



Notes on a Shared Landscape: Making Sense of the American West

David Bayles

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In his best-selling *Art and Fear*, David Bayles (with Ted Orland) closely examined personal and autobiographical episodes in search of general truths about artmaking. Bayles now turns that same attention to his native West.

When European Americans "discovered" the American West, they fell in love with the resplendent landscape. The love affair and its congenital flaws persists to this day.

Bayles writes: ". . . the question is why my people bungled our occupation of the West so badly when no one really wanted to, when there was every chance to get it right, when voices of caution were constantly raised, when what needed to be done was frequently obvious, and when, occasionally, we did get it right (think: National Parks)."

Notes on a Shared Landscape engages the issues that make the West the West—widely ranging over the autobiographical and the cultural, the ecological and the epistemological, the cow and the potato. This is an intensely personal book, and though the Western library is huge, there is not another book like it. Much of the text unfolds in Yellowstone, where Bayles writes:

In the Lamar valley of the Yellowstone, beaver gnaw the trunks of cottonwoods, elk browse their leaves. The shadows are long, even in summer. Even so, it is just another place. In it, just as elsewhere, we see the marks of our own hands faintly because we don't have to know very much about the land we live in, because we are equally a part of and apart from nature, and because there is hardly any moment when humans are more delusional than when self recognition is required.



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