

Fertile Edges: Regenerating Land, Culture and Hope

Maddy Harland

Permanent Publications (Nov 6, 2017)

Softcover \$12.95 (192pp)

978-1-85623-309-5

Maddy Harland is the editor of Britain's *Permaculture* magazine, now celebrating its twenty-fifth year, as well as the cofounder of an associated eco-publishing company. *Fertile Edges*, a chronological collection of her editorials for *Permaculture*, is a snapshot of the last quarter-century of environmental developments—both progressive and threatening—and a trove of inspiration for green advocates everywhere.

The concept of permaculture arose in Australia in the 1970s with the work of Bill Mollison, among others, but quickly found worldwide significance. A shortened blending of the phrases “permanent agriculture” and “permanent culture,” it refers to ensuring sustainable energy systems for future generations. Harland boils it down to “the fundamental desire to work with Nature, and not against her.”

These one- or two-page essays maintain a delicate balance between the big picture and small-scale achievements, often by spotlighting well-known visionaries alongside local activists. Each editorial is a cohesive, well-crafted piece on a clear theme.

A timeline and descriptions of major events in Harland's life and in the wider world precede each section, giving a sense of the sweep of history. Again and again, catastrophes serve as evidence of human damage to the planet: the mad cow disease outbreak in 1996 reveals the dangers of intensive farming, while the increasing frequency of natural disasters reflects climate change and the threat to the Gulf Stream.

Yet whether Harland is recounting a local greening campaign or a trip to Bhutan, she is relentlessly practical and surprisingly optimistic. “Choose your strategy, your campaign, your activism, your research, your passion—however humble—and stick to it not for a year or two, but for the rest of your lives. Speak up,” she advises. Being a part of the environmental solution, in whatever way, is, for her, the most “powerful antidote for despair.”

REBECCA FOSTER (January/February 2018)

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