

BOOK REVIEW

ROBERT JENSEN. 2021. **The Restless and Relentless Mind of Wes Jackson: Searching for Sustainability.** (ISBN-13: 978-0-7006-3055-4, hbk). University Press of Kansas, 2502 Westbrooke Circle, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-4444, U.S.A. (**Orders:** kansaspress.ku.edu/978-0-7006-3055-4.html). \$26.95 US, 152 pp., 6" × 9".

The Foreword by David W. Orr contains an assessment of Jackson's thinking and writings, "Of the many things that can be said about Wes Jackson, the most important have to do with his role as a master teacher who taught whoever was listening to think more imaginatively and courageously about our connections to soil, culture, time, and how we got to our present state."

About the Author: Robert Jensen is an emeritus professor in the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin and currently collaborates with the Ecosphere Studies program at The Land Institute, Salina, Kansas. He is the author of many books.

About the Book: In the Barn is the opening topic that highlights the Prairie Festival held September each year at The Land Institute near Salina, Kansas. Hundreds of people are crammed into this open-air "Big Barn" with dirt floors to hear inspiring speakers from around the globe. This event includes the world's outstanding authors, thinkers, artists, and advocates that focus on the problems of agriculture, food, the environment, sustainability, and social and environmental issues ("an intellectual hootenanny" according to Jackson). It is a special experience, sometimes a little raucous, but always noisy, in response to controversial environmental issues, with inspiring take home messages about a future ecological worldview based on sustainability. I have been there and you must experience the ambience to appreciate the excitement of the attendees and interaction with the speakers!

The following topical headings chronicle Jackson's life and thoughts: The Energy of Life; Agriculture; Taking Nature Seriously; Too Many, Too Much; Knowledge; Schooling; "We" Have to Accept Limits; A Creaturely Worldview; Conclusions: Spontaneous Elaboration.

The Energy of Life includes one of Jackson's main talking points about the use of the terms "biosphere" and "ecosphere," the former excludes the nonliving components of any ecosystem such as minerals especially carbon, space, habitats, soil, light, heat, cold, atmosphere, water, and others. One of the Jackson quotes I like is, "We treat the planet like a mine from which we extract the resources we want and a dump for wastes we don't." Here is where the five carbon pools are mentioned: soil exploited through agriculture, forests, coal (fossil plant deposits), oil, and natural gas. An extractive human-based economy has utilized these carbon pools as unlimited resources for thousands of years and that leads to the phrase "a species out of context" in reference to human activity.

Agriculture, only eight must read pages, outlines the 10,000-year-old problem of agriculture with humankind manipulating the land for living and economic gain. Taking Nature Seriously emphasizes that humans are part of nature not separate. Here is where Jackson started comparing the deep perennial root systems of natural prairies with the shallow root systems of monoculture grains (wheat, a Kansas staple, corn, and sorghums, all grasses). These natural prairie areas in Kansas resulted from millions of evolution years. This led to the concept of Natural Systems Agriculture based on plant breeding to select for perennial polycultures represented in part by Kernza and rice. The eyes-to-acres-ratio describes how mechanization has led to how increased number of farming acres per person has followed with the huge mega-farms of today and the decline of rural populations as more and more people move to the cities, and some towns, that formerly relied on farming and ranching are dying. Like my hometown near the Flint Hills of Kansas!

There are a series of black and white photographs pages 66–74 that depict the history of The Land Institute and the role of Wes Jackson in their activities.

Schooling is another topic that merits a careful and thoughtful consideration of A Major in Homecoming. Homecoming would be a major subject in the university curriculum including the value system of smaller communities. The concept of A Creaturely Worldview is a special way to live and think about how to live in a more sustainable lifestyle replacing the Industrial Worldview of high intensive use of carbon pools.

Spontaneous Elaboration contains a Jackson quotation: "The world will always be more beautiful than useful" which may mean different things to different people. For me it means the aesthetic beauty seen in nature that once lost through extinction of species, is gone forever. There are many other examples of beauty that will pique your imagination! This is what is special about Jackson and this book, it will make you think about how to live more sustainably and appreciate the natural beauty of the world we all live in.

Everyone who cares about the future of humankind and the sustainability of a better planet earth should buy this book, read it, and ponder the possibilities of saving a way of life that leaves behind a thriving ecosphere for all life.—*Harold W. Keller, Professor Emeritus, Botanist, and Mycologist, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.*