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# Visions: A Personal Essay

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I'm suspicious of folks with visions. They are too certain. Blind to surprise. Deaf to other voices.

I do not have a vision for *Conservation Ecology*.

I do develop senses that help listen to intriguing voices that are hidden amongst the noise. Owl-like ways to hear the rustle of the mouse. So I guess I try to discover visions rustling out there.

The simplest example of what I mean is in sculpting. I start with a number of hazy ideas, and then I discover the image caught and hidden in the swirls of the wood's grain. I listen to the voice of the wood.

My research has always been like that. In the early days of predator-prey functional responses, the device was components analysis. A way to engage levels of complexity and maintain generality. It was a beast-for-the-moment design; the beast most appropriate for the step in hand. The result was many voices, each playing facets of one song. Praying mantis, deer mice and shrews, barracuda and iao, salmon, the suite of insectivorous birds in the boreal forest. Lions and gazelles. It was a way to listen to the hidden voice of nature. Those voices led to the discovery of resilience. Not a song but a composition!

Most recently, it led to the "world is lumpy"— patterns at scales from centimeters to kilometers, from days to millennia. And an approach that is a bit of strong inference, but more of adaptive inference and multiple lines of evidence— from every major biome in the world, from endangered and invasive species, from nomadic and sedentary organisms. And beyond that, similar rhythms, once heard, seem to be in economic systems, social and behavioral.

But I was never smart enough to create all that. I had to nurture senses to hear nature's voice.

Adaptive ecosystem management has been the same process. The workshops evolved to let voices speak: scientist, scholar, and practitioner. We learned who they were, in heart and spirit, and each had a different contribution. The Peerless Leader gave the guiding melody. The Blunt Scot was on percussion. The Snively Whiplash gave the creative dissonance. And the Compleat Amanuensis knit it together. The Benevolent Despot hummed a lot.

And now *Conservation Ecology*. What is it? It is a foundation to develop devices to listen to the quiet voices of people— scientists and scholars of many stripes, practitioners — and for them to listen to each other. In universities, government, and the private sector. In business as well, I wish. People in the Netherlands and Sweden, in Spain and Malaysia, South America and Madagascar, Canada and Australia. In Africa. And not just in the United States. Voices masked by the noise, wherever novelty and experience combine. We are finding ways to have deliberative conversations among listeners.

That is much more valuable, now, in this time of turbulence and transformation, than policy and planning exercises.

C. S. Holling

## RESPONSES TO THIS ARTICLE

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