

ON Beauty

Douglas R. Tompkins—Aesthetics and Activism



Tom Butler and Sandra Lubarsky

with principal photography by Antonio Vizcaíno

If anything can save the world, I'd put my money on beauty.

DOUG TOMPKINS

ON Beauty

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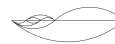
TEXT

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DAVID BROWER CENTER

Doug Tompkins loved life, in its every manifestation, but especially all that was wild and beautiful. He never felt more alive than when immersed in wildness. A loyal friend to nature, Doug used his singular talents to, as he'd say, "pay his rent for living on Earth," echoing the late David Brower. With fearless resolve, persistence, and work, Doug created a legacy of vast protected lands, rebounding wildlife populations, and inspired activist communities around the world. This volume is dedicated to Doug, our beautiful friend. —PETER BUCKLEY

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Monte León National Park, Argentina



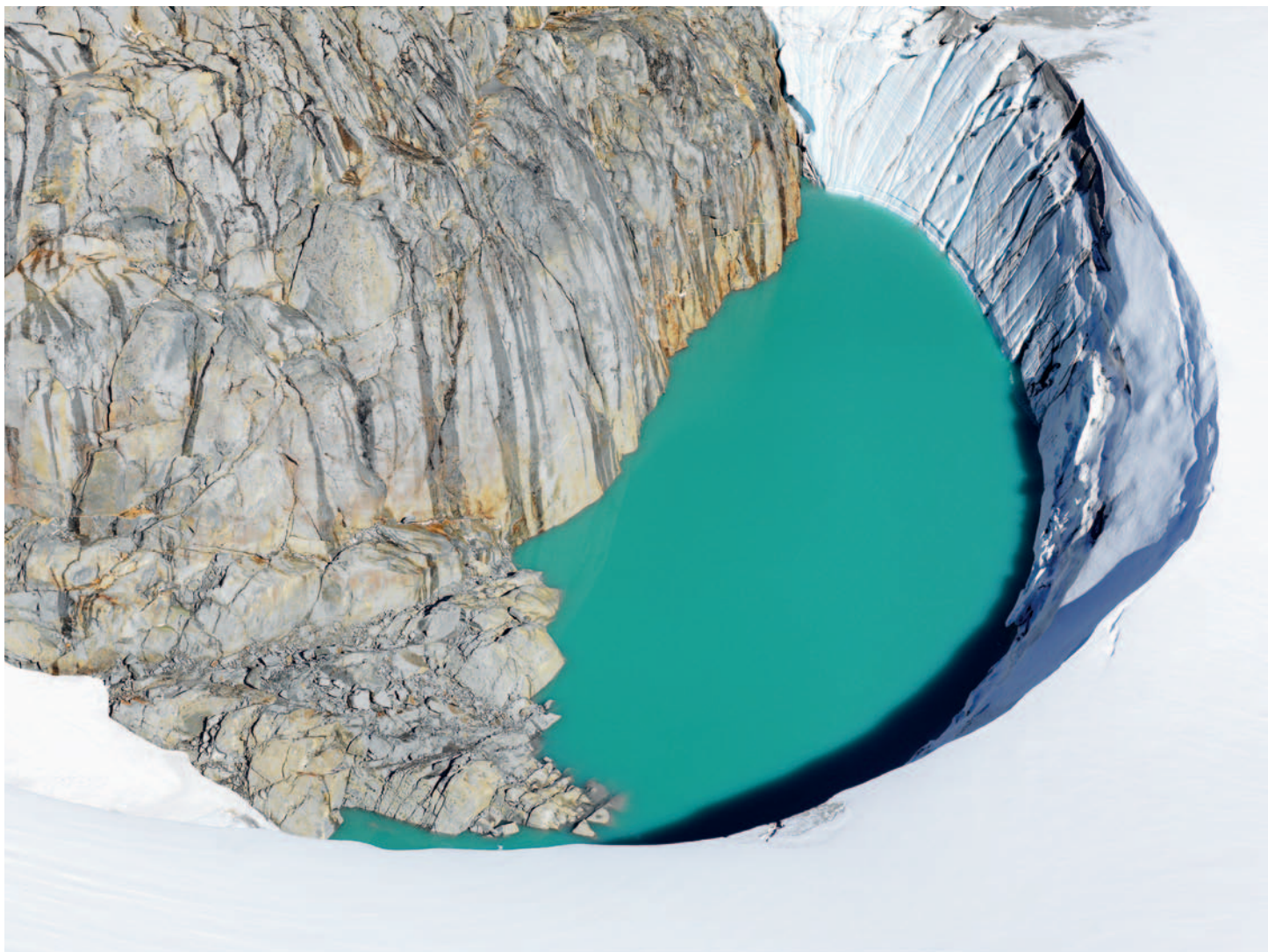
Corcovado National Park, Chile





Perito Moreno National Park, Argentina





Pumalin Park, Chile (left), Monte León National Park, Argentina (right)



Patagonia National Park, Argentina





Mountain lion, Chilean Patagonia (left), snowy egret, Iberá Natural Reserve, Argentina (right)





Yendegaia National Park, Chile (left), Pumalín Park, Chile (right)



Yendegaia National Park, Chile



*Douglas Tompkins on Hell's Lum,
Cairngorm Mountains, Scotland*



PROLOGUE The Beautiful Line

TO A NONCLIMBER, THE PERCH SEEMS PERILOUS. The ice-covered rock is nearly vertical. Only the front points of the climber's crampons are embedded in the ice. The man on the cliff is not only unroped—and therefore unbelayed in case of a fall—he does not appear to be wearing a climbing harness. That is, he does not intend to “rope up,” as climbers say, but to ascend the route unprotected. His hands are obscured, but are clearly not being used to hold his ice axes and thereby provide a third point of contact with the ice.

It is just one brief moment in time, one day of many, many days that Douglas Rainsford Tompkins spent in wild country. But that instant captured on film hints at the boldness—the attitude of “commit first and then figure it out”—that characterized Doug's approach to outdoor adventures, business, and conservation activism through the decades.

Yvon Chouinard, Doug's friend and climbing companion for more than half a century, says that this photo of Tompkins on Hell's Lum in Scotland is the best shot he ever took. It is indeed a fine image. A set of rounded forms makes an appealing pattern, the photo conveys movement, with a palette of blues and grays and sunlight reflecting off the ice.

Like every photograph, however, the image misleads, committing sins of omission. There are many elements to absorb and admire, yet much that is suggested remains unseen. Its two dimensions merely intimate a three-dimensional reality. Its tight cropping keeps us in the dark about how far Doug would fall if his crampons or the ice should fail. Would a slip be fatal? We can imagine the wind howling across the Scottish highlands but we cannot feel the cold soaking into hands and feet. We cannot feel the dampness of the air, or the pricks of spindrift as the wind sends pellets of airborne snow and ice onto exposed skin.

But we can see one thing quite clearly. We see Doug Tompkins enveloped in beauty.

AT THE TIME OF THAT OUTING in the Cairngorm Mountains with Chouinard, Tompkins was an accomplished alpinist, climbing at a level somewhat below the sport's best. Doug was too busy to pursue mountaineering full-time. A few years earlier, he had opened two outdoor equipment stores in the San Francisco Bay area, and running his business, The North Face, limited Tompkins to pursuing his sporting interests only part-time.

From childhood, Doug had been an outstanding athlete. First learning to ski at a hill near his family's home in New York's Hudson River Valley, and to climb at the cream-colored crags of the Shawangunks, a mecca for rock climbing in the Northeast, he was called to the mountains. He had been a downhill ski racer, training with elite skiers on the U.S. national ski team, in hopes of making the Olympic squad. He didn't make the team but his first visit to Chile for off-season ski training led to a lasting passion for that region of the southern hemisphere.

In 1968, Tompkins, Chouinard, and three other climbers drove a van from California to the southern reaches of South America—surfing and skiing and shooting film along the way—to attempt the third ascent of Mount Fitz Roy in Argentine Patagonia. The footage is evocative of a more innocent time when such expeditions were driven by the thrill of adventure for its own sake, not corporate sponsorship or viral video clicks. The film's sequences of Doug reveal an innate, incandescent physicality; on a surfboard or descending a snowfield on skis, he exudes charisma.

In downhill skiing generally, and racing particularly, finding the right line is central. The difference between being on or off the medal podium may be fractions of a second. The winner will be the one who has taken the ideal line down the mountain, skiing as boldly as possible without missing a gate and veering off course.

In rock climbing, too, the line or route of ascent is primary. Whether a route will “go”—that is, can be climbed, and with what level of equipment

and technique, is a matter of style. In the 1960s, big-wall rock climbing transitioned from the use of pitons, metal pins hammered into cracks which the climbers used to ascend, to “free” climbing where pitons and bolts drilled into the cliff were used only for protection in case of a fall. A body of ethics emerged alongside the technological innovations in gear that soon allowed the pitons and bolts mostly to be abandoned. The cleanest line became a polestar for climbers of Doug Tompkins’s generation. Doug’s friends Royal Robbins, Yvon Chouinard, and others were the intellectual fathers of that new body of climbing ethics.

In extreme level whitewater kayaking on wilderness rivers, an activity that Doug later would pursue at the highest level while paddling with Robbins and others, identifying the right line is not merely a matter of beating other ski racers or climbing a route with the purest style. It can be a matter of life and death. Making the right choices means survival; a mistake can mean calamity or worse.

Looking back on the arc of his life, it seems fair to suggest that seeking the most ambitious and beautiful line is a consistent trait of Doug’s adventuring, business, and nature conservation eras. While perhaps more obvious when he was working on graphic design or architectural projects, it is also clear that Doug integrated aesthetics into all of his organic farming work and park-making initiatives during his later decades.

Though as a young man he did not articulate it explicitly, the pursuit of beauty was a central animating force in Tompkins’s intellectual development. As an older man with a fully formed worldview, Doug’s belief that all life

has intrinsic value—and that beauty is the expression of this value—led him to focus his formidable energies on projects that integrated aesthetics and activism. The result was a series of astounding accomplishments in defense of nature’s vitality.

Many of us who knew Doug have been inspired by his life and work—and by how the *idea of beauty* can be a transformational force for healing a broken world. Today, when the loss of beauty accelerates daily, when the collective activity of humanity has triggered a global holocaust of our fellow members in the community of life, how might we embrace beauty as an animating force to guide our trek back toward membership and communion? What if each of us aimed, as Doug did, for the beautiful line, aligning the gradients of our lives with those of others? What if every person sought to embody, in the most ambitious way available to her or him, a beautiful life?

Ultimately for each of us who live in the extraordinary, too-rich-for-words tangle of life in this moment on Earth, it comes down to this: How can we live in ways that promote beauty? —TOM BUTLER

Universal Beauty

TOM BUTLER

Yendegaia National Park, Chile





There is no synonym for God so perfect as beauty.

JOHN MUIR

*b*EFORE JOHN MUIR BECAME the great prophet of American wilderness and champion for national parks, he took a thousand-mile walk to the Gulf of Mexico, botanizing along the way, and rambled widely through California's mountains, puzzling out the geology and glacial shaping of the landforms he traversed. The largely self-taught naturalist was a mountaineer and endurance athlete of prodigious boldness and skill. Even when carrying a plant press to save specimens, Muir typically traveled light, often with little more than a satchel containing bread, a book or two, and his journal.

One day in December of 1874, while Muir hiked alone in the northern Sierras, a storm gathered. A cautious mountaineer would have

Perito Moreno National Park, Argentina

sought shelter in the low country. Muir instead went up, climbing a ridge to experience the weather's full force. At the height of land, he noted a cluster of hundred-foot-tall Douglas fir trees whose "lithe, brushy tops were rocking and swirling in wild ecstasy." Muir was accustomed to climbing trees for his botanical studies; he easily ascended the tallest fir and spent hours riding the storm's currents.

"The slender tops fairly flapped and swished in the passionate torrent, bending and swirling backward and forward, round and round, tracing indescribable combinations of vertical and horizontal curves, while I clung with muscles firm braced, like a bobolink on a reed," he later wrote. During his time aloft, Muir reveled in the "the high festival" of fragrant air, sublime light, and the "music" of windswept trees. "The sounds of the storm," he noted, "corresponded gloriously with this wild exuberance of light and motion."

While this recounting of "wild ecstasy" in the treetops is particularly thrilling, Muir's prose generally tended toward the effusive, with praise of "Nature's open, harmonious, songful, sunny, everyday beauty" a leitmotif. Later sought out by presidents and captains of industry, the then-obscure naturalist would become famous through his writings, which form a running commentary on his own rapturous relationship with nature, the "freedom and glory" he enjoyed in "God's wilderness."

A Scotsman by birth who emigrated to America with his family at age eleven, Muir's early years on a hardscrabble farm carved from the American wilderness were filled with toil and cruelty at the hand of his devout,

evangelical father, whose strain of Calvinist-influenced Christianity was as severe as the beatings he inflicted on his son John. The younger Muir's theological leanings would later evolve toward pantheism, but his deep familiarity with the King James Bible not only influenced the quality of his prose but also laid the foundation for his evolving worldview.

Like most people of his place and time, Muir would have been able to recite by heart the opening passage of Genesis, which formed the dominant creation myth of his culture:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
And God said, "Let there be light:" and there was light.

In that account, God goes on to separate the heavens and earth, the land from the waters, to fill the Earth with plants and animals, to create men and women, and then to give humans "dominion" over all of the Creation. It's a rich story, beautiful in its drama and poetry, albeit problematic once one gets to the granting of ownership of and divine exhortation to "subdue" the Earth.

Muir, a man of science as well as a believer in the sacredness of nature, would later explicitly reject the anthropocentrism inherent in the Genesis story, writing, "No dogma taught by the present civilization seems to form so insuperable an obstacle in the way of a right understanding of the relations which culture

sustains to wildness as that which regards the world as made especially for the uses of man. Every animal, plant, and crystal controverts it in the plainest terms.”

In another work he asked, “ Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?” In another, while railing against humanity’s hubris, he noted: “I have precious little sympathy for the selfish propriety of civilized man, and if a war of races should occur between the wild beasts and Lord Man I would be tempted to sympathize with the bears.”

Donald Worster’s brilliant biography of Muir, *A Passion for Nature*, includes a scene wherein Muir comes upon a bear carcass and stops to mourn his fallen ursine neighbor. The notion that the bear was kin, a relative in the community of life, was an idea at odds with Muir’s cultural heritage but of course commonplace in indigenous cultures around the world. If Muir had been born to any of numerous native North American nations, he would have learned stories in which bears figured prominently in the cultural mythology and would have been able to recite his tribe’s creation myths as readily as the young Scotsman quoted scripture.

The Miwok Indians, who thrived for millennia in the western Sierra foothills down to the Pacific Coast before a conquering civilization disrupted their culture, have a creation story featuring a female silver fox and male coyote who sing and dance the world into being. Without digressing into Muir’s interactions with Native Americans (suffice it to say he was both a progressive thinker as well as a product of that colonial civilization with its racial bias), Muir’s writings and those of other early thinkers in what came to be the

American wilderness conservation movement reflected earlier, indigenous ways of experiencing the world.

Muir's description of nature's intrinsic "order and beauty," his familial reverence toward other forms of life, the way he believed that it was a property of humans to glow "with joy" when "exposed to the rays of mountain beauty"—these values are aligned with the sentiment encapsulated in the Navajo/Diné people's traditional prayer, "The Beauty Way":

In beauty I walk
With beauty before me I walk
With beauty behind me I walk
With beauty above me I walk
With beauty around me I walk
It has become beauty again
It has become beauty again
It has become beauty again
It has become beauty again

Along with the needs of food, shelter, and sex, there may be no more fundamental human yearning than this—to be connected, to be in harmony, to feel rooted to place and people, to walk in beauty. "Biophilia," the term coined by biologist Edward O. Wilson to describe our innate inclination to affiliate with the diversity of life, captures that longing.

Almost certainly the mountaineer's compulsion—the drive that John Muir felt to climb the highest peaks in the Sierras, or Doug Tompkins's zeal to put up first ascents on multiple continents—was partly an expression of this beauty-seeking tendency. And even for us wilderness travelers who do not aspire to similar climbing exploits, it is that direct experience of wildness that kindles connection, the kind that Henry David Thoreau described when he said: “Talk of mysteries! —Think of our life in nature, —daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, —rocks, tree, wind on our cheeks! the solid Earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact!” (For his many virtues, we'll forgive Thoreau's excessive use of the exclamation point.)

While people naturally inclined to spiritual introspection may discuss such matters unashamedly, many of us leave such topics unexamined, or fear to say it out loud. This search for connection is inextricably tied to life's existential questions: From whence do we come? Where do we return? While sauntering through this mortal plane, are there times and places we can brush up against the eternal? (And must we climb to the top of a stormswept Douglas fir to experience that primal unity?)

If the desire to be connected is indeed one of our deepest human inclinations, how ironic is it that modernity, at least in the supersized, techno-industrial-capitalistic form we see in the overdeveloped world, presents an almost perfect set of cultural conditions to thwart that desire. The economic, political, and cultural superstructure that shapes and constrains daily life in countless ways undermines life-affirming relationships and erects barriers to



the formation of an integrated understanding of an individual's place in the biotic community.

The foundation of the great wall separating people from all our relations in the community of life is language and the way language presupposes and reinforces a worldview. The way that language shapes our thinking and undergirds the dominant human-supremacist worldview is a largely unexplored topic in the popular literature of nature conservation, and, unfortunately, one can find a million examples of common language in “environmental” discourse that reinforces a resourcist worldview. The language of ownership and dominion is built on happy talk of “stewardship” (a word that originally referred to the “ward” of the “sty,” the person who tended the domestic animals) and “working landscapes” (places where natural habitat is removed or manipulated to support resource extraction, such as logging or livestock grazing). Note in the next direct mail appeal or calendar you receive from an environmental nonprofit the ubiquitous use of the possessive “our”—as in, “we must protect our oceans” (as if the oceans belonged to us).

In its bias toward human-centeredness we can see that our reductionist, mechanistic, and increasingly cyber-metaphor-infused language is quite unlike that of earlier human cultures, where stories of communion and reciprocity between the human and other animal nations were ubiquitous. Beyond the pseudo-tribal gyrations of professional sports and the clichés of regional identity (Don't mess with Texas!), there is little common language that anchors people to place, and to other creatures in the land community.

Nearly twenty thousand years after humans painted extraordinary images of animals on the cave walls at Lascaux—and presumably participated in a sophisticated ritualized relationship with the creatures depicted—how can our present discourse on beauty and the relations between our species and others be so bereft and trivial? How much we have lost.

In our time, what passes for concern for beauty is mostly thin and cheap, oriented toward crass commercialism and celebrity worship. On the other end of the spectrum, a river of academic writing about art and aesthetics is intentionally insular, inscrutable to nonexperts, and powerless to shape any broadly meaningful cultural transformation.

If the idea of beauty as a potent elixir to help heal the world is to have any chance, then first we must speak of beauty in a way that is not trivial. That is not superficial. That is not corrupted by the values of a society oriented toward perpetual economic growth. If we are to be successful in gestating a new cultural conversation about beauty's power to kindle ecological and social recovery, this discussion must be broadly accessible and attractive.

With a foundational orientation toward ecocentrism, that conversation might borrow from the Norwegian ecophilosophers whose writings deeply influenced Doug Tompkins to orient his life's work toward beauty. It might also include the "sense of wonder" Rachel Carson articulated, as well as the poetry of William Wordsworth and his English Lakes District contemporaries who later influenced Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and so on. Like an ecosystem whose integrity and beauty are linked to

its diversity, a language of beauty for our times will include the indigenous voices not well represented in the canon of the classic nature tradition, as well as the nonhuman voices we hear around us, if we listen.

A language of beauty needs to evoke the voices of those creatures on the cave walls at Lascaux as well as the creatures with whom we share our backyards. It might invoke, to borrow Derrick Jensen's phrase, "a language older than words." It need not necessarily replace the creation myth of any particular culture, but it can include and enhance them in a holistic narrative that gains power from its cultural diversity.

Whether our preferred creation story includes the Miwoks' Silver Fox or the Hopi people's Grandmother Spider or the astrophysicists' Big Bang, whether we understand the spark of life/beauty emanating from the hand of a Divine Creator or the miraculously creative unfolding of what Aldo Leopold called the "evolutionary odyssey," the results we see around us—life's diversity—are astounding. If we take seriously the scientific explanation of our species' evolutionary heritage, then we are not just metaphorical neighbors to all organisms in the community of life, we are literally related, a genetic connection we can describe through science or absorb through the stories of indigenous cosmologies. The spleenworts, sequoias, and humans have common ancestors. This is worth repeating for emphasis: All our relationships with other living creatures are, ultimately, familial.

Whether we recognize it or not, we *are* connected. Our sense of autonomy is an illusion, resulting from biological (our sensory apparatus) and cultural

factors. Disconnection is practiced artifice, underlaid by philosophical, linguistic, and cognitive training, most of which is entirely unnoticed and unexamined. A conscious effort to practice beauty, however, can help override the cultural conditioning of disconnection.

It may not be John Muir's transcendent moment of ecstasy in the delirious treetops, but for some of us not so bold, the unlearning comes with daily practice of greeting the neighbors. Recognizing our common origins, conjoined journey, and common fate, we echo the warm acknowledgment issued by the poet Mary Oliver to "the moss grazing upon the rock": "I touch her tenderly, sweet cousin."

Of a spring morning, when I rise early to spend time with arriving warblers in their springtime finery, Blackburnian with his iridescent orange breast, Canada with his decorative black necklace, Chestnut-sided with his incessant chatter that he's pleased to meet me, I say yes, I am pleased to meet you too.

Radically mysterious, the epic of evolution's long unfolding is a pageant of pulsing and contracting life, the universe breathing beauty. We, along with the wildflowers and wolves, cicadas and jaguars, come from beauty, and like every living thing, will return to beauty.

For that which
befalleth the sons
of men befalleth
beasts . . . a man
hath no preeminence
above a beast. . . .
All go unto one place.

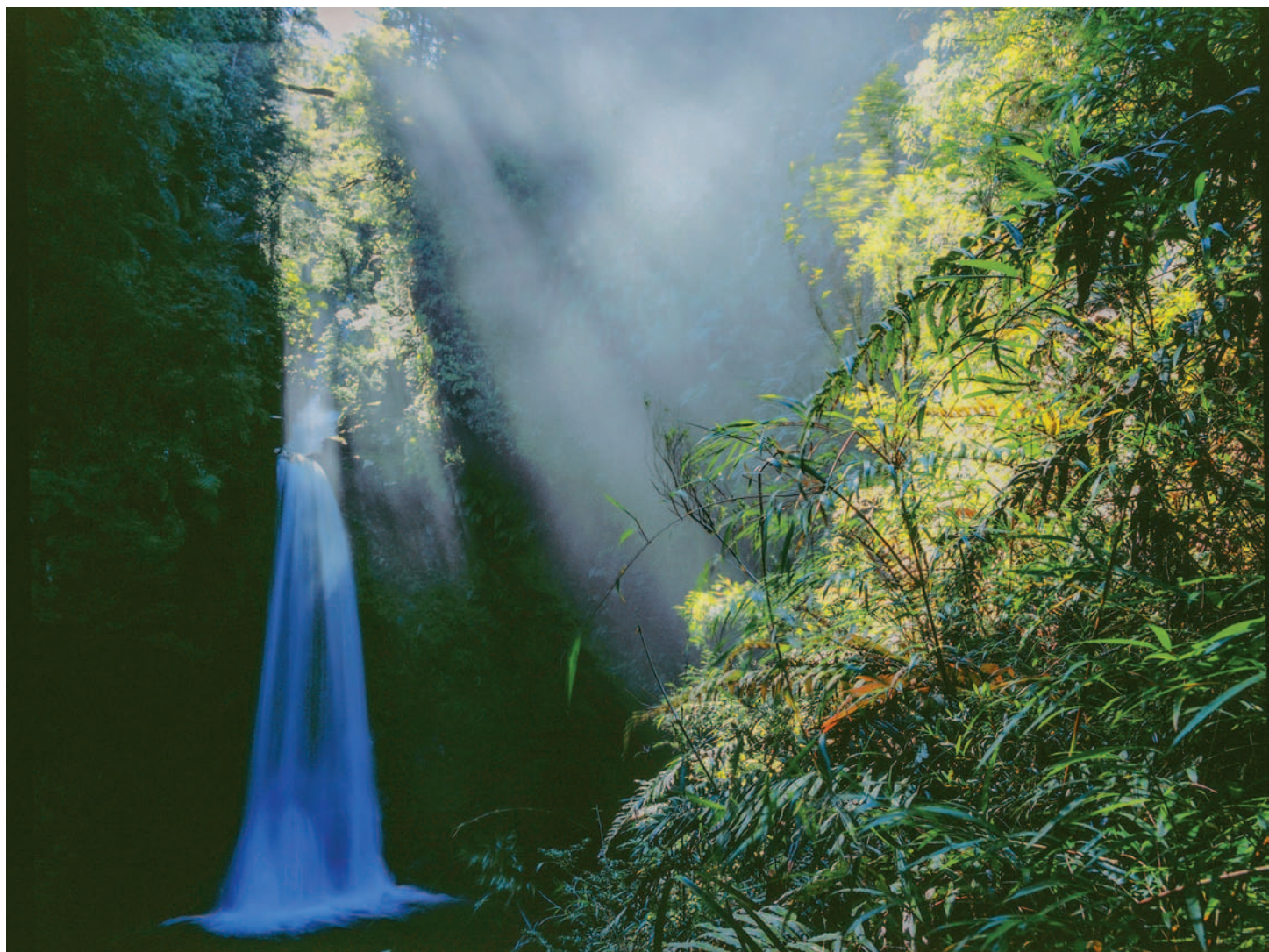
ECCLESIASTES 3:19–21

The Kinship of Beauty and Life

SANDRA LUBARSKY

Pumalín Park, Chile





The greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe.

ROBINSON JEFFERS

PART OF THE DEEP PSYCHOSIS of our time is that we measure the world in terms of our own pleasure. It's an old riddle, whether something pleases us because it is beautiful or whether we think it is beautiful because it pleases us. For most of western civilization, almost every major thinker—Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas—resolved the riddle in favor of beauty's presence in the world. Old-growth coastal redwoods, filtering sunlight and sheltering bundles of huckleberry, are beautiful in their structure and their relations. An encounter with these fog-catching trees yields a surge of delight in their beauty, a spontaneous primordial “wow!”

And yet, the convention of our times is to claim that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” that instead of being a fact of the world, beauty is

Pumalin Park, Chile

something formulated by our minds and dependent on individual preference—and then imposed on the world. People decide for themselves whether something is beautiful or not, and that decision is usually based on pleasure. Those towering sequoias with their furrowed bark and burlled torsos shift from being beautiful in and of themselves to being beautiful because they please us. The eye of the beholder becomes a barometer of personal satisfaction—and pleasure becomes the measure of beauty rather than the result of beauty.

This human-centered approach to beauty is so fully threaded into the fabric of our modern way of thinking that we are scarcely aware of its consequences. But in turning inward to find value, we turn away from the world. In believing that value is something generated only by humans, we conform to the idea that the world lacks its own value. And in making our pleasure the primary measure of value, we imply that all life on Earth is for the purpose of serving human life. The result is a relationship with the world that is destroying the world.

The belief that beauty is in the eye of the beholder is part of the larger cultural story of human exceptionalism, with its justification of human dominion and entitlement to use the Earth as we desire. We split the world between intrinsically valuable humans and everything else, valued only for their usefulness to us. But this image of a hollow-shelled world, devoid of value (except for the value imposed on it by the human species), is not supported by our lived experience. Every time we look out the kitchen window to enjoy a sunset crackling with gold or step into the night to catch a blaze of

meteors in the sky we enact a rebuttal to this parsimony of value. Every time we spontaneously shift our awareness toward the orange-tipped curve of an ocotillo blazing in the desert or a sweep of purple jacaranda petals carpeting the sidewalk, we break the narrative that the human mind alone produces beauty. What was thought to be hollow is resonant with merit and our response to it is visceral and unpremeditated. In that moment, we know that the world generates its own value, that the world was beautiful before humans arrived on the scene, and that we are shaped, enchanted, and sustained by it. We know that beauty is something more than human invention and personal opinion. And we know that the pleasure we experience when we walk in the world is a pleasure given to us, the consequence of beauty arising from the living relations of the world.

When we remember this, we begin a rotation back toward the world. Spinning like dervishes, we abandon the deep loneliness of separation and realign the axis of human experience with the life that infuses our life. Our direct experiences of beauty can guide us. Begin with sunsets, meteors, ocotillos, and jacarandas, the extraordinary familiars of the world. Admit with poet Arthur Sze that “the infinite glitter of the world’s here in our arms, here or not at all.” Abandon the idea that beauty is a small subject, best kept within the confines of the arts or women’s fashion. Recognize that the question, “What is beauty or the beautiful?” is a metaphysical question about the makeup of the universe and that to ask it is to replace the conventional picture of the world-as-machine with the image of the world-as-alive.

When we’re on the
land, in communion,
in community, we
remember that nothing
exists in isolation.

TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

In remembering, we free ourselves to admit that beauty is a quality of life that overflows individual judgment and narrow, personal pleasure. It is a matter that belongs in the open space of public discourse.

BUT IT ISN'T EASY to talk about beauty. Language systems are nested in metaphysical systems and language and culture are intertwined, producing and reproducing each other. The words and concepts we use and the way we use them are permeated by assumptions about how we understand reality. Our modern, western culture is largely dominated by the idea that the best way to describe the way things function is in terms of a machine and that, like a machine, reality is made up of dead matter that has no intrinsic value. We talk about hearts pumping blood, bodies needing fuel, and brains operating like computers. Because in some ways and to some extent, reality is machinelike, these are helpful metaphors. But the trouble is that we have tended to move from "is like" to "is," and we have accepted these machine-based metaphors as a fully accurate description of reality. Mechanism has become an idea so deeply embedded in our culture that we are hardly aware of it. It is the primary reason why we have lost our proficiency in the language of beauty.

The lexicon of beauty includes words that have no application to machines: feeling, emotion, value, participation, inspiration, creativity, spontaneity, openness, and aliveness. These words, spoken in a mechanistic world where proper language is expected to be definite, precise, and quantifiable, sound soft and indeterminate, like a private language with no common rules. We

stammer, struggling to answer the peremptory question that demands a sound-bite answer, “What is beauty?” Out of embarrassment or exasperation we censor ourselves. But a language unspoken is a language endangered and a culture impoverished. Not to speak about beauty is to contribute to the diminishment of a vital part of our experience.

Yet, after so many years of cultural indifference, it is challenging to speak about beauty as a value that deserves our attention. It is, by contrast, shamefully easy to point to the cost of silence: clear-cut forests and disfigured mountains, spoil tips and tailing heaps, strip malls and swaths of concrete parking lots. In our failure to make beauty a public concern, vast tracts of formerly healthy ecosystems have been transformed into discarded landscapes. Ecological decline always involves the loss of beauty. At the very least, for the sake of curtailing the wreckage, we had better find our tongues and relearn the language of beauty.

The most important conversation we can have today is about how to live well on our beloved Earth without destroying it. It is the conversation about sustainability. But it isn't customary to speak of beauty as a critical dimension of sustainability. There is no place for beauty in the popular “three-E” formula for sustainability: economics, environment, and equity. Beauty plays no role in the mainstream hope that we can manipulate and manage complex ecological systems or that we can develop technological innovations that will preserve our first-world lifestyles and protect the planet's biotic health and climatic stability. But these are notions of sustainability that are rooted in the very worldview

that has steered us toward this most precarious period in human history. We are in need of a broader, deeper foundation for sustainability.

Though the word “sustainability” seems to suggest endurance as its paramount goal, in fact it bears a greater intention: a concern with flourishing. The question is not meant to be, “How can we endure endlessly on the planet?” or “How can we maintain the status quo?” At the heart of the notion of sustainability is an axiological question about value and what is worth sustaining. It is a question that goes beyond mere persistence, though certainly reproductive capacity is a necessary part of the answer. A far greater ethical-aesthetic vision informs the practical work of sustainability, one in which the convergence of beauty and goodness is assumed. The question we need to ask is, “How can we live in life-affirming ways?” and it is synonymous with the question, “Can we live in ways that promote beauty?” Sustainability is a practical guide for arriving at a world flourishing with the beauty of life-supporting relations.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING to know about beauty is its kinship with life. Rather than denoting a thing in isolation, beauty signifies life-in-relationship. Most importantly, it is evidence of the cooperation of incalculable forms of life, shaping themselves into a life-supporting community. In this labor of life adjusting to life, each individual life aims both for reproduction and for an intensity and fullness of life. That intensity and fullness depends on a million delicate adjustments that simultaneously strengthen the vitality of the individual and the whole, achieved only over great stretches of time. The outcome is a

*Southern spectacled caiman and
young, Iberá marshlands, Corrientes
Province, Argentina*



world where diverse forms of life belong, in the very literal sense of the word: holding membership of place and sharing interest and concern. The outcome of belonging, of right relationship, is a place of beauty. It is where our own vitality is nursed and fortified. When we experience this beauty, we feel the quickening of our being, an intensifying of our individual lives in right relationship with the life of the whole—and the revitalization of our deepest and oldest desire to belong to the world.

This way of understanding beauty makes it clear that beauty is more than an inconsequential subject of fashion or a matter for debate among artists. It is fundamental to an ecological paradigm; beauty is the name for the value associated with aliveness. Inextricably bound up with the morphology of individual organisms and communities of organisms, it is the way we talk about patterns and relationships that create and sustain life. In its partnership with the deep structure of life, beauty is most visible in our encounter with life-affirming experiences. Flowing water, buds and blossoms, young children—these are familiar instances of beauty in association with vitality. There are a million ways that beauty appears both with regularity and surprise, and always, like life itself, ephemerally. When they arise from a place of health, they produce a manifold of beauty. In a diminished environment, they are brief, tilting moments, undone by the absence of vigor and coordination.

Because beauty is so diverse, there is no one best or final form. There is great beauty in the high desert of the Colorado Plateau and great beauty in

the lush temperate rainforests of the Chilean coast; there is great beauty in the simplicity of a Zen meditation hall and great beauty in the vibrant aesthetic of artist Frida Kahlo's blue house. There are many manifestations of beauty and as with all experience, beauty is specific to its environmental and cultural conditions and to the experiencing subject. But the diversity of beauty, its plural forms, does not mean that beauty is simply a matter of opinion. It is a mistake to move from the diversity of beauty to the claim that beauty is completely subjective, entirely a matter of individual perspective. When we see images of mining operations on the Alberta tar sands with its tailing piles, open pits, and clear-cut boreal forest, or images of a living body in pain or decay, perhaps a baby albatross in the process of dying from the tiny bits of ocean plastic it ingested, it is fair to say that there is widespread agreement—nearly universal agreement—that these things are ugly. This agreement helps us to understand that judgments of beauty, like those of ugliness, are not simply subjective. We may disagree on details and we may choose to ignore or repress our immediate relational rapport but we share a deep receptivity to experiences that increase or decrease life.

To separate beauty from life and life from beauty is to do great injury to both. The same goes for undoing the bond between beauty and goodness, treating them as different kinds of value. In fact, goodness is a form of beauty, one that depends on the free and conscious actions of persons. It is nested in the broader category of beauty, the value in which all of life, conscious or not, participates. To repress the one is to distort the other. We speak of ethical

actions as “beautiful” for the very reason associated with beauty: They are life-affirming. Both beauty and goodness are ways of coordinating life to life and enabling each individual life to flourish. Both evoke action directed toward increasing and intensifying value. Both are teachers of care, drawing us into relations beyond ourselves. Work on behalf of justice and fairness, efforts to alleviate poverty and suffering—all are acts of beauty, enabling all members of society to freely and fully engage with life. Years ago the Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “It takes a great deal of inner cultivation to attain real love and real compassion. It takes also a new conception about the relevance of beauty and the marvel and mystery of everything that exists.” Acts that sustain value, increase value, and heighten the enjoyment of value are part of the relevance of beauty. Our ability to create communities that are life-affirmative depends on recognizing that aesthetics and ethics are cooperating constituents in the social order that is the confederacy of beauty.

An ecological understanding of beauty as the value related to life affirmation shifts the way we think of the natural world—from a storehouse of resources for human use to a web of relationships teeming with life, filled with intrinsic value, and directed not only toward the perpetuation of life but also toward the fullest expression of aliveness. Although in a living system neither ecological health nor beauty is guaranteed, the capacity for both exists. And it is that capacity that calls us to the practice of beauty, to cultivating ways of moving in the world that sustain and contribute to life. Because ecology and aesthetics are interrelated, the practice of beauty involves the practice of sustainability,

both of which abide by the fundamental parts-whole rule of all relations: In a healthy system, the exquisite details of each singular life adds richness to the larger body of relations and is, in turn, strengthened by these relations. The practice of beauty and the practice of sustainability are one and the same, a coherent effort to value and contribute to the vividness of life. It is an effort motivated by more than our narrow desire for pleasure, though great pleasure comes in its wake. In leaning into the world, we make ourselves receptive to the world's profuse beauty and we become exuberant, more fully alive.

The Redeeming Power of Beauty

SANDRA LUBARSKY

Corcovado National Park, Chile





A thing is right when it tends to support the integrity,
stability, and beauty of the biotic community.

ALDO LEOPOLD

SO MANY DRIVERS on the I-17 corridor from Phoenix to Flagstaff pulled onto the freeway shoulder one early April day that it looked like a major traffic accident lay ahead. But it wasn't a 75-mile-an-hour tragedy that had people slowing their vehicles and craning their necks. It was acres of yellow-haloed brittle brush, accented by the blues and oranges of wild lupine and globe mallow. It was the magic of a desert in super bloom, its power more irresistible than the urge to override the interstate speed limit.

Aldo Leopold said there is a human compulsion to "hunt" for beauty. With cameras, field glasses, sketchbooks, and even lethal weapons, people pursue beauty and a connection with the vitality of the natural world. And yet we continue to judge beauty to be unimportant. One of the most

*Magellanic Penguins, Monte León
National Park, Argentina*

effective ways of dismissing beauty has been to insist that it is not useful. In a culture where usefulness is defined as contributing to economic productivity—and where productivity and efficiency are litmus strips for testing the worth of things—beauty is given short shrift.

But then we have a year of generous rain and the thin-soiled desert becomes an elaborate carpet of pollens and nectars. We swerve off the highway like bees with our own electrostatic charge, compelled to make contact with beauty as a means of revitalizing our lives.

AND STILL WE ASK, “What good is beauty?” and then default to our habit of measuring worth either as financial yield or reproductive fitness. We tell ourselves that beauty’s usefulness is as handmaiden to money and sex. And of course, the commingling of beauty with desire, abundance, and pleasure is undeniable. (And why would we want to deny it?) But we are both careless and doctrinaire if we claim that beauty’s usefulness is wholly reducible to these services.

The idea that beauty has no use of its own is a particularly modern assumption—and mistake. But it is now so deeply ingrained in our way of thinking that even those who make art and those who write about art uphold it. An artist friend whose work is a celebration of biodiversity told me, without the slightest hesitation, that beauty is a luxury, far down on our hierarchy of needs. We have been taught to think that beauty and usefulness are separate categories. In a culture that values function over form, this is a lesson in the nonessential status of beauty.

But our inability to acknowledge the necessity of beauty is part of the life-destroying attitude that has fractured Earth's ecological systems in unpredictable ways, like irregular shards of untempered glass. The result is a harrowed landscape of strip malls and strip mines, terrains stippled with billboards, oversized houses, and overbuilt developments.

Beauty has its own independent worth and usefulness. It is not simply an instrument for commercial gain or a strategy for procreation. In a world where beauty is not included as an active ingredient, life-sustaining patterns are eroded and processes of degeneration seem inexorable; indeed, they are allowed to be so.

THERE IS A STORY BEHIND how beauty came to be seen as useless and how usefulness came to be identified solely with economic productivity. It is part of the story of how the world became modern. While this story cannot be told in a few pages, it is important to give some time to understanding its central feature: the idea of mechanism. This is the idea that reality is best understood to be like a machine—and it is this idea that we need to rethink if we are going to find new and life-affirming ways of living in the world.

Championed by the seventeenth-century mathematician and philosopher René Descartes, mechanism remains the dominant explanatory metaphor of reality to this day. It has been extraordinarily powerful as a method for assembling and disassembling complex structures. It is the guiding narrative behind the splendors of technology. Think internal combustion engines and computers, pacemakers and 3-D printers. When we describe the brain as a

computer, the heart as a pump, and the nervous system as a network of neural circuits, we testify to the conceptual and linguistic influence of mechanism on our way of understanding reality. But mechanism is not the full picture of reality (machines do not ponder the meaning of life or stop to revel in the beauty of the desert in bloom) and when we forget this, we distort our own experience of being alive and we find ourselves incapable of talking about experiences like goodness and beauty that we most treasure in our lives.

Descartes was not alone in promoting mechanism, but his writings have been the most influential. Drawing on a parallel between the mechanical clocks and toys invented during his lifetime and the way the natural world functions, Descartes declared, “I suppose the body to be just a statue or a machine made of earth.” In one grand speculative leap, Descartes proclaimed that the natural world was like a machine, entirely explicable in physical and mathematical terms. Only God and human souls (or minds) were exempted from the new mechanical order. Everything else—human bodies and the whole of the natural world—was functionally equivalent to pulleys, levers, air pumps, water machines, wheels, and springs.

So sure was Descartes of the likeness of nature to a machine that he practiced live animal dissection, operating without compunction on eels, rabbits, and dogs while they were still alive. In what is an appalling example of the power of philosophy to rationalize experience, the yelps and shrieks of these tortured beings were explained as no more than the sounds of popped gears and displaced wheels, the commotion of frictional loads bearing down on

a bodily surface. Animals were simply reflex-driven machines and the animal-body-as-machine could feel no pain. Descartes's vivisection anticipates our modern-day disregard for the vitality of the natural world.

As part of his reorganization of reality, Descartes also declared that only measurable aspects of reality were objectively real. That meant that only the properties of physical matter like size and shape were real facts. All other qualities—color, sound, smell, and taste—were considered to be subjective, merely the feelings of observers about what they saw or felt, but not aspects of the objects themselves and so not hard facts about reality. Beauty, too, was redefined as a subjective quality since it was not a measurable, physical feature. Before Descartes, most people believed that beauty was objectively present in the world. After Descartes, it was no longer possible to make this claim.

Over the next several hundred years, the mechanical philosophy, with its core belief that nature was governed by the laws of mechanism, became the blueprint for modern science. Instead of being rich with self-animated life, the basic composition of reality was considered to be dead matter. Nature's secrets became mathematical puzzles and engineering problems. Scientific knowledge came to mean knowledge of the physical composition and behavior of entities—and the ability to manipulate and maneuver them.

Because an inert world wears no value of its own, its worth depends on its usefulness to others. Rather than self-generated beauty, the things of the world were awarded value for their efficiency and productivity, the same measures by which machines were gauged.

Sleek, fast, shiny, precise became the adjectives of the new turbo-aesthetics, subservient to a surging industrialism. Eventually, efficiency and productivity became the benchmarks for all kinds of human interactions: business, education, healthcare—and we began to think of all of these as forms of industry.

Many of our modern, public buildings offer unambiguous visible evidence of this shift to a mechanistic view of the world. By the early years of the twentieth century, architects around the world were captivated by the new aesthetics of mechanism. Architectural modernism became a love affair between newly available building materials like plate glass, cast iron, steel, and reinforced concrete and machine-inspired industrial design. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius passionately declared, “We want an architecture adapted to our world of machines,” and the most acclaimed of all pioneering modernist architects, Le Corbusier, famously redefined the house as “a machine for living.”

“Form follows function” became the famous mantra of modern design. Though function had always been an important dimension in the design and construction of buildings and material goods, it now came to be understood almost exclusively in terms of behavioral and industrial efficiencies. Form was uprooted from its relationship with the patterns and limitations of nature and separated from the traditions of culture and place. The result was an architecture unmoored from its traditional concerns with beauty, indifferent to culture and place, and with neither knowledge of nor regard for its impact on living systems. This was machine-thinking imposed on a machine-like world.

IN FACT, WE DANGEROUSLY distort reality when we reduce it to a machine, oversimplifying it by excluding the properties that are most intimate to being alive, properties like subjectivity, feeling and emotion, intrinsic value—and beauty. Mechanism is an inadequate frame for understanding who we are as human beings and what the natural world is really like. It cannot explain our experiences of freedom and creativity, our desire for meaning, or any aspect of our interior, mental life. It cannot even fully explain a single living cell, much less a forest or an ecosystem. Nor can it explain evolution, the upward path to more fragile and sensitive ways of being. (Although biologists often talk about “survival of the fittest,” the fact is that rocks are better at surviving than organisms.) And because it has allowed us to treat the natural world as if it were a storehouse of dead matter for human consumption, it has led us to think only of economic value and to justify enormous ecological destruction.

The claim that beauty is useless except when it is in service to efficiency and productivity is simply the outgrowth of our modern infatuation with mechanism. And that infatuation is a strong one. Those in industries that have benefited from treating the Earth as a commodity operate as if its spell is unbreakable. A few years ago, when the representative of a West Virginia Coal Association asked, “What good is a mountain just to have a mountain?” he was sure that the answer was self-evident, that there is no “good” in just having a mountain. He assumed that there are things that have no use apart from their usefulness to humans and he assumed that all value is economic value.

Good design requires
careful ecological
thinking. From
this comes its own
evident beauty.

DOUG TOMPKINS

He was mistaken. Beauty didn't go away nor did it become useless, in spite of modern efforts to debase it. Our experiences of beauty are a convincing counter to mechanism and to the idea that the only value the world has is as a resource for human productivity. So are our experiences of mountains, rivers, gorges, and glens. Though the modern worldview has tried to explain it away, anyone who has experienced the power and force of the beauty of the world knows that beauty remains the most vibrant, sensate part of our general experience and that it has real impact on our lives.

To return life to the world—and beauty as the value intrinsic to life—requires that we replace mechanism with descriptions of reality that capture the vibrancy, wholeness, and abiding value of the world. Even the early modern philosophers and scientists struggled with the best way to imagine the world. The image of the universe as a clock-like mechanism did not immediately win the day. Some argued that the pipe organ, the second most complicated device of the time, was a more accurate representation of the world's structure. Imagine how this image would have changed our understanding had it been adopted! Pipe organs are no less mechanical than clocks but, unlike clocks, they are created for the express purpose of creating beauty. Had we inherited this image of the world—the world as a celestial instrument created for the purpose of making divine music—it would have been considerably more difficult to dismiss the power of beauty.

We experience beauty as an active ingredient in the world, not as something fabricated by our minds or as a capricious judgment. In an unexpected

*Vizcachas, future Patagonia
National Park, Chile*



encounter with beauty, we emit what seems to be a universal reflex—a quick inhalation, as if beauty were a form of oxygen, crucial to sustaining our lives. What do we do with this testimony for the aesthetic dimension of life? At the very least, we can admit to the presence and power of beauty and speculate about a world in which it is one of the underlying organizing principles.

WHAT IS AT STAKE in this twenty-first century of human civilization is our ability to establish right relationships with our co-inhabitants of this planetary jewel. Beauty is fundamentally about achieving such relationships. Its meaning relies on relations of proportion, harmony, contrast, and intensity. Its power comes from its affiliation with life. It turns on the cosmological notion of fitting order and the evolutionary notion of adaptation, both of which assume that life is an evolving, relational process. This is beauty's use: its role in creating and sustaining life-supporting relationships. This is both the ordinary work of beauty and its extraordinary outcome.

The universe is not like a machine—it is not a clock, an organ, or a computer—performing a predetermined set of tasks. The universe is a multiplicity of living organisms, each with its own intrinsic value. It has aim and purpose; the word “cosmos” expresses this conviction in its etymology as “fitting order.” But early on, the Greeks recognized that order alone is not sufficient, that the values of beauty and goodness are part of the nature of order. They combined the word for beauty, *kalos*, with the word for good, *agathos*, to produce a compound noun, *kalokagathia*, the “beautiful-and-good.”

In a cosmos that is so ordered, beauty has cosmological utility. It is key to being in sync with the structure of the universe, to achieving a balance between order and novelty, coherence and creativity, yearning and satisfaction.

It was with considerable insight that ecologist Aldo Leopold included beauty in his conservation ethic: “A thing is right when it tends to promote the stability, integrity, and beauty of the biotic world.” Leopold’s training as a scientist gave him the tools for explicating the meaning and significance of stability and integrity. It did not prepare him to talk about beauty, but his intimate experiences in the natural world compelled him to do so. Leopold wanted to figure out how we can live in right relationship, as “plain citizens,” with our nonhuman kin. That involved recognition of the inherent value of all living beings, of their worth to themselves, and of our enjoyment of their self-worth. And he wanted a way to honor, support, and encourage the exuberance of life as it is manifested in ecological relations. He understood that this was beauty’s provenance.

The development of patterns of right relation is fundamentally an aesthetic enterprise (often reinforced by religious and ethical traditions). It requires creativity and risk as well as a finely tuned sensitivity to what Potawatomi writer Robin Wall Kimmerer calls “the vital beingness of the world.” Right relations evolve as relations of adjustment, each life feeling its way in response to other lives. The aim is vitality, of both the individual and the individual-in-relation-to-the-whole. This is how beauty comes into the world, in generous companionship with life.

Because this vision of the aesthetic structure of the universe diverges so dramatically from the dominant mechanistic image, we are more familiar with its absence than its presence. Under the dominion of mechanistic thinking, we have treated the natural world as dead matter and beauty as mere opinion. We've denied that we experience beauty as a significant force in our lives. Our culture associates beauty almost exclusively with female appearance—and then belittles beauty as a subject unworthy of serious attention.

According to the psychotherapist James Hillman, this modern repression of beauty's presence and power—and the psychic disorder that follows from it—is pervasive. "We are each out of order and in need of therapy because we have forgotten that life is essentially aesthetic, cosmologically so." The consequence of our aesthetic amnesia couldn't be greater: In repressing beauty, we repress our love of the world and our concern for it. The psychological toll becomes an ecological one; we are thrown off kilter in our relationships with each other and we throw the whole world out of balance.

And so, it is possible to go through our days with little awareness of the world's beauty. Sometimes, this is because we live in places that have been so damaged by industrial activities that our heedlessness is an act of self-defense. Often, we have yielded our attention to technological or economic pursuits. Almost always, our modern expectations of productivity and efficiency have shrink-wrapped our days into smaller and smaller packages so that we rush from one task to another, giving negligible notice to the radiance backlighting our lives. Always there is the authoritative claim, a constant voice-over, that beauty is unimportant and of no use.

But there is no sustaining our relation with each other or other beings as long as we think of beauty as useless and the world as a machine. We need to free ourselves from the metaphysics of mechanism and its diminishment of beauty. It is beauty that holds us to our bodies and the body of the Earth. Beauty is like oxygen, pumping our limbs with vitality, enabling us to seize the moment of a springtime burst of life in the desert. Its importance is cosmological, biological, ecological, psychological, social, and ethical. In calling us to articulate a different metaphysics and a different understanding of how to live in relational proportion to the universe, beauty testifies to its redemptive capacity to save the world.

Animated by Beauty

TOM BUTLER

South American gray fox





I have so many things I'd like to do before my hourglass runs out. Although in my heart of hearts I know nothing will stop the apocalypse, it gets me charged up to oppose it. Something in the system, almost genetically, propels you to work for beauty . . . I am realizing that beauty (aesthetics) is, in a way, the sum total of it all. If I could capsule the crisis we're all ensnared in I'd say it comes down to—in *the absence of beauty*.

DOUG TOMPKINS

ONE LATE NOVEMBER DAY IN 2015, springtime in Patagonia, I asked Doug Tompkins if I could take a photo of him next to a trash can. He obliged, grinning, and held out his hands to the rubbish bin in question as if presenting a new item in a product line.

Perhaps somewhere on Earth there is a trash receptacle of equal quality and construction—but probably not. Hanging between two wooden posts was a conical can of galvanized iron, freshly painted black, weighty enough to withstand the fierce Patagonia winds. In place of a lid, the can's opening was shielded from the elements by a wood-shingled hip roof adorned with copper flashing. The entire unit rested upon a pad

*Doug Tompkins in the future
Patagonia National Park, Chile*

of individually cut stones, not unlike a high-end patio treatment one might see in northern California. This was a custom, hand-built, artisanal trash can. Doug designed it and was here to evaluate its execution.

After standing for the photo, he continued checking on the workers' progress finishing up the stone walkway and cooking shelters and renovations to an old stone cottage that was being transformed into ranger quarters for a campground at the future Patagonia National Park. The park is a Yosemite-scale protected area being created by a nonprofit founded and led by Kristine McDivitt Tompkins, Doug's wife and conservation partner for more than two decades.

As I stood admiring the trash can, an Andean condor soared overhead. It was a small thrill. Despite having visited the Chacabuco Valley, site of the Patagonia Park project, several times, I'd never before seen Chile's national bird. Among the largest flying creatures on Earth, Andean condors are emblematic of the region. When people describe the windswept wilderness of Patagonia as "timeless," it is both cliché and apt. The condors contribute to that sense of timelessness; their aspect in flight appears primordial, which isn't surprising given that their lineage extends to the time of dinosaurs. By contrast, our closest ancestors emerged only a few million years ago and our anatomically modern human species only a couple hundred thousand years ago—an eye blink in geological time. Which is to say, humans are not only newcomers to the passing nature show on Earth, but in this specific place, southern Chile, people have been present only for fifteen thousand years or so. Sheep ranching—the most direct representation of modernity—came to the

country but a century ago and in a few short decades “trashed the landscapes,” as Doug Tompkins often said, wherever it was introduced.

In Patagonia, a region Doug first visited in the early 1960s for ski race training, he found one of the most intact, wild places left on Earth, and also a place where the actions of a colonizing European culture were quickly eating away at the beauty and integrity of the land.

Working alongside Kris and the Tompkins Conservation team they assembled, Doug would spend the last quarter century of his life buying and helping to *rewild* some of the most scenic and ecologically vital places in the southern cone of South America. At Pumalín Park, his initial flagship conservation project, he and Kris built the largest private nature sanctuary on Earth; there the Valdivian temperate rainforest ecosystem was mostly intact and restoration activities focused on developing small organic farms along the park boundary. In the Iberá marshlands region of Corrientes Province, Argentina, and here in southern Chile’s Chacabuco Valley, the recipe for conservation action was reversed, with concerted efforts needed to restore beauty and wildlife abundance that would attract visitors from around the globe to new national parks.

Restoration and rewilding efforts in the Chacabuco Valley included a host of active and passive techniques to help heal the land from past abuse—livestock removal and dismantling of fences, releasing Andean condors with solar-powered tracking devices to understand their behavior and movement, captive breeding of Darwin’s rheas, reseeding native vegetation, controlling



The native population of Darwin’s rheas is being augmented through captive breeding at the future Patagonia National Park, Chile

erosion, etc. The recovery since the former estancia was purchased is stunning, perhaps even more dramatic than Doug and Kris Tompkins imagined when they drove through and camped in the area in 1993; then the valley was filled with hundreds of miles of ranch fencing and thousands of sheep grazing the hillsides to dirt.

By creating ecological conditions conducive to wildlife recovery and constructing exceptional public-access infrastructure, the national park effort is intended to help drive a regional economic transformation that will demonstrate how local economic progress can be a consequence of wildlands conservation.

The Patagonia Park project is led by Kris Tompkins. Since the outset she has been the main public face and promoter of the effort, its top administrator and fundraiser. The couple's division of duties, however, had Doug responsible for the design and oversight of the buildings and recreational facilities. In practice this meant that he had his eyes and mind on every detail—from the conception and execution of the park headquarters compound to the hiking trail layout to the campground trash cans.

For anyone who knew Doug during his business career, when he famously had a sign saying “no detail is small” behind his desk, the elegant trash can at a park campground under his purview would not be a surprise. In this case, Doug's intense interest about every facet of the built environment complemented his general theory of national park conservation, which went something like this: Create huge parks that will sustain beauty and biodiversity. Invite people to experience these parklands by building outstanding infrastructure. Design the

recreational amenities and trails/roads to affect only a small percentage of the protected area (nature comes first), but create opportunities for people to experience scenic beauty and abundant wildlife. With such direct immersion in wild nature, at least some people will truly connect with the wild world, will be stimulated to learn, grow, and become activists confronting the present “eco-social crisis,” the great unraveling of ecosystems and indigenous, land-based human cultures across the globe. With engagement by citizen activists, the movement for ecological and social progress will expand and a culture of conservation will percolate throughout society.

In a nutshell this was Doug’s strategy, and thus his conservation work always had both immediate local and long-term global aspirations: In the particulars, every detail (and, again, no detail is small), would contribute to this larger purpose.

Thus the trash can and the condor (which may have been one of the individual birds that park biologists released as part of the rewilding program), were part of the same story—a story of direct, tangible, hopeful work accomplished in service of a great vision for the future. In that future, Earth’s health, integrity, wildness, and beauty will have been restored, and the human species will flourish because it will have been reintegrated into the community of life.

Many of us who were lucky enough to pass through Doug’s orbit during the latter couple decades of his life knew that a freewheeling conversation on these ideas was likely to ensue. He liked nothing better than to hone his arguments in spirited discussions, which, in reality, were typically one-sided. Doug mostly talked and it was usually thrilling to listen. Either in



*Hiking trail footbridge,
Pumalin Park, Chile*

person or via e-mailed “rants from the southern listening post,” as he called them, Doug interwove thoughts on life, beauty, worldview, megatechnology, capitalism, activism, and the extinction crisis. He was a true revolutionary in the sense that his years of personal scholarship and interaction with leading thinkers had convinced him that a deep, systemic overhaul of society was needed, and that this would require a cognitive revolution—a change in humanity’s operating system from human-centeredness (anthropocentrism) to ecocentrism, putting the health of nature at the forefront of concern and recognizing that all life has inherent value.

A couple weeks after our trash can inspection tour at Patagonia Park, on December 8, 2015, Doug Tompkins died of hypothermia following a kayaking accident on Lago General Carrera, a lake bordering the future national park. It was little comfort to the people who loved him, but it was certainly appropriate that Doug’s last days were in the company of dear friends, in the wilderness, camping and paddling in a sublimely beautiful setting.

The news of his death rocketed around the world. Many of the headlines identified him as a founder of The North Face or Esprit, the two major commercial brands he helped create. None that I saw suggested that Doug was a pioneer of commercial-scale organic farming in Argentina and a trenchant critic of techno-industrial growth culture. Or described him as the most ambitious and effective wildlands philanthropist in history. Or called him perhaps the greatest citizen advocate for national park creation since John Muir. Such headlines would have been accurate.

For the people who worked with and admired Doug, I suspect a simple statement would have rung true: Douglas R. Tompkins, champion of beauty, is dead.

A LISTING OF DOUG'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS in conservation would be long, and it would be impossible to tease out the respective contributions of Doug and Kris. In 2013 Doug wrote of their history—"As all good romance novels go, we fell in love, got married, and have been living happily ever after, working on conservation projects . . . for over twenty years in Chile and Argentina"—but that matter-of-fact recounting hardly reflects the spectacular energy their personal and professional pairing generated, or the depth of Doug's adoration of Kris.

Risking cliché, it's fair to say that Doug and Kris, an unlikely coupling to many who knew them, beautifully completed each other in personality and skills. The result was not only an exceptional marriage but a potent collaboration for conservation. Even a brief smattering of highlights is impressive: Through charitable foundations, roughly two million acres acquired for nature conservation; that acreage, being incrementally donated back to the national park systems of Chile and Argentina, has leveraged up millions more acres of adjacent government land to national park status. More than twenty farms and ranches acquired personally and restored. Millions of dollars granted to nonprofit groups working to protect wilderness and wildlife. Numerous extirpated species, including giant anteaters and pampas deer, reintroduced to their former home landscapes.



*Douglas and Kristine Tompkins,
Pumalín Park, Chile*

Crucial strategic and financial support directed to activist campaigns, including the seven-year fight opposing proposed dams on wild rivers in Chilean Patagonia. Design and construction of some of the finest park infrastructure on Earth. More than twenty books published, mostly large-format, on ecological issues, following in the activist/publishing footsteps of environmentalist David Brower.

The capstone of this conservation career was undoubtedly the new national parks. By 2015, Tompkins Conservation and partners had helped create five new national parks and expand a sixth. Following Doug's death the pace of national park creation accelerated. A book-length retrospective report of the first 25 years of Tompkins Conservation activity, published posthumously, still only scratches the surface of the efforts that Doug and Kris Tompkins led through the years, encompassing land conservation and park creation, ecological restoration and rewilding, grant-making and publishing, supporting grassroots activism, and advancing ecological agriculture.

The latter area of work provides a useful example of Doug's modus operandi. After selling his stake in Esprit and establishing the first of several family foundations, Doug focused in his early years as a philanthropist on three areas: wilderness and biodiversity protection, sustainable agriculture, and efforts to fight megatechnology. But even as he made grants from the Foundation for Deep Ecology to support pioneers in agroecological research such as The Land Institute, Doug began to buy degraded agricultural properties in southern Chile, and to direct hands-on restoration activities that converted them to beautiful, productive, organic farms.

*Giant anteater, part
of the wild population
reestablished by the
Tompkins Conservation
team at Iberá National
Park, Argentina*



With his boundless energy, it seems that Doug was never quite content to let others, even groups and campaigns he admired or supported financially, have all the fun; he wanted to work directly on the issues he cared about. For example, after years of admiring Captain Paul Watson and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society's efforts defending marine wildlife, in 2008 Doug signed up for a tour of duty protecting whales in the Antarctic Ocean. Despite being the oldest guy on the ship, he worked his shifts as a regular crew member, including throwing butter bombs (baseball-sized projectiles of rancid goo) at the Japanese whaling ship *Yushin Maru*.

The common thread that connects all Doug's interests and efforts was beauty. A fierce devotion to beauty—the intrinsic beauty displayed by the pageant of life that evolution has produced as well as the pleasing (and life-honoring) patterns of orderliness and integrity that are found in well-inhabited domestic landscapes.

From his years as a pilot flying small planes around the Americas, Doug had an unmatched eye for seeing and admiring the landscape from above. Perhaps initially from a mountaineer's perch and later from an aviator's, Doug was often in a position to see the creeping degradation, the wild world being incrementally devoured by industrial and population growth. His attunement to beauty was so great that he experienced an almost physical pain at the degradation and uglification of the Earth:

*Douglas and Kristine
Tompkins's farm at Reñihué,
bordering Pumalín Park*

I cannot stand to see beauty defiled, and things done badly. Aesthetics have always figured into my thinking as a guiding principle. The imposition of



human artifacts into the landscape can either appear harmonious, if done thoughtfully, or be a disjunctive to our sense of beauty if executed badly. The saying “If it looks bad, it is bad, and if it looks good, it (most likely) is good” has become my foundation for any quick analysis of whether a landscape is healthy or not.

Doug had no formal training in graphic design, architecture, or art history and yet was widely read and knowledgeable on these topics. During the apex of his business career his art collection included paintings by Francis Bacon and other modern artists. He valued vernacular and traditional handicraft; at one point he owned perhaps the finest collection of Amish quilts in the world, some of which were displayed on the walls at Esprit headquarters. In 1990 he developed an exhibit featuring that quilt collection at the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco and an accompanying large-format book, *Amish: The Art of the Quilt*.

Where did Doug’s genius for beauty come from? To answer the question is, of course, impossible. We could no more describe with precision the roots of Doug’s brilliance than we could say why Georgia O’Keeffe had the ability to capture certain qualities of light on canvas, or why Ansel Adams framed his photographs of the Sierras in the manner he did.

Like beauty, genius may be an emergent phenomenon arising from a series of patterns and conditions, one of which, perhaps, is grace. Unknowable ultimately, but with traceable lines of association, from family through countless associates, friends, and intellectual influences.

*Wild eye in the sky;
Doug Tompkins in his
beloved Husky airplane*



The aviator and amateur architect/designer that Doug was to become sprang from seeds that were planted by his parents in childhood. His father, John “Jack” Tompkins, was an antique dealer in New York’s Hudson River Valley who specialized in early American furniture and decor. His mother, Faith, was a warm and gracious woman, an interior decorator who kept a lovely home and had a knack for completing a room. On scouting trips to see and acquire pieces, often trips taken in Jack’s small plane, Doug learned that it was the specific details that determined an antique’s provenance and value. “My father taught me many of my guiding principles,” Doug recalled as an adult. “He had a brilliant eye for design, for proportion, for good lines, for workmanship, and for quality in all things. He instructed me at a very young age to train my eye. That has helped me all my life in whatever I was involved in.”

The contempt for authority Doug displayed throughout his life was likely the underlying reason he was expelled during his senior year from the Connecticut prep school he attended (the given reason varied depending upon whether Doug or his mother told the story). Like other prominent entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, Doug dropped out of formal education but never ceased learning. In later years he liked to quote Mark Twain’s quip about not letting one’s schooling get in the way of an education.

For Doug, a person of boundless intellectual curiosity, that unconventional path worked out exceedingly well. The lack of academic credentials did not prevent him from a life of intense personal scholarship. His houses were filled with books. His coffee tables were bedecked with volumes featuring the

greatest nature photographers on Earth, many of whom he knew. His associates included leading figures in design, architecture, fashion, and later in conservation philosophy, science, and activism. When Doug developed an interest in a particular topic, his approach was not to associate with mainstream “thought leaders” but to identify the truly vanguard thinkers/doers in the field, read their publications, and in many cases get to know them personally. In this way his circles included a host of luminaries in diverse fields.

This trait of self-education by both doing and seeking out mentors began when Doug was a young climber and aspiring ski racer. Due to a chance invitation as a youth to go rock climbing in upstate New York’s Shawangunk Mountains with a family friend, Doug’s course as an adventurer was established. Frequent visits to the Gunks and the Adirondacks were soon followed by road trips to the Tetons and other climbing destinations.

In 1961 Doug first traveled to Chile, to do off-season, summertime ski race training with others who aspired to make the U.S. national team. Dick Dorworth, who became friends with Doug through ski racing and later coached the U.S. men’s ski team, describes the young Doug as a very good skier but not quite at the level to make the national team. Not only did Doug like to ski fast, he liked to drive fast (a trait that would last his entire life). While in Chile for ski training, Doug and fellow racer Billy Kidd talked the local BMW motorcycle dealer into letting them borrow bikes to test ride before purchasing. Those motorcycles were returned safely but no sale consummated after many enjoyable miles roaring down roads in the Chilean countryside.



The fast life; on skis, circa early 1960s

In his early twenties, Doug spent a year working and skiing in Aspen, won some races around the West but would never ascend to the highest levels of international competition. While skiing and bumming around California a few years later, a beautiful young woman named Susie Russell picked up Doug while he was hitchhiking near Lake Tahoe. She was from a prominent San Francisco family; Doug was a sculpted specimen with an irrepressible sense of adventure, which she shared. They married in 1964 and subsequently had two daughters, Quincey and Summer.

In the 1960s San Francisco was a vibrant scene with artists, writers, musicians, and other creative types brewing up a revolution that later percolated through American youth culture. California was also a hotbed of climbing activity with Yosemite Valley the climbers' mecca. Doug moved easily in sporting and artistic circles and was even something of a connector between worlds. In 1964 Doug and Susie opened a mountain and outdoor gear, ski, and climbing equipment shop, The North Face, in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, just across the street and up the block from the City Lights bookstore, by then famous for its publication of Allen Ginsberg's poem, "Howl," and the subsequent arrest of bookstore cofounder Lawrence Ferlinghetti for spreading that "obscene" work. Ginsberg, the embodiment of 1960s cultural zeitgeist, hung out in the neighborhood when in town.

In Doug's recounting, Ginsberg would occasionally come into the North Face store, and sometimes bring others, to marvel at the huge Ansel Adams print of Yosemite Valley that was the shop's centerpiece artwork. Apparently it

was incomprehensible to Ginsberg, who was not an outdoorsy guy, that people would seek to climb those massive columns of vertical rock. The manner in which Doug, who had little start-up capital for the store, acquired a highly valuable Yosemite print from one of the country's foremost photographers, is illustrative of his boldness. Never shy about going right to the source, Doug had noticed the massive print at the photographic lab he used and inquired about it; the lab owner gave him contact info and Doug drove to Carmel to introduce himself to Ansel Adams, won his favor, and purchased the huge print for a nominal fee.

During this period Doug became acquainted with Jerry Mander, then a music and theater publicist whose office was just down the block from The North Face. For the new store's opening party, Mander arranged to have a local band called the Grateful Dead play; other singers, including Joan Baez and her sister Mimi Fariña, came to the party and members of a biker gang, the Hells Angels, provided security.

Mander would soon be recruited into the advertising industry and go on to create some of the most influential public interest ad campaigns of the era. Working with Sierra Club executive director David Brower, Mander created the famous full-page ad in the *New York Times* that helped turn the tide against the Army Corps of Engineers' plans to build dams along the Colorado River, including one that would have partially flooded the Grand Canyon.

Doug, a Sierra Club member since his teens, was impressed with David Brower's climbing legacy and bold advocacy for nature; he asked Mander to



The business life; at The North Face with El Capitan, courtesy of Ansel Adams

introduce him to Brower, leading to another longstanding relationship that affected Doug's thinking and future direction in life. Among other things, Brower's use of beauty as a tool for activism—communicated through large-format books to anchor environmental campaigns—inspired Doug's own nonprofit publishing program that he established after leaving the business world.

Jerry Mander's influence on Doug's budding activism was also crucial. Years later Mander would help Doug start his first foundation and together they would launch various initiatives including the International Forum on Globalization. Mander was also to become a leading critic of megatechnology. His books, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* and *In the Absence of the Sacred*, planted the seeds for Doug's later embrace of technology criticism. This particular intellectual interest became central to Doug's understanding of the eco-social crisis; he read widely on the topic, convened symposia of leading technology critics, and during his conservation career almost always linked his arguments for ecocentrism with a critique of industrial society's "myth of progress" based on technological innovation. In a 2013 note to Peter Buckley, Doug's friend of nearly half a century, he wrote: "The idea that technology is part of human nature just because people want to be comfortable and have an easy life, is speaking to the poverty of the human imagination more than anything else, and the lack of an ethical position in regards to sharing the planet with other critters, or the destruction of beauty."

Doug's charisma and relentless drive made him both a natural and conflicted businessman. By the late 1960s The North Face had a second location

and interest in mountain sports was growing; the business soon became too constraining for someone who wanted to be on mountaineering expeditions as much as possible. (Doug once told a protégé that if the young man had a job that didn't allow him to be out adventuring at least four months a year, then he had the wrong job.)

In 1968 Doug sold The North Face, gave most of the proceeds to support Susie's nascent dress business, and headed off on an epic road trip from California to Patagonia that was chronicled in the film *Mountain of Storms*. Doug had conceived the movie project after noting the commercial success of the surf movie, *The Endless Summer*. He invited his friend and fellow climber Lito Tejada-Flores to be the cinematographer. Once Lito figured out how to use the camera, he filmed Tompkins, Yvon Chouinard, Chris Jones, and Dick Dorworth as they surfed and skied their way through the Americas before an attempt to climb Fitz Roy, on the Argentine side of the Andes in Patagonia. The resulting documentary was an early example of the adventure movie genre now presented at mountain film festivals around the globe.

The team of self-described "funhogs" was the third to summit, putting up a new route after roughly two months on the mountain; according to Dorworth's journal, thirty-one of those days were spent in two ice caves hiding from the dreadful weather and high winds. It was not always pleasant to have five powerful, strong-willed young men in such close proximity. As on most such expeditions, some interpersonal fireworks occurred but the team left Patagonia as friends and remained so in subsequent decades. Tompkins and Chouinard



*The climbing life; on
Mount Fitz Roy, 1968*

continued to enjoy kayaking and climbing adventures through the decades and were together on the last trip that Doug would make into the wild.

The film was pretty good—but nobody made any money from it. Doug did, however, get another big taste of the Patagonia region's beauty and wildness, and Chouinard would end up making the iconic Fitz Roy profile world famous when he incorporated it into the logo for his clothing company, Patagonia Inc.

When Doug got back from the Fitz Roy climb, he joined the business, Plain Jane, that Susie and her friend, Jane Tise, had started, specializing in young women's fashion. In its first decade or so that growing company marketed products under seven different names. Then in 1980, the disparate brands were consolidated under a single banner, Esprit, and the company's distinctive logo and typeface debuted. The way that Doug and Susie's combined talents would influence the fashion world as they built Esprit into a global fashion powerhouse and one of the most recognizable brands of the 1980s is worthy of its own book, given the story's dramatic arc and large cast of characters.

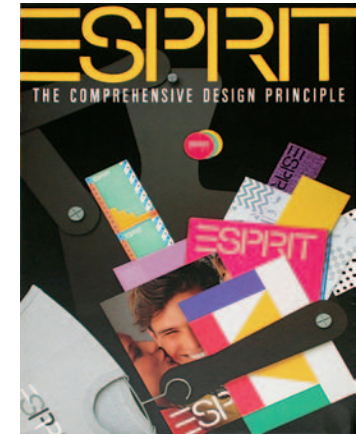
A visual snippet of that larger narrative, however, and some clues about Doug's personal aesthetic evolution can be gleaned from the 1989 book that he cowrote and produced with several of his longtime graphic design collaborators. In *Esprit: The Comprehensive Design Principle*, a fascinating reflection of Esprit at the height of its cultural influence, Doug describes the philosophy behind the company.

As illustrated in *The Comprehensive Design Principle*, during the 1980s Esprit's commitment to an overarching and consistent style was almost fanatical. From the typesetting on the business cards and product hangtags to the

storage racks in the warehouse, the packaging materials, architecture and interior design of retail stores, catalog design, photographic style, every detail was considered and executed in a way consistent with Doug's design philosophy. During this era, Doug's sense of beauty was deeply influenced by various modernist architects and Italian designers and artists. The retail stores and corporate facilities that Esprit built around the globe were filled with polished metal, concrete, and plate glass—materials that he would later decry as icons of modernity, symbols of the techno-industrial growth culture that was devouring the planet's beauty and wildness.

The leadership at Esprit was classically entrepreneurial. Doug's favored style of mountain climbing—commit and then figure it out—transferred to his corporate management philosophy. In practice this meant: follow instinct more than conventional business practice, care little about money, hire the most creative people, and strive to make the most fun and fashionable apparel and lifestyle products for the target customer. He also continued to spend large blocks of time away on expeditions, joking that he favored the M.B.A.—management by absence.

By the late 1980s Doug's interest in conservation activism and his qualms about the fashion business were growing: "It took years of scholarship and engagement in campaigns and projects to get myself up to speed and to develop a deep and systemic understanding of what was driving the crisis of nature and culture," he later said. "I left that world of making stuff that nobody really needed because I realized that all this needless overconsumption is one of the driving forces of the extinction crisis, the mother of all crises."



In a 1989 book, Doug articulated his design philosophy for Esprit

Moreover, during this period his marriage and business partnership with Susie was ending. She arranged for external financing to stay at the helm of Esprit and Doug took his stake to start the next chapter of his life. That wealth, earned from selling consumer goods in dozens of countries, was the foundation for Doug's unprecedented conservation work during the last quarter century of his life. The irony was not lost on Doug that he had benefitted spectacularly from a globalized system of corporate capitalism only to become a trenchant critic of that system. Indeed, he was quick to point out how advertising-fueled consumerism of "fashion" products contributes to the damage that modern industrial societies wreak upon the Earth and to frame the conservation-oriented period of his life as making amends, "paying your rent for living on the planet," as he said, borrowing a line, with attribution, from David Brower.

Often the most insightful critics of an established belief system, whether religious or secular, are people who have been raised or indoctrinated within that system. And of course, when a person has a certain kind of passionate commitment to a worldview, is a true believer (and especially when a convert from another faith), their devotion to the new path may be very great. Once Doug had his conservation epiphany and reset his thinking toward ecocentrism, his devotion to the cause was absolute. This globe-trotting entrepreneur and marketer would become, during the last chapter of his life, an evangelist for beauty.

SEVERAL AMERICAN CONSERVATION movement luminaries, including John Muir and David Brower, were first mountaineers. Even Henry David Thoreau, who tends to be thought of as the cranky guy who built a cabin by Walden Pond and rambled the tame woodlots around Concord, had a formative experience climbing Maine's Mount Katahdin in 1846. After reaching the mountain's ridgeline Thoreau found himself "deep within the hostile ranks of clouds." He described the scene as "vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits. Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. He is more lone than you can imagine."

The mountain taught Thoreau a lesson about scale. Everyone who travels in wild country will recognize that feeling of aloneness with one's thoughts in the face of nature's power. Every climber who has conquered fear on vertical rock will hear something familiar in Terry Tempest Williams's assertion that "wilderness is a place of humility." While humility was most definitely not a Doug trait, he did begin learning the lessons of the mountains early. Looking back upon those years of adventuring in some of Earth's most pristine landscapes, Doug clearly recognized how they laid the foundations for his later self. "For those of us that grew up going out into the wilds of the world," he said, "we got into our souls a sense of beauty."

The call of the mountains not only helped shape Doug's athletic pursuits and aesthetic sensibility but also affected his philosophical evolution, especially through the person of Arne Næss. An alpinist and academic, Næss was a

To those of us who
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DOUG TOMPKINS

Norwegian philosopher who is considered the father of “deep ecology,” an idea he developed in an early 1970s paper that dissected the distinction between a “shallow” or reformist-minded environmentalism and a “deep” long-range movement for ecological and social progress. In every social change movement there will be tensions between incremental reformers and radicals who focus on root causes and aim to implement systemic change. In the 1980s, with grassroots activist campaigns springing up around the globe, Næss’s articulation of the need for deeper thinking struck a chord, influencing, among others, leaders of the Earth First! movement in the United States.

Early proponents stressed that deep ecology was not a specific religion or ideology but a social change movement based on a common set of principles, the key ones being that all life has inherent value and that people who recognize the need for systemic change have an ethical obligation to be active in the struggle to achieve it. This resonated intensely with Doug Tompkins. Few people who had the opportunity to chat with him about the state of the world went home without a good lecture that touched on the need for systemic analysis of industrial civilization and an invitation to resist and reverse its deleterious effects through a life of activism.

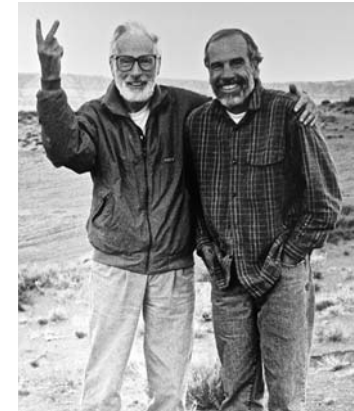
The ecocentric worldview that Doug developed in his later years rested on a foundation of scholarship and a wide, personal network. His intellectual and activist influences were many and global—from Juan Pablo Orrego in Chile and Juan Carlos Chebez in Argentina, to Dave Foreman and Wes Jackson in North America, to Helena Norberg-Hodge and Vandana Shiva

from Australia and India, respectively. These and dozens of other thinkers and activists were in Doug's orbit through the years, but arguably the Norwegian philosophers Arne Næss and Sigmund Kvaløy Setreng were indispensable to Doug's intellectual development.

Doug first heard of Næss in the 1970s when he read and admired an article Arne had written about mountain climbing. Years later, in 1985, the book *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* by Bill Devall and George Sessions was published, bringing Næss his first widespread attention in America. This was Doug's introduction to Næss's philosophy and he avidly began reading his works, as well as the writings of a host of other authors on the leading edge of ecological thought. As he had with other individuals whose work interested him, Doug also sought out a personal meeting; through mutual acquaintances he arranged to have dinner with Næss during a visit to Norway. Their friendship would last until Arne's death in 2009 at age 96.

"I rank Arne right up at the top of the people who have . . . caused me to rethink things," Doug once told an interviewer. "Coming across Arne's work and being influenced by him—not only by his thinking, but through our friendship—and as well through other writers and thinkers, activists, that have been influenced by Arne . . . this has deepened my understanding of both the ecological crisis, our relationship to nature, and the importance of activism."

It is tempting to wonder if Doug found a father figure of sorts in Næss, a man of exceptional playfulness and vigor, intellectual and athletic, and very different in demeanor than Jack Tompkins. In any case, Doug described



In Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (left), Doug found an intellectual mentor who helped him deepen his understanding of the ecosocial crisis

Næss as “one of the most profound thinkers in the world” and would show his admiration for Næss in various ways, including naming his initial post-Esprit family foundation the “Foundation for Deep Ecology” and later underwriting through its publishing program a multivolume set, the *Selected Works of Arne Næss*, that translated many of Næss’s writings from the original Norwegian.

One key point that Næss promoted was that each individual participant in the deep ecology movement formulates his or her own ecological philosophy or “ecosophy,” bringing to that personal worldview their own experiences, religious sensibilities, individual talents, and so on. Næss called his philosophical framework, “Ecosophy T,” after the mountain Tvergastein that he revered and upon which he lived for long periods in a high-elevation hut.

Doug never articulated it in these words, but it seems that his personal worldview might have been dubbed “Ecosophy B”—for beauty—because that was his polestar and motivation. “I am realizing that beauty (aesthetics) is, in a way, the sum total of it all,” he wrote to Jerry Mander in 2003. “If I could . . . capsule the crisis we’re all ensnared in I’d say it [comes] down to ‘in the absence of beauty.’”

Inasmuch as the absence of beauty was the result of industrial humanity’s destruction of the primeval world, and the answer to this problem was resistance, Doug’s natural talent for image-making/marketing would become central to his own activism. From the inception of his first charitable foundation in 1990, a commitment to “idea work” was clear. Originally called the Ira Hiti Foundation for New Paradigm Thinking, the later renamed Foundation for Deep Ecology

launched a book-publishing program that reimagined the campaign tool pioneered by David Brower during his years running the Sierra Club. But while Brower had collaborated with prominent photographers such as Ansel Adams and Eliot Porter to create gorgeous nature-focused photo books to anchor conservation campaigns, Doug Tompkins put a reverse spin on the art-format book.

For more than two decades, beginning with the book *Clearcut: The Tragedy of Industrial Forestry* and continuing through *Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot*, Doug strived to publish the world's biggest, most beautifully executed coffee-table books on ugliness: Industrial forest clear-cuts. Overgrazed wastelands. Strip-mined mountains. Factory farm gulags. Using powerful imagery and writings by leading thinkers on the topic at hand, Doug and the publishing team with whom he collaborated through the years (full disclosure—I was on that team) sought to shock the sensibilities about how badly the industrial growth economy was abusing this glorious blue-green planet.

The publishing and grant-making programs that Doug oversaw through the foundation were concurrent with his land acquisition and activism in Chile and Argentina. As Doug and Kris's park-making and farmland restoration activities in the south absorbed more of their funding and attention, the North American grant-making program was largely discontinued, but in the dozen or so years that it was most active, Doug's philanthropies gave hundreds of grants and tens of millions of dollars to leading-edge groups working for wilderness protection and sustainable agriculture, and to campaigns fighting against economic globalization and megatechnologies.



Through his foundation's publishing program, Doug highlighted—and helped resist—industrial culture's destruction of beauty

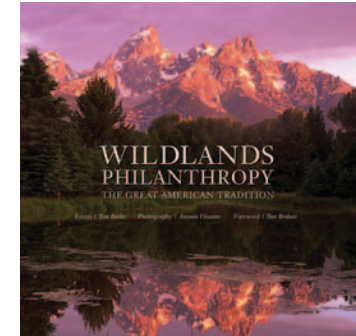
In late 2002 Kris and Doug crossed paths with the landscape photographer Antonio Vizcaíno, who came to visit them for several weeks in Pumalín Park the following year. Through his many books of nature photography, Vizcaíno was attempting to document the grandest wild places left on Earth and to use the power of natural beauty as a motivator for conservation. The extended discussion that Doug, Kris, and Antonio had on this topic led to Doug adding beauty as an arrow in his publishing quiver, and to a long-running collaboration between Doug and Antonio. Beginning with the book, *Wildlands Philanthropy*, in 2008, they would jointly produce a series of large-format books on the national parks that Doug and Kris, along with partners, helped create.

These parklands books, with Antonio as the primary photographic collaborator, may have been seen by some outside observers as self-promotion—monumentalizing Doug and Kris’s philanthropic works—but there was a deeper political motive for their publication. In the early days of the national park movement, private philanthropy was a crucial tool; the first national parks in Argentina, Ireland, and other countries resulted from donations of private land to the state. Many U.S. national parks were created or expanded in the same way, but such philanthropy hasn’t really been trendy since the Rockefeller family’s association with the U.S. national park system in the early and mid-twentieth century. Moreover, a tradition of wildlands philanthropy was essentially unknown in Chile and Argentina despite notable historical examples in those countries. Producing a series of elegant volumes on these newly created protected areas both elevated the cultural conversation about

national parks among the political elites who were the target audience and helped normalize the idea that wealthy people might acquire private land and then donate it to national park systems as a form of patriotic civic engagement.

These parklands books, volumes entirely focused on natural beauty, also helped counter a narrative about Doug and Kris's motivations for large-scale land acquisition. After Doug and Kris were married in 1994 and began building their conservation empire in Chile and Argentina, their activities became controversial. That controversy attracted media attention. The story of two charismatic American conservationists with cool business cred, he from Esprit and she the former CEO of the Patagonia clothing company, buying huge swaths of private land, was irresistible to journalists. That media interest only increased when the "outsider gringo" controversy kicked up due to skepticism about the couple's intentions.

More and more they were, as Doug described it, "handed the microphone"—which gave them opportunities to talk about the value of national parks, the role of ecotourism to regional economic transformation, and why large-scale hydropower development in Patagonia was exactly the wrong direction for future energy policy. And increasingly Doug talked about beauty, "beauty as a basic," a foundation from which to think about ethical action and social policy that would help divert industrial civilization from its suicidal trajectory. In Doug's mind, beauty was the common thread connecting all of his and Kris's work, from creating parklands and restoring damaged landscapes to designing the fence gate latches at their organic farms.



Adding "beauty" books to the activism-oriented publishing program, beginning in 2007

When, in the last decade of his life Doug became acquainted with the work of Sandra Lubarsky, an academic whose writings on the connection between beauty and ecology are both profound and wonderfully accessible, he discovered a thinker articulating what he had long felt. Here was someone talking about the power of beauty, its centrality to human experience and its potential to motivate. Here was someone from the western philosophical tradition, like Arne Næss, whose thinking pointed toward earlier, deeper, more primal ways of being in the world that modernity has mostly extinguished. Doug already felt these things in his core. Sharing Lubarsky's work with his far-flung circle of correspondents became another opportunity to be an evangelist for beauty, for the kind of aesthetic and ecological integrity that Robinson Jeffers, Doug's favorite poet, invokes in the line, "The greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe."

Doug and Kris in the Lácteo River Valley, Argentina; here he acquired a large private ranch and later donated it for addition to Perito Moreno National Park

UNDOUBTEDLY, WHEN HISTORIANS of the future write about Doug and Kris Tompkins, they will consider their body of work within a larger story of the global conservation movement's emergence and maturation. National parks are, of course, a key part of that story. Just as today's visitors to Yellowstone and Nahuel Huapi and Serengeti national parks learn about the origins of those iconic protected areas, future travelers to Iberá and Pumalín and Patagonia national parks will learn about the Tompkins-initiated birth stories of those strongholds for nature. Because national parks are the best known and



most durable means for protecting habitat and interpreting the scenic wonders of a nation, it is natural that their institutional legacy will remain strong and subject to cultural remembering. Wild beauty is easy to admire. (Indeed, it seems we are genetically predisposed to do so.)

The other ways that Doug Tompkins worked to advance his vision—via activism and campaigns, through grant-making and symposia that sought to build the intellectual infrastructure of the conservation movement—do not leave the same kind of institutional footprint. They may be less apparent to people considering Doug's life, but no less crucial.

Also less visible will be his direct engagement in agroecological experimentation and ecological restoration because the numerous farms and ranches that Doug and Kris restored with personal funds, not through their foundations, will have other private owners a century hence. The innovative practices pioneered there may be surmised from enhanced soil fertility but probably will not be recorded in institutional memory. The evolution of Doug the farmer, however, and it was a description he used of himself, is key to understanding why he ultimately chose to translate his personal philosophy into action.

This evolution was not tangential to his other conservation interests. Furthering beauty in the domestic landscape, the places we inhabit, became as crucial to Doug's vision as protecting wild beauty—the landscapes and native wildlife—of the wild parklands he sought to conserve.

From his long interaction with leading agrarian thinkers including Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson, Doug had thoroughly adopted the idea that

ultimately there will be no saving Earth's wildness—as embodied in wilderness areas, national parks, and other protected areas—without solving the problem of agriculture, the dominant force degrading Earth's beauty and biodiversity during the last ten or twelve thousand years. Doug had internalized ecology's central insight—everything is connected—and overlaid it with his own aesthetic orientation: Beauty is the yield of right relations. Everything to be done in the world can be connected by beauty. The fresh flowers on the table, tidy compost piles in the garden, hand-crafted furnishings in keeping with local traditions, domestic animal breeds well adapted to a particular climate and soils . . . all of the choices one would make in a domesticated landscape and household should reflect, as Wes Jackson preached, “the genius of the place.”

During his travels around the globe, Doug saw the creeping degradation of the world, the expanding ugliness, and also noted particular places where orderly farmlands, well-scaled towns, and vernacular architecture reflected an overall harmony among people and the land. The examples of this that he admired, for example in parts of Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, were committed to memory, their features analyzed and compared to the land-destroying onslaught of industrial agriculture that is transforming so many of the planet's richest habitats into feeding factories for a burgeoning human population. “We employ vernacular architectural styles appropriate to a given area as part of our commitment to eco-localism,” Doug wrote. “We do not want to introduce any building into the rural landscapes where we work that

You have to start
with the idea that
a good farm is a
beautiful farm. That
everything you do
and you think about
doing should add
beauty to the farm.

DOUG TOMPKINS

invokes the iconography of the techno-industrial culture that is commodifying and eliminating nature's beauty and richness."

Farmland restoration became, for Doug, an absolute passion, a way to reverse ugliness and enhance productivity in the agrarian landscape. Initially, the small farms he acquired were near his big conservation project at Pumalín Park; they were intended to buffer the protected area from negative outside influences such as timber poaching and to serve as *de facto* guard stations for the park. Later, when the Tompkins-founded Conservation Land Trust began purchasing large tracts of property in the subtropical grasslands of the Iberá watershed in Corrientes Province, Argentina, Doug and Kris's personal agricultural holdings expanded to include large private ranches that also served to buffer the protected area and to demonstrate nature-friendly livestock grazing practices to neighboring landowners. Here the specific restoration tools were different but the objectives the same. And Doug loved seeing the results: "Virtually nothing is more pleasurable than to nurse sick land back to health," he wrote.

After many successful farmland restoration projects, by 2007 Doug felt ready for a much more ambitious project—attempting to transform a commercial-scale, conventional farm with significant soil erosion and depletion problems to a highly diverse organic operation. The 7,420-acre Laguna Blanca farm in Entre Ríos Province, Argentina, posed challenges aplenty—from pest loads in the subtropical climate to the fact that Argentina has very little domestic market for organically certified products. The setting, along the

mighty Parana River, and the property's size and general attributes, also offered the opportunity to create something exceptional.

During the final eight years of his life Doug spent tremendous amounts of his time, mental energy, and money to create the perfect farm: its stunning beauty a by-product of erosion-control terraces and intercropping, its housing and barns perfect in their design and decor, and all of the cultivation and use of the property balanced by the large part of the farm (roughly 57 percent) left unmanaged and devoted to wildlife habitat.

At Laguna Blanca, a key practical objective was to get closer to achieving fully no-till, organic cultivation practices, but the overarching goal was more holistic, more aligned with trying to demonstrate in practice Aldo Leopold's definition of conservation being "a state of harmony between men and land." As was Doug's penchant, every detail was considered, from the way crops were rotated to the treatment of livestock to the interior décor of farm buildings. There were plenty of mistakes made, some costly, but the attempt was a grand and noble one, and the results were stunning.

In his last book, a volume devoted to the Laguna Blanca experiment, Doug articulated this effort to achieve harmony in the agrarian landscape:

A focus on beauty of both land and architecture results in harmonious living. The workplace culture stresses that a neat and orderly farm brings pleasure to everyone and adds to the productivity, ease of maintenance, and ultimately to the value of the operation. Good things come from



*Table setting at Laguna Blanca Farm,
Entre Ríos Province, Argentina*

heightening the aesthetic quotient at any farm, and it gives those who have to look at you from the outside pleasure as well. In short, we believe that sustaining beauty in the landscape is as much a social responsibility as maintaining ecological health.

IN CONSIDERING HIS LIFE, we begin to see how extraordinary were the ways that Douglas Tompkins served “the organic wholeness” and “beauty of the universe” described by Robinson Jeffers. We can see how Doug grew in his understanding of and commitment to beautiful action. When he said, “if anything can save the world, I’d put my money on beauty” he did not merely use a common expression, he literally was investing his considerable wealth, time, talents, energy, and intense drive to do that.

While we can never know all the intellectual and experiential influences that shaped Doug’s character and forged his worldview, we can say with certainty that his life’s work for wild beauty and organic wholeness continues. In a perverse irony, the worldwide attention to his untimely loss and especially the outpouring of positive attention in Chile and Argentina actually accelerated his conservation agenda.

In the weeks following Doug’s death, Kris Tompkins met with Argentinean President Mauricio Macri to discuss the ongoing efforts to establish parklands in and restore missing wildlife species to the Iberá marshlands region of Corrientes Province. They subsequently met and signed a joint agreement to create a new Iberá National Park prompted by donations of private land assembled

Laguna Blanca’s multicolored croplands are a by-product of intercropping and soil-erosion control practices



by Tompkins-affiliated nonprofits. The birth of Iberá National Park fulfills a dream that began with Doug more than a decade before and which gathered strength through the efforts of the Tompkins Conservation team and allies.

On the other side of the Andes, on a crystalline day in March of 2017, Kris Tompkins stood alongside Chilean President Michelle Bachelet in Pumalín Park and signed a joint agreement to dramatically expand Chile's national park system. Doug conceived the idea for this unprecedented expansion of Chile's protected areas and presented it to Bachelet government officials as a detailed proposal early in her second term. In the signed agreement Tompkins Conservation pledged to donate essentially all of its Chilean landholdings including Pumalín Park and Patagonia Park as well their public-access infrastructure (with those elegant trash cans!) to the Chilean people. In response to this roughly million-acre gift, the Bachelet administration agreed to add more than nine million acres of other government lands to the package, including upgrading some existing national monuments to national park status. When fully executed the deal will create five new national parks and expand three existing ones. It is the largest-ever expansion of a national park system prompted by a donation of private land. During the ceremony, Kris said, "I wish my husband Doug, whose vision inspired today's historic pledge, were here on this memorable day. Our team and I feel his absence deeply."

For all who knew Doug and feel his absence deeply, it is a comfort to know that his work for beauty goes on—and that each of us is invited to join that grand cause in whatever capacity we can, inspired by his example.

On some distant morning, when thousand-year-old alerce trees stretch to the heavens in Pumalín National Park, when jaguars and giant anteaters roam freely in Iberá National Park, when great herds of guanacos fill the Chacabuco Valley of Patagonia National Park, Doug's brief moment on this once-and-future wild Earth will be reflected in these habitats and creatures, his vision embodied in their genetic lineage and evolutionary potential. His work for ecological health, for integrity, for wildness—for beauty—will have no end.

Animated by Beauty C R E A T I N G P A R K S

*Pumalín Park, the world's largest private nature reserve,
in process to be donated to Chile's national park system*





Corcovado National Park, Chile, established 2005 (left), Monte León National Park, Argentina, established 2004 (right)





Patagonia Park, Chile, in process to be donated to the national park system (left), Patagonia National Park, Argentina, established 2014 (right)





Iberá National Park, Argentina, administratively established in 2017, statutory approval by Congress pending (left)
El Impenetrable National Park, Argentina, established 2014 (right)





Yendegaia National Park, Chile, established 2013 (left), Perito Moreno National Park, donated inholding for park expansion, 2013 (right)



REWILDING

Andean condor, future Patagonia National Park, Chile





Huemul (South Andean deer) (left), and mountain lion kitten, future Patagonia National Park, Chile





Jaguar captive breeding center operated as part of the Tompkins Conservation rewilding program, with the goal of reestablishing a wild jaguar population (left) and reintroduced green-winged macaws, Iberá National Park, Argentina



ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE

Laguna Blanca Farm, Entre Ríos Province, Argentina





Hornopirén Farm (left) and Pillán Farm, Palena Province, Chile





Vodudabue Farm (left) and Reñihué Farm, Palena Province, Chile



ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

Ranger quarters, El Amarillo sector, Pumalín Park, Chile





The Lodge at Valle Chacabuco (left), and Lodge Annex accommodations, future Patagonia National Park, Chile





Laguna Blanca Farm headquarters, including quincho (barbecue house) built on an old livestock water tank (left) and Laguna Blanca Farm office, Argentina



Toward Beautiful Action

TOM BUTLER

Monte León National Park, Argentina





While life and beauty are not one and the same, they dance cheek to cheek. In a rhythm of reciprocity, beauty enhances life and life reaches toward beauty.

SANDRA LUBARSKY

ONE DAY, NOT LONG AGO, I found myself along the waterfront in San Francisco, among a throng shopping at the Saturday morning farmers market. It was a far cry from the modest farmers market held weekly in my rural Vermont town. Here were scores of vendors offering exotic foods as well as handmade breads and pastries, interspersed with farmers displaying their produce. A guitar-strumming young woman entertained the milling crowd.

After purchasing a plateful of dumplings, I wandered to a park bench. With a view of the Bay Bridge and proximity to the budding singer-songwriter, it seemed lucky to find an open seat, but as I approached the bench I saw that it also came with a less picturesque

*Red-eyed grebes, Patagonia
National Park, Argentina*

feature—a homeless man, wearing only some dirty trousers, sprawled directly on the hot concrete. He didn't appear injured or dead, and it was initially unclear if he was sleeping or unconscious. Shoeless, sockless, and shirtless, his brown skin was mostly exposed to the blazing sunshine.

I took up a position on the bench a few feet from the prostrate man and watched how the people around him, the parents strolling by with toddlers, the young professionals getting organic kale, the tourists like me, made instant calculations about the inert stranger. We noted his presence, made a snap analysis, and then chose not to see him further. I ate my lunch and wondered—was the man ill or just inebriated? Might he become dangerously dehydrated lying on the concrete in the sun? Should someone try to help him?

After a few minutes, another homeless fellow approached. He was a white guy wearing a backpack, with unkempt beard and hair, and he carried a large scrap of cardboard and a club-length stick. Again—a mental calculation: Is that stick a weapon? He doesn't seem aggressive but who knows? Man #2 didn't speak to or try to arouse the fellow on the ground, but walked around him for a moment, seeming to make a mental calculation of his own. He then sat down on the concrete and carefully positioned the cardboard between the prone man's head and the sun, propping up the makeshift sunshade with his stick.

The change in light or radiant heat slightly roused the man on the ground, who moved a little, and may have opened his eyes briefly to note the cause of the cooling shade. Even if not fully awake or present, he seemed aware, I think, that someone (his friend?) was nearby and watching over him.

If the woman who had claimed the other end of the park bench noticed the beautiful act transpiring before us, if any of the passersby wondered about the two homeless men, I cannot say. My mind raced. Shall I bring them cold drinks? Shall I go back to the bakery vendor and get another loaf of bread to give them, or offer the baguette I'd just purchased? What shall I do to support this display of human connection?

To my shame, I did nothing to acknowledge the act of compassion there at the farmers market, where empathy was felt, and some old cardboard was deployed to alleviate suffering. Instead of performing any of the kindnesses that played out in my imagination, I finished my lunch, threw away the trash, and walked back toward a fine room at the Hilton.

ARNE NÆSS, WHOSE WRITINGS and friendship so deeply influenced Doug Tompkins, was not a fan of the philosopher Immanuel Kant but he did find useful Kant's distinction between a moral act—something done solely out of duty or obedience to a moral code—and a beautiful act, which springs from personal inclination, that is, “it ‘feels natural’ to do it.”

In his essay, “Beautiful Action: Its Function in the Ecological Crisis,” Næss writes, “The beautiful act is in Kant's view a morally complete act because it is benevolent. Benevolent action expands our love to embrace the whole of life. It completes us and perfects us.” Of course one can feel inclined to act in a way that also corresponds with moral behavior; this would be a beautiful act in the Kantian sense. For addressing the particulars of this

moment on Earth, when life's richness and diversity are being flayed by human activity, Næss suggests that employing arguments of usefulness and morality about particular policies may be helpful as citizens work for ecological and social justice, but that ultimately influencing people's desire to live and work in ways harmonious to all life will be most effective. The latter tactic goes to fostering inclination—beautiful action—and will likely have more force to advance the change that we seek:

An invitation to act beautifully, to show beautiful acts rather than talk about them, to organize society with all this in mind, may recognize and acclaim such acts, and be a decisive factor that at last will decrease the unsustainability.

In the farmers market I witnessed beautiful action and yet let shyness or fear of an awkward interaction deter me from emulating it. I didn't act—either out of moral duty or inclination. That personal failing starkly contrasts with the sterling example of my sister and brother-in-law who have spent much of their lives serving the hungry and homeless in a major American city.

Walking through a downtown neighborhood with my brother-in-law once, I was struck by how he not only noticed the homeless guys on the street, he mostly knew their names and could greet them from a place of genuine human relationship after spending decades running a drop-in day shelter serving that population. In my sister's case, I saw how the social service nonprofit she led for

years was engaged both in policy work to help address the larger societal factors that allow widespread food insecurity among the working poor, and in directly providing food to the hungry people who lined up around the block each morning. For any social change movement that hopes to be effective over time, policy engagement, which can be abstract, and direct action are crucial and complementary.

Among prominent conservationists of our time, it's probably fair to say that Doug Tompkins was unparalleled in the way he straddled these worlds of abstract and direct engagement. He was deeply immersed in the questions of ecological philosophy—using a range of tactics to critique the anthropocentric ideas undergirding industrial civilization—while also battling industrial forestry and river-killing dams and other by-products of a worldview that sees the Earth as merely a storehouse of resources for human exploitation. And all the while he was buying land and creating parks and reintroducing missing wildlife to those protected areas and designing buildings and restoring farms . . . The scope of his work is dizzying.

Certainly Doug's innate charisma and energy level were central to his success, but one also suspects that his mountaineering background, the ability to focus so intently on climbing a peak, left a foundation of endurance that served him well in his conservation work. While he might have scoffed at such a notion, it may be that his years of adventuring in wild country provided Doug with a deep well of wild energy to tap.

Unlike many conservation activists, Doug never burned out and he was scornful of others who did. He seemed tireless because he was.

Truth and beauty can
still win battles. We
need more art, more
passion, more wit in
defense of the Earth.

DAVID BROWER

The late, great Edward Abbey, patron saint of radical environmentalists once wrote:

Ramble out yonder and explore the forests, climb the mountains, bag the peaks, run the rivers, breathe deep of that yet sweet and lucid air . . . sit quietly for a while and contemplate the precious stillness, the lovely, mysterious, and awesome space.

Few people enjoyed more peak bagging and river running in the remnant wilderness areas of Planet Earth than Doug Tompkins. Through the decades, in expeditions to every continent for climbing or kayaking adventures, he experienced the lovely and mysterious, living Earth: As a teenager learning to climb on the spectacular, cream-colored rock of the Gunks. Screaming down icy blue ruts on ski racecourses from Aspen to Portillo. Evading strainers and keeper holes while kayaking rivers from California to Kamchatka. He not only saw the world as a pilot with as keen an eye as any human ever witnessed Earth from above, but on the ground, as a wilderness traveler, making love to the world in a thousand places that few people if any had ever seen.

That lovemaking with the world deepened beyond his mountaineering years into arguably the greatest body of conservation action by any philanthropist in history. Doug was a ferocious advocate for his adopted causes, argumentative in the extreme, willing to throw massive resources—energetic and monetary—into the fight to protect and restore wild nature.

The Baker River, still wild and free due to the Patagonia Without Dams campaign; for more than seven years Doug and many fellow activists fought the project that would have dammed the Baker and other rivers in Chilean Patagonia



It may be tempting to look at Doug Tompkins's litany of accomplishments and say sure, easy enough for a rich guy. It is true that most of us don't have millions of dollars to buy habitat and donate it for parks, or reintroduce missing wildlife to those protected areas, or support activist campaigns, or create organic farms, or publish award-winning books. But of the people who do, how many deploy their wealth and talents with more commitment to beautiful action?

As the kindness I witnessed in the farmers market shows, a beautiful act sometimes costs nothing. Scavenged cardboard and a stick will do. The currency required is personal courage—overcoming the risk of connection, the fear of failure, and facing the hard truth that to see the world as it exists in our time is deeply painful, for it is filled with suffering and brokenness.

In such a world, courageous action is hard, even if we feel the inclination. It takes practice and a supportive community. The dominant culture promotes uglification of the world. The physical scaffolding of civilization is based on resource exploitation that degrades nature and diminishes beauty. The ideological scaffolding of modernity is based on human supremacy. Status, wealth, and success stem from not challenging these structures.

Even modest attempts to undermine the structures of power are daunting. The example left us by Doug Tompkins is one of courage and conviction, of joy in the fight for a better, saner, more beautiful world.

The way home to connectedness and healing is before us. Like a salmon ascending its natal stream to spawn—moving inexorably upstream toward its beautiful origins—can we be similarly compelled by instinct, inclination, and love?

Each of us who lives has tools and talents to help nurture beauty in a broken world. Each of us, rich and poor and in-between, is presented daily with opportunities to display empathy and to foster reconnection.

No single beautiful act will save the world. But if we believe that beauty can help guide us toward ecological health, integrity, and wildness, then countless individual acts of beauty will create a mighty river of positive change. Beauty will be our measure and motivator to love the world through our actions.

When dawn comes, when the birds sing the world into being for another day, how will we answer their music with songs of our own?

What will we do for beauty?

*Douglas Tompkins, at home
in beauty, at Malambo Farm,
Entre Rios Province, Argentina*



AFTERWORD

Imagine the perspective 100 or 200 years from now. The myth of progress has become just that: a deposed myth. The notion of ever-developing megatechnologies—including global capitalism as an economic megatechnology indispensable to development—has fallen from grace. We have made that paradigm shift to an eco-local, highly diverse, healthy, and lightly populated economy. The Earth has recuperated from its dark times of biodepletion, the climate is now stabilized, wildlife populations are recovering, and the evolution of much complex life has jump-started itself after being stopped dead in its tracks in the bleak times of the twentieth and the twenty-first century. *Beauty has returned everywhere.*

DOUG TOMPKINS

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Producing this book as companion piece to the “Douglas R. Tompkins: On Beauty” exhibition at the David Brower Center has been both daunting and exhilarating. No single publication, especially a slight volume such as this, can record the accomplishments of Doug Tompkins. No one can fully know the factors influencing his intellectual development regarding beauty. And thus we did not aim toward those impossible targets. Rather, we hoped to explore the idea of life-affirming beauty that Doug came to embrace in all of his work and to ponder how the world might change if everyone used their time and talents similarly.

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—TOM BUTLER AND SANDRA LUBARSKY

ABOUT THE DAVID BROWER CENTER

The David Brower Center's mission is to provide a home for the environmental movement. We believe in inspiring and nurturing current and future generations to advocate for the beauty, diversity, and ecological integrity of Earth. The nonprofit center's building was designed to serve as a living laboratory, a beautiful example of sustainable urban development aligned with the values of resident nonprofit organizations and visitors. It contains three floors of leased office space, the street level Hazel Wolf Gallery, and several flexible event spaces.

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To those of us who grew up going out into the wilds . . .
we got into our souls a sense of beauty.

DOUG TOMPKINS