is paramount.

Agricultural technologies often remove the need for thought beyond the immediate needs of the machine. At the same time our technological devices tend to slip into the background. So

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<sup>15</sup> Though, in doing so, I had to pause momentarily from my mental focus on my bodily engagement with the machinery, which only occurred if the machine moved slow enough to warrant such a break in focus.

their impacts go unnoticed. Therefore it is first necessary to look at one of the most basic and ubiquitous farm technologies – the tractor – and investigate how it impacts wildness and farmers.

### V. *Agricultural Technology: Tractors*

Tractors are dangerous. Today's industrial agriculture behemoths are almost unfathomably large – weighing as much as 45 tons<sup>16</sup>. Therefore the agricultural technician must exercise extreme caution while operating these farm technologies<sup>17</sup>. Extreme caution while operating a tractor generally means two things: keep your pace and stay in a straight line. Driving a tractor in a line is not necessarily difficult, but it requires focus. Like my bottling experience, the necessity of paying attention to the machinery trumps the ability to pay attention to anything else.

Surely when driving a tractor one can lose focus momentarily. If the sunset is gorgeous, the row might even be slightly crooked because the purple and orange hues were simply too commanding to ignore entirely and the technician's thoughts wandered from the task at hand. However, it is sheer folly for the agricultural technician to lose complete focus from the machine and allow his thoughts and observations to be occupied elsewhere. The danger is too great.

Because technology commands our attention, we lose the ability to become intimate with Otherness. The sunset entails so much more than colors dispersed in the sky. It is the gradual, time-slogging, meandering death of daylight as the night-time world comes alive. Colors crawl across the spectrum from blue to electric yellow and pink, to purple and orange, to blood red, and fading to a deep blue canopy cascading with stars, as deer emerge from their daytime wooded invisibility to graze lazily while the tractor roars passed. A tractor operator cannot spare the attention to notice that kind of nuance. Surely we have all been intimate with at least one sunset

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<sup>16</sup> [www.worldrecordacademy.com/transport/largest\\_farm\\_tractor\\_world\\_record\\_set\\_by\\_Big\\_Bud\\_Tractor\\_101647](http://www.worldrecordacademy.com/transport/largest_farm_tractor_world_record_set_by_Big_Bud_Tractor_101647)

<sup>17</sup> In general, the injury and fatality rate for farm workers dwarfs that of all other industries. [www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/agriculturaloperations/](http://www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/agriculturaloperations/)

in our lives and perhaps the farmer is desensitized by the familiarity of so many similar scenes. But farm technologies do more than merely detract from our mental engagement by distracting our visual attention.

In addition to alienating us from our experience of Otherness through our basic sense of sight, tractors are loud. They are loud enough to warrant hearing protection during operation. So, as the sun sets, we also lose intimacy with the birds that sing their twilight sonatas. One of the main ways Thoreau co-created with wildness was through musical recognition and exchange with Other-than-human manifestations of wildness. While our auditory engagement need not have musical overtones, some of our agricultural technologies, such as tractors, sever this basic human way of experiencing the world.

Tractors also displace our tactile faculties. When hoeing, Thoreau literally sinks his sun-scorched feet into the dirt to experience and reverberate foot-blistered wildness. When driving the tractor, the agricultural technician can see soil compact beneath the weight of the tires. However, being tangibly intimate with every square yard of the field is not an option from the seat of a tractor. A retort might be that the farmer can be physically intimate in other ways; perhaps by taking soil samples. When we look at Tom Farms LLC we will see the reduced need for such intimate acts as we increase our use of agricultural technologies.

Adding to the divorce of the farmer from intimate contact with manifestations of wildness, most new tractors on the market today come with a cab. Certainly for farmers, the comfort provided by a cab is appealing. It permits farmers to work longer and suffer less unpleasantness by effectively cutting them off from the elements. But recall from our discussion of Bekoff, Turner and Thoreau in the first chapter, that gross physical contact with weather and climate is one of the ways humans attune to the Other-than-human world.

So for both the human and Other-than-human, the requisitioning continues. Now agricultural technicians can sit in their air conditioned tractors all day and into the night if necessary. They can call upon mp3s, cds, satellite or local radio and tune out the sounds of the moment. The increase of technological devices in the tractor shows the tendency of technology to make the world readily available by morally commodifying elements of time, space and community. And through moral commodification, Otherness vanishes.

As a further example of technological insidiousness and moral commodification, the sound of the radio displaces the noise of the tractor. So when driving a tractor, we might more easily forget or ignore our place in the requisitioning. Without the steel rattle of a diesel compression engine banging in our ears, the tractor more ably slips into the background of the everyday. We lose context for our actions.

In any case, the agricultural technician does not experience the basic weather patterns that his plants interact with. Agricultural technicians cut themselves off from situations of attunement. Unlike Thoreau, agricultural technicians do not need to immerse themselves in the cold rain and snow, wind, or heat as often. They are distanced from some basic manifestations of wildness simply by virtue of climbing into the tractor and closing the door.

Though these examples are largely based on physical experience of Otherness, we must remember that our technological devices do more than simply impact our physical relationships. As we noted, they also influence how we mentally interact with manifestations of Otherness. When farmers become agricultural technicians they are, in a sense, working on the assembly line. The farmer must adhere to the pace of the machinery while driving a tractor, whether during field preparations that include tilling and seeding, during field maintenance that includes spraying fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides and fungicides, or during the harvest.

Tractors have set speeds determined by their gear ratios. While the operator might shift gears, most tractors' PTOs and attached farm devices operate optimally at specific engine speeds. Thus, the machinery literally dictates the pace at which the technician must operate. In farming, as in beer bottling, for the machine to function properly and perform efficiently, it must stay in motion. The pace is constant and it is the agricultural technician's job to keep it moving.

So the agricultural technician does not have the option to pause from his task and take a moment to embrace Otherness around him. Nor does he have the time to notice it. His technologies mentally cut him off from the relationship with otherness. So he cannot become deeply intimate with autonomous Others. Even if he notices Others, he cannot pause and reflect on the thrasher or the woodchuck as beings in themselves. He cannot respect them in the Thoreauvian manner. Instead the agricultural technician keeps the tractor moving straight, with meager experience of the Otherness manifesting around him.

## VI. *Agricultural Technician: Case Study*

Heidegger believes that, because it conscripts things into a ready-to-use context, modern technology engages the world with a sort of perpetual motion that increases its scope and impact as time progresses. The reason that the essence of technology achieves this self-amplifying perpetuation is due to its very nature. By continuously conscripting and ordering nature, modern technologies create more resources to be used for the purpose of further conscripting nature via technology. This has significant implications for the future of farming.

For example, in November 2014 Quentin Hardy of the New York Times reported that Kip Tom, a seventh generation farmer living in Indiana, uses increasing amounts of information technology to farm two major commodity crops: corn and soybeans. Since Kip Tom inherited

control of the farm in the 1970s, the size of his family's farm has expanded from 700 acres to 20,000 acres (Hardy 2014). Tom and other farmers around the country use information technologies that include satellite-connected tractors and combines covered in sensors that record in-field soil chemistry as often as every three seconds while the vehicles are moving.

With increased technology, farmers no longer need to sample soil or be intimate with their farm. The combination of machine, chemical and information technology supplants actions that promote intimate engagement. This sort of information recording and resource ordering for future use is precisely the pitfall of technology that Heidegger warned of. It supplants the information exchange that Oma suggests is essential for appropriate engagement. By sampling soil every three seconds and creating satellite maps of the field so chemical companies can pre-order necessary soil amendments to Tom's door, new farm technologies "objectify, define, and analyze" soil wildness, incarcerating it in the Birchean sense. They also remove the autonomy of Tom and farmers like him – reducing the human to another link in the commodity chain.

Since the so-called "agricultural revolution" of the 1970s<sup>18</sup>, farm technologies have developed to the extent that an agricultural technician in the driver seat of a cell-modem carrying, self-driving tractor, does not actually need to drive. For instance, Hardy (2014) reports that instead of driving the tractor, Tom's combine driver Ernie Burbrink "sorts real-time data about moisture, yields and net bushels per acre on his iPad, sending important information by wireless modem to distant cages of computer servers that begin analyzing the data for next season's planting." So, even though he is not occupied by the act of driving, his mind is consumed by the machine's requisitioning interpretation of wildness. He is already thinking

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<sup>18</sup> The agricultural revolution is a term that came to prominence under Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, who famously asked farmers to plow "fencerow to fencerow." He preached technological efficiencies and the policies that began under him created a widening rift between farmers and the land.

about next season, which decreases his ability to mentally engage with wildness manifesting in the present moment.

Before he drove Tom's tractor, Burbrink worked on his family's smaller farm next door (Hardy 2014). Because of increased mechanization, Burbrink opts for Tom Farms LLC over his father's farm (2014). Unfortunately for Burbrink, we can envision a time in the near-future when computer programs will automatically sort and send data – supplanting the need for human labor and displacing him from the land altogether. While Tom credits agricultural technologies with the growth of his business, he acknowledges the disruption of community they cause.

Tom affirms that, in the face of big agriculture, small farms appear to be a thing of the past (Hardy 2014). Tom understands that with farmers like him adopting and implementing new information technologies offered by agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto and John Deere, smaller farmers, such as Burbrink's father, simply cannot keep up (2014). One of the ways that Tom Farms LLC has been able to grow is by consuming the operations of his neighbors. As Kip Tom puts it, "Your neighbor is also your competitor" (2014). Unfortunately for surrounding farmers, the buying power of Tom Farms LLC that results from the scale of Kip Tom's operation enabled him to purchase more technologies and out-compete his neighbors.

With the continuous increase of inboard agricultural technologies, farm equipment prices have skyrocketed. A combine that cost \$65,000 in the year 2000 now costs around \$500,000 (Hardy 2014). That is more than many small farms' gross incomes in a single year. For commodity farmers, the increase of tractor technology almost forces Tom's method of farming; particularly if farmers view their neighbors as competition rather than a supportive community where each member functions in their own niche and helps others in times of crisis and bounty. Much like the soil community, small subsistence farming communities are self-supporting. In

Tom's case, the increased use of technology seems to have shifted his relationships with the community of Others around him from support to commodification.

Even though he has out-competed his neighbors, his increased dependence on technology leaves Tom and farmers like him more beholden to commodification by big agribusiness. Hardy (2014) reports Tom's concerns that agribusiness is privy to the field information he gathers. Despite Tom's concerns, the promise of technology wins out and Tom continues to purchase, and be requisitioned by, technology. A trend Heidegger suggested would occur.

This has been the trend since the agricultural revolution. More expensive, technology-laden equipment means that more farmers will take on debt to purchase tractors, combines, drones and access to satellites and sensors. They feel these purchases are essential to increase production levels enough to maintain their business in the face of that debt.

So again, we can see the endless cycle of requisitioning. In the eyes of their owners and the marketplace, technology-dependent farms must grow. They need to harvest more crops every year. They need to become more efficient every year. And they need to do it on more land every year. Which means they need to subvert more manifestations of wildness perennially.

Equally important to our concerns for respecting wildness, big technology-laden operations like Tom Farms LLC are only more efficient if they grow a select few commodity crops. Commodity crops are planted in mass, spaced more closely together, sprayed with biocides more regularly and managed more formulaically. Agricultural technicians growing commodity crops also have a relatively predictable commodity market to sell to. Problematically, large monocultures are more susceptible to climate fluctuations and pests. Both are manifestations of wildness that we noted can never be fully vanquished from the farming situation. To attempt to do so is an example of the farmer being misled by the promise of technology. Even if our

technologies can make farming more efficient and productive in the short run, they cause us to forsake our relationships with wild others to the extent that we lose resilience in our crops and communities.

So we can see how the requisitioning tendency of technology breeds exponential requisitioning. This trend is troubling. As farmers feel the strain from debt and the need to produce increasingly more crops to make ends meet, they either “get big, or get out” as Nixon’s Secretary of Agriculture and cheerleader of the Green Revolution, Earl Butz, demanded. These days they also get efficient or lose out. Both cost money. But as we have seen, the consequent subduing of wildness is a very real non-monetary cost that often goes unnoticed.

As more farmers are requisitioned as agricultural technicians, the community of wild Others will also suffer. Not only are Other-than-human populations of wildness killed and suppressed, but humans are increasingly severed from community-level relationships with one other and with Other-than-humans. When these relationships are compromised, we lose connection with that which makes us human in a wild world.

To re-establish appropriate relationships with the Other-than-human world, it is important to reconcile our agricultural technologies with farming practices that are focal. In our final chapter, we look to the work of Paul Thompson to solidify what we mean by “focal farming.” We see a firsthand example of communal focal farming techniques when we discuss Buffalo Bird Woman of the Hidatsi Tribe. We close by discussing a few small steps we can take as contemporary farmers and humans to move ourselves and our communities to a more focal existence.

## Chapter 4: Planting the Seeds for Focal Farming

### *I. Introduction*

We set out to determine how farmers might cultivate wildness: both in themselves and in the world around them. From the work of Turner and Birch we learned that wildness is autonomous and fundamentally Other. As such we can only come to know it through substantial experience and appropriate relationships that we characterized as co-creative. By recounting his farming endeavors in the bean patch, we noted that Thoreau engaged Others in our prescribed manner.

A tension arose when, through the work of Heidegger and a case study of Tom Farms LLC, we recognized the tendency of technology to sever meaningful relationships by short-circuiting our intimate engagement with Others. Technology creates distancelessness and requisitions both the human and Other-than-human world into resources. The work of Borgmann helped us to understand that we lose context for our actions when the world is commodified morally.

We acknowledged that our technologies tend to commodify the world in the moral sense. The promise of technology is to make reality comfortably available. It takes the daily physical and mental discomfort out of seemingly ordinary and sometimes troubling acts (Borgmann: 1984, 139-140). So instead of talking to your co-worker, you can send an email (Borgmann: 2003, 154-155). Instead of brewing beer at home, you can buy it at the 7-11. Instead of building a shelf, <http://www.ikea.com> will fulfill your shelving needs. Instead of having to work within the rhythms of nature to avoid being pelted by cold rain and snow, the agricultural technician can climb into his tractor and close the door.

What we lose by making reality comfortably available is engagement with Others. We lose our attunement to manifestations of wildness. We lose the Thoreauvian joy for the task, pride in a job well-done, autonomous thought during the act and pleasant reflection on it afterward.

This is not to say that technology possesses a life of its own that invariably controls humans (Borgmann 1984: 40; 105-107). We have more free will than that. Technology responds to and is shaped by society as much as society responds to and is shaped by technology. As individuals we retain the ability to make choices concerning the technologies we adopt and those we dismiss as unnecessary encroachments into our lives. The question becomes: where do we draw the line?

To foster wildness, we must move toward the more focal farming methods of Thoreau. In Chapter 3 we witnessed how modern agricultural technologies tend to sever our relationships with the world in a way that diminishes our appreciation and respect for Others. We can view focal farming as the remedy to such moral commodification. It is a practice that nourishes engagement with *Das Ding*, a term we investigate momentarily. Our project now is to rectify agricultural methods that conscript and incarcerate the wildness of humans and Other-than-humans alike. By engaging such methods agricultural technicians can take the first steps toward cultivating wildness and begin to embrace focal farming practices.

## II. “*The Thing*”: Heidegger’s “*Das Ding*”

Though the essence of modern technology dismantles Nature and reality into discrete and orderable pieces, Heidegger (2012) offers *The Thing*<sup>19</sup> as a bridle on our engagement with technology and a way for us to turn back toward understanding our place in a community of Otherness. *Das Ding* can be thought of as an object or activity in the world that captivates our attention. Though they potentially captivate us, Heidegger believes that Things are inconspicuous (21). Because of their everyday nature, Things do have the tendency to slip into

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<sup>19</sup> Heidegger uses this term because “The Old High German word *thing* means gathering and indeed a gathering for the negotiation of an affair under discussion, a disputed case. Consequently the Old High German words *thing* and *dinc* become the name for an affair; they name what concernfully approaches the human in someway...” (12). I capitalize “Thing” when I intend it in the sense that Heidegger intends “*Das Ding*”

annihilation – to pass out of our view unnoticed. They can be, in the words of Birch (1990), “lost sight of.” As is the case with the sunset, the Thrasher’s Paganini birdsong, the tinkle of Thoreau’s hoe, the rich soil community, or even a hand-crafted beer or bookshelf, if we are not attuned for one reason or another, then we might be blind to the story behind these “Things.”

During the Bremen Lectures, Heidegger (2012) indicated that we lose sight of the Thing when modern technology orders what presences (32-33). In our vernacular, we might say that technology standardizes that which otherwise might tell a story. This is the essence of Borgmann’s moral commodification. Heidegger believes technology requisitions Things and pulls humans into the chain of requisitioning (32-33). That is, we begin to use Things without considering their essence. We are able to eat an apple without acknowledging it came from a specific tree in a specific place, picked by a person with a family and worries and joys. We often do not consider whether the apple traveled 2000 miles, 200 miles or 2 miles. As far as we are concerned, it came from the grocery store and we can always buy more. Technology causes us to become blind or numb to the existence of the Thing to the extent that we take it for granted. Despite this tendency, Heidegger offers *Das Ding* as a check on our engagement with technology. He believes *Das Ding* entreats us to focus on its subterranean aspects: its history and the web of relations that encircle it.

By pulling us into its story, *Das Ding* can call us to pay attention to formerly insignificant aspects of the present moment. This tendency leads Heidegger (2012, 23) to say Things “concernfully approach us from their mutual reciprocity.” By acknowledging the Thing, we can become intimate with the world in a way that grounds us sensually and emotionally with the present moment and all that attends to it. This includes the history leading up to the present and the web of life that surrounds it. Acknowledging the apple as *Das Ding* opens its web of relations

to our investigation. We might note the waxy buildup, see its bruises and imperfections, and read the sticker that indicates its origins. While we can never know the entire story behind an apple from Chile. However, recognizing its existence outside of ourselves helps to reduce its moral commodification. It helps us to reflect on our choices and our engagement with the world. We might think twice before purchasing apples from Chile. We might amend our purchases to only buy apples from the US, or from our watershed, or from our neighbor. We might agree to eat seasonally within our bioregion. But these choices can only be made if we remove ourselves from the chain of requisitioning. For Heidegger, that requires our receptiveness to the Thing. By opening ourselves to the story that surrounds Things, we can gain respect for them as Thoreau did the groundhog and the weeds. By pulling us into their stories, Things balance our tendency to engage the world through technology.

### *III. Wild Things*

Heidegger explained how Das Ding helps us to resist the negative tendencies of technology. Our focus is agricultural technologies. So agriculturally we can investigate the parallels between Heidegger's Das Ding and our notion of wildness. Because manifestations of wildness are commonplace everyday occurrences, it is easy for us to take them for granted or overlook them. It is particularly easy to turn a blind eye to them if we regard these manifestations of wildness – the soil community and plants, climate, animals and people – as resources for us to use, rather than as autonomous Others. We have seen the industrial technician approach the sunset, the soil, seeds and other manifestations of wildness not as Things that convey a story, helping to form our thoughts and actions with their autonomy, but as commodities to be used for further conscription.

The more receptive we are to the Thing, the deeper we understand its story to be. As we learned, intimate relationships require prolonged experience. When the carpenter looks at a shelf she built, she recalls the mental puzzle of imagining the design and selecting the wood. She also recalls engaging in the physical work of shaping the shelf with saws, rasps and sandpaper. For the craftsperson who made it, the shelf has a story that is rich and deep. She can remember a web of events surrounding shelf construction that might include the weather and people she interacted with during the process. She might still feel the grit of the paper against her knuckles, or smell the dust of oak from her saw strokes. She might even chuckle when she notices the varnish stain on her pants and recalls the moment her cat twisted between her feet causing her to spill the lacquer. There are connections the craftsperson makes to her art that she simply cannot make to the art of others. In this sense, the shelf is a Heideggerian Thing for the carpenter. It reveals a robust, intimate and meaningful world to her.

It is similar with the focal farmer. Thoreau spent eight years crafting *Walden* for his readers and imbuing significance in his interactions with the world surrounding the bean patch. However, we can never know the full story of the beans. We can only know the limited amount he conveyed in *Walden*. However, even if we did not make the shelf or grow the beans, they can still draw us in with their story. We might know the carpenter or farmer. We might see stains on their pants and dirt under their fingernails. We might even visit the workshop or farm. Consequently, the Things these artisans produce disclose a deeper story of wild reality than the products of machines. Those artisan-produced Things can still be focal for us.

Conversely, we have seen that the story of commodity corn is convoluted. We cannot attach it to people or place. There is nothing unique or soulful about it. The story behind Ikea's shelving units are similar. They are produced in mass by machines that use requisitioned resources.

For Heidegger, the Thing is not an object for our requisitioning. It is rather a subject in its own right. So we can understand how earlier characterizations of wildness as autonomous otherness are akin to Heidegger's Thing. We can imagine how his notion of the Thing will help the agricultural technician to overcome the pitfalls of technology. It promotes human receptivity to Otherness and helps to open the world of concerned approach with which Thoreau engaged.

#### *IV. Community is Focal*

Using his notion of The Thing Heidegger offers a way to move beyond what he views as the pitfall of technology. By recognizing wildness as a kind of Heideggerian Thing, like Thoreau, we are called to farm focally. Though Heidegger says little about agriculture, Borgmann's treatment of focal practices, expanded in the realm of agriculture by Paul Thompson, provides us with an extension of Heidegger's Thing that does address agriculture in a more substantial way. Thompson helps to offer a solution to our tension so that we can find appropriate agricultural practices that permit us to salvage our cultivation of human wildness within the context of contemporary agricultural technologies.

In *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, Borgmann explains his notion of focal practices:

A focal practice, generally, is the resolute and singular dedication to a focal thing. It sponsors discipline and skill which are exercised in a unity of achievement and enjoyment of mind, body, and the world, of myself and others, and in social union. (1984, 219)

There are several salient aspects of a focal practice that we should make explicit before we continue. First, it is focal. When we engage in a focal practice, we center our focus in an act or Other. That centered focus helps us to be receptive to a world of Others. When the story unfolds, we realize the extent to which our bodies, minds and communities are entwined.

Second, it is a practice. We must engage the practice regularly. Borgmann clarifies that merely engaging in the act once or sporadically might enliven us and enrich our experience of the world, but it fails to carry with us in the same way a practice does (1984, 207). For example, Thoreau claims to have ritualistically bathed in Walden Pond every morning (Cramer 2004, 108). He writes with deep appreciation about the magic encapsulated in his dawn immersions. Through this focal practice he became intimate with nuanced changes that occurred every day in the landscape. If he swam on an irregular basis, he might still have been enlivened, but the depth of his attention could not be as intimate. Nor could the morning bath have enduringly focused and centered his day, reminding him of the wildness he continually attuned to.

At the same time, our practice should not be so rigid and routine that the enchantment is drained from the act. In that case the world will cease to reveal itself because we will not be open to it in a co-creative manner. Surely Thoreau bathed longer some mornings than others and swam in different directions in response to a particular bird chirping from a distant branch.

We might perceive the connection between Borgmann's focal practice and our observations of Thoreau. Surely we saw Thoreau exercise "discipline and skill" (Borgmann 1984) when he hoed seven hours per day. We noted Thoreau's enjoyment of thought, physical exertion and interaction with a wild community of Others. We have been treating Thoreau as a focal farmer all along. However, we refrained from defining focal farming until its importance for wildness was apparent. Now that we understand how focal farming techniques can help us resist the tendency of our agricultural technologies to requisition wildness from our lives, we look into it more deeply. Thompson's view of focal farming digs into the land and elements of human community that we have neglected until now.

In *The Agrarian Vision* Thompson makes the agricultural implications of focal practices explicit when he explains,

Borgmann's analysis of focal things originated in reference to technology, but it also applies to land. The deeper philosophical meaning of agrarian ideals can be articulated when farming and what Borgmann calls "the culture of the table" are understood as focal practices, as established habits of living that impart broader meaning and purpose to people's lives. (2010, 111)

So while it is evident we are justified in referring to Thoreau's individual farming practices as "focal," Thompson connects focal farming to the greater human community by joining agriculture with the Culture of the Table – a necessarily communal act. When we gather around a table to eat, we celebrate life with friends and loved ones. We share common stories. We share common food. We slow our lives by enriching them through a web of relationships with Others.

Thus far we have been interested in Thoreau because of his focus on wild Others during his agricultural pursuits. We examined Thoreau's methods of engagement because of their tendency to cultivate wildness of both the human and Other-than-human world through co-creation. Thoreau was after intimate contact with the land, but his individual agricultural engagement lasted less than two years. Thompson focuses on more traditional communal methods of farming – traditions rooted in a specific land-base and arising from it.

Partly because he is concerned with human communal attachment to the land, Thompson (2010) reserves a privileged place for farming in the realm of focal practices. Noting that not everyone can be farmers, Thompson (115) rightly allows that we can "be dedicated to a place without farming it." Contemporarily we see this attitude in advocates involved with land trusts and open space preservation, as well as wilderness and outdoor recreation enthusiasts. However, in *The Agrarian Vision* Thompson comments on the difference between farming and other types of land-based focal practices.

Although these kinds of dedication might also constitute focal practices as Borgmann conceives of them, farming unifies 'achievement and enjoyment of the mind, body, and the world' in a way that preservation and beautification cannot. Farming is and has been throughout history the preeminent practice by which

human beings bring forth the sustenance of their lives (we might also include hunting and fishing). Farming is productive and reproductive of human life. Farming must, of course, be supplemented by skills and crafts that are not part of farming per se, but building, toolmaking, and the martial arts do not center, order, and unify “myself and others” in the way farming does. (115)

Thompson makes the case that centering the community on a practice essential for life is the salient focal aspect of farming. Focal farming communities need to come together around their farmers. Thompson reasons that people need to eat to live. In sedentary communities, eating means embracing agricultural techniques. With agriculture as a focus, the community members orient themselves to accommodate the needs of the community’s farms. So, in non-focal operations such as Tom Farms LLC, farming more focally means embracing practices that allow co-creative input from the surrounding community. It means abiding by farming practices that create jobs for more than a neighboring farmer or two who cannot compete. But in a world where commodification makes life readily available for everyone, the need to come together around farmers disappears into the background.

In pre-industrial western farming communities, blacksmiths and farriers had a central place for tool-making and equine care. Communities required a miller to grind corn and wheat grown by the farmer. And of course, other community members needed to work on the farm, help raise barns and celebrate bountiful harvests. In cases such as these, community members feel themselves to be inextricably linked to the farmer and the farm. They are dependent on and tied to the land even though they might not experience it in the same way as the farmer. They also depend on one another and understand that the autonomous contributions of each person are necessary for their dynamic biotic community to thrive.

Thompson’s suggestion that “we can be dedicated to a place without farming it” (115) opens room for people to be dedicated to the land-base and reduce the moral commodification of their food by supporting local farmers. There is a contemporary trend to “Eat Local.” Communities

across the country have weekly Farmers' Markets. Many have two or more. Local restaurants and grocery stores purchase produce from local farmers. It is a trend that indicates people's desire to live more focally, have less oil attached to their food, support their local economy, eat healthier and more closely to their land-base and know the story tied to their food.

The commodities produced on Tom Farms LLC are not produced for immediate human consumption, so residents of Leesburg, Indiana looking to eat locally and engage the story of their food need to look elsewhere. The roughly 550 residents of Leesburg (US Census Bureau 2010) have the option of traveling to two different Farmers' Markets – 14 and 18 miles away. But the focal aspect of eating local is somewhat removed when a short walk across town is replaced with a lengthy car ride. However, the Leesburg community could deepen their dedication to place by cultivating a community garden to help them attune to the land and embrace the interdependent communal aspect of farming that is so important.

In Chapters 2 and 3 we discussed the interdependence of the soil community. Below, Thompson (2010) helps us to extend interdependence to human communities by explaining how farm families and communities rely on one another for vitality. He shows how farmers engage Other-than-human communities in a dynamic way that promotes vitality. We should not expect Tom Farms LLC to turn into a nature-based commune in Leesburg, Indiana, but we can recognize that adjusting scale and practices to accommodate co-creative relationships with the wild communities we live with helps to make for a more holistic, rooted and wild experience.

On the traditional farm, everyone depends on everyone else. Fields must be tilled and animals must be fed. Milk must be made into butter and cheese; crops must be planted and later threshed. Cows, pigs, and chickens must be slaughtered and rendered. These practices establish roles for each member of the farm family and, in some communities, for designated individuals or family groups who become butchers, millers, or wheelwrights or who take up some other task that complements farming activities. There is no formula for these roles; every farm, every farm community, is different. (2010, 115)

Though Thompson's rendering of the traditional farm might seem slightly anthropocentric and domineering of Others (as well as a rather shallow caricature, it seems), we should not take the quote out of context. Thompson is keenly aware of the need for humans to respect manifestations of Otherness. We should remember that the main reason Thompson believes farming is a paramount focal activity is that it helps communities engage the land in a meaningful way. Below he explains why each farm community is different.

The differences reflect different soils, different microclimates, different neighbors, different histories, and different social institutions. In every case, however, focal practices evolve under the weight of feedback mechanisms and impressive object lessons that communicate the interdependence of people with one another and with the land. (116)

Focal farming communities are necessarily rooted in respect for their land-base. They must be rooted to evolve practices based on feedback mechanisms that arise from an intimate "interdependence of people with one another and with the land." This is partially how co-creation works. In Leesburg, the feedback mechanisms seem to have responded to the global market rather than the expectations of the land. Commodity crops might provide money to Tom Farms LLC, but they are not representative of the specific soil, microclimate, history and people of Leesburg, Indiana. The crops grown by Tom Farms LLC are not unique or indigenous to the land in any real way. Nor do they respond to community needs. Our task as focal farmers is to co-create as a human community attuning to the local land. Our later discussion of seeds more deeply establishes this connection.

Drawing from Gene Logsdon's *At Nature's Pace*, Thompson (2010) uses the word "evolution" in the same sense that we have discussed co-creation. We have also referred to communities as being both dynamic and biotic (life-promoting). Evolution is essentially a long-term attempt at improving survival through the adjustment of organismal or communal composition in response to outside stimuli. So his term neatly fits our requirements for

appropriate engagement: prolonged, intimate contact that causes us to adjust our thinking and behavior. Thompson explains this on both individual and communal levels:

Farming demands the engagement of mind and body with the world. The evolution that Logsdon praises is a mindful and social process whereby individuals and social groups evolve a way of being, of continuing to be, that is attuned to, in Thoreau's words, the expectations of the land on which they are situated. (115)

So the more we use farm technologies to requisition and commodify land-bases, the less we need to attune to any specific land-base. Thompson connects the social and physical well-being of the community with mindful bodily engagement and attunement to the expectations of the land. We saw Thoreau's prolonged attunement to the land and his consequent cultivation of wildness. We characterized the soil community as dynamic and life-promoting. Thompson helps to bridge the gap so we can see that the human community promotes its own autonomy by respecting the expectations of the land. Communities might grow and preserve most of their own food, providing food security. Historically it was a necessity. Today, the more farming communities can attend to their needs internally, the more autonomous they will remain.

Thompson (2010) reiterates that the practice of focal farming is the foundation for attunement to local land. Farming communities need to respect the land for their survival.

In traditional farming, farmers who are not attuned to the unique characteristics of their situation or not singularly dedicated to the pursuit of livelihood that is farming's central norm fail. Communities that are not organized around the needs and capacities of their farmers fail. (116)

In other words, focal farming is not a job, it is a way of life. The Tom Farms website (2016) acknowledges that Tom Farms "has built a farm company on the platform of operating it as a business, and not as a lifestyle (...)" Kip Tom claims that he buys more machines and expands his operation to increase efficiency and remain competitive (Hardy 2014). He envisions a future where he spends increasingly less time behind computer screens and more time with his family (2014). While that is an admirable, understandable and seemingly never-ending goal, if he farmed focally then Kip Tom and his family would already enjoy communal co-creation with

one another and their land-base rather than needing to increase commodification and requisitioning in an attempt to escape from the land. Instead of decreasing his work, Tom's operations have increased and extend beyond the immediate farm to seven counties in Indiana as well as a location in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Tom Farms LLC 2016). Though it is multi-generational, Tom Farms LLC is anything but traditional. In the following section we look at the Hidatsa tribe. Their communal farming style is both a traditional way of life and, in Borgman's terms, "focal."

#### V. *Buffalo Bird Woman (Waheenee)*

Thus far, human community has largely been absent from our real-world examples. While Thoreau connected with wildness and the Other-than-human community in co-creative ways, he said little of his interactions with people in the local agricultural tradition. What advice he did receive from other farmers, he largely ignored. Thoreau came out of the tradition of Transcendentalists that wanted to retreat from an industrializing culture and reconnect with Nature. In that context, his denial of European farming practices makes sense and actually helped him to achieve his goal of engaging wildness intimately. Thoreau shows us how to farm focally with manifestations of wildness, but he leaves out the importance of human community.

Thompson has shown us how community needs to be enmeshed in focal practices and that a web of communal interactions arise from a prolonged engagement to a specific land base. We noted how wildness is a dynamic biotic community of which humans are part. We have also realized humans are innately wild. So we need to see how farming communities embrace agriculture and on another. The anthropological work of Gilbert Wilson helps draw our themes

together. His work conveys the first-hand experience of Buffalo Bird Woman, known as Waheenee, and shows how tradition evolves from intimate connection to a specific place.

Wilson's book, *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden* portrays the life of a fiercely autonomous human who lived vitally in a relatively wild, agrarian community in the Missouri River Basin. As a member of the Hidatsa American Indian tribe, Waheenee was born into a tradition that farmed wildly. They placed gardens in perennial stream beds for greatest soil water content. Cultural practices included digging holes in the ground to use as wintertime food and seed caches (Waheenee 1987). Tradition taught specific ways to line caches with corn and particular techniques of layering vegetables so that the weather would not spoil the caches' contents and so wild animals or other tribes could not find them and dig them up before spring.

Waheenee's tribe relocated when she was three years old (1987). Despite being displaced, the Hidatsa remained close to their original land-base. Her tribe's traditions carried on in their new village, not far upriver from Waheenee's North Dakota birthplace on the Knife River.

The tribe co-created with manifestations of wildness in astounding ways, including using hoes constructed of bison scapula or deer antlers attached to sticks (Hanson 1987, xv). The Hidatsa showed respect for animals they killed by using the animals' bodies for daily human tasks. Waheenee recalls her grandmother yelling at the children for playing with her deer antler hoe for fear they would break it (1987, 12-13). As a village elder, Waheenee's grandmother must have understood the story surrounding the hoe. She undoubtedly knew the hunters. She likely remembered any celebration that followed the successful hunt and the time and care she put into crafting the rake. Such time and care, and her reluctance to let the children play with the hoe, show her respect for the animal. From this example, we see that connecting ourselves deeply

enough to place so that we can recite the stories behind the land's web of relations can help the entire community to approach life in a more focal manner.

The Hidatsa also respected soil wildness enough to understand that fields need to lay fallow for a number of years (Hanson, p.xxi) to ensure vitality. In addition to allowing the fields to rest they traditionally amended the soil by burning cleared brush on the fields for nutrients (Hanson, p.xx). Though they might not have known the chemistry behind their actions, through time and practice, the Hidatsa embraced a wild tradition that promoted a thriving dynamic biotic soil community. A community that they perennially co-created with for sustenance. They lived sustainably within a closed loop-system. Outside inputs on their farm were not readily available, but living closely with the land ensured that outside inputs were not needed.

The Hidatsa were well attuned to the low rainfall in their river valley. Over generations they cultivated corn varieties that responded appropriately to the climate. Both corn and people adjusted to place over time. Evolutionarily, plants have the ability to adapt to specific climates and microclimates from years of reproduction. The Hidatsa had a willingness and need to co-create with the plants and seed. Much like Thoreau helping the beans to become more wild, the Hidatsa helped attune corn to the wildness of the Knife River microclimate. Like Thoreau they co-created crops with wildness. As a result of their techniques, both human and cultivar grew more in tune with, and rooted in, the wild conditions of their place.

Like Thoreau, Waheenee indicates how she co-created with the elements to make work less burdensome. She paid attention to her task and to wild conditions that might make her task easier. For example, when threshing and winnowing corn, she waited for a slightly windy day because the wind separated the chaff from the grain for her provided she poured it into the sack in a specific way (41). So, through Wilson's account, we can see how Waheenee's agricultural

practices align with Thoreau's cultivation of wildness. As focal farmers, we too can pay attention to manifestations of wildness: by simply allowing the rain to water our crops or promoting a predator wasp population to take care of an abundance of aphids damaging tomatoes. The community of small-scale organic farmers already use some of these tricks.

Waheenee's practices also illustrate Thompson's call for community. She farmed in a focal way, connected with the past through traditional farming methods and to the future by maintaining those traditions and passing them on. She was both self-reliant as a farmer and part of a larger farming community that shared responsibilities and spread traditions over generations.

While the women worked on their own individual gardens, they completed their work generally at the same time during the day. So they were simultaneously working autonomously while within their community. Surely they conversed and passed the time with laughter and story. Sometimes they even helped one another plant gardens. If four women seeded, they group-seeded four gardens per day rather than each seeding her own (Waheenee 1987, 69).

As part of a communal division of tasks that Thompson insists are unique to each community, young girls kept watch over the gardens during the day, lest animals and thieving young boys would steal into the garden and make off with the vegetables (Waheenee 1987). Mal-intent seems to be absent from the interaction. This theft-and-observance was merely the cultural practice. Everyone respected the autonomy of the Other, while each followed their own preference and filled their community role. In a way, each of the community members sharpened the skills of the others. Young girls helped young boys to develop stealth. Young boys helped young girls to develop keen eyes. The serious play helped them to learn one another. They had different goals, but the dynamic interaction propelled everyone involved to become more vibrant.

The tribe's villages show an overall commitment to community. Still, within that community, families possessed different origin stories, ceremonies, dialects and variations on farming methods (Hanson 1987, xiii). The Hidatsa Tribal methods of farming reflect "a stable cultural adaptation to specific ecological conditions" (Hanson 1987, xii). In other words, they were focal farmers. They knew the land and worked with the cycles and other manifestations of wildness.

Though we might think of the Hidatsa tribe as ancient history, Henry David Thoreau was in his early 20s when Waheenee was born. They likely worked barefoot in soil on the North American continent simultaneously. They definitely felt warmth from the sun on the same days and probably had the same storm system drop precipitation on the soils they farmed. I mention this because we are not as distant from wild and communal farming traditions as we might think. Each person engages relationships in slightly different ways and each community is unique in its focal farming roles and methods.

While I have not solved the problem of cultivating wildness, I hope I have provided direction so far. In the remaining pages, I offer one illustration of how we might cultivate our innate personal wildness and embrace the dynamic biotic communities we inhabit. Regardless of where, when and with whom we farm, we need seed.

## VI. *Seeds are The Thing*

Thus far we have seen that focal farming is a way to build relationships with wildness and foster interdependent autonomous communities. We have also seen that technology tends to sever those relationships and requisition the farmer into an agricultural technician. We understand that, to cultivate wildness, the agricultural technician needs to embrace the ways of the focal farmer, ideally within a community that regards farming as a central focus. My goal

here is to talk about agriculture as a practice rather than a business. I am talking about a particular mindset from which to approach the land. The suggestions I make cannot be applied to agriculture technicians attempting to grow their companies, because such continual growth necessitates domination, which undermines our reasons for this project. Instead, focal farmers, backyard gardeners and any others hoping to grow their own wildness might adopt my suggestions and apply these principles in their own life.

From our discussion of Heidegger it is evident that a manifestation of wildness to act as Das Ding could provide a story to contextualize Otherness and to help us refocus on what we have lost sight of. I believe the seed is such a Thing. Regarding the seed as a focal point, and seed-saving as a focal practice, opens the door for us to deepen our engagement of the agricultural situation. As potential life, the seed is a symbol for our project. As a future plant and eventual fruit, it is a necessity of every farm. As an evolutionary entity that changes based on the experiences of prior generations, it is steeped in community and tradition.

In agriculture, everything starts with the seed. It is certainly slight. Even the largest seeds are no larger than a thumbnail. It is also unassuming, with only the potential of a plant bottled up inside. Seeds need to be nurtured for fruit to take form. Once sprouted, we need to interpret the information they convey for the co-creation of vital fruit – food that will in turn produce vital seed. If the seedling is long and spindly, it needs more light. If it is discolored, it lacks nutrients. Seeds require us to pay attention to soil and weather. Like Thoreau making piles of the weedy dead so his beans have space to grow, we need to pay attention to seedlings so they bear fruit.

Currently, the vast majority of fruit in the agricultural world is produced from economically and morally commodified seeds. Gaining context and refraining from becoming part of the chain of requisitioning becomes much more difficult when our farming efforts begin with a blind eye

to the story behind the fruit. Context starts at the beginning of the story, so detaching the seed from its status as a commodity is essential to focal farming.

While the moral commodification of seeds varies in degree, the traditional act of seed-saving is largely unpracticed. Seed cultivation has been outsourced and requisitioned by agribusinesses to a large extent. Even organic seed cooperatives such as *High Mowing* and *Seeds of Change* economically and morally commodify seeds. While farmers might understand where their seeds are grown, the seeds are still largely readily available from dialing a telephone or clicking a box on a computer screen. Ordering seeds separates the farmer from a necessarily focal act that requires humans to respond to and live within the rhythms of Earth. Commodified seeds are divorced from place as Thompson regards it and separate the farmer from visceral, intimate connection with manifestations of wildness that help us to attune with our inborn wildness.

Intimate visceral connection to the land is one reason saving seeds is a focal farming practice. Additionally, seed-saving helps to cultivate plant wildness over generations and is beneficial to the farmer's growing efforts in the long-run. As we noted from Thompson and Waheenee, one of the essential facets of focal farming is evolving and co-creating with our particular place. Plants tend to assimilate to a particular microclimate over time. If seeds are produced away from the land-base in which they are grown, and purchased anew every year, then they can never acclimate to the "expectations of the land."

Further, if the farmer chooses to save seed, she will need to pay greater attention to how her agricultural practices impact the land. If agricultural practices deplete the soil in any way, that malnutrition will manifest in the seed. Particularly if depletions occur over several years. Those deficiencies will be expressed in the next generation of plants and fruit, and the cycle will repeat. So, farmers who grow their own seed need to attune to the land as both Waheenee and Thoreau.

Waheenee's cultural practice was to let the land rest and to replenish it by burning nutrient-rich plant matter. Thoreau's replenishment tactic was to avoid tilling and reincorporate his own nutrients into the soil, thus respecting the community of soil wildness. Today's small-scale organic farmers tend to compost on-site fruits, vegetables, chicken manure and other organic matter. Focal farmers that save seed will be more intimately engaged with the land and, consequently, will understand the need to find ways to co-create soil vitality over generations. Those methods will need to work for focal farmers and the specific land they farm.

In this way saving seeds promotes the sort of co-creation with wildness that focal farmers seek. But perhaps most importantly, on-farm seed-saving helps to maintain the farm at a human scale. Thoreau worked at a human pace, hoeing seven miles of beans daily. On the other hand, recall that technology tends to lead to runaway requisitioning. As a consequence of increased technology, Kip Tom expanded the family farm to 20,000 acres and consumed farms of the surrounding community to do so.

For Tom, much of that increased technology was in the form of new and bigger tractors with greater amounts of information technology. This helped to requisition the land more efficiently. However, such a grandiose expansion of Tom's operations was also enabled by the seeds requisitioned as a result of big agribusiness's seed technologies (including GMO seeds).

If we consider how many seeds need to be harvested, saved and stored in order to plant and cultivate 20,000 acres versus seven linear miles, we will realize how the requirement of seed-saving can restrain the tendency of technology to expand our operations. Instead of Kip Tom ordering somewhere between 500,000 and 1.5B commodity soybean seeds to cultivate 20,000 acres (Stine Seed Catalogue 2016), he and agricultural technicians like him would need to alter their methods to accommodate a more human scale.

However, as Heidegger predicted, in the case of Tom Farms LLC exactly the opposite happened. Tom has been further requisitioned into the industrial agriculture paradigm. According to Tom Farms' website (2016), the LLC breeds hybrid commodity seed "that is processed and sold to producers across the world." This is the anti-thesis of the reason focal farmers should save seeds. Instead of co-creating plant adaptations to a specific land-base over generations, Tom Farms LLC purchases genetically modified<sup>20</sup> commodity seed (Hardy 2014) from Monsanto (Tom Farms LLC 2016), cross breeds them<sup>21</sup> (2016), and sells them as economically and morally commodified seeds to locations across the globe. This process divorces the seeds from place entirely. But how might seed saving be more focal for farmers like Kip Tom that have yet to go through the cross-roads of no-holds barred requisitioning?

Becoming more focal could mean one of two things: either decreasing farm size or hiring community members to save seeds that will remain fertile year after year. In both cases, the need to focus on seeds would push the agricultural operation toward more focal farming practices. While Tom Farms might need to be scaled back drastically and change its operating paradigm to be considered truly focal, positing the seed as *Das Ding* opens the door for big farms to connect with manifestation of wildness in a co-creative way. As we have seen co-creation cultivates wildness, which promotes more focal ways of farming. Like seed saving, once the process begins, it potentially repeats. Perpetuating wildness can commence with the first crack of light that starts to unfold the potential inherent in the seed.

In fact, seed saving is a never-ending process. It attunes us to Earth cycles. If a farmer starts with seed, her typical process is as follows: She first needs to germinate the seed in spring, which requires understanding that every different type of seed has a different germination period and

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<sup>20</sup> A fundamentally anti-wild practice, because it removes autonomy and projects onto Others.

<sup>21</sup> Probably so that the second generation of those seeds will be sterile, making it impossible for future farmers to grow seed from seeds bred by Tom Farms LLC.

temperature. Once germinated the farmer must tend to the plant in its vulnerable seedling stage while simultaneously preparing the field for planting as summer approaches. Once the plant is hardy enough to survive outdoors, she digs the plant into the soil where it will spend the remainder of the season exposed to the sort of “wild enemies” that Thoreau’s beans experienced. As the harvest sets in, and autumn approaches, the days grow shorter. The focal farmer thinks about the beginning of the following season and the seeds that she will need to save now. But this is not the typical experience of most modern farmers.

Farmers like Kip Tom need to start somewhere. Even when farmers purchase commodity seeds<sup>22</sup>, seed-saving co-creation can begin to take place once the plant begins to grow in the field. In the same way that Gregor Mendel cross-bred pea plants to determine heredity traits, the farmer might cross-pollinate her tomato plants. Perhaps the community that supports the farmer prefers a certain color or flavor. Or perhaps a certain type of plant performs better in the farm’s microclimate. In these cases the farmer might breed plants so that subsequent generations of sought-after tomatoes flourish. Or maybe she is absolutely pleased with the species of heirloom tomato she cultivates, whose seed her grandfather brought from his medieval village in Italy, and she simply wishes to continue to grow that species. In this case she can save its seeds to maintain her familial traditions and help the species adapt to a new microclimate. It becomes more attuned to the land she farms; more able to exist within the wild community specific to the land.

Seed saving furthers focal farming efforts because the farmer needs to be mindful and exquisitely attentive when preparing to save seed. She needs to intimately examine the plant for disease and sought after physiological characteristics. A plant without disease might have an evolved resistance. So when choosing fruits from a plant, she selects for disease resistance in

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<sup>22</sup> Provided they are not hybrids incapable of reproduction in the same way that a mule is sterile. Or worse yet, “terminator seeds” whose plants cross pollinate with similar species rendering their fruit infertile.

future generations. She also needs to choose fruit with preferred characteristics: for example, largeness and roundness in tomatoes or garlic with large cloves. In this way, future generations of plants are more likely to manifest these characteristics while still growing autonomously.

In addition to requiring the farmer to focus on the plants, the act of seed saving is visceral. It brings farmers into deeper, more intimate contact with plants. Garlic must be dried, in a dark, well-ventilated place. Once dry, the bulbs must be hand broken and the cloves hand-selected for preferred qualities. Tomatoes can be smashed, by hand, into a bucket. When doing this the farmer feels the internal structure of the tomato. She remembers the months of hard work and preparation that led up to this moment. She envisions the future of the seeds she saves: the field preparations that need to be done before winter; the seed germination that must be done in late winter; and how next year will be both different and the same as this year. She can plan and dream and attempt to manifest, in detail, the potential she sees locked up in the future. The act of seed saving opens space for this sort of mental engagement. It is a focal practice.

During the seed-saving process, as her hands strain the tomato juice and pulp away from the seeds, she thinks of the sauces she will eat in front of the fire during the winter months. When she eats those sauces, canned by hand from tomatoes she co-created with the land, her life within the rhythms of Earth will be synthesized into a complete story. She will reflect on this seed-saving moment. She will also remember the summer sun kissing her face as beads of sweat streaked the dirt her hoe kicked up while fighting innumerable scores of the “weedy dead.” She will look out of the window to see fields resting under a blanket of snow. She will smile because the sauce she eats came from her hard work and connection to the land. Land that she cannot see under the snow, but that she knows intimately – from the inside out – year after year.

### **Denouement: Re-Inhabitation**

Unfortunately, because we are steeped in a mindset of domination, we cannot expect to change our entrenched lifestyles or to heal wounds overnight. Regarding Others with ownership is part of our tradition. Because we must eat to live, and because food is one way to connect with the community of Others in the world, I offer focal farming as a way to begin to reorient our mindset. Even so, my treatment of the seed as Das Ding is only a gesture. Within the world of focal farming it is just one step on a spectrum containing a plethora of possible focal actions.

Our discussion helps us to understand the theoretical importance and necessary reasoning for focal actions. So whether we farm or not, by implementing focal practices in our own life, we are more aptly tooled to combat the requisitioning tendency of technology. We can understand how individual decisions might help us maintain autonomy while attuning to the innate wildness of our land-bases and human communities. By remaining mindful and considering ways to cultivate wildness, we can try to keep the requisitioning tendencies of our technologies in check.

For those of us who do not farm, there are other avenues we can take to cultivate wildness. We need intimate, repeated experience. We can decide to turn off our computer every night at 8pm and go outside to look at the sky. We can leave our camera at home and observe the sunrise every morning or jump in the river every day, or even every week. We might opt to leave our phones by our bedside and embrace a weekly communal meal with our dearest friends. We could even upgrade from smartphones to dumbphones. Or house phones. When our devices mediate and separate us from Otherness, recognition is not an option and experience is taken for granted.

Still, I believe that food is an appropriate starting point. It is fundamental to our existence and is simultaneously taken for granted as part of the everyday. When we open our eyes to the story

behind our food, the veil of the imperium can slowly unravel. With the story in view, the road we travel is up to each of us.

We could drive to McDonalds to purchase commodity beef hamburgers and high fructose corn syrup soft drinks, and remain ignorantly happy with our meals. We could also walk along Missoula's Clark Fork River to River Road Farms, pick up our CSA share, experience the riparian area and share stories with the farmer. We could even volunteer our time and labor in exchange for even less morally commodified produce. Perhaps we even attune to a seasonal diet and preserve the bounty for winter. Preserving locally grown food can sound romantic and elitist to some people. But it is a time-tested human act and was a necessary peasant lifeway for millennia. Growing a backyard garden or volunteering at a local farm sounds pleasant, but we are all so busy, who has the time?

Another way to pose the question is to ask whether we find greater enjoyment through experiencing manifestations of wildness or engaging requisitioning technologies. What makes us feel more alive? These questions are answered by the choices we make. Like the seed, our wildness is only the beginning. We might be surprised to learn that cultivating our own wildness makes the whole community, including ourselves, more dynamic and vital.

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