

PhotoWeek Northwest IX.15.2008

*40 images & texts made
at, below and above
Hidden Lake,
the South Wallowas
by Cliff Crego*

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Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness—Alpine Lake at \pm 2200 meters (7173 feet).

A high cirque located at the far Northwest end of the East Eagle Valley,



Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness—Alpine Lake at \pm 2200 meters (7173 feet).

A high cirque located at the far Northwest end of the East Eagle Valley,

Hidden Lake is one the most beautiful jewels of the South Wallowas and the Eagle Cap Wilderness. East facing, strikingly peaceful and feminine in character, it is one of finest examples of an intact alpine watershed I've ever seen.



Hidden Lake
TOPO

On the road in the Northwest of America.

SUNSIGHT!

—for Mark Simmons

Sunrise. No!

Sunsight. Yes!

Fuller was right. Each morning,
the Earth turns to greet the Sun.

We are all turning.

The Muslim turns.

The Christian turns.

Even I turn, with my religion
without a name.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*



SUNSIGHT!—
6:56 AM



Streamside
Fieldwork—
VII.30.08



Eagle Cap,
view from
Hidden Lake



Last Light on
Granite Mountain &
PILGRIM



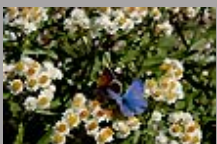
Flowform
&
Destructive Movements



Frazier Butte &
SCIENCE. ART.
RELIGION.



Alpine Ensemble II
&
Two Miniatures



Pearly Everlasting &
A TOSS OF THE
COIN



Marker
Stonepines—
dying



[Cathedral Rocks](#)



[Koch Snowflake](#)
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[3 MINIATURES](#)



[Last Light at Pop](#)
[Creek Pass](#)

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[South/
North
Sister](#)
[—
first
light](#)



[Hut,
Black
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SUNSIGHT! 6:56 AM Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness—Alpine Lake at \pm 2200 meters (7173 feet).

. . . SUNSIGHT / SUNCLIPSE . . .

The great 20th century architect, poet-philosopher of design and inventor of the geodesic dome, *Buchminster R. Fuller* (1895-1983), introduced the complementary concepts of *sunsight* and *sunclipse* to replace the traditional words, *sunrise* and *sunset*. He argued—very convincingly in my view—that our language should reflect the actual turning or rotation of the spherical planet Earth on its axis, instead of the ancient illusion of the Sun making an arch over an essentially flat surface.

You can test your own intuitive perception of this movement in the following two ways: (1) See if you can answer without straining and quickly in which direction the Earth turns (My experience is that most people cannot, although everyone can tell you the Sun 'comes up' (is *sighted*) in the East, and goes down in the West (is *eclipsed* by the Earth) ; (2) Make with a hand the a rotating circle which corresponds in direction to the Earth's rotation. These two little test ought to be enough to convince most of us that we do indeed still live and think in terms of these powerful illusions of Flatland.

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Last Light on Granite Mountain, view East, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

PILGRIM

Armies have sergeants.

Monks have masters.

Pilgrims must go it alone.

Somebody give me a word for the energy
of breaking camp, and stepping out—
into the unknown.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*

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Last Light at Pop Creek Pass, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

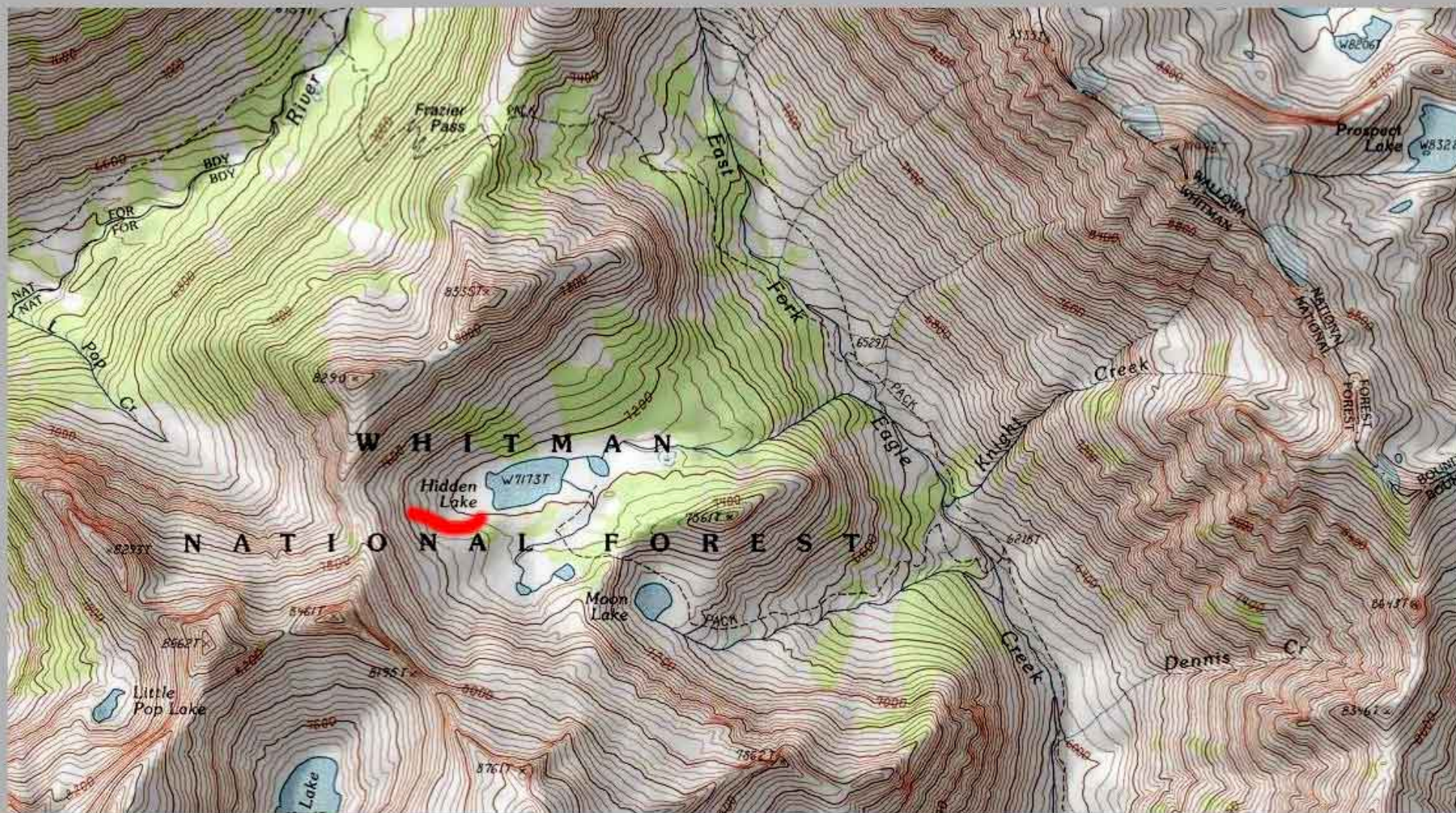
WEST WIND AT POP CREEK PASS

Each time I cross a pass, I suddenly remember something I always seem to be forgetting about the energy of insight, about how similar the two experiences are. This moment of crossing over, the epiphany that fills us as a new horizon appears before us and instantly rushes in. This is the energy, it seems to me, of sudden awareness, of suddenly discovering a new way of seeing or looking. Where does it come from? What is its source? It doesn't seem personal to me, a mere mechanical product of my own memory. No. Insight seems to be coming to us from 'someplace out there,' from someplace truly intelligent or divine, an *in-breathing* of the gods as the ancients used to say. We don't really know, do we? To me, it is just there, ever-present, like pure air, like healthy rich soil, like the clear fast-flowing water moving around me everywhere. One can either choose to listen to it, move with it, drink from it, or just walk right by indifferently and ignore it.

A steady west wind roars through the ridge crest firs and pines, blowing the last few thoughts of the past decisively away, and bringing the sound of what seems to be a distant ocean near. O view of the known world . . . I turn to look a last time at the valley from whence I've come.

Just before I step across into this new world, the flashing white outline of a nutcracker's wings catches the last light of day as it shoots straight up, sheering the strong winds like surf, and vanishing almost as quickly out of my field of sight. And all this as if to say, *"Ah, you poor people people. Will you ever learn to fly, learn to fly free of the fetters of fear, free of the fear of falling?"*

These are the thoughts that fill me, as I take out my headlamp, adjust its single bright beam, and start finding my way slowly down a steep talus slope as the darkness of night descends around me, happy to once more have been reminded about these things.



Hidden Lake TOPO, Eagle Cap Wilderness—Alpine Lake at ± 2200 meters (7173 feet).

A high cirque located at the far Northwest end of the East Eagle Valley, Hidden Lake is one the most beautiful jewels of the South Wallows and the Eagle Cap Wilderness. East facing, strikingly peaceful and feminine in character, it is one of finest examples of an intact alpine watershed I've ever seen.

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Eagle Cap, view from Hidden Lake (West), Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

HOW TO PROTECT AN ALPINE MEADOW

Hike there.

Find water.

Sit.

Move as little,
and stay as long,
as possible.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.7.2008*

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Eagle Cap, view Northeast from evening Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Cathedral Rocks, South Wallowas . . . (also sometimes called Castle Rock)

a 'blank page' composed of nearly vertical, four or five hundred meter massive limestone cliffs (\pm from 1600 to 2050 m.) waiting for the ambitious rockclimber to put up new routes.

As far as I know, no one has of yet
attempted a first ascent.

Southern counterpole of the *Matterhorn* of Hurricane Canyon and located on the westside of the spectacular East Eagle Valley, is the formation I like to call *Cathedral Rocks*. This seems to me a good name because of the manner in which it lights up with early morning light, especially when seen from the valley floor during the summer months. Like many places of great power and dignity in the Wallowas, Cathedral Rocks has been somehow given a name, *Granite Cliff*, which seems to me rather like a lame cartographic afterthought. First and foremost, the formation is limestone and not granite. Secondly, these generic names are like calling your beloved family dog 'dog.' But in all seriousness, the point is not so much *what* a formation is called—*Castle Rock* is another name some oldtime locals know—but rather more the fact that names are important because they are how we weave together our own internal maps of the poetry of a place.

If you want a direct sense of how this works, all you have to do is look up at this mountain with a small child. They will point at it with the index finger of either the left or right hand—the digit with seeks to *indicate* the meaning of things—and ask its name. With children, bad names confuse, whereas good names will light their faces up much like Granite Cliff itself begins to glow with the first light of a new day. This is a crucial part, it seems to me, of how a young person grows up with deep, natural roots in the spirit of a place.

CATHEDRAL ROCKS

Strong, bold, simple, clear lines.

A cloud passes by . . .

Strong, bold, simple, clear lines.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.7.2008*



Catherdral Rocks
TOPO

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Southern counterpole of the *Matterhorn* of Hurricane Canyon



*Krag Peak with Muir Lake (Crater Lake) from a trailless West / East ridge crossing
just under Red Mountain I call Bowhunter Pass—view West . . .
Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.*

Coffee—the Good from the Bad

for the makers of the documentary, Black Gold:
Wake Up and Smell the Coffee (2006),
Nick & Marck Francis

I tried to give up coffee, once. It gave me a headache, so I never tried again. But now, as I brew my morning cup, I see before me a large sorting room filled with Ethiopian women. Some of the women are old, some are young, but all wear colorful headscarfs, and all are, it seems to me, beautiful. The women are separating *good*, unroasted, sundried coffee beans from *bad* coffee beans. One at time; all by hand. They are paid about fifty cents a day. And all of this for me, for you, for the pleasure of our morning coffee.

Truly, the day of reckoning is now clearly upon us—upon you, upon me, in which some even more subtle, invisible, unseen hand of judgement shall separate us, too. *The good, from the bad.*

MORAL COMPASS?

A question for our time? *"Have we lost our moral compass?"*

"Nonsense!—say the Devil's banker. "In the much-will-have-more of the universe of money, there is no North and South, no Good and Bad! The is only more, more, more!"

GRACE

Bless those who grew this food.

May they also be happy, well-fed, and safe.

Bless them, brothers and sisters, all.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*



Dipper Falls, trajectories, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

ON THE NECESSARY SEPARATION OF ETHICS FROM RELIGION

One of the great fundamental insights upon which the US Constitution is based is not just the idea of the balance of power, derived from Roman law, but also, and of equal importance and significance, the strict separation of religion and state. It seems to me, that clear thinking and a new set of moral problems which confronts the world as a whole now demand that in a similar way ethics be separated from religion. Why, you ask? Because, in view here explored, in the theater of moral debate, both our shared intelligence and common humanity ask that we check our cloaks of sectarian beliefs at the door.

For with moral questions—and this is in my view beyond all doubt—if there is to be meaningful dialogue, just as in a republic no one may claim to be above or outside the rule of law, in the critical discussions of dialogue there may be no claim made to absolute authority. So how then are we to decide what is good, right and just? Well, I would say by placing calmly and with great respect the arguments, the evidence, the facts, and the competing theories on either side of the scales of Truth. And then weighing their relative merits and defects. For if we really consider this process carefully, what is truly sacred is the motionless, neutral center upon which the fair, unbiased balance of the scale depends.

In this way, as new ethical imperatives become established and codified as part of the main body of accepted law, we may come to see that it is this movement of coming to ethical truth together voluntarily itself by means of reason and intelligence—and not by any external, coercive force of King, or mere President, or Pope, or God—in which we can quite rightly and whole-heartedly put our trust.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*



Alpine Ensemble, view South above Pop Creek Pass, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

NEW IDEAS

The greatest instrument of change is the new idea. It brings together both for the individual and the collective our hitherto scattered and confused creative energies into one unified direction. The new idea does not show us the details or technicalities of *how*, but rather the crystal-clear necessity of *why*. And that makes all the difference.

RELATIONSHIP

The interval between two tones, the shadow cast by a tree, the flashing sparkles of waves on a stream or leaves on a tree, all are not static *'things,'* but rather movements of relationship.

Perception is always a question of relationship.

A MIND THAT DOES NOT AGE

One advantage of eyes that grow weaker with age is that one sees less and less of all the disturbing details reflected in the unforgiving mirrors of decline. But then, if we are lucky, we may also discover that the mind's own *inner* eye, as we learn to see more deeply into the nature of seeing and learning themselves, grows younger, brighter, and ever-more resilient with this great gift of each new turn of the living Earth, each new passing day.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*



Holly Brook, graceful meanders, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

ON THE NECESSITY OF ROADLESS AREAS (II)

Because of the near complete motorization of North American culture, roadless areas have gained in the past twenty years or so tremendously in significance. Now, at road's end, we also reach the spiritual end of what I see as a defining imbalance of the made-in-the-USA metaphysics of the world, namely, a remarkably one-sided way of thinking about freedom.

North Americans seem largely to take a self-centered view of freedom, what we might call *the freedom to* of the individual. Why might this be imbalanced? In my view, it is because it fails to take adequately into consideration the possible harm caused by the potentially negative consequences of our actions as they reverberate out into wider contexts, into the wider community.

It is really very simple, this idea that freedom always has two sides, the *freedom to*, and the *freedom from*. Take the example known well to every big city apartment dweller: I want to listen to my loud music in the middle of the night; You want to sleep. So to make life liveable, we have to work out some kind of a balanced agreement between us. What I want to suggest is that all freedom works essentially in this same way. And what is more, individuals and cultures may be characterized by which side of the two they tend to give emphasis, give the most significance and legal protections. We can easily imagine the extremes, and it is good to do so for the sake of clarity. On the one hand, we have the state of absolute lawlessness, where every one just does as they please; And on the other, we have the state of total control where no one is allowed to do anything at all freely. Whereas North American culture has evolved an exemplary balanced form of liberty in the areas of freedom of speech and expression, it seems to me extraordinarily *imbalanced* when it comes to the three key defining areas of finance, private property. or anything powered by hydrocarbons. If I can make money, if its my land, or if its my car or truck or dirtbike, 4-wheeler or snowmachine, the basic assumed metaphysics is, "*Get out of my way!*"

Even though the original idea of setting aside large tracts of land without roads of any kind undoubtedly originally concerned itself with the harm wrought upon the environment

by the negative side-effects of mechanized travel, roadless areas now also offer us a place to experience the benefits first hand of a more balanced idea of freedom. In addition to the freedom to, we now have a complementary freedom from. Predictably, the freedom from part of the equation deals mostly from the unwanted by-products of car culture, like freedom from noise, or the freedom from air pollution.

Like water meanders through an alpine bog, finding a kind of living balance by turning now to the left, now to the right, I think this more balanced idea of freedom is something beautiful to behold. But don't take my word for it. It might be worth making a bit of an effort to get out of one's car and hike up into one of those areas just to rediscover for oneself what freedom is really all about.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*

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*Tall Bog Onions at Holly Brook (Allium validum), highly edible & must
prized by the members of the Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*



Sibbaldea,
September aspect



Western
Hawkweed

THE DIFFERENCE OF BUT A HALF A STEP

Bright sun on granite,
a major key ascending
beyond the highest peaks,
beyond the most distant of stars.

A cloud passes by with misty rain . . .

Instantly, all changes to shades of
dark, wet, volcanic rock,
a minor key descending
with roots to the middle of the Earth.

The happy and the melancholy,

two sides of one movement . . .

How could I ever choose?

O gods of the most divine of soundscapes, forgive

us that philosophers no longer ponder

this difference of but a half a step between 3rds.

O mystery of creation!

My lyre of peace shall be forever tuned

and tempered

to both.

*Muir Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.12.2008*



Frazier Butte (Frazier Pass is not shown, but just to the left of
the descending ridgeline on the left side of the image, view East . . .)
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

SCIENCE. ART. RELIGION.

Science begins when we are willing to drop a theory
when it is contradicted by fact;

Art begins when we are willing to tear down a museum
and put up a new one when it no longer fits what we
see as beautiful;

Religion begins when we are willing to drop rigid belief
and claims to absolute authority because we have seen
that they are the source of the barriers of barbed-wire
that divide us.

Although urgently necessary, attempting to unite Science,
Art and Religion in their present state of disarray would
certainly be folly. It would surely result in hedious hybrids
like a Mozart Mass pumped up with drums and bass guitar,
or a rank pseudo-science constructed consciously as a
smokescreen for the fundamentalist conditioning of the minds
of the young. And yet their fragmentation corrupts the
highcountry springs of our collective creativity. Better to
take down with great care and a sustained seriousness the
arbitrary dams of their division—one at a time and all at
once—and let them flow naturally of their own accord
together as one.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.8.2008*



New Leaves, Balm or Black Cottonwood (Populus trichocarpa), leaves of young trees are more slender (oblong-lanceolate) than on more mature trees. South Wallowas . . .

—On the road in the American Northwest.

POPLAR OF FORGIVENESS

A poplar tree offers me shade,
moving from ridge to valley,
I rest a while.

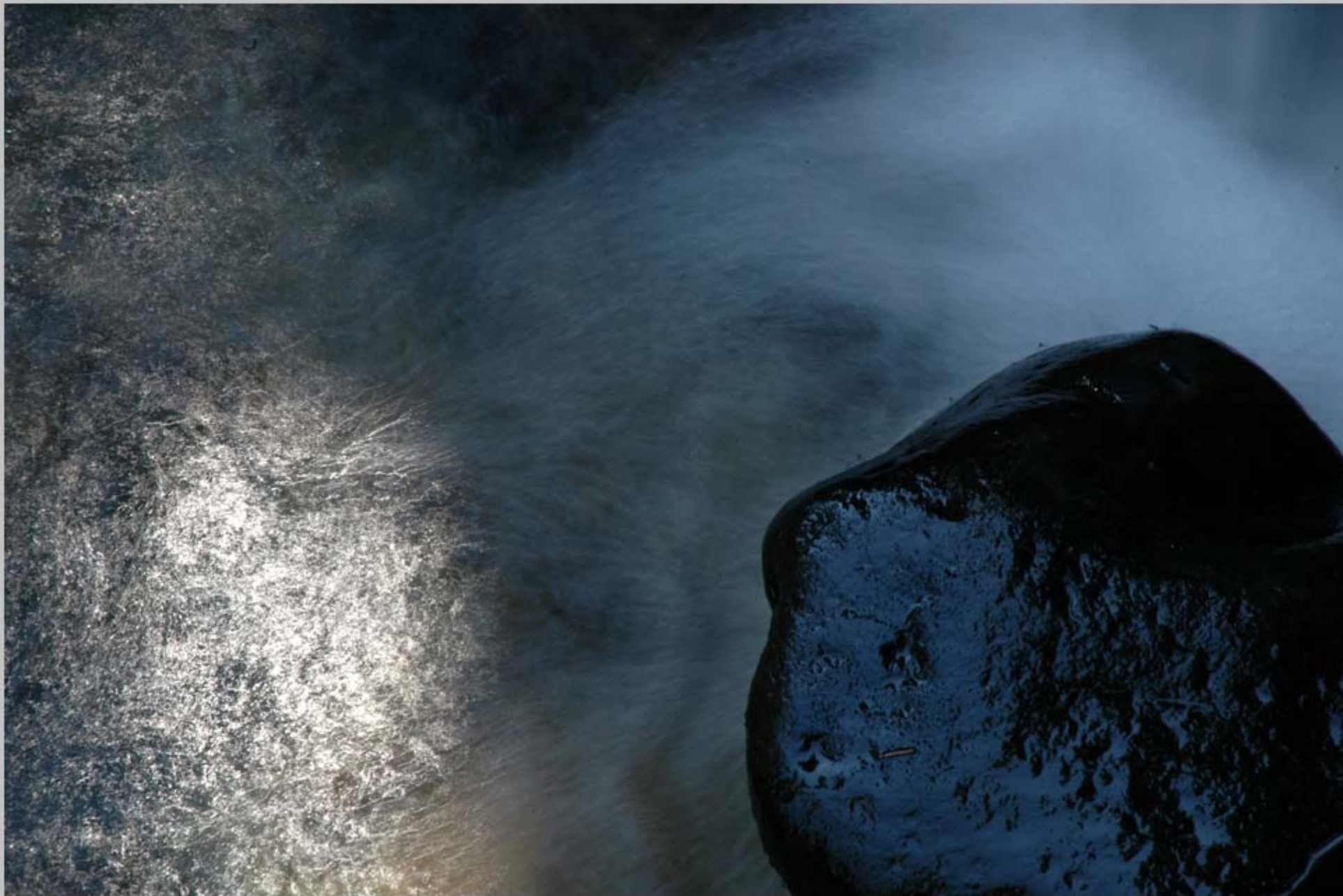
It's the sound, the sound
of the wind moving in the leaves,
a sound wholly absent at the more austere altitudes,
that washes away like the water of a Lourdes
all the hurts and pains of the past.

How we long to go back, go back and set straight
our mistakes of the past, to say
that it wasn't like that, or that
we didn't intend things to turn out
the way that they did.

But the sound carries these thoughts
away to somewhere else I know not where.
I open my eyes. A leaf, already yellow, falls.
A chickadee flutters by.

I must live a better life.

*Cottonwood Place,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.4.2008*



Dipper Falls, rock-water flowform, Eagle Cap Wilderness
On the road in the Northwest of America.

ON THE LENS OF PERCEPTION & THE CONTRADICTION OF WASTE

Just as it is an important ritual for me to clean my camera lenses carefully every day—removing smudges and dust, but being careful not to scratch the glass, which I have to confess I'm not very good at—so too it seems essential for me to every day clear the lenses, so to speak, of my perception. Philosophy is the cloth with which I do this.

All seeing is conceptual. That is, a concept is like a lens or a filter which in a powerful way shapes or in-forms what we see. So part of my daily practice as a kind of philosopher / artist is both the cleaning up of old, and the learning of new concepts. For instance, I learn and begin to study a new variety of mountain plant, say a species like Alpine Fleecflower, a member of the Buckwheat family which I had not seen before coming into the Wallows. As Thoreau remarked long ago, it is surprising that after one has learned to recognize a new species one suddenly begins to see it everywhere. At a more subtle level we can also begin to observe how a new concept actually works, in this case a new plant species. What did I see before I had the Fleecflower concept? Just an undifferentiated green background? It's an interesting problem.

At the same time this cloth of philosophy clears away old or no longer useful concepts. This might be necessary if a concept is no longer relevant, or worse, misleading or false.

Take the concept of waste, for instance. Now waste might admittedly seem at first glance to be an uninteresting, most would say, banal thing. After all, in normal everyday life, waste is that which we want to be rid of. But from the view of conceptual philosophy—this mundane, ordinary concept of waste may be seen to have extraordinary significance because of a deeply hidden contradiction between how we think about waste, on the one hand, and how waste actually works in the natural world, on the other. (Notice that here, philosophy is a lot like intellectual play, because we are allowed—indeed even encouraged—to make sweepings statements like these, and then explore by means of

image, reason and logic where they might take us. It is rather like trying out a new lens or filter and seeing what we can see, what we can do with it.)

Now, a recurrent theme of mine is that waste as either a concept or fact does not exist in Nature. One of the signature features of Mother Earth's web of life, in my view, is that what is discarded by one organism—the excrement, body parts, gases, etc.—becomes the essential food of another. So there are no one-way streets, or dead-end roads where junk, especially toxic junk, just piles up in the natural world. Instead, the movement of the cycles just keeps turning and turning as the energies of life continuously in a marvelous and wonderful way transform themselves.

From Nature's perspective, what we call waste is simply a failure of design. Take a new iPhone, for example. Sophisticated, charming, information technology, yes. Perhaps in some ways even revolutionary. But why is not closed-loop recycling and easy repair designed into all the iPhone's components right from the very start? I would argue simply because the present concept of waste necessitates that we turn a blind eye to the destructive consequences of our all-pervasive throw-away lifestyle and the metaphysics of design that supports it. Indeed, I would go on to suggest that this really rather remarkable devil's loop of seeing waste as an unfortunate but necessary evil of technological innovation has in a way become a central defining illusion of present Western culture. In other words, we may well be remembered when the large-scale strata of history come to be explored in the distant future not by what we have created but more by what we throw away.

Briefly, of crucial importance is the ethical dimension of this culture of waste. For example, to stay with the iPhone for a moment, is Apple behaving unethically by not designing technology for zero waste? I would argue most definitely. And so am I if I purchase their products, which I do. For what we are really doing is passing on a whole ugly heap of exceedingly complicated and expensive toxic cleanup crises to our children.

To conclude is this philosophical spirit, just let me say that an important implication of this idea that waste is a contradiction, is that it offers us the clearest and simplest way to approach massively complex global problems like air or water pollution, soil contamination, or climate change. It is simple because we could not only clean up the problem at its physical, but also, and in a way more importantly, at its conceptual, philosophical

SOURCE.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, VIII.17.2008*

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Western Hawkweed, skyview at 2200 m. (Hieracium albertinum) Member of the Aster family.

Hawkweed is a perennial which is densely pubescent with long white hairs and a milky sap found in the entire plant. According to Charles Johnson,

Hawkweed was used as a source of chewing gum by Native Americans.

Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Hawkweed
Closeup &
A MAN OF ONE CUP

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Western Hawkweed Leaves—close-up (Hieracium albertinum) Member of the Aster family.

Hawkweed is a perennial which is densely pubescent with long white hairs and a milky sap found in the entire plant. According to Charles Johnson,

Hawkweed was used as a source of chewing gum by Native Americans.

Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

Close-up photography is for me a form of meditation *on form*. A meditation on *structure*, on how the normally not clearly visible parts of especially the wonderful world of plants fit & work together.

In my dumstruck, simplistic way, I find myself frequently saying aloud, "*Why isn't this enough?*" Why isn't this revelation of Nature's beauty not enough to turn us all into humble and devoted monks, scientists and artists?

This is what I think of as *the mystery of the middle realm*. The central image of this middle realm—a space residing between *the incomprehensibly small and the incomprehensibly large*—is for me a three-fold composite: the branching structures of a tree, a river, and a fundamental tone with its overtones. I'll come back to this idea in another miniature, but for now, just let me say that I believe that we—despite the great and fantastic achievements of Western science—do not understand this middle realm very well. Why do I say this? Well, because it is in a self-evident, obvious way, demonstrated in the short-comings of what we make & design.

Take one of my recurrent themes: the imposition of the straight-line grid that car-culture designers overwhelming seem to prefer. (If there are anywhere exceptions in North American to this rule, the burden of proof is on you.) In the Northwest, the rectilinear pattern dominates all, resulting in a strident '*wolftone*' or contradiction with the immense beauty and spirit of the land itself. Indeed, I might have expanded the phrase had the measure allowed in the last little piece below to: "*In the West, Cut down. Dig up. Pave straight roads. Put barbed-wire around the rest.*"

Here then is a little set of three *37-step poems** which plays with this theme of the unfortunate misfit between natural and cultural structures. The "*man of of one cup*" is in this case me. This is really true; that is how I live. (Well, *two cups*, if I include my thermos...) I long ago embraced and took my vows, as it were, with Lady Poverty. This, I find liberating. I periodically go down into the low country to pay my bills, get provisions, see friends, and do my necessary web work, etc. But each time I return to the mountains, I say, "*Ah, the end of survival, and the beginning of living.*" One of the first things I do is go to a fast, clear-running stream, and wash my cup.

One Cup Only

(I)

Empty, round metal
cup I use every day, how I've
grown fond of the feel in my hand,

center with

gifts from far and near.
Hot teas steeped in cold spring water.

(II)

Square grid without a
center, towns built with quick money,
with gold, whiskey, easy women.

Home was

always someplace else.
O Silver Maple, so far West.

(III)

Boom days of easy
plunder now a thing of the past,
Speed's run flat dead knowing that the

direction

was wrong. Cut down. Dig
up. Put barbed-wire around the rest.

Camp Lost & Found,

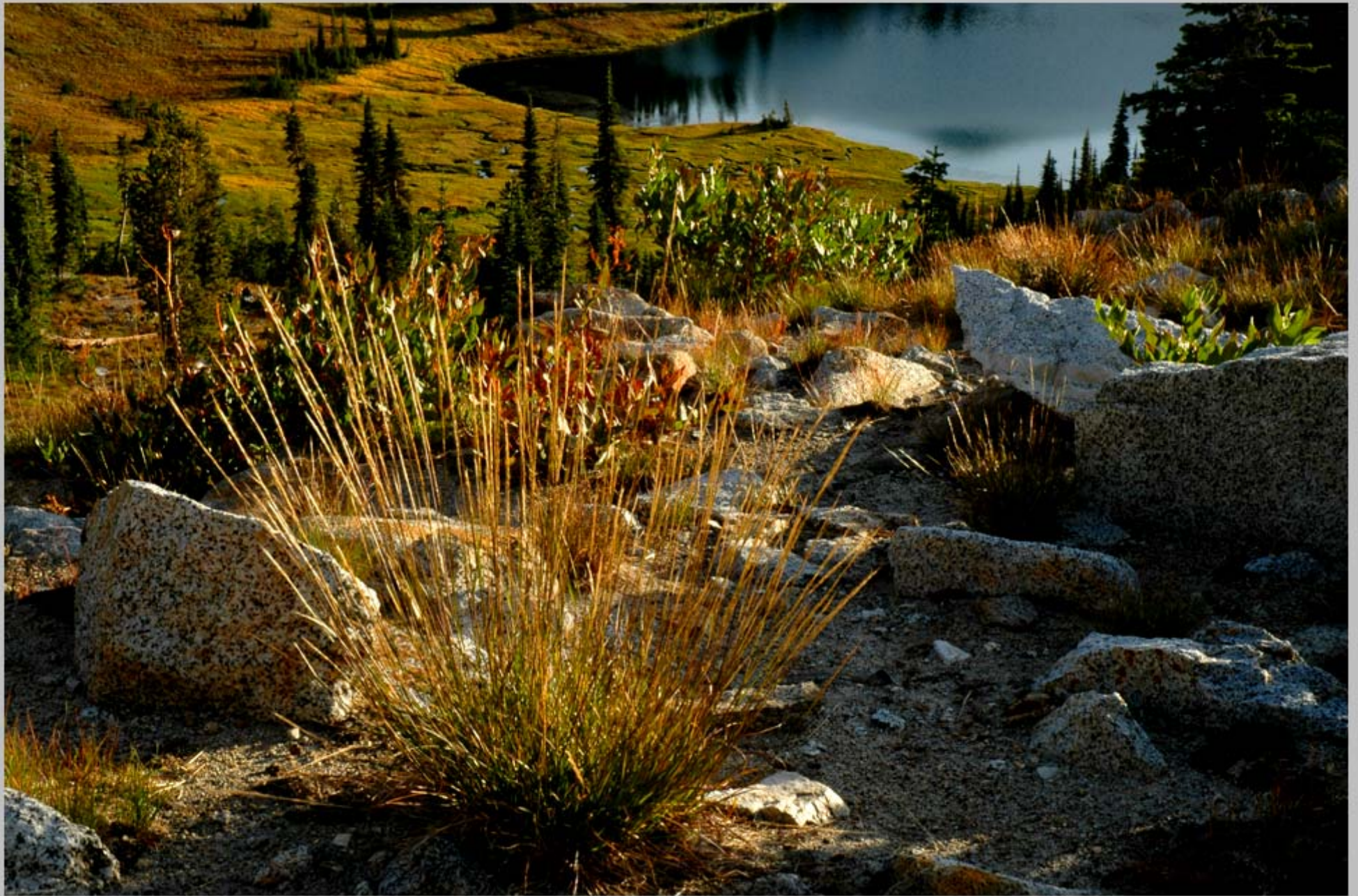
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008

*In order for a variation form like this to really flower, one needs to do them in sets or sequences. Try reading them out-loud to get a sense of how the rhythms and accents change in surprising ways while still keeping to the basic 37-step pattern.

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*Alpine Ensemble II, above Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*

TWO METAPHYSICAL MINIATURES

(I)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Some people make us smart; Others, make us stupid.
Some people make us happy, Others, make us sad. If
dialogue and compassion form two sides of the triangle
of friendship or relationship, this might be then the third—
encouragement, or the sustained, mutual generation of the
energy that makes change, discovery, makes real creative
work possible. Truly, this is how the world becomes a
better place, one person at a time.

(II)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Have you ever thought about how the world of Nature no
longer seems to inform or shape our manner of movement
or dress? Or why, in a more general way, contemporary
culture no longer seems shaped or informed by a fecund
interaction of human creativity and place? Is this not in part
because of an insidious process of not physical but rather
spiritual colonization?

In the past, the church wanted us to believe this or that—
the actual details of content are in my view irrelevant—as a
means of spiritual dominion and control; Now, the *instruments
of commerce*—corporations, governments, and, well, yes, once
again, churches—all wish in similar ways to take possession
of our souls. They do this by conditioning our likes and dislikes.
If this seems more to characterize the dark ambitions of a
totalitarian society and not the proud badge of freedom worn
by Western-style democracies, please consider that by the time
the average student arrives at a North American university, he
or she will have seen about 12,000 hours of television commercials.
Extraordinary, by any standard, and especially in need of an
explanation as to why this is tolerated. These new embodiments

of commerce and control thereby gain great influence over how we vote, how we spend our money, and how and what we believe is true and important. This they have done, and with amazing success.

If you think this exaggeration, imagine this: put a young person from China, India, Japan, Australia, North / South America, or Europe on a forest path anywhere in the world. Remarkably, they will in a nearly identical way look wholly out-of-place. Truly, they will look as lost as if they were fresh off the streets of downtown LA. Their movements will all seem to emerge from one simple, common, programmed language. These movements say, "*Hey, dude! I speak MTV! Get out of the way.*"

Revolt of youth? Quite doubtful. That would require at the very outset that one give away the keys to the car, tear up every logo in sight, smash the CD-player and TV.

Perhaps the greatest endangered species of Western culture has become now the *free spirit*, the one who can think, see and act with intellectual integrity and independence—*right or wrong*—for oneself.

I say to you, to outfit oneself in style for the coming peaceful, first-and-foremost *inward* revolution, one need not buy a single thing.

Now Imagine that!

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008*



Holly Lake, September aspect, view from above looking East, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
On the road in the Northwest of America.

When I asked Mark Simmons, former Speaker of the House in Oregon and now a leader in Rural Development, what he would name the beautiful little tarn above his camp at Hidden Lake, without a moment's hesitation he answered, "*Holly Lake*." For his daughter, Holly, who was standing near by with her mother, Joni—as she smiled and blushed in her charming way. "*Excellent*," I said. And so we gave a bit more shape in name and word and sound to the enchanted high alpine landscape above East Eagle Valley and the South Wallowa mountains.



Mark Simmons
at
Hidden Lake



Mark—
getting
ready to
pack out...



Holly Simmons,
at Hidden Lake

SEEING

I tell myself:

To study Nature, learn to see;

To learn to see, watch seeing in action;

To watch seeing in action, observe the blocks.

When the blocks are clearly seen—like *fear, greed, impatience, desire, etc.*—seeing begins to free itself like a river after its arbitrary dams are breached. I tell myself: The intelligence of the learning eye always looks both ways.

HOW THE WORLD CHANGES

Don't waste time trying to save corrupt politicians.

How much better to teach the young! It takes but nine years to educate a new generation of enlightened scientists, farmers, artists and healers. At the entrance way to this school of a wholly new way of being stands but a single sign with three imperatives: *"All those who enter here, leave behind your old ideas of war, of fear, of waste."*

DIALOGUE

The great and wonderful journey of dialogue begins when we come together with but six simple words:
"I don't know. Let's find out!"

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*



Holly Brook,
meanders



[Alpine Ensemble,](#)
[above Pop Creek Pass](#)



[Krag Peak &](#)
[Muir Lake](#)



[Bog Onion at](#)
[Holly Brook](#)



[Dipper Falls](#)
[Step Cascade &](#)
[September Stream—](#)
[a trio 37-step of](#)
[poems](#)



[Moonrise Over](#)
[Red Mountain / White](#)
[Granite](#)
[Mountain](#)



[Fall Alpine](#)
[Fleecflower—](#)
[close-up](#)



Dipper Rock<
Whisper Flow
&
TWO PATHS



ON THE CULT
OF COMPLICATION

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at the **PhotoWeek online store**, click [here](#). Or view as [SLIDESHOW](#) . . .
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South/
North
Sister
—
first
light



Hut,
Black
Butte



Ponderosa
Pines—
after burn



Manzanita
Spring!

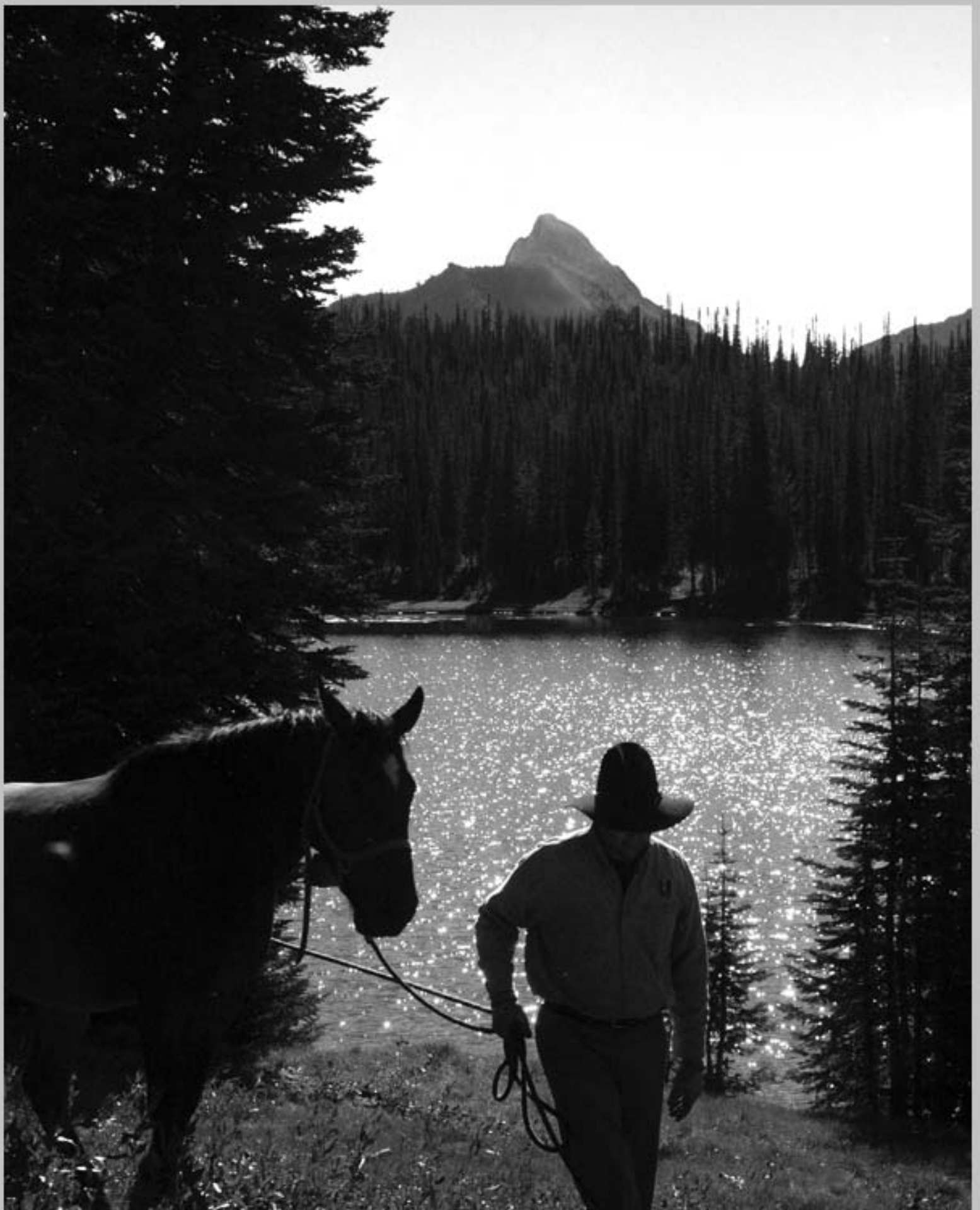
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Photograph by Cliff Crego © 2008 picture-poems.com
(created: **VII.27.2008**)



Mark Simmons, at his camp at Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .





Holly Simmons, at Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



*Pearly Everlasting with Blue Butterfly Duo, just under Horton Pass,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*

One of my constant themes is a difference I see—for better or worse—between mere *mechanical randomness* like that which a computer so easily generates, and chance. Chance I see as something far more mysterious. An event may seem like chance only because its matrix of causes lies outside the field of our comprehension; Or it may at other times appear as an almost divinely inspired confluence of hitherto separate streams of fate, as when two strangers unexpectedly encounter each other on a path and instantly recognize and are bonded by a kind of deep sympathetic resonance. I in no way think that such a view must retreat into a kind of dreamlike romantic subjectivity. On the contrary, such an open view of chance appears to me almost unavoidable as we by hard thinking reach the end of the road of logic and reason, and enter into the pathless wilds of the unknown. This is where Art & Science, I feel, so easily join hands and walk together, for who would deny that *what we do not understand* of reality is a vastly—perhaps infinitely so—greater realm or domain or area than that which we can truly say we know or understand. And who would deny that image and metaphor are not just as necessary items of our equipage as mathematics and formal model when it comes to exploring new and still uncharted terrain.

So, in this spirit, here is a little flutter of a piece which turns around this idea of chance and what I call the butterfly way . . .

A TOSS OF THE COIN

A fork in the trail appears,
with two wooden signs, each pointing
in opposite directions, each
of equal appeal.
Which way shall I follow?

I could stop to study my map.

Or wait a while to ask a fellow passerby.

Or I could leave it to the gods of chance

and toss a coin,

heads to the left,

tails to the right.

Always ready and willing to bet on good

fortune, I give my lucky nickel a stout thumb-flick

up into the clear morning air and watch

it spin for the longest time as if in slow motion,

then, to my amazement, miracle of miracles,

before my disbelieving eyes my coin

metamorphoses into the most

beautiful butterfly I ever beheld.

What to do? Of course:

Follow the butterfly way!

*Benchmark Camp,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008*



Pink Mountain Heather—close-up July aspect (Phyllodoce empetriformis),

above Hidden Lake, High Wallows . . . On the road in the American Northwest.

LOVE RESONANCE

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

See the electronic keyboard—*the synthesizer*—with
its brittle octaves made of wired concrete, and its complete
lack of *sympathetic resonance*.

When similar sounds no longer spontaneously vibrate
together, when like sounds no longer reflect one another,
when like sounds no longer mirror each other's energies,
upon which instrument shall we play our songs of love?
Upon which instrument shall we teach our children the
principles of nature's way?



Metolius—
Water. Water. Water.



*Dipper Rock, Whisper Flow, Cliff River watershed,
Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*

War pays, literally . . .

More than two thousand years ago, Aristotle (384 - 322 bce), in his classic *ETHICS*, states uncharacteristically as if it were self-evident and not in need of logical demonstration, that we prepare for, and wage war in order to achieve peace, and for no other reason. I disagree. War and Peace are not contraries, not opposites; they are in my view utterly unrelated, in the same way that what we think of as 'evil' and 'good' are also unrelated and not opposites.

The metaphysics behind these thoughts is important. For, if we believe that war is inevitable, and that we therefore must prepare for it, then the thought itself becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and hence one of the primary causes of the future wars that it sees as inevitable, and so on. And on, and on.

Projecting evil out into the world as an actual independent force out to do us in, say as the Lucifer of Dante's *Inferno*, also leads, in my view, to equally imbalanced ways of thinking.

This might be easier to see if we think for a moment on music. Now, we performers make mistakes. It happens all to the time, and to the best of us. Now imagine that if we, every time we erred—that is, strayed from the good, the right, the beautiful—simply said, "*Lucifer made me do it!*" That would not get us very far, would it? Because we would be looking for the source of our mistakes—in other words, the 'evil' that has befallen us—somewhere outside of ourselves, which is, of course, absurd.

Well, my contention is that with war and peace it is no different. In other words, war is not a means to peace; it is simply a mistake. A very grave mistake, indeed, one which has become in a way the world's most serious illness. After all, it is clearly irrational in the extreme to devote half of the world's resources to the slaughter of one another in greater and greater numbers and by ever-more scientific and efficient means.

This, I think, is clearly an ethical problem. Not a religious one. And not a political one. Why? Because it is a problem of the heart,

of compassion. And, in my view, as an ethical problem it even trumps climate change because the waste generated by the machinery of war is itself a primary cause of anthropogenic climate forcings—somebody please do the numbers here because I have no doubt that they are surely horrifying—and not the other way around. At least, not yet.

And the economy? Unpayable mountains of debt? Well, *"it's the war, stupid."* Preparations for war in even a healthy economy will tend to drive that economy towards collapse, because war preparations are by far the greatest destroyer of wealth, even when your industries still produce more than just weapons, and even when you have not borrowed your way into a debt so deep in order to finance those war preparations that it will take generations of hard work to clean up the mess.

So, why is this not a theme of political debates? Because, as the brilliant Marilyn Waring says in the Terre Nash's documentary, *Sex, Lies and Global Economies* (1998), *"The cost of a single new nuclear submarine equals the annual education budget of 23 developing countries with 160 million school-age children. This is war. War is marketable. War pays, literally."*

That's why.

TWO PATHS

*"It is no longer the choice between violence
and non-violence in this world;
it's non-violence or non-existence."*

from *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*'s last major address,
April 3rd, 1968, *"I Have Been to the Mountain Top."*

One of the most persistent and pernicious illusions
of control is the ancient idea that we can come to peace
by way of war. It is this thought that conflict is inescapable

and unavoidable that leads us to incessantly prepare for it.
Yet, preparing for war is not like preparing for fire, or for
a hurricane. No. Preparing for war is a primary cause of war.

There are evidently only two alternative paths: One follows
the drumbeat of essentially lost leaders, marching us straight
off the cliff of non-existence; The other is the path of peace.
Nowhere do they cross; Nowhere do they meet.

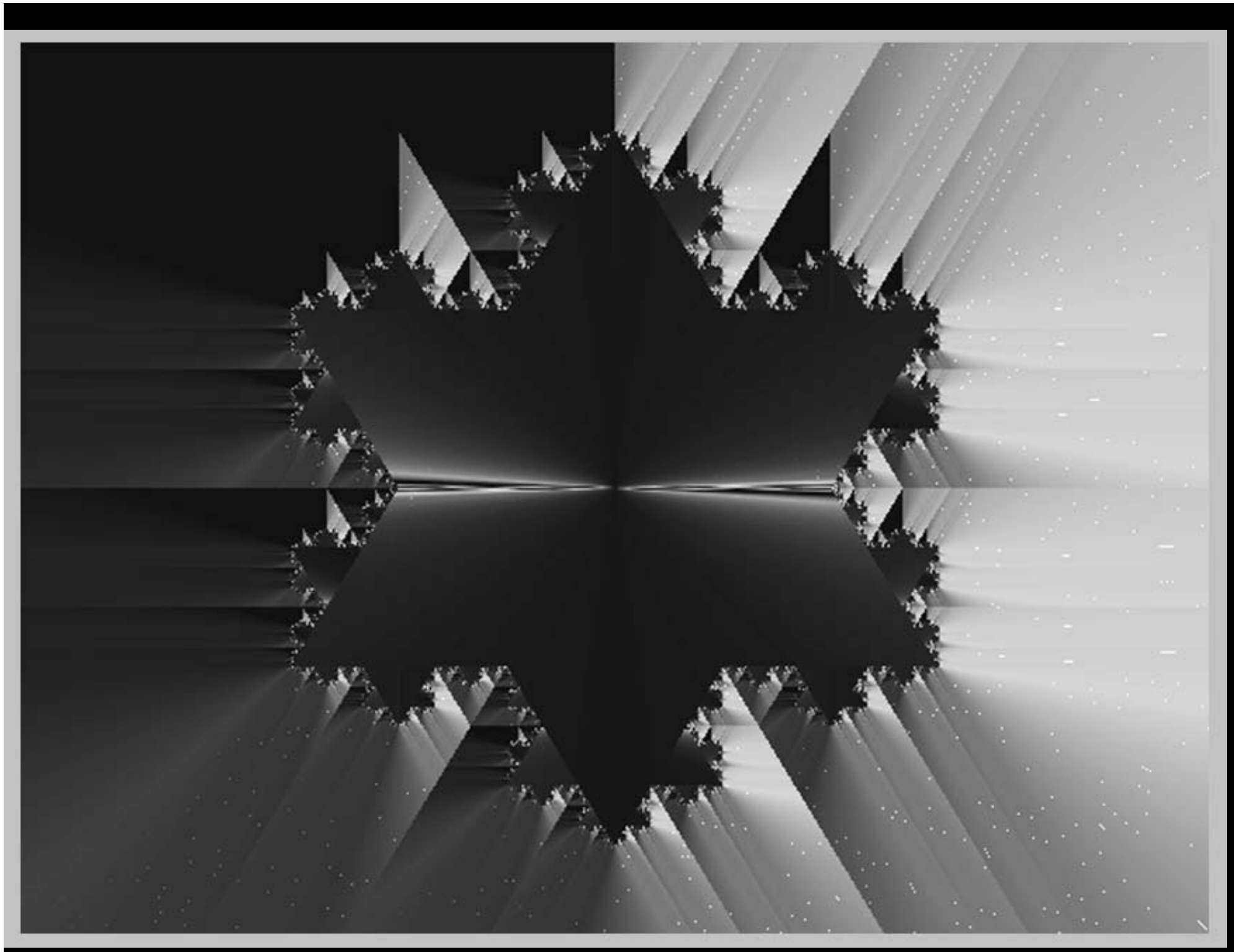
The great and historic challenge but also opportunity
before us, both individually and collectively, is the
demonstration in all possible directions—one at a time
and all at once—of the urgent necessity of this truth.

*Benchmark Camp,
Lakes Basin,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.30.2008*

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Koch Snowflake Flowform (generated with XoaS) . . . The *Koch Snowflake* was discovered in 1906 by Swedish mathematician, Niels von Koch. *"It begins with an equilateral triangle; three new equilateral triangles are constructed on each of its sides using the middle thirds as the bases, which are then removed to form a six-pointed star. This is continued in an infinite iterative process, so that the resulting curve has infinite length. The Koch snowflake is noteworthy in that it is continuous but nowhere differentiable; that is, at no point on the curve does there exist a tangent line."*
(Encyclopædia Britannica 2007)

THREE MINIATURES

(1) In limit, there is freedom; in freedom, there is limit.

Even the wildest of rivers creates itself the boundaries
of the bed that order its flow.

(2) New meaning necessitates new form.

After drinking from the source of a hundred mountain
streams, even the finest of wine glasses
may no longer suffice.

(3) Form emerges out of movement;

It is the outward envelope of the rhythmic pulse of change.

*"The Office,"
Richland, Oregon,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, X.15.2008*



Eagle Cap, Big Sky, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Hidden Lake, first light, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



*Cloud Flowforms, coming from the West at 10:00 am, next day clear
& warm. Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*



*Ron & Tommy, two South Wallowa friends, just returning with brothers
Frank & Clint Randall from a horeback trip up to Hidden Lake. Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*



*Morning Coffee Camp at Family Simmons—Joni & Mark, with daughter Holly,
Hidden Lake, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .*



Black Elderberry at 1800 m., (*Sambucus racemosa* var. *melanocarpa*) My friend, David Landrum, expert field biologist from Corvallis with almost 30 years of experience working in mountain forests throughout the Northwest and my better in things botanical in every way, still owes me \$100 on a bet he lost on this species. *S. racemosa* in the Alps is indeed red, and inedible; this Wallowa variation, is *dark blue*, and edible. **Sorry Dave! Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .**



Holly Lake, September Aspect, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Subalpine Fir forest along the meanders of Holly Brook , Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Hidden Lake, September Camp, morning light (7:15 am). In the Wallowas, east-facing high cirques make good campsites despite the cool nights, because they enjoy abundant early morning sunlight. Always a blessing. Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .



Streamside Fieldwork, East Eagle Valley , South Wallowas . . . Here
I'm working alongside the East Fork of Eagle Creek at one of my lower summer
basecamps, just below 5000 feet or so. I pack out of the roadless Eagle Cap Wilderness

area, process texts and photos, then bike out about 50 k to either Richland or Halfway, or a longer rider of 80 k to Baker City, all along the old gravel stagecoach gold route. Access to the South Wallowas is much more demanding than the North near Joseph or Enterprise. At the same time, there is much less traffic of any kind, whether hiker, horseback riders, or motorized vehicles. I've never once seen anyone else on a bike, and that despite the fact that the area is ring-wormed with old logging and mining roads that make for excellent mountain biking.



Metolius—
Water. Water. Water.



9-bark in Riparian



New Leaves—
unfolding

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FIELDWORK on Cornucopia Peak, Looking for Gold! (no luck...) (\pm 8600 feet)

View over Pine Valley & the community of Halfway . . .

On the road in the American Northwest.

FOOL'S PROSPECT—
to the reader . . .

O dear reader, please, you decide . . .

How ought I best spend my days?

Should I be out digging in dark loam for new poems,
or would I be better off looking for tiny specks of gold?

O, how I envy the industrious ant, dragging past me
the dead carcass of another species
very much larger than itself.

What booty! What satisfaction
at work well done!

No doubt, no hesitation there!

Yet here I sit, as I scribble and scratch away
at works fated—when the graces are with me
—to be beautiful, yet so sadly ignored.

And then, as my pan comes up empty again,
with nothing to show for my work today
but cold hands and a sore back,
slowly, I learn to see that all that sounds
right and good on my composing tablet may,

once tested by the Muse's unforgiving hammer of truth,
be but so much more shiny, attractive—
but o-so-easily fractured—
fool's prospect.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.1.2008*



Metolius—
Water. Water. Water.

CLIFF CREGO

The image displays a musical score for solo violin, titled "A Meditation on the Cult of Complication, Eagle Cap Wilderness..." by Cliff Crego. The score is written on a black background with white musical notation. It includes various musical notations such as treble clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf*, *ppp*, *mf*, and *subito*. There are also tempo markings like *sempre simile* and *constant*. A large, thick red scribble is drawn over the middle section of the score, and a yellow brushstroke is visible in the lower right corner. The score is numbered with measures 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 19, 24, 29, and 32. The title "A Meditation on the Cult of Complication, Eagle Cap Wilderness..." is written in a stylized font at the bottom of the score.

A Meditation on the Cult of Complication, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

ON THE CULT OF COMPLICATION— *a rant in search of a key . . .*

The contemporary worship of complication mistakes the contortions of the intellect wrapping round itself for the mystery of the new and unknown. The worship of complication, or the deliberately difficult and obscure, is cultivated and consumed by a style of thinking that has completely lost its resonance with the natural world.

The cult of complication is like the obsessive figuring of a mind caught up in the random zig-zag noise of 12-tone melodies biting at my ears like hordes of hungry horseflies in a hot, unbearably dry afternoon sun, or in the degenerative chaos of money markets before they surge like drug-induced erections and then just as suddenly and precipitously collapse.

I say to you, the energy that we sense when we spontaneously encounter the new and unknown is an altogether different order of movement. It instantly aligns, challenges, and speaks to our whole being, like the firebolt of attraction we experience when unexpectedly encountering an attractive stranger's face. Or when I'm struck dumb by Rilke's magic wand of cascading sound images as it releases a flood of insight and emotion within me. Or when I hear that one Mozart violin sonata in a minor key that I must learn by heart and arrange. Or when I stand before the hurricane of sound of a Varèse that sweeps away in a heartbeat all the piles of accumulated contemporary rubbish with one true call of a solitary trumpet, or roar of a contrabass-trombone. That, Sirs, is the miracle of the new. Like the northface of an unclimbed mountain, it is simply there, pristine, pure and utterly indifferent to the confused chatter of our clever and oh-so-petty coffeehouse reviews.

*Hidden Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.5.2008*

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Marker Stonepine—Whitebark Pine, dying (*Pinus albicaulis*) This is a color

& form to learn. The sad rusty-red of sick stonepines stands out on high slopes and ridges at a distance of more than 1000 meters. I use them as crosscountry guideposts, hence, the epithet "marker."

Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

Whitebark Pines are in trouble around the mountains of the Northwest. For me, they have become a *sentinel species* because they are not only the grandest and, in my view, most powerful of pines to reach the upper limits of treeline—even in death the sun-bleached white snags stand tall for centuries—but also, like wounded watchful elders, the Nestors of the high-country, they are sounding a message of warning.

In the Alps, a related species of stonepine, *Pinus cembra*, is an object of much veneration and folklore. Just the act of an old mountain farmer saying its name in dialect, *Arve*, seems to fill him with a kind of primeval religious awe. Indeed, it has for hundreds of years been the favored wood for carving, and remarkably, for works of Art which show when seen within the traditional European cultural categories both sacred and profane aspects, ie., both crucifixes & 'wildman' masks for mountain carnival, *Fastnacht*.

I mention this only because I am repeatedly reminded that no similar tradition, as far as I know, exists in North America. Perhaps that is why only a handful of dedicated scientific researchers seem to be listening seriously to what the Whitebarks are saying, and not the culture at large. For as always—and this is sad to say, and is of course only my own opinion—North American culture is largely indifferent, is largely uninformed by the spirit of its great mountains.

Perhaps that is why I feel somehow compelled to mark in image and word as many of the sick stonepines as possible that I meet along the way.

| see also: [Whitebark Pines: *Endangered Sentinel*](#) for a collection of more images |

WHITEBARK PINE—8 *key ecological*

features (after Charles G. Johnson)

- (1) Of little commercial value for timber products.
- (2) Distribution and abundance of the species dependent on Clark's nutcracker for seed dispersal.
- (3) Fire resistant due to its severe site and scattered nature (fire discriminates against *subalpine firs* giving competitive advantage to the pine).
- (4) Fire control lengthens intervals between sanitizing burns resulting in fire-prone stands due to increases in fir composition.
- (5) Very susceptible to **white pine blister rust** and secondarily to **mountain pine beetle** after weakening by the rust.
- (6) Besides Clark's nutcracker, woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, finches, crossbills, grosbeaks and blue grouse use the seeds. Squirrels, chipmunks and bears use the caches.
- (7) Blue grouse use needles and buds.
- (8) Greatest value of the tree is for watershed protection.

*data from Alpine and Subalpine Vegetation
of the Wallowa, Seven Devils and Blue Mountains*

By **Charles Grier Johnson Jr.**

2004 USDA- Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008*



Alpine Fleeceflower—close-up (Polygonum phytolaccaefolium)

Member of the Buckwheat family—notice the knot-like swellings

giving the clan its other somewhat less charming common name, Knotweed—after the first frost of highcountry autumn, the entire plant loses its moisture, becomes paper-like in texture, and then turns a stunning fiery orange to rusty red. With parboiling and stirfying, much like, say, Burdock, the finger-thick roots of Fleeceflower are not only edible but in my opinion a real delicacy. If there is one plant to know in the Wallows come fall, this is it!

Eagle Cap Wilderness ...

Here's is an autumn quartet of Alpine Fleeceflower images growing in diverse situations varying in altitude from about 2000 to 2400 m., and mostly seeming to prefer a granite (gray background!) substrate:



[Alpine
Fleeceflower
on
Granite](#)



[Fleeceflower
at Pop
Creek
Pass](#)



[Horsemen
Crossing
Fleeceflower
Meadow](#)



[Fleeceflower
At Glacier
Lake](#)

ON FREEDOM'S NECESSARY BALANCE

Freedom, it seems to me, is always a question of balance between *freedom to*, on the one hand, and *freedom from*, on the other.

I might feel that I should be free to mine for gold upstream from your homestead. You, in contrast, may feel equally strongly the right to be free from the danger of the cyanide from my leech ponds getting into your drinking water.

Clearly, the task of the rule of law is protect both freedoms,

carefully weighing the pros and cons in each case in an ongoing way. Balance between the two freedoms is not a fixed state, but more akin to keeping a bike upright as the rider shifts his or her weight, now to the left, now to the right away from the direction of the fall.

Notice, too, that freedom so balanced is always *ethical* freedom. That is, it is freedom that is necessarily mindful of the myriad potential negative consequences of actions undertaken by free agents as they reverberate throughout the wider community, or the human-plus-natural-environment, as a whole.

*Camp Lost & Found,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.15.2008*

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Alpine Fleeceflower at Glacier Lake (Polygonum phytolaccaefolium)

Member of the Buckwheat family—notice the knot-like swellings



Alpine Fleeceflower on Granite (*Polygonum phytolaccaefolium*)

Member of the Buckwheat family—notice the knot-like swellings





Horsemen Crossing Fleeceflower Meadow (Polygonum phytolaccaefolium)

Member of the Buckwheat family—notice the knot-like swellings

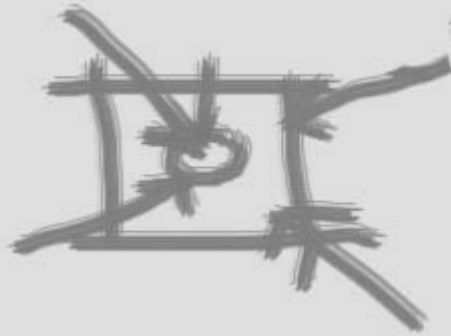


Rock-water Flowform, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .

ON TWO DESTRUCTIVE EXCEPTIONS TO NATURAL MOVEMENT

The natural web of life—or how a great diversity of species are knitted together in a weave of interdependencies—has deep roots in both space and time. Its strength is not just its resilience, but also its ability to quickly adapt to change. These changes may be small and hardly noticeable, or large-scale and catastrophic, but both are frequently initiated by what are essentially chance events. The responses, however, are anything but determined by chance, and are rather swift adaptations shaped by, in the view being sketched here, highly developed forms of natural intelligence. This complementary back and forth of *chance* and *necessity* results in a deeper formative ground which is remarkably free of waste and contradiction.

Now, two uniquely problematic forms of movement which are evidently not native to this web of life but which are characteristic of humans and the artifacts which they produce are: First, *the total absence of movement*, as for instance where toxic wastes accumulate in life-web environments as essentially dead, inert weights because of their inability to break down and thereby become reassimilated as new components of the natural cycle; Second, the other extreme is *exponential runaway growth*. This occurs, for example, when species which are not part of the life-web are for whatever reason introduced and then go on to fragment the fabric of interrelationships and dependencies. Because exponential runaway growth is clearly growth which, as we say, is *out of control*, it contradicts what I see as the universal principle of natural limit.



the total absence of movement



exponential runaway growth

***TWO EXTREME FORMS OF DESTRUCTIVE,
NON-NATURAL MOVEMENT***

It is evidently because both extremes violate the natural order of movement that they are potentially so destructive. They both place themselves, so to speak, *outside* of natural movement by either *refusing* to move, as in the case of the toxin that will not budge, or by *refusing to stop moving*, as in the case of exponential runaway growth of, for example, some weeds. One could say that both sides of this refusal defy the central ordering principle of limit, which in turn is both the complementary side of freedom and a key feature of the dynamic balance of all self-sustaining natural cycles.

One expansion of this idea into the realm of finance that I'll

explore in another miniature is how the mathematics of compound interest results in equally destructive cultural movements: one grinding the debt of the already poor into an absolute insoluble toxic standstill; the other running away exponentially with more and more wealth going to the already wealthy, seemingly without end or limit. Remarkably, in an almost identical way to natural systems, this imbalance must necessarily lead to total collapse. And also remarkably, the key missing concept or feature is again simply limit. A balanced, free economy, in my view, must of necessity be a strictly limited one. Just like an essentially self-organizing network of streaming pathways—either for cars or for digital data, it makes no difference—there must be a small, explicit, unambiguous set of clear rules for what is *not* allowed: not faster than, not on that side of the road, turn here, stop there, etc. In an economy, these speed limits on wealth would instantly insure a vastly more equitable distribution of essential resources among all the peoples of the world community. Like Gandhi famously said: "*The Earth provides enough for man's need, but not for his greed.*" We would do well, I think, to redesign our cultural systems to conform organically to the demonstrably more creative intelligence of the natural world by taking this fundamental insight as our basic point of departure.

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*Moonrise Over Red Mountain / (White) Granite Mountain, Eagle Cap Wilderness . . .
View East from Muir Lake, IX.12.2008 ('Crater Lake'...)*

Mountains & Meaning

What mountains mean to us in many unconscious, tacit, yet powerful ways conditions or forms our attitudes towards them, as well as our own behavior once we have entered them. Yet, the metaphysics of mountains, in my view, suffers tremendously from outmoded stereotypes, which may or may not be partially true—like monks in meditation in the high plains of Tibet (now being replaced by Chinese machine guns), or Cowboys and Indians fighting it out in the rugged canyons and highlands of the American West—but they greatly impede the discovering of new and more currently appropriate ways of seeing and being.

Mountains have, after-all—just as the North and South poles of the planet—become ground zero for the effects of climate chaos. So any disaster already unfolding down in the lowlands one can easily amplify by at least a factor of two once we enter the land above the trees. Glaciers are disappearing at a very much faster pace than any expert I know of had predicted until very recently. Permafrost is melting. Artifacts in the Alps, a range I for personal reasons feel very close to, are coming out of the melting ice around the Schnidejoch between Wallis and Berner Oberland which are more than six thousand years old. The great Whitebark Pines, some of the oldest trees in the American Northwest, are becoming what I think of as the polar bear of trees because they are literally being forced off the planet, off the tops of mountains. As temperatures rise just one or two degrees c., the Whitebarks are falling prey to mountain pine beetle infestations against which they have never evolved defenses.

So what do mountains mean to me? Well, obviously, many things. What comes immediately to mind is Emerson's saying, *"Poetry is saying the most important things in the simplest possible of ways."* That, it seems to me, is what the mountains are saying to us. The most important things, in the very simplest of ways. The way a river begins out of nowhere by bubbling up from the ground as a trickle of pure, crystalline spring water.

Or a genus of plants like the Buckwheats miraculously and artfully adapts to the wind and cold as each species progressively becomes lower and more compact the higher it grows. Or the graceful, almost timeless meanders of an alpine boggy brook, full of healthy lightning fast fingerlings, going so against the grain of the straight-line concrete roads and channels of present Western culture. Or the wonderful symbiosis—a kind of *living together art-form*—of the Nutcracker and Whitebark Pine, the tree providing nutritious nuts for the bird, the bird playing the role of haphazard gardner for the tree as it caches hundreds of nuts, many of which it forgets and that then go onto sprout and become new stonepine seedlings.

This is the stuff not just poems are made of, but also myth and fairy-tale. And yet, where are the children? Nowhere in the Northwest, nowhere in the Wallowa wilderness have I seen children under 12 years of age. I think instantly of Sacajawea of the great Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery carrying her little infant Jean-Pierre safely and with an utterly amazing self-confidence—truly a great gift of her Shoshone culture—from present day North Dakota to the Oregon coast and back again. Climb Everest? Well, yes, perhaps. But in my book, let some young intrepid mother / alpinist repeat or better that remarkable feat.

So what do the mountains mean to us? Evidently, not a place to teach the young—to let them learn for themselves—the most important things, in the simplest possible of ways. This must change. And I am confident it will change once we resolutely turn to face the Sun, and abandoned the failure of the culture of oil, war and waste.

Imagine sitting around the fire-ring at night and looking out on the moonrise pictured above. How would you open up the eyes of a child to the scene? I would say: *"You see that red earth mountain on the left? And look at that mountain almost as white as snow on the right! Do you see how the Moon is rising right where the two mountains join hands? That's the Moon's way of blessing them both. That's the Moon's way of telling the 'red' Native American peoples and the 'white' European-American peoples that they need to make spiritual peace for all the bad things that happened in the past. Pretty, isn't it?"*

Let me sound out this little meditation with a childlike miniature in the manner of Emily Dickinson:

I lost my spirit the other day.
It was nothing I had read,
Or anything I had done or said,
It was something
I did not,
could not, say.
The mountains made it stay.

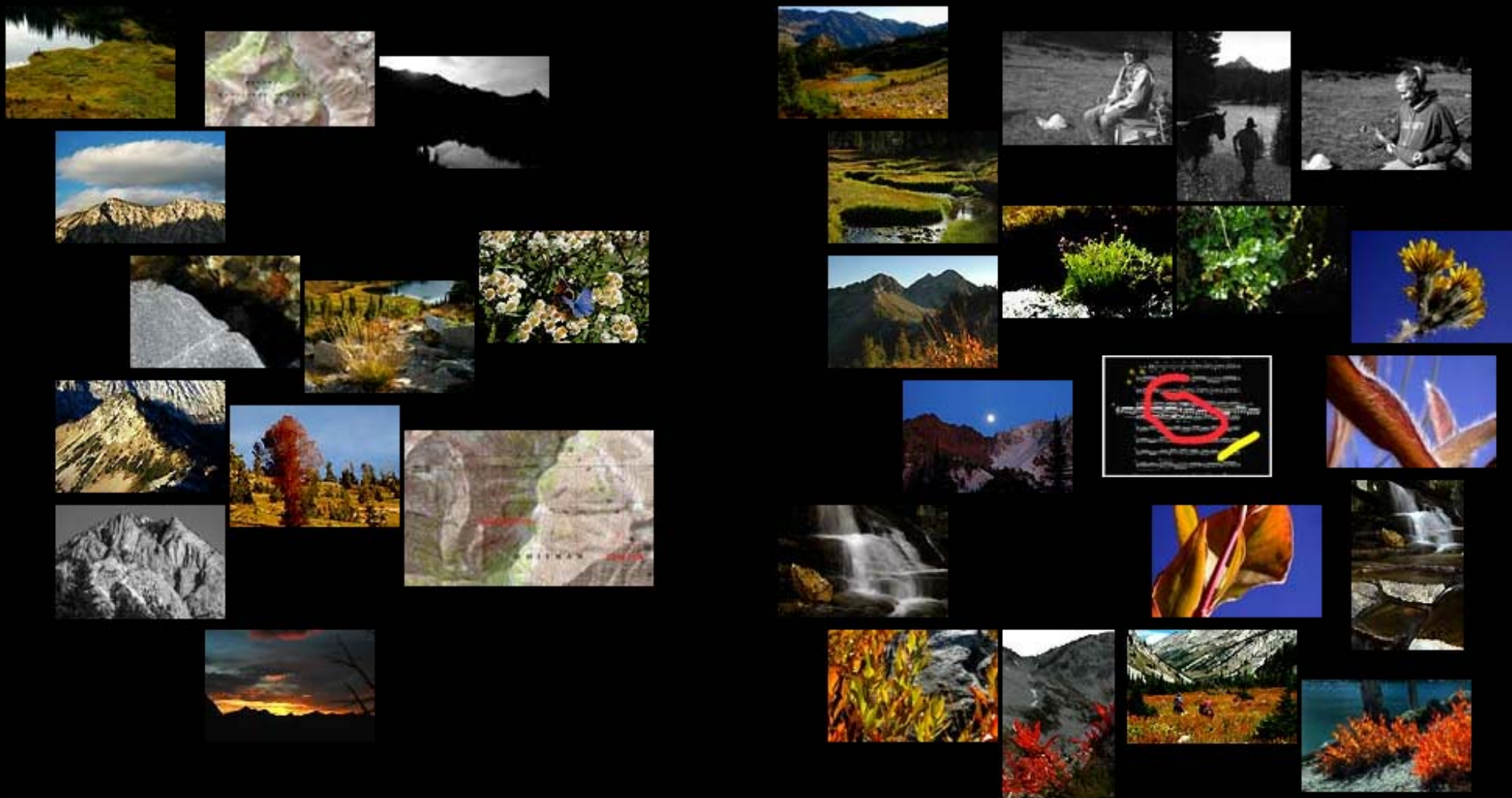
*Muir Lake,
Eagle Cap Wilderness,
Oregon, IX.12.2008*

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