At Himmelbjerggården, one feels a connection to the Earth that modern life so often stifles or forgets. Today, rather than offering a fixed method, policy proposal, or educational framework, I want to invite you on a more contemplative journey — one that lingers with the cultural and philosophical closures that distance us from the world. Walking a path opened by the wound and guided by wonder, we will recover a quieter grammar of relation grounded in care.

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We begin our wanderings in the city because these places most clearly reveal what modernity conceals and diminishes. In cities constructed for consumption and display, it is becoming increasingly difficult to feel the presence of the world. According to Byung-Chul Han, '*presence* requires *exposure, vulnerability'*.[1] A wound — both a rupture in the systems we inhabit and a personal event — signifies and gives form to this vulnerability. Han explains further: 'Without a *wound*, I ultimately hear only the echo of myself. A *wound* is an opening, an *ear for the other*.'[2]

It is worth noting here that the word wound typically carries connotations of harm, and Han sometimes emphasizes pain, though always in service to the other.[3] In this talk, I focus on the wound in the sense of decentring and receptivity — states notably rare in urban environments.

In major conurbations, we rarely feel exposed or vulnerable, such that even a sliver of sky between towering buildings or a birdcall above traffic can feel like rupture. This estrangement is symptomatic of what Han frequently describes as the regime of 'the smooth'.[4] Smoothness flattens and disperses '*negativity'*, which for our purposes is not pessimism but is instead a sign of the different or alien, creating the '*resistance* that constitutes *experience*'.[5] A wound is resistance and negativity, and it is rarely experienced in the sealed system of the city.

[1] Byung-Chul Han, *Non-things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), p. 57.
[2] Ibid. See also p. 73.
[3] For a discussion on the significance of the wound and its relation to the other in the context of depression, see Byung-Chul Han, *Capitalism and the Death Drive*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Polity Press, 2021), pp. 46-47.
[4] Ibid., p. 22.
[5] Ibid., p. 34.

The built environment concretises the smooth impulse through sameness: sleek façades, geometric grids and streets devoid of greenery. These design choices express a deeper controlling function, which, as Han describes it in relation to globalism, is to 'accelerate the accumulation of capital and communication', a process which 'deprives us of meaning and orientation'.[6] Cities built on capital provide few opportunities to connect with nature and do not support rootedness of identity. What disappears in this smooth flow, then, is not only texture but the conditions and structures for relation with one's surroundings.

Our relentless need for efficiency and uniformity is part of a broader metaphysical project that shapes how we perceive and engage with the world. Max Weber famously argued that '[t]he fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world"'.[7] He understood this project as being driven by 'the belief that […] one can, in principle, master all things by calculation'.[8] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer later encapsulated Weber's concerns under one cold command: 'All gods and qualities must be destroyed.'[9] To understand what is lost, we turn to my colleague Patrick Curry, who insists that qualities are 'necessarily plural, recursively defining and defined by all the others they are not, whereas effective disenchantment requires a single principle in order to rule them all'.[10] This means they are never abstract or universal but particular and relational.[11]

I put forward the formulation that a wound, as an opening, heralds the return of qualities from what I call *the other side* — from the textured, storied and living world that we shut out. The groundwork of ecoliteracy lies here: not in data or facts, but with attentiveness to qualities and the felt particularity of places, textures and presences. Without these, there can be no wonder.

Wonder is the heart of enchantment. It is always directed at an another, as Curry insists:

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[6] Han, *Death Drive*, p. 71.
[7] Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trans. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 129–56 (p. 155).
[8] Ibid., p. 139.
[9] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, 'The Concept of Enlightenment', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–34 (p. 5).
[10] Patrick Curry, 'The Work of Wonder', *Western Humanities Review*, 72.2 (2018), 28–41 <https://www.westernhumanitiesreview.com/summer-2018-72-2/patrick-curry-the-work-of-wonder/> [accessed 14 July 2025].
[11] Ibid.

> [E]nchantment is a matter of relationship. That in turn requires each party to be distinctive and therefore different, creating a gap between them over which they can meet. That in turn creates a "third thing", something new in the world.[12]

Difference is therefore essential, as are certain dispositions, namely 'openness, respect and tolerance'.[13] But the kind of openness I explore here is not the same as Curry's more ethical and intentional stance.

A wound marks an immediate condition of openness that happens suddenly and without choice. It is a break in the self's enclosure, a moment when we are exposed to something other. This openness cannot be created or sustained by will. And yet, we may still long for it as a moment in which we might be reached. Building on Curry, I suggest that wonder is the positive and life-affirming response to exposure. It is a turning towards and acceptance of difference, through which exposure melds into enchanted relation. But like the wound, wonder is not a matter of control or decision. It remains unpredictable. Curry reminds us that enchantment is 'wild, and therefore unbiddable'.[14] No formula or procedure, however benign, can capture it.

Capital tries to take advantage of the city's sterility and sameness through consumer culture, which offers nothing more than hollow imitations of wonder. Curry's term is 'glamour', a kind of 'false enchantment' that mimics relationship by preying on 'a desire either to possess the other or be possessed by them'.[15] For instance, advertisements, as concentrated glamour, block out our surroundings, even as they promise a life well-lived through domineering messages. Advertisements are *false openings,* hiding the world and dulling the senses to what truly nourishes.

Another false opening is that of the shop window, though in a different register. Beyond abject consumerism, the shop window or front serves as a metaphor for modernity's obsession with control and order through transparency.[16] In our neoliberal society, transparency manifests as an ideology of extreme visibility and availability in our economic, political, social and personal relations.[17] Under this ideology, according to Han, 'things […]

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[12] Patrick Curry, *Enchantment: Wonder in Modern Life* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2019), p. 13.
[13] Curry, 'The Work of Wonder'.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Han, *Death Drive,* p. 22.
[17] Ibid., pp. 33–35.

shed all negativity'.[18] The '[s]ecretiveness, strangeness, and alterity' that gives the world depth cannot be tolerated.[19] Everything must be laid bare, destroying the other, which relies on a degree of opacity.

Together, smoothness and transparency obscure connection, further imposing a world of disenchantment that bolsters the efforts of glamour. These forces separate us from *the other side*. Yet there is another way. To experience a wound and to be moved by wonder is to contact that which resists assimilation — something different, opaque, irreducible — reopening a portal to the possibility of depth and change. Such openings necessitate a perceptiveness based in care, one that resists urgency and welcomes what cannot be wholly grasped.

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In our culture of spectacle and speed, we rarely linger. Han observes that 'we have lost those temporal forms that cannot be accelerated, those temporal forms that allow us to experience duration'.[20] Duration involves ritual and communal time, embodying a continuous experience that contrasts with the fragmented, atomized temporality of modernity.[21] And while the philosopher primarily associates duration with community, the values he promotes — presence and resistance to smoothing and transparency — are also found in certain experiences of art. As such, we now turn to places designed for attention, such as galleries.

When art is true to its calling, it becomes, in a manner of speaking, a wound-space: instilling a sense of exposure and vulnerability and inviting us to dwell long enough to face something outside of us. However, this capacity is threatened. Han takes aim at works that extol the physically smooth and outwardly affirmative, replacing mystery and opacity with shallow surprise and the course immediacy of touch.[22] The goal of much art today is to 'avoid injury', meaning that is sidesteps the difficult and imperfect in favour of smooth 'agreeableness'.[23] Moreover, artworks are often valued only for their conceptual novelty, to convey a message rapidly circulated and informatised.[24] This is especially true in our digital age, in which creations have become nothing more than *content*. Yet Han insists that '[c]onsumption and

[18] Ibid., p. 33.
[19] Ibid., p. 29.
[20] Ibid., p. 76.
[21] Ibid., p. 75–77.
[22] Ibid., pp. 80–82.
[23] Ibid. p. 126.
[24] Han, *Non-things*, pp. 62–65.

beauty are mutually exclusive. Beauty does not promote itself. It does not tempt you to […] possess it. Rather, it invites you to linger in contemplation'.[25] Consumption, he further explains, 'lives off splintered time' and therefore 'destroys duration'.[26] Meanwhile, effective art, as a site of negativity, induces a slow surrender to the enigmatic. Indeed, if art has a task, it is 'the *saving of the other*'.[27] Art enacts care for what is not us.

Han's perspective on the relational nature of art aligns with Curry's, especially the latter's concept of glamour. For the centrality of mystery, difference and otherness is as far from glamour — 'managed, manipulated, packaged, sold and bought' — as one can get.[28] Instead, what makes an enchanting creation, whether visual, performing or literary, arises from its refusal of rigid metaphysical divisions. According to Curry, art inhabits the in-between: between inner and outer, spirit and matter, self and world, making it a medium of attunement where boundaries are simultaneously respected and crossed.[29] Implicit in these dynamics is the reality that we are, as Curry puts it, 'embodied, ecological, interdependent, analogue, finite Earthlings', which fact, through art, brings out an 'astonished and humbling appreciation of *being* alive'.[30] Such an appreciation is less apparent or even actively derided in modernist approaches — not just the formal movement but its broader cultural ethos, which often lauds shock, irony, instrumentalism, mastery and abstraction.[31] This tension between enchantment and modernism highlights the need for another way of engaging with art.

Drawing on Paul Ricoeur, Curry argues for a 'second naïveté': a mature openness to wonder that stands beyond suspicion and detachment.[32] Understood this way, art becomes neither outright escape nor instruction, but a way of receiving the world anew. Ultimately, the enchanting experience of art points us towards what is also true of life at its core, which is that the world is a living presence or constellation of presences to meet in wonder and not a problem to be managed or solved.

Just as disenchanting ideologies infiltrate art, the tactics of some environmental activists make awareness of *the other side* — again, our storied, textured, and living world —

[25] Byung-Chul Han, *Saving Beauty,* trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), p. 56.
[26] Ibid., p. 73.
[27] Ibid., p. 68.
[28] Curry, 'The Work of Wonder'.
[29] Patrick Curry, *Art and Enchantment: How Wonder Works* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023), pp. 8–20.
[30] Ibid. p. 30.
[31] Ibid., pp. 31–37.
[32] Ibid., p. 183.

increasingly difficult. In my essay ‘Just Save Perception’ for *Earth Tongues,* I suggest that disruptive acts, such as vandalising artworks, risk alienating potential allies and undermining the careful perception that ecological care demands.[33] These demonstrations, though well-intentioned, can be driven not only by unreflective urgency but also by group pressure and the promise of viral visibility. At times, they reflect a reactive disdain for Western cultural heritage, reducing complex histories and ideals into monolithic symbols of oppression complicit in ecological collapse.

Galleries, as well as museums, remain some of the last locations where the self can soften enough to meet the world again. To disrupt these spaces and to damage artefacts is to risk closing the very portals through which transformation becomes possible. To look is not necessarily to preserve elite culture for its own sake but about defending the fragile conditions in which ethical attention can still flourish. Attention is a private act as well as a shared cultural responsibility that must be protected.

But not all meaningful encounters come through individual works of art. Some are held in the wider structures of memory and place. Thus, we now find ourselves stepping beyond the boundaries of the city altogether, towards cultural landmarks. Consider that heritage sites, especially those entwined with the rhythms of the Earth and with myth, offer a pause because they are rooted in the land itself, in ways we can still stand within. Yet they are increasingly drawn into contestation through performative conventions and activist disruption.

Take Stonehenge, for example. This site tells a story of people and place, like a hand rising from the earth and reaching across time, bearing wisdom not yet silenced by steel and concrete. Sadly, smoothness and transparency hinder connection even here, precluding the possibility of wound or wonder. For signs urging selfies encircle the entire monument. According to Han, the selfie ‘announces the disappearance of the kind of human being who is burdened by destiny and history’, meaning that they erode historical consciousness and the capacity to be shaped by what exceeds the self.[34] This disregard for historical continuity and collective identity finds its embodiment in the figure of the ‘jumping man’, the narcissistic self-displaying subject constantly in motion.[35] In such performance-driven space, what is lost is the felt sense of belonging to a larger story.

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[33] See Taylor Hood, ‘Just Save Perception’, *Earth Tongues*, 12 August 2024, <https://blog.ecologicalcitizen.net/2024/08/12/just-save-perception/> [accessed 16 July 2025].
[34] Han, *Non-things,* p. 36.
[35] Han, *Death Drive*, p. 52.

These displays are compounded by more confrontational activism. In recent years, Stonehenge and other places of cultural significance have been the targets of strident activist action intended to provoke, but which risk further fracturing the complex relationships between place, history and perception. We should all be worried that even at sacred sites, we are closed off from truly seeing or being changed.

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Renewed awareness of *the other side*, brought about through experiences of opening, denotes both a break and a turning point, transforming rupture into meaningful activity. Working with care and purpose becomes a way of tending to and honouring openings. With this in mind, we now stride further into the lived landscape, where attention becomes practice and the hand works as much as the eye.

In my own life, I have found orientation in the tethering of nature and culture, being drawn to areas such as prehistoric living and polytheism. I also practiced bushcraft, natural history, and volunteered at nature reserves and heritage sites. These experiences showed me that reconnection is lived and felt, not abstract. To deepen this sense and contribute tangibly, I studied countryside management and wildlife ecology. But over time, I began to suspect what I had always known: the scientific approach cannot express the full depth of what is at stake. It may even be the cause of our troubles. I therefore shifted, with renewed conviction, to cultural questions and the understanding that ecological renewal is as spiritual as it is scientific. This led me to research Earth-centred sacrality in literature as a postgraduate, studies that deepened my appreciation for the humility and care that undergirds an ecological life.

I continue the search for Earth-centred meaning with the journal *The Ecological Citizen*, which bridges the sciences and the humanities and asks how we might move towards an ecological civilisation. In my view, this depends on acknowledging the systems that close us off from the world and then walking two paths of practice together: embedding ourselves in the patterns and flows of the past and, just as importantly, treating the natural world with dignity and humility.

The significance of the past became clearest to me through hands-on work at Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire, England, where I volunteered ten years ago — an experience that still holds meaning for me. Working alongside likeminded volunteers and school groups to maintain roundhouses, carve a Mesolithic log boat, and help organise the Beltain festival

reinforced my understanding of duration in the truest sense, that is, as cyclical and ritualistic. This is the time of community and of sharing, or, as Han puts it, the time of 'one's fellow human beings'.[36] Butser became, then, a place to nurture those openings in my life that called for continuity and connection, not just with the past but also with other humans drawn together by the work of remembering and belonging, which is the fundamental duty of ecoliteracy.

More than this, tasks at the Farm revealed tradition not as a static anchor but as a dynamic guide. For me, the importance of tradition was symbolized by Butser's Janus Visitor Centre, named for the Roman god who looks both forward and backward, reminding us how the past shapes the present. This understanding calls for a reappraisal of remembrance. Curry articulates this need through his concept of 'radical nostalgia', meaning not sentimental longing but 'a remembering which empowers rather than disables'.[37] This was advocated by visionaries like J.R.R. Tolkien, who sought to foster refined scepticism of the new and an appreciation for the customary.[38] Closely related is the notion of a non-reactionary conservatism, which, as Curry suggests, is 'cautious, even suspicious, of change […] and accepting of the reality of limits'.[39] Through such habits and values, we may resist the flattening pace and pressures of modernity.

But if the structures of the human past offer guidance, that guidance is just one thread in the more integral weave of the more-than-human world. Tragically, a disenchanted mindset particularly distorts how we engage with nature beyond our wilful ignorance. For if we choose to act, we tend towards control over humility, creating a wall between us and the living world. Curry writes: 'Living nature and its myriad qualities are turned into mere quantitative stuff to be measured, carved up and sold off, which is justified by "ecosystem services", "natural capital" and other euphemisms for exploiting and enslaving.'[40] Thus, even

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[36] Han, *Death Drive*, p. 78.
[37] Patrick Curry, *Companions Directory*, The Guild of St George, <https://www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/companions-partners/companions-directory/patrick-curry> [accessed 14 July 2025].
[38] For the general ethos of radical nostalgia and true conservatism as expressed through Tolkien's writing, see Patrick Curry, 'Introduction: Radical Nostalgia', in *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1997), pp. 11–34.
[39] Patrick Curry, *Notes on a Philosophical Anthropology of Middle-earth* (draft paper for the 6th International Conference on The Inklings and Western Imagination, University of the Basque Country, 28 September 2020) <http://www.patrickcurry.co.uk/papers/Notes%20on%20a%20Philosophical%20Anthropology%20of%20M-E%20--%20final%20draft.pdf> [accessed 7 August 2025].
[40] Curry, *Enchantment*, p. 91.

those who care can be just as capable of reducing life to nothing more than inert machinery or a technical solution.

My undergraduate research on carrion beetles revealed some of these issues. While these lesser-known and scorned insects aid decay and renewal, research is often filtered through an instrumentalist lens. Worse, a general prejudice against insects propped up by a desire for progress in conservation leads to widespread killing in the name of a more rigorous dataset. Against this, I chose another path after being made vulnerable by and receptive to these creatures.[41] Inspired by the ethos of 'compassionate entomology', I opted for non-lethal methods in my study, respecting the beetles' dignity as far as possible.

Such decisions reflect a shift in worldview, which contemporary animism, understood as a post-secular relational ontology reclaimed from colonial perspectives, helps express.[42] Graham Harvey describes animists as those who believe that 'the everyday world is full of persons about whom and with whom we make choices and enact relationships'.[43] This stance naturally brings forth an engagement with nature that is, as Curry suggests, 'pluralist, perspectival, sensuous'.[44] To be ecoliterate, in this context, is to know the land as community and to recognise its inhabitants, human and non-human, as participants in shared lifeways. This is a porous and interpersonal mode of being that resonates with the wound's vulnerability and the relationality of wonder. It does not smooth the world into a resource, nor render it transparent to the human will. Accordingly, an animist Earth is one of caution and care, resistance and enrichment. Such an interplay is what Earth-centred sacrality entails.

Valuing radical nostalgia, adhering to non-reactionary conservatism and adopting an animist attitude reshapes how we live. This perspective encourages us not to disparage the tried and true, the old and slow. Conservation efforts become grounded in the local and particular, led by love for the land. It urges empathy and respect for all living things. And it helps us to step back and let the Earth breathe when the day is done.

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Our journey now brings us to the edge of day. In my essay 'Defiance in Half-light' for *Elsewhere Journal*, I propose that by attending to twilight, a time that is simultaneously for

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[41] See Taylor Hood, 'Caring for Carrion Beetles', *Earth Tongues*, 4 January 2025, <https://blog.ecologicalcitizen.net/2024/08/12/just-save-perception/> [accessed 16 July 2025].
[42] Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics*, rev. 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), pp. 142–46.
[43] Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 54.
[44] Curry, *Ecological Ethics*, p. 141.

and not for us, ‘we become not merely creatures of the day — advocators, managers, defilers — but wonderers in a wider world’.[45] As a daily rupture in algorithmic time, twilight, like a kind of temporal wound, reveals subtle qualities that daylight often washes out. It does so through its negativity: not through what it presents, but through what it withholds. Half-light unsettles the totalizing clarity of the day. In contemplating it, the world is not conquered or corrected, only held.

We need to remember how to take solace in what we already have, situating ourselves in nature’s enduring realities instead of always striving. Han supports this view in a warning: ‘Inactivity constitutes the human. […] Without moments of pause or hesitation, acting deteriorates into blind action and reaction. Without calm, a new barbarism emerges.’[46] As I have already suggested, this is particularly true of our ecological moment, in which it is all too easy to be swept up in righteous urgency. Counter to this, Han describes the need for a ‘*politics of inactivity’* capable of bringing forth *‘an intense and radiant form of life’*.[47] I believe that this constitutes a challenge not only to the destroyers of the Earth, but also those good people who have forgotten how to be still.

Alas, at nightfall, the human figure reaches for light, accelerates pace, seeks resolution. Darkness, literal and metaphorical, becomes a limit to dread. Curry believes that we venerate light because we associate it with ‘logos, reason, heaven and maleness’, thereby diminishing ‘the sources of enchantment in mythos, emotion, Earth and the female’, which, he argues, spring from maternal darkness.[48] Seen this way, darkness symbolises a refusal to be reduced or fully known. It resists the rationalist drive of anthropocentrism that is sceptical of limits and reminds us that meaning arises not from rule, but from reverence.

Darkness and death are synonymous, both representing in modernity a lack of meaning and vitality. Death is the ultimate limit, the final rupture. For Han, it is ‘*a losing-oneself-in-the-other* that puts an end to narcissism’ and therefore constitutes ‘the negativity par excellence’.[49] Yet under capitalism, we deny death through medicalisation, euphemism and performance. The capitalist fear of death forces us into a no-limits frenzy of growth that is

[45] Taylor Hood ‘Defiance in Half-Light’, *Elsewhere Journal*, 17 July 2024, <https://www.elsewhere-journal.com/twilight-posts/2024/7/17/defiance-in-half-light> [accessed 14 July 2025].
[46] Byung-Chul Han, *Vita contemplativa*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), pp. 8–9.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Curry, *Enchantment,* p. 93.
[49] Han, *Death Drive*, p. 12.

causing, as Han argues, 'not only ecological, but also mental catastrophe'.[50] Curry suggests that the roots of this catastrophe can be traced back to distorted forms of spiritual idealism and scientific materialism, which 'worship death as spiritual fulfilment or, fearing it as the absolute end, crave scientific immortality'.[51] But there is another way.

Death is neither saviour nor enemy. Instead, it is an opening where the rupture of dying gives way to relation. Val Plumwood, writing from an animist perspective, holds that 'death confirms transience, but on the level of the ecological community, it can affirm an enduring, resilient cycle or process'.[52] I suggest that for those still living within this cycle, awareness of death calls us back into participation with life, inspiring greater care. To live with care in this context means embracing natural cycles, considering alternative forms of burial and not shying away from life's most important qualities, chiefly fragility and impermanence.

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As our journey ends, I want to stress that none of these ideas represent a quick fix or ready-made solution. Rather, what we have encountered is a more challenging but ultimately hopeful way forward that attends to the vulnerability and exposure inherent in the wound and the relational dynamics of wonder.

To live well in such a world means recognising how our obsession with capital and communication erases all that is different and absorbs all that is other; seeing how even art and activism lose their power when rendered consumable or unreflective; understanding tradition as embedded continuity sustained by enduring practices; meeting the more-than-human realm not with mastery but with humility; cultivating contemplation and respecting mystery; and approaching death as another form of relation. All of these ways defy closure and negate distancing.

To see the world through the wound and wonder at the other — to make contact again with what is textured, storied and alive — is to care. From this care, we may walk towards an ecological civilization.

[50] Ibid, p. 8.
[51] Curry, *Enchantment,* p. 116.
[52] Val Plumwood, 'Tasteless: Towards a Food-Based Approach to Death', *Environmental Values*, 17.3 (2008), 323–30 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30302203> [accessed 14 July 2025].

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