

## **A Political Space: Reading the Global through Clayoquot Sound**

Edited by Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Pp. vii + 285; research guide & index. ISBN 0-8166-4039-4 & 4040-8

Reviewed by Darrell Whitman, Keele University, October 2003.

Locating where politics occurs, as R.B.J. Walker points out in this infinitely interesting commentary about the fight for the future of Canadian old-growth forests on Vancouver Island's Clayoquot Sound, "challenge[s] a deeply rooted connection between claims about what politics is and claims about where politics is." Politics is never where or when or how you might image it to be: it simply cannot be contained in ways that we might prefer for academic investigation, as the authors of these essays argue.

In composing the political space created by the controversy at Clayoquot Sound, the editors have embraced two storylines: a near-term recounting of events occurring over the last two decades, and a longer-term narrative that has reached back for centuries. The near-term story begins as a struggle between the logging industry and a small group of local environmentalists, but then quickly expands to include First Nation communities, organized labor, the provincial government of British Columbia, international non-government organizations, "rock music" groups, urban ecologists, Western science, "traditional ecological knowledge", the tourist industry and the European Union. The larger narrative has a much longer timeline rooted in a colonial history, Western philosophy, gender politics, consumer culture, urbanization and capitalist globalization. The why and how of these storylines is the framework within which the thirteen contributors have composed "A Political Space."

This book offers an unusual format: while it's organized along the familiar lines of an edited book, it includes notations to "The Clayoquot Documents," which are basic research documents accessible through the Clayoquot Project Website. (A Research Guide is included at the end of the book to aid readers in the most efficient use of the website.) These references allow a reader to further examine specific events and issues, as she or he desires. It also adds considerably to the value of the book as an instructional aide through which students can more closely examine the reasoning that informs a writer's comment and judge the particulars of claims and sources. It also represents an important and hopefully encouraging recognition of the value of the internet as an educational tool.

The individual contributions to the book reflect a variety of perspectives and writing styles. Some are personal and more clearly connected to Clayoquot Sound, while others are more theoretical and offer general comments about environmental politics. Karena Shaw's "Encountering Clayoquot Sound" begins the commentary with a personal account of coming to Clayoquot Sound first as an outsider but then as an academic intimately interested and involved in the political dynamics that continue to occur there. The writing is crisp and engaging, as is the story itself. Bill Chaloupka follows with "There must be Some Way Out of Here," an essay that deconstructs strategies and tactics with a Foucaultian prism. Unfortunately, while the subject is interesting, the writing is at times turgid and seems to drifts far from Clayoquot Sound. Timothy Luke, "On the Political Economy of Clayoquot Sound", and R. Michael M'Gonigle, "Somewhere Between Center and Territory", contribute insights into the political economy that produced and sustains Clayoquot Sound as a forest industry with writing that helps this often dry topic come to life. Catriona Sandilands then takes us on a personal and philosophical journey to Clayoquot Sound, during which she persuasively argues that the human construction "wilderness" has obscured the realities of the ecological-human problematique. Sharon Zukin then offers a delightful and thoroughly ruthless expose' of tourism as an extension of consumer culture.

The more provocative essays in the book are those that offer an ecological view of Clayoquot Sound through the eyes of First Nation peoples. Thom Kuehls, in "The Environment of Sovereignty", gives us a sense of how "sovereignty" as a culturally defined concept has been imposed rather than negotiated in Clayoquot Sound, and Umeek of Ahousaht follows this with "Discourses In and About Clayoquot Sound", a First American's history of the Sound and how the First American's encountered British colonialism as a collection of ideological notions handed

down from Locke and other European political theorists. Gary Shaw in "Clearcut Identities", provides a fascinating analysis of the clash between Western science, which he identifies as masculine, and "traditional ecological knowledge", which he characterizes as feminine. In this essay, he characterized this conflict as not merely a struggle over who's knowledge, but also as part of the larger struggle over hierarchy and state power. R.B.J. Walker closes the commentary with an essay "They Seek It Here, They Seek It There", which broadly challenges traditional politics and its efforts to confine political thinking to discreet categories which it can manipulate and control. Here he also asks the question, where as a political matter is Clayoquot Sound located.

This book is not for those who want to tread the well-worn paths of environmental politics. It requires a willingness to think beyond traditional boundaries that ordinarily confine Green politics to identifiable politics and political actors. As the editors point out in closing, "Clayoquot appeals to us as a site of analysis precisely because it eludes us. We cannot reduce its stories to one or represent 'it' (what? The place, the story, the problem, the solution, the politics?) as a singularity." In this way, "A Political Space" is not so much about a patch of trees in an obscure tract of land know as Clayoquot Sound, but rather it is about politics generally, and not just environmental politics. It is about the many threads that form the collective human experience that we call politics: about its history, its sociology and anthropology, its ideations and ideologies, about its discourses and institutions, and about how this all exists within and as a part of the dynamics of anthropogenic and ecological change. It is, in the end, about us - everywhere and at all times - when we interact