

## Farm to Text Meeting Notes 3.23.16

- Attendees:
  - Andrea Crawford
  - Nate Preus
  - John Linstrom
  - Kim Adams
  - Leah Becker
  - Christie Chaplin-Sanders
  - Shifali Patel
  - Henry Randal
- Wendell Berry: The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture
  - Berry has described this book as being conceived of as a single-structure essay (a cohesive unit)→idea unfolded over the course of the book
  - Pg. 8: resonance with post-structuralism (the real is something you might need to nurture) and with Baudrillard
    - Map covers the real, *inverted*: no longer do we have a reality covered by a map of discourse/understanding/media (degrading things), instead we have a map that covers the real and the real is the rotting thing that is vanishing
    - The attempt to map the real gets out of hand→linked to the advent of capitalism (the erasure of the real is capitalism eating itself)
    - The more we start putting our faith in the map rather than real the more we perpetuate our ability to *only* see the map that we've drawn for ourselves—Berry gets at this too, especially in the way that we have commoditized food (don't see the reality of food, but the *market* of food and food after harvest)
      - Bailey: *The Apple Tree*; way that a tree becomes a bud becomes a fruit→what role can literature and art play in punching through the map?
    - Baudrillard lacks an ethical critique that Berry might provide
      - Berry's text has tension between the macro level critique of economic domination/capital vs. the micro level of personal responsibility of transforming ourselves (Pg. 23)
  - Use of the word "Value" in Berry: spiritual or Marxist? Human value or commodity value?
  - Critique of Berry as nostalgic
    - BUT no past to go back to (colonization has already happened in America)
      - Boomers (looking for the next economic boom) vs. Stickers (one who finds the pleasant place and builds a community)→ Wendell Berry's 2012 Jefferson Lecture
        - BUT Native Americans and farmers were/are not always *just* stickers and the colonizers and miners not *just* the boomers. Perhaps Berry's text is too polemical.
  - Bad farming (Ch. 4)
    - What we lost: the *potential* that was there to create a sustainable community
    - Pg. 40: where the economic system has driven the farming community
    - We are *all* implicated in this problematic system... so how do you (we) change that system?
      - Berry starts with individual and extends outward (very agrarian)
      - How is an organization different from a community?
        - Berry critiques non-local organizations and privileges knowledge cultures of local communities
        - Pg. 8: organizations as exploiters; human orders as nurturers
          - "Mystery": "Divine Mystery"? "Embracing Ignorance"?

- Rural Americans as a threatened “minority”
  - Economic system systematically disconnects people from their land by consolidating it for the hands of the few
  - Uses populations that we have available vocabulary for as metaphors for what happens to rural Americans
  - Native American oppression
    - “Redskin” (Pg. 4-5): designated victims of exploitation
    - Fails to speak about Native American land processes, good or bad (starts with European Americans rather than Native Americans)
  - “Niggering” the world (Pg. 12)
  - Could Berry be drawing a distinction between the *motivations* behind land use? Maybe, but he doesn’t go there
- Cooperative economy vs. competitive economy
  - Quasi-socialist undercurrent
  - William Morris and Berry agree: we have degraded work so much that we pretend that we don’t want to do it. But a fulfilling human existence means doing good work. (Ruskin: loves gothic architecture because you can see the labor)
- Pg. 10
  - Can better food production practices be elitist? There will not be enough food for everyone, but what is the greater good? What is the best way to address world hunger? →small batch production is nearly nonexistent today, because it isn’t what is subsidized, etc.
  - Perhaps Fritz Haber’s Haber-Bosch process has led to this misconception that mass farming and petroleum-based fertilizer can help feed the world
  - People who are currently suffering in the agricultural system now are perhaps the people who are going to continue suffering (low-income)→this is the problem we have to fix, monetarily
- Pg. 42 (second full paragraph)
  - Idea that “inefficient producers” need to be “eliminated” is shortsighted and unfairly establishes value (“abundance will destroy its producers”)
    - This critique really is a class critique, but not fully fleshed out
- The Efficiency Movement at the turn of the century
  - Division of labor (Adam Smith)→where work becomes demeaned (applies to modern agriculture)
    - BUT this is also when slavery is dismantled because labor is shrugged off onto machines (which brought its own problems)
  - Once you had surplus food you could have bureaucrats who could cut down on the people producing the food which leads to the opposite of surplus
- Pg. 13
  - Answers to problems are to be found in our history
    - Theorizing land into macro economic models is almost impossible because cannot locate the productivity
    - Land cannot function as a commodity (property rights are merely an idea: cannot sell it in the same way as a material *product*)→commodities are false
- Ch. 3 (Pg. 28)
  - “Terrarium view of the world”→viewing world through glass (possessive capitalist ideas of property)
  - “The question isn’t to use or not to use, but how to use”
- Next Month: Sonya Posmentier
  - Chapter from her book in progress and a conversation with her