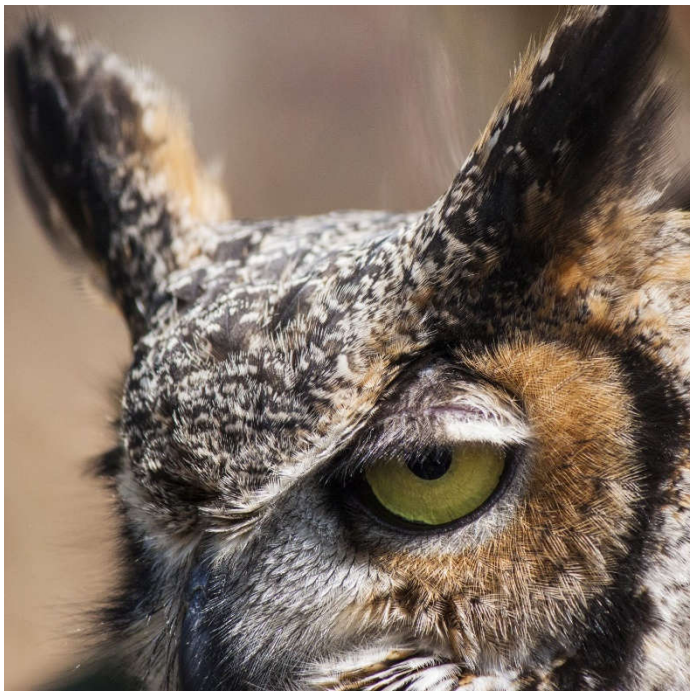
| Photo Essays |

The following photo essays depict the vivid memories of the Wisconsin-based workshop Animating the Landscape. *This trip was organized by the Center for Culture History and Environment (CHE) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in May 2018. This was the fifth time that students and academic staff of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich had taken part in this interesting initiative and the authors are among those who decided to jump on board.*



Above: Great horned owl (REGI)
Cover: Barred owl recovering from a head injury (REGI)
Essays Authors: Noemi Quagliati, Claudio de Majo
Photographs: Noemi Quagliati

Noemi Quagliati

IMMATERIAL COLORED FRAGMENTS OF LANDSCAPE

How can I convey with words or images the sound of thousands of buzzing honeybees, the smell of a mixture of cows' milk and excrement, and the astonishment in realizing how much an owl's neck can twist? An experience speaks much more than many words or pictures.
However, visual narrations can give the sense of a subjective experience in a specific environment. Photographs, for example, function as visual stimuli communicating through one of the five traditionally recognized sensory faculties. Unlike texts, photos cannot dig deep into a phenomenon: they only accurately describe the external appearance, offering a partial perspective of the scene. Nevertheless, pictures have the power to immediately activate visual memories: they give a direct feeling, provoking instantaneous emotions in the viewer. Moreover, thanks to great accessibility, photography is often considered a more democratic tool compared to other means of communication.

What strikes me about photographs is their ability to visually exhort the observer to explore histories. As fragments ripped from time and space, photos represent only limited tracks of more intricate narratives; despite this, they still have the mysterious capacity to catch the eye and draw people's attention towards "something more."
To write this piece, I will let the artificial memory of my camera be a *memento* of the intense experience I lived on the other side of the Atlantic. Functioning as a tool of remembering, the immaterial colored fragments on my computer screen represent pieces of much more complex environments.

Before visiting Wisconsin, I could not clearly picture it in my mind. Hollywood has certainly distributed many depictions of the United States of America, but most of them portray either the Northeast megalopolis or the "Wild Far West." An unusual destination for Europeans, the Dairyland—Wisconsin is a leading dairy producer—is often regarded as a flyover state by a large portion of Americans. Although the flora and fauna of this state echo in the pages of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* and in Henry Hamilton Bennett's photographs of the Wisconsin Dells, the available material was not enough to get an early sense of the place.

This lack of images was perhaps the reason that drove me to take an unusually high number of pictures. Now collected in a digital photo album, this material illustrates not only visual features of different places visited in Wisconsin, but it also shows the specific relationship occurring between observer (myself) and the subjects of the pictures. For instance, one element immediately recognizable in my album is the disproportionate number of close-up shots compared to landscape pictures. The secondary presence of landscape photographs based on natural aesthetic appeal, namely panoramas represented in the manner of painters, reflects the aim of the place-based workshop to explore the dynamic multi-natural environment of Wisconsin, examining the points of contact and collision between human and nonhuman lives.

In fact, the type of landscape participants experienced during the trip was first an "instructive multisensory landscape" narrated by indigenous communities, local food producers, and experts of environmental and conservation organizations. Traveling by bus from Madison to Lake Superior to comprehend the natural diversity of the state, we also encountered a "landscape in passing" characterized by forests, lakes, streams, marshes, and lowland shrub (fig.1). Silos, farms, and center pivot irrigations were also on the edge of the horizons.

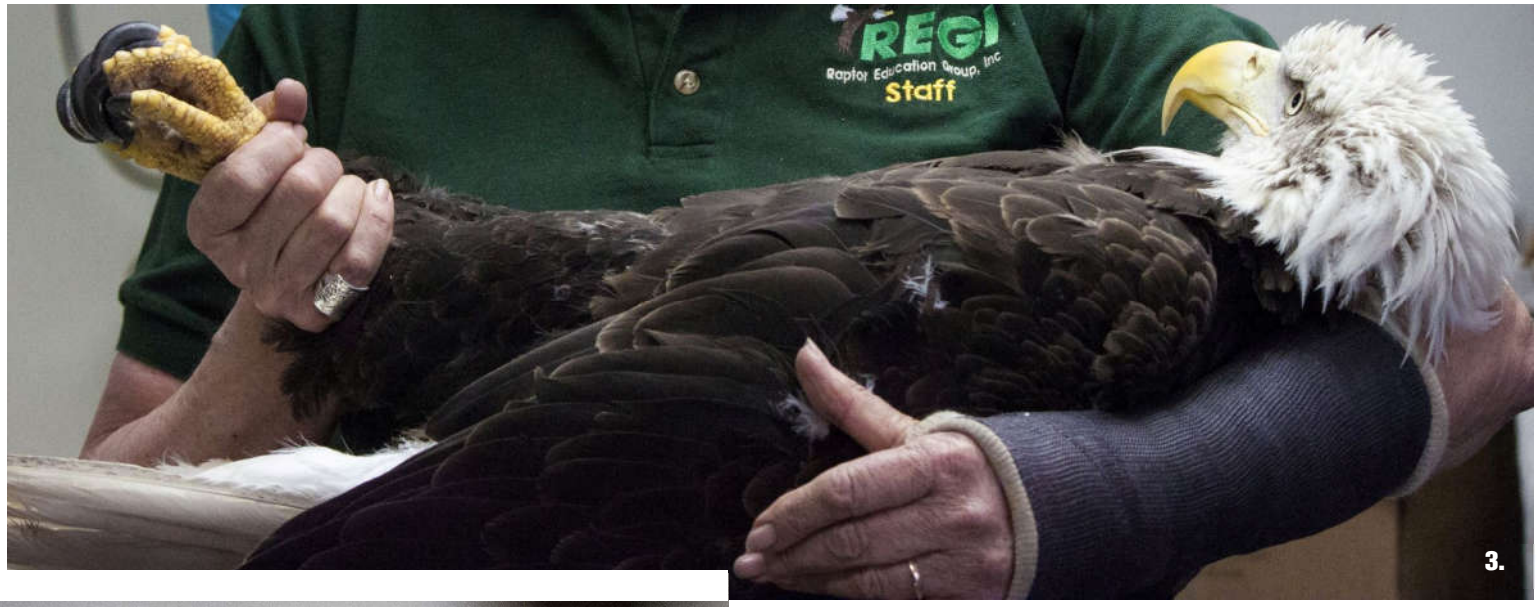
1.

However, animals caught my eye much more than anything else. Mostly recorded with a telephoto lens that has a long reach, both domesticated and wild animals constitute the main presence of my pictures. Maintaining a certain distance from the subject in order not to disturb it, the camera allowed one to magnify details of its body: the hawk's cryptic coloration of plumage, wing shape, and curved beak; the bee's large compound eyes, long proboscis, and antennae (fig.2); and even the ear postures of cows, which seems to indicate their emotional state.

2.
Bees at the Henry's Honey Farm

Although choosing to photograph a certain subject is not always a conscious exercise, the unfamiliar proximity to these animals was probably the major factor in leading me to focus on non-human creatures. The narration of experts and caretakers accompanied these physical encounters, and most times helped me observe animal behaviors and understand their specificities: therefore, influencing the process of taking pictures. What affected the act of recording was confronting myself with the difficult cohabitation between humans and animals. When our group encountered these animals, they were living in captivity: some of them, like the raptors, were injured, and caretakers worked to release them back into the wild once recovered; others, like the dairy cattle, spend their entire life in factory farms without knowing the smell of grazing on a sunny day.

Many photos I took in the raptor rehabilitation center REGI (Raptor Education Group Inc) show the special relationship established between birds and their caretakers. It is hard to find a picture in this series portraying animals alone: rehabilitators persistently take care of these injured birds. With their mysterious body language, these people are a constant presence able to calm down even the biggest eagle (fig. 3-4-5-6). Movements, gestures, breathing, sounds, and especially touch pressure play an incredible role in building trust between birds and humans. With the motto Rehabilitate, Educate, Research, Release, the REGI team knows every aspect regarding behavior and habitat needs of the native birds of Wisconsin and it communicated to our group the precious importance of wildlife.



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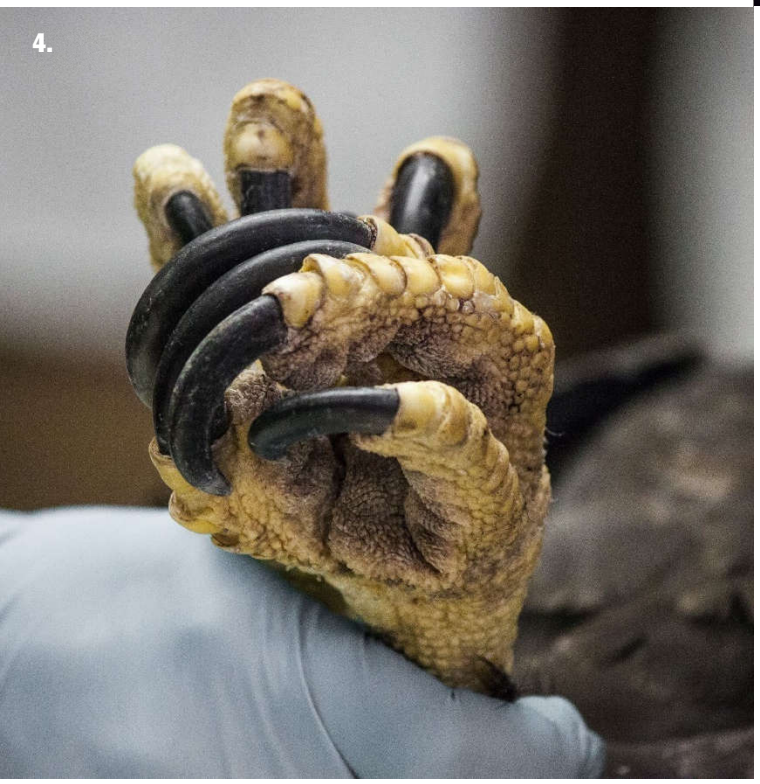

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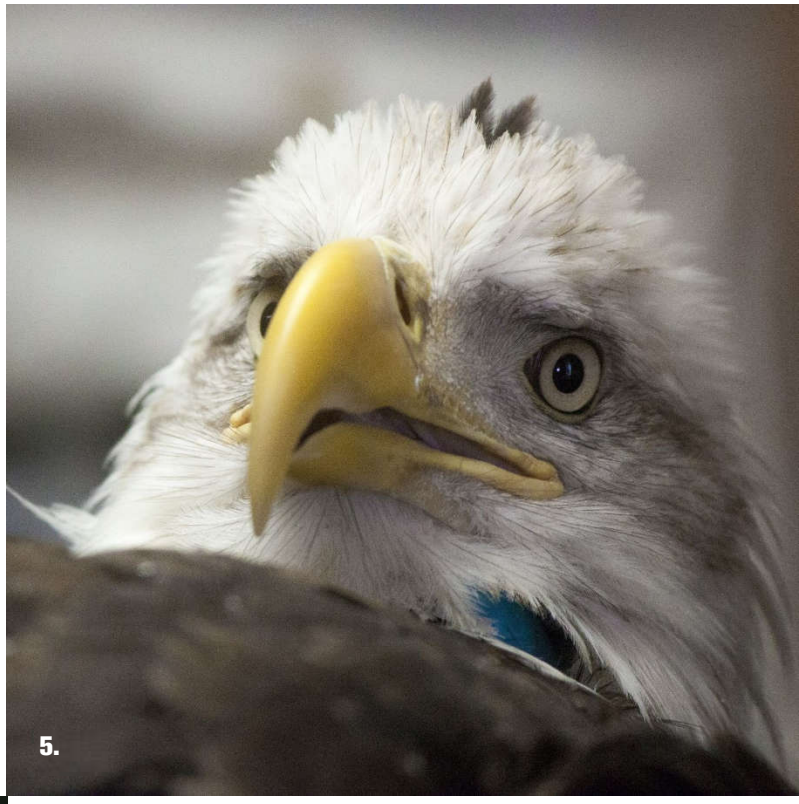

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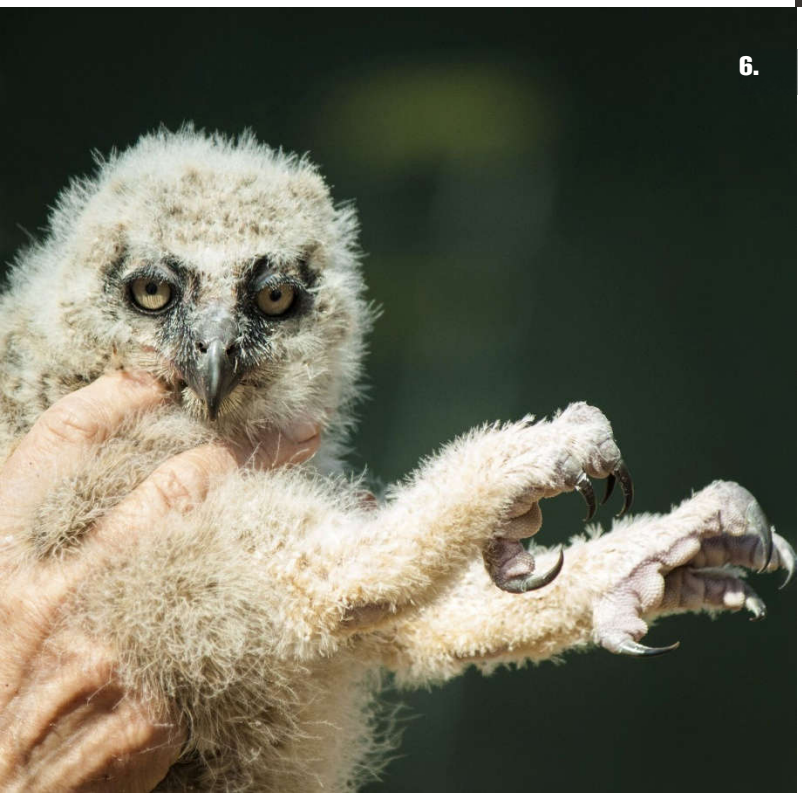


6.

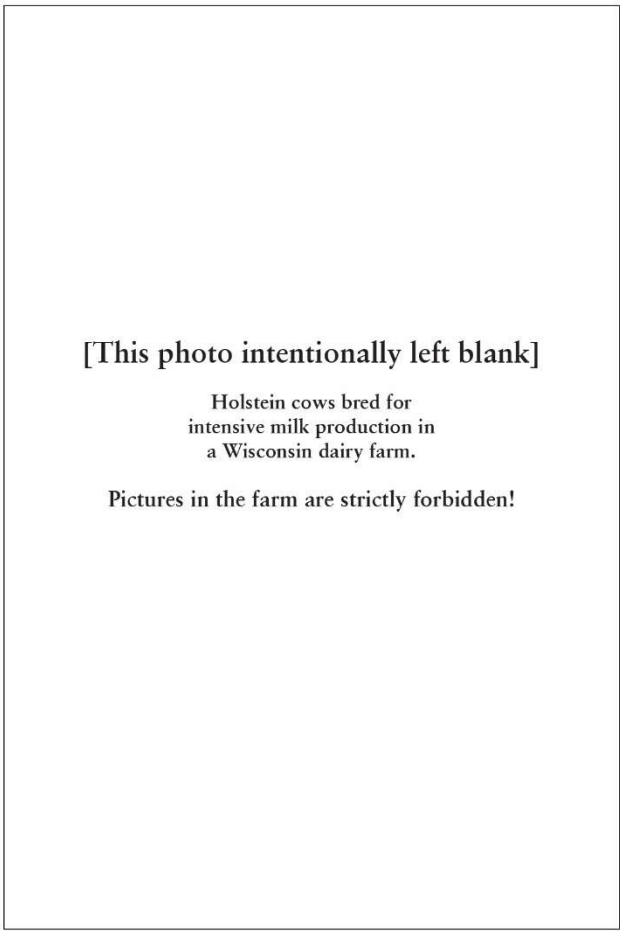
3-4-5.
A bald eagle patient receives a physical exam

6.
An orphaned bald eagle

Opposite in terms of human-animal relationship is the case of cows bred for milk production. The dairy farm we visited near Wausau can milk 3000 Holstein cows three times a day through a high-tech automatized process. People working in this business refer to bovines as "workers."

Starting from a spiral staircase, our visit included a 1/4 mile tour on a catwalk above the near constant movement of the cattle towards the milking machine. If taking pictures had not been strictly forbidden, I would have shown the position of the visitors in relation to the cows. It was an uncomfortable sensation: a God's eye view above the animals' backs, which were pushing one another in the small, dark, and artificial farm space. Although I have to trust only my "natural memory," I vividly remember curious dark eyes looking at me from down there.

7.



Even the absence of certain pictures has an important meaning in portraying and understanding an event. I believe that if the film could not be exposed or the digital sensor has not detected any light waves to make an image, leaving a space for the unrepresented but existing content is crucial. Sometimes books contain vacant pages where is reported: "This page intentionally left blank." In the same way, a deliberately empty photographic space with an explaining caption gains a special meaning (fig. 7).

Entering the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in Baraboo we are informed instead: "Visitors are welcome to take pictures and video during their visit. Flash photography is allowed." This organization works worldwide to protect and restore wild crane populations and the ecosystems on which they depend. Its headquarters hosts a captive flock of approximately 100 cranes, including the only complete collection of all 15 species in the world. Equipped with many facilities, including a gift shop, the center is stormed by schoolchildren that want to see cranes dancing in spring. There is even a sort of theater, where the audience can appreciate this spectacle.

Obviously, the charisma of these animals attracted my gaze—white wings with feathers ranging from white to brown, head topped with stiff golden feathers, intense red cheek patches (fig. 8). Our group had a lively discussion with experts about the value—but also the challenges—of endangered species management and conservation, connected with the importance to engage new generations' interest in environmental issues.

8.
A black crowned crane with the head topped with stiff golden feathers (ICF)

However, in most snapshots, I portrayed cranes staring out from behind a pen made of iron and Plexiglas (fig. 9-10). Although the close-ups emphasize the visitors' closeness to the animal, the visual obstacle of the fence reminds one, once again, of the ongoing collision between human and nonhuman beings. These photos make me think of Rilke's poem *The Panther* (tr. Walter Arndt).

In the Jardin des Plantes, Paris

His gaze has been so worn by the procession
Of bars that it no longer makes a bond.
Around, a thousand bars seem to be flashing,
And in their flashing show no world beyond.

The lissom steps which round out and re-enter
That tightest circuit of their turning drill
Are like a dance of strength about a center
Wherein there stands benumbed a mighty will.

Only from time to time the pupil's shutter
Will draw apart: an image enters then,
To travel through the tautened body's utter
Stillness—and in the heart end.

9.
A white-naped crane (Vulnerable Species ICF)

10.
A black crowned crane (Vulnerable Species ICF)

Arriving with a blurry image into my mind, I left Wisconsin with a much more detailed sense of its environments. My way of perceiving the landscape during the workshop was not only determined by desiring to look, know, and record, but I attempted the perhaps impossible challenge of emphatically feeling the diverse creatures that inhabit these places. Although memories fade quickly, especially in a modern social life characterized by technological acceleration, the visual material I brought back to Europe after this experience now drives me to remember and describe the sensations perceived during the workshop.

A landscape deserves to be experienced directly, with no mediations...only with the greatest respect. However, I hope these pictures could be a starting point for further reflections and inquiries about human and nonhuman coexistence in specific environments.

Male American Kestrel (REGI)

Claudio de Majo

THE DAY I MET BIG JOHN: NATIVE RIGHTS, COMMONS AND CONSERVATION ON THE SHORES OF LAKE DU FLAMBEAU

The bus rides over long roads surrounded by tall woods stretching for kilometers before you can see a single living being or a building. We are literally cutting a forest in half, riding a fossil fuel vehicle in between what two centuries ago would have been a remarkable natural monument and, perhaps more than three-hundred years ago, an essential source for the survival of Chippewa Indian tribes and a great diversity of non-human animals and plants. The feeling is similar to the first 10-15 minutes of an S-Bahn ride from the pre-alpine area south of Munich, where I used to live last year, to the city-center. However, the trees of Wisconsin are much taller, the woods thicker, and you literally cannot see the end of them.

The skimming images of the pine tree forest is the main memory I hold onto in regard to the field trip through rural Wisconsin. Although the trip mainly consisted of interminable daily bus rides, only interrupted by short visits that in most cases did not imply any direct contact with nature, the workshop gave me very important lessons on a personal level, as well as valuable inputs as a doctoral student who grew up between Europe and South America.

The Animated Chippewa Landscape: Lac du Flambeau

From a personal perspective, this experience was very valuable in reminding me of a very important truth: in most parts of the world the concept of distance functions on a set of proportions that for people from the so-called Old World is very hard to imagine. In spite of my multiple life experiences in several countries on the other side of the ocean, to this day this difference in proportion still amazes me. No wonder that visiting the US-American state Wisconsin, and attempting to cover several locations in a few days, meant sacrificing our actual time outdoors to long concrete motorways. Personal considerations aside, I have also benefited from this trip as a doctoral researcher in environmental history with a strong interest for ecology and collective action. In particular, visiting the Chippewa Indian reserve at Lake du Flambeau, a great example of perseverance and activism, taught me a lesson that I will never forget. So the story goes.

On the second day of our workshop, May 15th, 2018, we reached the Chippewa reserve early in the afternoon. Tired from the ride and stunned by the damp hot climate of the lake region in the early afternoon, I got off the bus looking for members of the reserve, excited by the tales of environmental justice told us by our travel companion, Prof. Larry Nesper, a friend of the tribe for a long time who has carried out fascinating ethnographic work in the region. My first reaction in looking at the man who received us was a mixture of surprise and amazement - that sort of cathartic feeling that happens when mental projections and reality collide. The strong-looking and polite big man standing in front of us was Brooks Big John, chair of the tribal council of one of the most powerful native tribes of Wisconsin, perhaps of the whole federation. Aside from showing his leadership in every action, Big John has an amazing curriculum, and his knowledge spontaneously emerges during his talks. He communicates his heritage and sense of belonging with every action and word he pronounces. After a brief welcoming, he led us to their community museum, a former boarding school aimed at "re-educating" native people, where several members of his family had been forced to live in the past. He also introduced another historical figure of the tribe: Tom Maulson, the man whose political efforts led this tribe to its current prosperous and privileged condition.

As they tell us the story of their tribe, these two people do not show any signs of what David Riesman - in an attempt to describe the inquietude of our times - would have defined as 'outer-direction.' Although at a first glance they would not look as such, these people are ***the real environmental activist of our times*** - people who embody a different gradient of values, who fought for social justice in the attempt to preserve their tribe's traditional way of life, consisting of practices based

Tom Maulson's Tribe Medal

on different socio-ecological patterns of life. Among them, we were informed about fishing and hunting for survival. Yet, in their talk they also mentioned activities of fishing and hunting on the reserve for recreational reasons, mainly led by non-native people. As this information paved their way from my sensorial perceptions to becoming actual thoughts, I struggled to understand how these two very opposite ideas of nature could possibly coexist: on the one hand cultural patterns for the management of natural assets based on centuries-old patterns of collectivism, on the other hand, nature as a asset for recreational activities.

This weird yet functional arrangement has led me to formulate some reflections on the study of the commons. So far, scholars have investigated the commons as an institutionalized pattern of resource management alternative to governmental centralization or to market-led systems. Both present and historical studies of the commons have insisted on the centrality of risk-sharing in collective action as the main advantage of this system. Other studies have adopted the commons as a key concept to interpret sustainable strategies based on collectivism that could inspire current governance processes and post-developmental agendas. Over the last years, systems of collective action for the management of natural resources have been investigated by researchers on the field of environmental humanities, demonstrating instances of collectivism in various contexts. Much research has

Members of the Tribe Who Joined the Army

emphasized the interconnections between traditional subsistence activities of indigenous people all over the world and the universe of the commons, emphasizing their relations with theoretical academic frameworks such as environmental justice and political ecology. In this light, the struggles of indigenous people in defense of their way of life can be read as an attempt to protect their societies based on the collective management of natural resources against the privatization attempts of the capitalist system.

Hearing the story of the Chippewa tribe, I could not help noticing the perfect fit of this example: since the 1980s, animated by leaders such as Big John and Tom Maulson, the tribe has been fighting as a collective for the survival of its traditional activities, defending its way of life against different political and economic interests. Moreover, the example of the Chippewa tribe can be considered as another instance of the thin line between wilderness and conservation, as observed by authors such as William Cronon and Roderick Nash. Multiple are the challenging questions arising from this complex interplay of factual evidence and conceptual constructions: 1) should we consider the traditional practices of the Chippewa tribe as commons? 2) if yes, to what extent do institutional actors, such as the state of Wisconsin or the federal government influence the functioning of the tribe's original rules? 3) can traditional practices, conservation, and recreational activities harmoniously coexist in such a complex fame of social and ecological values? Can the recent history of this tribe still be defined as an exemplary struggle of

Larry Wawronowicz explaining the activities of the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society

political ecology, despite its current compromise with local institutions?

These are only some of the major questions that arise from such a short consideration, mostly supported by personal reflections and intuitions rather than valuable documentary evidence. Certainly, judging from the amount of reflections that such a short experience was able to convey, a more in-depth investigation on the state of the Chippewa tribe might constitute a challenging future research endeavor.

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