

Rewilding with Wilson Alvarez and Ben Weiss

Podcast Transcript, February 18, 2014

<http://www.thepermaculturepodcast.com/2014/rewilding-with-wilson-alvarez-and-ben-weiss/>

Scott Mann:

Hello and welcome to the Permaculture Podcast, a listener supported program. My guests for this episode are Wilson Alvarez and Ben Weiss. They are permaculture teachers and practitioners from Lancaster, PA - who focus on re-wilding, observation, and tending to the wild, particularly Zone 4 Permaculture. I also consider them my friends and colleagues in the local community, having learned and shared a great deal with both of them, as well as having sat down and broken bread, and had meals together. This is their third time on the show, and you'll find link to those past episodes, as well as for their permaculture design course - which revolves around three core principles, reconnection, regeneration, and rebellion. It is quite a conversation, and I look forward to having more with them around this area of expertise, around re-wilding and observations. I'm reminded of David Holmgren's suggestion that we all find our own nichés, and I continue to develop my own. If you enjoy this interview or any of these past episodes, please make a donation so I can keep things rolling along. Find out how at: thepermaculturepodcast.com/support. Now we go to Ben and Wilson. I'll join you again afterwards with some updates.

Scott:

Our last conversation about your work in re-wilding and zone 4 permaculture has had a lot of impact on the listeners, with feedback and interest in what you're doing, and how its gotten them to think differently about zone 4, and our role as designers, and making change in the world that honors both human space and the wild. From that, I'd just like to continue that conversation to learn more about your work, and the advanced PDC you're teaching, and how that impacts your development of the rewilding school, and the other projects you're involved in.

Ben Weiss:

So we're teaching an advanced permaculture course that we've branded Wild Permaculture, because its a nice catchy title. But its essentially about permaculture for zone 4, to a certain extent Zone 5 - so, semi-wild land management, and also, beyond just land management or interaction with ecology, looking at zone 4 as the boundary of not only physical human culture, but also, or i should say not only our physical civilization, but also our culture. So, zone 4 being the boundaries of thought, the boundaries of knowledge, the fringe of culture, places where creativity springs forth from the unknown. I personally am fascinated with the way that marginal lands and marginal ecosystems synchronize with marginal people and marginal ideas. So, that's sort of the fodder for the curriculum of our class, which I'm really grateful to be teaching this class, its full, its really well-attended, people are really excited about it. And its really helping Wilson and I systematize a lot of the information that we've been gathering and generating over the last half decade, to get ready to write our book. Again, as I've said in other interviews with you Scott, the foundation of the curriculum for the class, which, again, is the foundation of our work, is all about observation practice. And this constant re-emphasizing of permaculture as an applied science doesn't work without a continued observation practice. So, that's where we're starting with our students. The first half of the class is all about learning various different ways to observe Zone 4, both as a physical and a cultural and ideological place. Then the second half of the class is all about learning how to design in zone 4. And again, not in only the physical zone 4, but also the cultural zone 4.

Wilson Alvarez:

So, the way we started thinking about re-wilding and zone 4 permaculture is that the three tier triangle that we came up with. Reconnect to the land. Regenerate the land. And rebel against the culture. Those three are independent, yet they work together - just think of it as a tripod, if any of those come off, the whole thing falls apart. So, reconnect, the first principle of permaculture is to observe and interact. We can write whole books on just observation. Our whole class is eight months, the first four months is just observation techniques. As designers, as people, and for me, coming from a re-wilding/primitive skills background, I've taken awareness and observation out of the - what I was telling Ben the other day - the realm of the five senses, and moved it past that, sort of to, internal observations, what I'm feeling like, how does that affect my observations, emotional observations, how I'm feeling, how does this thing make me feel. And then even further beyond that. How we've broken down the class, and how we're doing this, and how we're approaching observation, is foundational. How do you use your senses? We all have these dulled senses from living in cities, and living inside of houses, and not being sort of part of the world. So, when you talk about designing, you can't design something you don't know or understand. I think for us to observe first and interact - I think it was Bruce Lee that said "Knowledge without application is worthless." What's the point of having knowledge without applying it? So, getting people to observe what's actually happening in front of them. Then after that, that's the only way you can move toward the design process. So, like Ben was saying, its half and half. But what it ends up being is 8 months of observation, and 4 months of design work, because they end up continuing their observation techniques the entire time. Me and Ben were just talking about how we could teach a year-long, based on this. It would be, the first four months would be observation, observation techniques, so they end up doing it for the whole year. Then, on month 4, we start doing regeneration techniques, so they get 8 months of that. Then the last four months would be introduction to rebellion, so different types of activism and thinking, so they get four months of that. You base it on the foundation and then all the way up. It breaks up the class really well.

Through observation, and through these types of things we're pushing the boundaries - and especially the class we're coming up with now that we're calling Sacred Observation - we're really pushing the boundaries as to what's safe to talk about, what should be talked about, and how do we talk about it. Me and Ben, we sat for a couple hours now, what's the best way, you know, I asked a couple people in my class, are you going to be comfortable if we talk about this? And yet, through all that, it doesn't matter if you're comfortable or not, and it might be even better if you're not comfortable, because I really need to get the information out there. It doesn't matter what foundation you come from, religious/non-religious, spiritual/non-spiritual, observation is just technique. We've been trying to put it in some sort of palatable way that someone who comes from a religious background, and someone who comes from an atheist scientific background, everyone can swallow it. That's the most important thing. The technique is more important than the semantics of it. I think that's where we're headed, and I think we've seen that this is so important we have no choice. It takes 4, it takes 8 months - it takes way longer than that, I've been 10 years, I've literally been 10 years of doing observation, and everyday I observe something new, or I figure out a new way to see something, or something interacts with something else that I've learned. Then this network is created and I see things in a whole different way. So, its a life-long process, but its foundational. When we started thinking about this advanced class, how are we going to teach observation in four months, well, we're not. We're teaching them foundational things, and they'll spend the rest of their lives doing it.

Scott:

Its one of those things, when I was talking with Natasha [Alvarez], that it seems so simple when we break it down. But realizing the amount of time we spent to get to the places where we are to do the things that we need to do; they are these long pursuits, we take that first step and it seems to open our

eyes and say "I can see now for the first time!" Then five years later you look back and say "I didn't really see then, I just happened to see something." And it continues to grow, and change with you.

With your course, its an advanced PDC, and there's 23 students in it, did you require that everyone in it have a PDC in order to take the course?

Ben:

Yeah, we did set that as a prerequisite. We did also, in the course details, we would be willing to make an exception for someone who can demonstrate certain life-experience or learning that would allow them to be participating in an advanced PDC. The reasons we did that was that we wanted to make sure there was a vocabulary that had already been established, so that we didn't spend time in class going back all the time constantly reiterating and re-explaining the basic ideas of permaculture, and the basic ideas of ecology. Listening to what Wilson was saying about the development of our curriculum, it made me realize - I'd like to put this out there - that what you all are listening to right now is essentially a conversation that demonstrates our process of developing this idea of Wild Permaculture, permaculture for zones 4 & 5. I'm really appreciative to be participating in this process, and I'm also really appreciative of the people who've come before us in the permaculture movement who have established this tradition in permaculture as an applied science, of constantly checking, re-checking, examining, re-examining, and evolving this system forward.

On the front cover of David Holmgren's great book *Permaculture Principles & Pathways*, he's got that permaculture flower design. Weaving through that flower is this spiral, which if you read his explanation of what that design is, he says that the spiral weaving through this flower which represents permaculture as a science, is a reminder to us that permaculture as an applied science has to continually adapt to be applicable, to be useful to whatever is going on. And so I can't sit here and claim that we've developed the entire system of what wild permaculture is, and looks like. For example, Wilson mentioned, several times, these three ethics of wild permaculture, which we've been developing, and which he gave me credit for, but he came up with them, and they're wonderful. And I've been working with them, adding something back to the mix. He articulates them as a reconnection to the land or to the wild, regeneration of the wild systems, and a rebellion of the destructive culture. I personally prefer to use the word rejection, and that's okay. But it is definitely, I wanna make sure everyone understands we are talking about a rejection of the culture of oppression and destruction, that has caused the separation between modern humans and the spirit of the wild, that the first of those three ethics, reconnection, is offering a solution to.

Another thing I'd like to throw out here about the development of this conceptual framework for wild permaculture - which, again, permaculture is essentially just a conceptual framework, a tool for us to organize our thoughts and our understandings and our information - we're working on 6 new principles of permaculture design, that complement David Holmgren's, but that are very much about developing a culture that lends itself to reconnection and regeneration, and rejection of that oppressive destructive culture. I'm not prepared at this time to articulate those 6 principles, but in the near future, they will be worded in a way where they're ready to be taught.

To go back to this class that we're teaching, I'm just so glad to be involved in it, because its allowing me, and forcing me really, to get this stuff down, to get it ready to be taught, and to be offered. Lastly, I just want to hit on what Wilson said about being a little bit uncomfortable, and tie that back to what I said earlier in this interview about zone 4 not only being the margin of our human ecosystem, but also the margins of culture, and the margins of thought, and the margins of understanding. That is uncomfortable. Historically, humans are afraid of the unknown, and the fact that we are being pushed to develop a system that allows us to reconnect, regenerate, and reject. It demonstrates this discomfort, it demonstrates this place of not knowing. We are, along with our students, moving through this process, of checking the edges of what's out there, what's out there. When I go out into the woods, on the edge of my city, its a little nerve-wracking. There's homeless people out there, I have been

threatened before, I've found evidence of crime. Those marginalized ecosystems are dangerous to go into. Wilson was talking about the spiritual dimensions of this observation work; for a lot of modern people, those are dangerous places to go. We have a fragile psyche in the modern world, and so going out and exploring methods of observation, that are not supposed to even work, that could be dangerous or frightening, that is where we're going with this work. Not everything we develop will be correct or complete. That's another beautiful thing of the work we're doing, that we're constantly challenging ourselves to surround ourselves with the community of permaculture practitioners, who are willing to take this science beyond where it has already gone.

Wilson:

There's one big part of that rejection/rebellion part, how do you practice permaculture in the age of collapse? How do you practice permaculture at the age of peak oil? Or the age of environmental collapse? Do you continue to just focus on techniques, or what do you do? That's why it has spawned me, and Ben, to really focus on the wild lands, the places that are not completely pigeon-holed into human based systems, and still have - not only do they have a wildness, they have answers out there. There are answers out there, that's what Zone 5 is all about, leaving it and learning from it. Just because its a zone 4 doesn't mean it doesn't act as a zone 5 as far as giving information to you. Its reciprocal. Zone 4 is very reciprocal in that you can not only give, you can receive from it. So, this is the age of collapse whether you want to say it or not, or whether you want to believe it or not. We are living in an age of too much CO2, Greenland is melting. I just watched that documentary on the Greenland ice sheet that's melting, and if that happens, god knows what. The CO2 levels are higher than they've been in 250,000 years. And, the only thing that gives me hope is permaculture, the only thing that frustrates me the most is permaculture - because it doesn't take us anywhere. Where its being taught, what its doing, and how its being applied doesn't go even close to as far as it could, and it doesn't help as much as it could. So, this is practicing permaculture in the age of collapse. This is what it looks like. This is our personal response to not being scared, not being frightened, not being pigeon-holed into saying that "I teach permaculture so I teach it this way," no, I teach permaculture, and I want to be able to apply it this way, so how do I do that. That's where I'm coming from, I think that's where I think the project is coming from too. What do we do? What makes us feel? I feel best when I'm in the woods, and I'm being surrounded, and I have a communication with the land itself, not isolated in my house by myself. I don't feel very good doing that. Just applying that to say how can thing affect more people, more animals, more plants. That's what it is for me.

Scott:

How would you describe re-wilding, both from a practical techniques standpoint, but larger to those principles and ethics, and how they apply to people?

Wilson:

If you go and Google rewilding, you're gonna get two different things. You're gonna get, there's a start up by Dave Foreman called The Rewilding Institute, which is this big push in conservation biology to bring megafauna back to North America, to bring elephants, and lions, and cheetahs back - which they were here before, just some of them have only been gone 6,000-8,000 years. So, they say, the Rewilding Institute, the conservation movement says that now, elephants especially they're being killed for their ivory like crazy in Africa and we have huge parts of Kansas that are like the savannah. Elephants have done well here, they will do well here, let's bring them over here, we don't even need to create habitats for them, they'll do just fine here. We have the American antelope which runs at 70mph, its the fastest animal other than the cheetah, which, why does it go so fast, well, because we had the American cheetah here and that was its number one predator. So, bringing a cheetah here wouldn't be out of the question. So, that's the one. If you go Google rewilding, you're gonna get the conservation

rewilding idea of moving megafauna to places where they either fill a niche that they've already filled, or could fill a niche of an extinct species that has gone extinct for one or more reasons.

The second one that you'll see is sort of the anarchist rewilding, which is the undomestication of humanity and the undomestication of land. So, in anarchist rewilding, you'll/they'll look at a city as see it as just subjugated land; they'll even see farms as subjugated soils, soil is being left to a certain pH, and a certain thing. Well, if we walked away, the pH would change, and trees would grow, and roots would grow, it would be truly different.

What I'm saying in rewilding is I'm mixing those two. I am using it in an anarchist way, and also using it in a conversation biology way. Because what we're doing with the Rewilding Project, the Rewilding School, and the idea of restoring eden, is both of those things. We're saying, we must undomesticate ourselves. And what is domestication? We think of domesticated animals, we think of a cow or a chicken or something. But if you go to Hawaii, you have wild cattle, which are domesticated cattle that were dropped off during the 1800s, so that when sailors would come back, they would have something to eat. You have wild lamb, wild sheep, so these things have gone what they call feral; they are animals who were previously domesticated who have now become wild. And plants are very similar like that, they can go, sort of, feral. A lot of what I'm talking about is that, the idea of undomesticating our thought processes so we don't think like everyone else, opening yourself back up, rewilding yourself, letting information come from all different places, very much like a wild plant has to put deep roots in order to get nutrients from different places. And also the idea of, we have sick landscapes, we have things that are messy, we have huge gaps that, you can see it, especially on the edges of cities, or the edges of towns, or the edges of cornfields. You'll see these islands that you can't even walk through them, the brambles are so big or the vines are so large. But, the idea of bringing in, maybe things that 'might not belong there,' but that will fill a niche and be multi-use. It might be useful for humans, might be useful for animals and deer at the same time, might be a nitrogen fixer, all that.

I think, as far as the Rewilding School, or what I'm saying as rewilding, is a really good mix of, when you google rewilding, I think its sort of a good mix of both of them. Its the hands-on approach of reconnection, which the anarchist rewilding is; and the conservation biologist regeneration part.

Scott:

When you're looking at rewilding, this is a reconnecting human beings with nature, and getting us so that we can observe in a more natural way, think in a more natural way - I don't actually know how to define 'natural' right now, but - to remove us from the current culture, so that we can be in a place where we can see, think and do in a more human appropriate manner. That it's not this 'okay, well I gotta be here at this time, here at this time,' this constant consumer culture push. Let's take a step back from that and find ourselves in this and the wild.

Ben:

What does it take to be a human in this world? And what is a human? I mean, its so simple to say that a human is a person. But what is it to be a *human being* in this world? I mean, I think there's a big difference. We were put here for a reason. All that type of stuff; what does that mean? What does life for a sort-of hunter-gatherer, does there world view look very different than ours? Of course. All that is based on, when you surround ourselves with permanent things - when we surrounded ourselves with things we've created ourselves. If I go out of my little house right now, I'm surrounded by trees that were planted by human beings, grass, and I'm surrounded by houses - these super permanent things. None of it comes from the landscape, everything was put here by human beings. Well, my psyche is based on these things that I've grown up with, riding in a car and doing all these things. Even though we're all biologically human beings, I'm a very a different species that a person who was born in a wigwam, and hunter and gathered for all their food, and did all these things. We'd see the world in a very different way. In *The Forest People* - its a really great book by Colin Turnbull - he actually took a

pygmy, from the forest, and he took him out to the savannah. The first thing that the pygmy saw was a water buffalo. He was so scared, he said, "why is that water buffalo so small?" Because, when you live in a forest, perspective is one of those things that's very hard because you can't see but 20 feet in front of you. So, his whole life, he hadn't seem more than 20-30 feet in front of him. So, when he saw this buffalo a mile away, or a quarter mile away, he had no frame of reference for understanding that its farther away so its smaller. That's something really simple, but its a way of saying that I can't see the world in a way.

Why does rebellion have anything, what does rebellion or rejection have anything to do with reconnection and permaculture in general? You can't reconnect to land that's being destroyed by your culture. You always have to come back to the questioning of why is this happening. I think people who are getting into permaculture have already asked that question to begin with. I think we're just trying to create these foundational things so that they can say, 'okay, I know, I've felt this way, but what can I do about it?' So that's where these other two parts come in.

Ben:

For our advanced PDC, Wilson developed this great graphic that illustrates how, for a culture to be sustainable, for a group of people to live in a sustainable way, they have to rely heavily on non-human infrastructure. In fact, the more human infrastructure we create, the more of a gamble we're essentially taking with our culture, the more fragile we make it. To expand on this idea of rewilding, and what that means, I keep coming back to Gregory Cajete's book *Native Science*. He talks in that book about the ecological understanding of native people is this constant and pervasive incorporation into culture and daily life of ritual, metaphor, story-telling, art, and ways of livelihood that remind us all the time of the source of our infrastructure, the source of the things that we need to live. But in our modern culture, we don't have those reminders. So, from a design perspective, permaculture wise, by having more wild land, healthier wild land, and finding ways of constantly increasing the amount of wild and renewable resources that our society relies on - we begin to rebuild these small, pervasive, daily reminders of what it is that's the source of our sustenance. And there's nothing unscientific about this. I don't want to get off into lala land, but, people do not take care of things unless they appreciate them. And just to use some basic emotions, like love. Part of rewilding is teaching people how to love the earth. Because we need to take care of the earth in order to survive, and people do not take care of something that they do not appreciate, they they don't have reverence for, that they don't respect. And people don't respect things, people don't love things, unless they have a certain level of understanding for them. Right now, there's very little understanding of ecology and wild land. Its far removed from modern people, and so, this middle ground between civilized, domesticated life, and rewilding, is, I think, what Will and I were talking about in our last interview, showing people that there is, that there are all manner of different types of basic value in wild systems, being close at hand, being actively participated with.

Scott:

Speaking about caring for the things that we know, or needing to know about things in order to care for them - I think about where I live, there's a cold water stream that runs behind my house. I get to watch the herons fish there. But, there's a connection there that, if they disappeared, my life would be less for it. I wouldn't be able to teach my children about them, or to tell them how much that big bird doesn't weigh in order to fly, and how that becomes a lesson about birds, and the natural world. So that then later when I talk to them and we're passing a group of turkey buzzards sitting next to the roadside - I can tell them, 'you know that big bird that you see in the stream, those birds weigh even less than that does.' We can use that as a lesson to count the birds, well 'you know that entire group of birds weighs less than you do.' And, it really makes a difference in the way that we're able to interact with the world, and the good that we can do by having that connection.

Wilson:

The idea of going out and looking at the land and seeing what it is, that's what we're talking about with all these wild lands. It's the same exact thing that we're talking about, that connection. The same connection that you have with your wife, the same connection that you have with your children, that love that you have, that's a type of love, that's a type of understanding, that's a type of relationship that we're going to need, whether we live in a city or we live in a - regardless of where you live, the wild lands are still the most important thing. They're where all the nutrients come from, where the oxygen comes from, where the water system comes from. So, no matter if you don't really interact with Zone 4, or Zone 5, on a daily basis - that's why you're breathing right now, that's why you're drinking water right now, because these wild systems exist. There are no human systems that can take over for them. It's the constant abuse of them, it's what's having our water being more and more polluted, and our oxygen being less and less, and the CO2 levels rising. All that stuff is because we can't see it.

The idea of what we can't see we can't take care of, and what we don't love we won't take care of either. The idea of having no choice but to be able to go outside and make a connection, because we don't have that much time. We don't have that much time to say, wait for the scientists to come up with something. I think that's just scary, and very dangerous, because at this point, - I kept saying the idea of 'collapse.' We're on so many different types of collapse scales, the fisheries, the water, and especially where we are, the fracking has gotten really out of control, and there doesn't seem to be any help coming from anywhere, especially the government or any other places. We're sort of left to ourselves, by ourselves, for ourselves - so where do we go from here? If we don't reconnect to each other, reconnect to our land base, we won't protect it - and I'm not gonna protect you if you don't protect me. It's that same exact reciprocal relationship that we need to create with non-human beings. And that's very, like, 'how can you make a relationship with a non-human being' or a non-sentient being, like something that doesn't breathe, like a rock or a stream. But you can! People have done it over and over again. We teach in the class this idea of bias; bias is the biggest filter for your perceptive world. The more biased you become, you're not able to have things come in. Just think of yourself as a cone that's been closed off, nothing can come in. You've already filled it, every niche is already filled in your book. So the less bias that you have, the more you can actually observe the world correctly. Open it up! That's why the internal observation is so damn important to getting, and actually seeing the world for what it is. We are looking at the world through dulled sense to begin with, we only have 5, not-that-good senses to begin with. We can't smell like a hound-dog, we can't see like an eagle, we can't do anything. But, what we have, we've already dulled. So, what type of world are we perceiving? Is it real? The idea of transcending the sensory world, the 5 senses, and seeing the world for what it is. I don't know if we can do that, if we don't have a relationship.

Scott:

Taking Ben's choice of the word 'rejection' - the way that I kind of just internalized all that is that it's about rejecting a culture of scarcity and hate, if you will, so that we can instead embrace a culture of love and abundance. That scarcity is one of those things that seems to divide us, you know we have to hoard this, hoard that. But, at least from my own personal path with all this, the more that I do this, the more I give away from it, the more connections are made, the more life I get to live as a result of this practice, it's not a matter of counting days or years until this happens or that happens.

As I was talking to Natasha, that idea of living an authentic life. You get to wake up every morning caring about what it is you do, and you can be more peaceful and loving in the world because you're not all stressed out, tweaked or hateful about things. Ben, when you walked in and asked me how I was doing, and I just laughed out loud about it because, for a moment, I wanted to give that normal answer of 'everything's okay.' But then there was a space where we could communicate about who we are as people and what's going on in our lives, and reinforces our connection of what we can

do to do more, to do better.

Ben:

For me, the idea of opening yourself for observation of any kind, an awareness of any kind - so, its not all nice, what's happening in the world isn't nice, it isn't fun. So its really easy to be like I don't wanna think about that, I'm stressed as it is, my job sucks, or this. So I think about what's happening to the fish, its so far away from you.. but its not. The more you ignore, the worse it gets. And that's where we are as a people. We need to open our eyes - that's the idea of observing - we need to open our eyes to what is actually happening. We can't mourn for what we don't know we've lost. The more you know, the more you'll fight. And you have no choice, because when you actually see 200 species a day go extinct, and people are starving to death; there's sex trafficking happening all over the world. Is that part of permaculture? Hell yes that's part of permaculture. Its part of being a human being so its part of permaculture, right. Its the important thing that we can't keep creating systems that hold up a system that's not working for us. Why are we acting like we can just continue keeping the lights on, and every-time the light is on, something is suffering for that. There might a landbase that is suffering for that. That might be running off coal, or running off the river, and the river is suffering. Everything we do has a consequence. Its invisible, so we can't see it, so its easy, its invisible suffering.

The idea of Zone 4 is getting rid of all those in-betweens where suffering can happen, and say, I am connecting to a landbase, and this landbase is going to give me something, and I am going to be reciprocal about it. Where in our culture, even if its organic farming or its this, it takes all these miles to get this and do this, something is always being hurt in this process. All this suffering in between me and my food source, or me and my community, or me and anything. I think we're smarter than we think, and I think we're more compassionate than we act. I think we could, especially using this Restoring Eden and getting back to the land, we could become truly sustainable, truly regenerative - by cutting all the middlemen, by cutting all that out, and going and talking to a human being, or going into the woods and actually having a relationship. The idea of cutting the suffering off. What is your happiness worth the suffering of others? If its not, if you don't feel good about that, then you need to say, then where can I stop the suffering, here or there? And that's sort of the rebellion/rejection part of this whole thing. If I'm not reconnecting, if I'm not becoming positive, I'm doing negative. It just is. The act of living in this world, driving your car and doing that, causes suffering for others, landbases, ecology, all of it.

Scott:

And I say this just because he's quotable, but what Larry Santoyo said, "is your handprint bigger than your footprint?" And everyday, are we able to make decisions that decrease suffering, create a more peaceful & loving world, and ultimately we all have to make those decisions in our own way. I would like it if I could just flip a switch, wave a wand, and have permaculture be as big and as broad and as effective as all of our conversations and discussions and figuring out how these different pieces work make it seem like it could be. But as long as we're all doing our work moving somewhere, and all of us will do that at our own speed. And for me, some of my own ignorance in order to remain hopeful is taking a multi-generational approach. I know what my society and culture gave me. I operate from a particular place. I want to make sure my children do better so that the world is better by the time my grandchildren are born. But yeah, we all have to answer our own questions and find why we do these things.

Ben:

One other piece that I'd like to bring to this conversation is this. You, just, a few moments ago Scott, were trying to sort of articulate your understanding of Wilson's principle of rebellion or rejection, and you said something about it being a rejection of the culture of hate. And I agree with, I certainly don't disagree with that. However, I think for me, the biggest bit of that rejection, if I could point my

finger at one attribute of the modern human being, the essence of a modern human being as part of our global culture that I would like to reject - its this kind of coldness, or separateness, from the world. And this belief, which is a false belief and very dangerous & damaging belief, that the world is not alive. In almost every mystical tradition, and throughout the global pantheon of indigenous culture, there is an active seeking to establish what is often referred to as a sense of wonder. Our culture does a very, very poor job of establishing a sense of wonder. And in fact, we actually do a really, here in the US, we do a really bizarre thing with our children. When they are little, we actually encourage a sense of wonder. Like, small children are supposed to participate in art, and play games, and tell stories, and have an imagination, and play with their friends, and spend hours and hours and hours in the yard or on the sidewalk, you know, playing games. But when children start getting, about, into middle school, the curriculum changes, becomes extremely mechanical, mathematical, technical, and production-oriented. We actually begin to discourage creativity, and this sense of wonder, because people are supposed to fit in, and they're supposed to fit into production. They're supposed to fit into the system of extracting resource, and funneling wealth to the people who already have it. To a certain extent, it makes sense because the people in power want their peons to have a certain amount of creativity, right, because that's where ingenuity comes from, and that's where our new technologies arise from - but only to a certain extent.

And in the permaculture world, in a lot of the interviews on your show, there's been a dialogue that I think is very, very valid, about making permaculture more of a legitimate science - and I completely agree with that. But I also think that in the permaculture movement, there's a problem, and the problem is that we claim that permaculture is derived from indigenous wisdom. But by and large, the permaculture movement rejects the piece of indigenous culture that is all about a sense of wonder, reveling in the unknown, and the living-ness of the world. And, there's only one person in the permaculture movement who has very actively put that part of indigenous wisdom at the forefront of permaculture, and its Starhawk. But she also gets, like, a pass. You know a lot of permaculturalists are like, Starhawk's great, you know, she has this long career of writing these books that have made huge positive social changes, and she's sort of like allowed to do this kind of mystical, living world thing. But mostly in the permaculture movement that's frowned upon, and I would like to see us to find a way to actively move forward as a science, while also bringing forward this, frankly, methodology, that was pervasive all around the world in indigenous societies, of finding and understanding the alive-ness of the world, and using this as this constant reminder to reconnect, and also as a method for obtaining information about how to live well, and how to live correctly.

And those are things that, I'm gonna go out on limb here, those are things like shamanism, and magic, and vision quests, and all names that are taboo in the scientific world - but if we would open ourselves, and take off some of those lenses of bias, like Wilson was saying. There are people in the scientific world now that have done a lot to legitimize some of those methodologies, but even those people are ostracized. I'm gonna throw out, like, The HeartMath Institute, or Stephen Buhner who you had on your show earlier. There's a book that Wilson and I both love called *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*, and its written by a guy named A.P Elkin. He was an anthropologist 75 years ago, and when he went and observed native people, he didn't say 'okay, they are able to do this thing that most other people would consider supernatural, but here's the scientific explanation for it.' He was just like, 'no, these aboriginal/indigenous shamans are doing things that are not supposed to be possible, and I don't know why, but I'm watching them happen.' There's a whole cadre, a whole slew, of scientists, modern scientists, who have tried to do that, unbiasedly, legitimize some of these things, and have just been struck from the record. I would like to see that come forward in permaculture. I would like to see a rejection of the idea that the world isn't alive, that it doesn't have a voice that tells us how to live well. That's going to be a huge piece of my career as a permaculturalist.

Scott:

We've gone a variety of place that I didn't know where we would end. And, just one last thought on what you were sharing, this idea of the native knowledge, and all these other things that we should be integrating into our practice. I might not understand all those ideas in the same way that you do, but, from some of my academic pursuits, its about how, within education, there's more to it than just the 3 Rs. That there's a narrative that goes with it, that there's a storytelling, there's something that comes with that sense of place. And, as we talk within permaculture about honoring both the scientific side and the native knowledge side, there still winds up being a binary there. And that trying to find a place where those two pieces can have a dialogue, and we as permaculture practitioners can exist within it - s an important discussion for us to continue on sometime, because there's a lot of value there, people feeling like cogs in the machine and things. It can be easy to be rejected by society, by people, by all these different things that further divides us from who we are, because we have to fill someone else's story.

And I think about how important story-telling is to education. With my children, I'm telling them stories about things, we're making up games. But, yeah, there's that point where there's that switch, well what are you gonna do when you grow up? I don't want to ask my kids that! I don't want them to have to start thinking about where they're going to be or what they're going to do, because I thought I knew what that was going to be, but then someone else had me be part of their story, so I followed the path that they had set out, and went through all this stuff before I finally found this road that I wanted to be on. And just being able to honor and respect other people, and where their information comes from, and how they interact with the world, because we all have different ways to describe our experiences as human beings, that informs our position and the way that we're able to interact with others. And, I'm concerned that society, and this culture that we exist in, is taking these pieces that are so important to the human condition, and turning them into something that doesn't give back to us. That we turn storytelling into something that needs to be humorous or entertaining. That art has to have some kind of a value. So many of these things we value as people in our interactions, that it has to have something that can prescribe a dollar value to. And how much entertainment fills all these different things that we used to get from our friends and family.

I think about a cookout that my Grandmother used to hold before she passed, where the family would all get together, the musicians would bring their instruments; the storytellers would be there. You know, I think everybody has that one uncle who tells dirty jokes that he shouldn't, to kids. There are these traditions, these pieces, that come together. And before my grandmother died, I sat down with her and interviewed her. Through that, and asking questions, she started telling me stories about her life. And I was able to understand how this woman growing up in 1930s West Virginia. Her and everyone else around them were so poor, that they couldn't care less about the Jim Crow laws, or race, or anything else because if anybody did that, they would all fail. But that stuck with her as an adult, so she always warmly welcomed everyone. That is now a part of who I am, and something that I teach to my children. And in order to take care of these things, we need to know these stories; we need to hear these stories. I think about the natural world, and caring about it. We can sit and we can tell stories about the places we've been, the places we've seen. Our own personal experience matters; Stephen Harrod Buhner talked about that, that idea of a citizen scientist - that we as people have to honor ourselves, and our own experience, and how that can move toward have a better understanding of the natural world. Telling stories about what our experiences are like; whether or not can explain them doesn't matter, its the stories, and the way that those stories build the social connections, and build culture, and return these things of value to us, as people and human beings, and breaks that paradigm, and helps us be a little less domesticated, and to see and connect, and do more.

Thank you both for this space that we've had today. I didn't realize I was going to end with a monologue there, but its just all the thoughts and places you've been able to take me today. And the beauty and wonderment for me in the difference of our positions, and the people that we are, and what I can value, in each of you, and what I take, of value, from this experience that you've given to me. So

thank you both very much for our time again.

Wilson:

Thanks Scott.

Ben:

Yeah, thank you a lot.

Scott:

And that was Ben Weiss and Wilson Alvarez. With how I ended that conversation with them, that little rant of mine, I think it was enough, and have no more notes to include here. However, I will be visiting Wilson, Ben, and Natasha again, in about a week and a half after the release of this show. So if you have any additional questions for them, please let me know. If you'd like to contact Wilson directly, his email rebelgardentolls@gmail.com, or Ben is susq.permaculture@yahoo.com. As always, you can contact me by phone, which is the quickest and easiest way, by giving me a call at 717-827-6266, or send me an email show@thepermaculturepodcast.com. You can join in with the community at facebook.com/thepermaculturepodcast, or follow me on twitter where I am [@permaculturecst](https://twitter.com/permaculturecst).