



# ***Reporting the Future***

## ***A Visual Parable of Environmental Ethics in Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison's The Architect's Brother***

*This article examines Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison's multimedia work, The Architect's Brother as a visual parable of the irreparable nature of environmental degradation, and as a compelling argument for a radical transformation of environmental ethics. Part I explores the terms "parable" and "irreparability" as pertinent to visual persuasion and environmental ethics. Part II examines the visual aesthetics at work in The Architect's Brother.*

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ParkeHarrison conjures up a destiny in which humankind's overuse of the land has led to environments spent and abandoned. The veracity of the photograph, from which all his images are constructed, provides the convincing backdrop for narratives of separation and loss.

Therese Mulligan, Curator  
George Eastman House, 2002<sup>1</sup>

Visual reportage and photographic documentation of environmental degradation have been notoriously difficult.

While individual instances of ecological crises such as large oil spills, heavy smog, and mountaintop removal are "photogenic," persistent deterioration of air, water, and land is largely invisible to the eye and to the camera lens. Although measures of climate change and levels of polluting toxins may be visualized through a variety of imaging technologies, such images need significant expertise to interpret (Frankel, 2002; Hope, 2004; Mitchell, 2001; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, pp. 279–314). Unlike the apparent veracity of photographs, high-tech imaging does not allow the untrained viewer to "see" (and thus to acknowledge) the realities of deep environmental trauma.

In the context of a culture that insists visibility determines significance, the general *invisibility* of the deterioration of the planet has inspired citizens to produce alternate kinds of visuals as rhetorical acts. For example, "image events" including acts of protest and resistance are staged for the mediated culture (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; DeLuca, 1999), and street theater and "toxic tours" are performed to persuade citizens to take actions for environmental justice in their communities (Pezzolo, 2007, 2003). Yet, despite overwhelming evidence that human life on earth has an uncertain future, non-sustainable practices are deeply entrenched in economic and cultural practices, and calls for a new environmental ethic have generated only sporadic changes in policy (Bruner & Oelshlaeger, 1994; McGibbon, 1989; Pompper, 2004; Robison, 1994; Wilson, 2001).

**Figure 1 (opposite). "Mending the Earth," (Series: Earth Elegies, 1999–2000). Copyright Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison 2000. Used with permission.**

The earth's future—as yet nonexistent, nonperformed, and nonembodied—is pre-eminently invisible and must be imagined rather than documented. For this task, the role of the artist is paramount, prophetic, and pragmatic. Re-envisioning a human relationship to nature is a primary goal of the environmental art movement and has inspired artists who argue for a rethinking of environmental ethics through the creation of a wide variety of aesthetic appeals. Although many "eco-artists" literally ground their "earthwork" in the material present, a "vision of the future" is a primary theme in their messages (Grande, 2004, p. xvi; Matilsky, 1992). Artwork that resembles photographic documentation is an especially powerful form of visual persuasion. Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison's multimedia work, *The Architect's Brother*, is an instance of imaginary documentation that persuasively reports on the future of the planet. This article examines *The Architect's Brother* as a compelling visual argument for a radical transformation of environmental ethics.

## The Artifacts

In sepia-toned photographs that use painting, sculpture, theater, and mime, *The Architect's Brother* envisions "the state and possible fate of the Earth" by creating a picture of an irreparable environment (Mulligan, 2002, p. 1). In nine series arranged by theme and chronology,<sup>2</sup> *The Architect's Brother* presents imaginary scenes in which Robert ParkeHarrison is photographed as a lone "Everyman" whose efforts to save a degraded planet (and himself) are foolish and too late. *The Architect's Brother* is the collaborative work of Shana and Robert ParkeHarrison, the former Robert Harrison and Shana Parke.<sup>3</sup> A total of 64 images constructed from 1993 through 2000 constitute *The Architect's Brother* (ParkeHarrison, 2001); 42 of them were exhibited at the George Eastman International Museum of Film and Photography in 2002 in ParkeHarrison's first solo show. From two



**Figure 2. "The Clearing" (Series: *The Passage*, 2001). Copyright Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison 2000. Used with permission.**

to four feet high and wide, the mixed media artifacts were made by combining and rephotographing large positive paper negatives. Wax and paint were applied to create images that shift in mood from whimsical to dark. On gallery walls, the size, texture,

and monochromatic color of the images increase the impact of the multi-layered content.

Multiple sources inform the aesthetic of *The Architect's Brother*. Classic photographs are sometimes

used as a backdrop for the staged events. For example, "Mending the Earth" (Figure 1) uses Timothy O'Sullivan's 1867 photograph, "Steamboat Springs, Washoe, Nevada" to create an image of Everyman's misguided attempt to close a geological fissure with a darning needle (O'Sullivan, 1867). The use of historical images as background to future imaginaries adds to the mysterious quality of *The Architect's Brother*. Three primary resources inform the visual narrative and iconography of this work: the 15th-century morality play, *Everyman* (Jokinen, 2002; Tatlock, 1916); Antoine de Saint-Exupery's illustrated allegory, *The Little Prince* (Saint-Exupery, 1942/1943); and W.S. Merwin's prose-poem, *Unchopping a Tree* (Merwin, 1970). By revealing and dramatizing themes common to these three tales, *The Architect's Brother* presents viewers with a moral choice: "I want people to realize the fragility of the Earth," Robert ParkeHarrison said (Low, 2002). Although a camera is used to create the mixed media vignettes, there is no pretense of historical documentation or representation of actual events as "visual truth" (Newton, 2001). Instead *The Architect's Brother* presents a visual parable of the future that invites viewers to reimagine themselves as moral agents for earth's salvation and with it, their own.

Picturing themes of an apocalyptic future, the visual iconography of *The Architect's Brother* makes real the interdependence of human beings and planet in ways that evoke an emotional, as well as intellectual response, from viewers. Every image frames the same character caring for a ruined planet. In some images, Everyman persists in trying to "fix" the planet with humble tools—a bamboo rake, a darning needle, hammer and nails, tape, string (Figures 1 and 2); in others he invents bizarre technologies to rejuvenate his world (Figure 3). "I portray these attempts within my work by inventing machines and contraptions from junk and obsolete equipment. The contraptions are intended to help the character in the black suit I portray to jump-start a dying planet" (Hirsch and Valentino, 2001, p. 97).

Most poignantly, the interdependence of human and planet is exemplified in dramatic vignettes that challenge established ethos and offer new ways of knowing the world. For example "Exchange"

(Figure 4) challenges viewers to decide what's going on. *What is being exchanged? Is life being saved? Whose? Everyman's? Or the dead twigs of trees?* The transfusion we witness is a ritualistic performance. Within the circle of stunted and deformed trees, Everyman's pose evokes those connections between human and planet that must be preserved. The message is also one of nurturance. Everyman's love of the earth, signified by trees, is unconditional, yet the poetic image is troubling.

Therese Mulligan, curator of the Eastman exhibit, commented on the aesthetic power of *The Architect's Brother*: "[The images] elicit an effective illusion in which rational thinking is suspended and an acceptance of another reality takes its place" (Mulligan, 2002). That other "reality," I argue, is presented as a visual parable of the irreparable nature of environmental degradation and functions as persuasion for a new environmental ethic.

This analysis proceeds in two parts. Part I explores the terms "parable" and "irreparability" as pertinent to visual persuasion and environmental ethics. Part II examines closely the visual aesthetics at work in representative images from *The Architect's Brother*.

## Parables, Visual Persuasion, and Environmental Irreparability

Central to this study is the rethinking of two terms familiar in analysis of discursive modes of rhetoric and argument, the narrative genre, *parable*, and the rhetorical commonplace, *irreparability*. While both terms are productive for study of narrative and verbal argument, each is pertinent to the study of visual persuasion as well. Further, I will argue here that the terms are related to each other in ways especially important to the visualization of the planet's future.

Whether narrated, visualized, or performed, parables are an explicitly rhetorical form of storytelling. Although fables, allegories, and parables are similar in that they are fictive tales presenting a *lesson* for audiences, parable scholars agree generally that parables are distinguished by a challenge to the existent moral order and by an urgent call for



**Figure 3. "Cloudburst"**  
(Series: *Promisedland*, 1998).  
Copyright Robert & Shana  
ParkeHarrison 2000. Used  
with permission.

**Figure 4. "Exchange"** (Series:  
*Earth Elegies* 1999–2000).  
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action. Unlike the typical fable, which most frequently dramatizes simple didactic platitudes, the parable is about ethical or moral choice. Parables are presented as exemplary stories that open possible ways of knowing the world. They are not narrated as moral law or as descriptions of proscribed behaviors—rather, parables present a hypothetical example of specific actions taken on some one person's spiritual journey. The parable is unfinished and mysterious; it invites audiences to participate in questioning the meaning of the human condition with an emphasis on what is good, and offers choices to audiences who must decide what is the right thing to do (Funk, 1982; Kirkwood, 1985).

Spiritual themes implicit in parables have generated rigorous analysis by scholars of religious rhetoric and a rich theoretical literature compares and delineates Hebrew, Christian, and Buddhist parables; Zen Koans; the teaching stories of Sufism; and "in general the parables told in contemplative and mystical traditions" (Kirkwood, 1985, p. 431). Biblical parables, and especially the New Testament parables attributed to the figure Jesus Christ, were used to propagate Christianity and are generally seen as central to the rhetoric of Christian conversion, redemption, and salvation (Griffin, 1994; Kissinger, 1979/2007). Yet, religiosity is not a necessary frame for appreciating the persuasive power of parables. Rhetorical scholars have examined the parable as oral narrative, confrontational communication, and exemplary and poetic metaphor (Kirkwood, 1983, 1985; Medhurst, 1993).

A significant aspect of the parable is the irreparable nature of actions taken (or not taken) in the spiritual quest. Kirkwood notes, "...[parables] afford no middle ground where one can 'almost' succeed or 'not really' fail. One either crosses the tightrope or not, and in either case the consequences are dramatic and irreversible" (Kirkwood, 1985, p. 439). Elaborating the concept of "irreparability" as "a rhetorical commonplace" (Cox, 1982, p. 227) Robert Cox writes, "The *locus* of the irreparable is a way of organizing our perceptions of a situation involving decision or action; its use calls attention to the *unique* and *precarious* nature of some object or state of affairs, and stresses the *timeliness* of our relationship to it" (original emphasis, p. 229). Cox exemplifies his argument by drawing upon legal and

political arguments claiming irreversible loss, and the urgency of decisions and actions in response to such situations. For instance, claims of irreparability are common in arguments against slavery, in the seeking of damages for loss of life or limbs, within the abortion and medical life-support debates, and for the protection of vanishing species. In each case, a unique and precarious situation demands an action marked by urgency.

Examples abound of the irreparable claim in arguments to protect ecological systems and natural environments: Julia "Butterfly" Hill recounts her tale of tree-sitting as an action of "last resort" to save trees "which had taken thousands of years to grow" from being "felled in moments with chain saws" (Hill, 2000, pp. 8, 23–24). Edward O. Wilson (2001) writes an imaginary letter to Thoreau as prologue to his book *The Future of Life*, "The natural world in the year 2001 is everywhere disappearing before our eyes—cut to pieces, mowed down, plowed under, gobbled up, replaced by human artifacts. No one in your time could have imagined a disaster of this magnitude....The race is now on between the technoscientific forces that are destroying the living environment and those that can be harnessed to save it" (Wilson, xxii–xxiii). Ecologist Sandra Steingraber (1997) claims that avoidance of irreparable risk is a human right that necessitates precaution in the regulation of toxic pesticides and herbicides (Steingraber, p. 29; see also Zarsky, 2002).

As these examples demonstrate, arguments claiming irreparability link directly to visions of future "doom" unless some immediate action is taken. And it is here, in representations of the projected future, that visual parables are most distinguished. The power of images to make present the unknown makes visual parables especially compelling and memorable. Visual parables have been the subject of communication, art, and media research as well, and such studies provide a vocabulary for exploring the aesthetics of *The Architect's Brother* (Blair, 2001; Kernan, 2005).

Advertising and film scholars, especially, have investigated the aesthetics at work in the crafting of visual parables. Exploring the history of advertising, both Roland Marchand (1985) and Marshall

McLuhan (1951) argued that early visual advertising worked as secular parables. Pictorial advertising urged consumers to purchase goods as the means to success and personal salvation: "Like the parables of Jesus, these advertising stories employed stark contrasts and exaggeration to dramatize a central message. And like the parables of Jesus, they sought to provoke an immediate decision for action" (Marchand, 1985, p. 207). While the choices presented to consumers in the secular parables of advertising did not explicitly challenge established mores, they "reinforced (and even encouraged conversions to) a modern, secular 'logic of living'" (Marchand, 1985, p. 207–208), encouraged viewers to turn away from traditional values such as thrift and domestic production of goods, and to embrace consumerism as a cultural ideal (Ewen, 1976). Although early advertising parables were text-heavy, as advertising became increasingly pictorial, "visual clichés" were used to elicit viewer response (Marchand, 1985, pp. 235–284). For example, repeated picturing of a businessman in front of a large office window became a visual icon for success; the "master of all he surveys" cliché was used to sell a variety of goods and services, including advertising itself. Likewise, the soft focus "family circle" image of mother, father, and children became an icon for domestic nurturing and sold innumerable products to women for their children and households (Marchand, 1985, pp. 248–254); pictures of sunbeams and rainbows associated products with a hopeful future and renderings of skyscrapers became icons of modernity and progress (Marchand, 1985, 255–259).

Additionally, advertising parables appropriated archetypal icons from religious art, investing modern consumerism with morality and virtue. For instance McLuhan (1951) ponders the values implied in the use of a Madonna and child image in an advertisement for cod-liver oil that features the tag line "I dream of looking up to my son," and asks, "Why do the ad men hitch onto religious art with such uncton?" (p. 76). "Pictorially" McLuhan writes, "the ad links the most lofty sentiments of motherly devotion and sacrifice to a dream that is unconsciously crude and base" (p. 76). Marchand concludes, "To the extent that they attained the numinosity of 'sacred symbols,' the visual clichés of advertising acquired a 'peculiar power'" (1985,

p. 284). Such "theatrical artifices within a highly emblematic display" (Kernan, 2005, p. 116) give visual parables the power of emotional immediacy.

Film scholars have framed both documentary and feature films as visual parables (Benson & Anderson, 1984; Bruce, 2001; Frenzt & Rushing, 2002; Medhurst, 1993; Rushing & Frenzt, 1985). In these studies, critics read specific film narratives and visual sequences as reinterpretations of archetypal myths that function as parables, in that they challenge the dominant moral order, imply the necessity of action, and remain open-ended. Martin Medhurst's (1993) analysis of Oliver Stone's film *JFK* is explicit about extending the meaning of parable to incorporate archetypal visual icons. His essay opens with an epigraph from Matthew 13:13, "This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (p. 128). Following a close reading of the film's narrative and filmic elements, Medhurst concludes that Stone's film exemplifies a visual parable in that the message is about "seeing" and "understanding" the truth of Kennedy's assassination in the face of a world blinded by corruption.

In demonstrating his thesis, Medhurst attends to the iconic representations of seeing and not-seeing prominent in the movie. Frequent depictions of smoke, light, mirrors, and windows represent visually how the truth is obscured from sight. Medhurst concludes: "[*JFK*] is a parable about our humanity. ... The moral of the parable, and of the film, is this: We are not only symbol-creators, but symbol-created. In this sense the story we tell can be none other than our own" (p. 141). Thus, the visual parable invites the viewing audience to "accept the story as told or tell another," that is, to see, and then to act (p. 141). Through visual aesthetics, the audience is pulled into a moral refiguring: *What does it mean? What is the right way to be? What should I do?* Above all, when the ethical choice is made, the parable invites action.

In sum, the visual parable argues for immediate action, challenges prevailing moral order, and models ways of moral agency by strategic use of stylistic devices such as exaggeration, contrast, and juxtaposition, image design, and the manipulation of

archetypal visual icons. Visualization of a precarious earth presented in the work of Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison invites viewers to see a vision of earth's future, to choose a new environmental ethic, and hence to act as caretakers of the planet. The irreparable consequences of inaction are made visible in dramatic vignettes constructed from familiar icons reimagined to perform rhetorical work. The following section of this article examines the aesthetic of *The Architect's Brother* as a visual parable through a close reading of representative images.

### *The Architect's Brother*

Collectively the images comprising *The Architect's Brother* portray the remains and consequences of human habits of greed, overconsumption, and carelessness toward the living earth, and depict Everyman's earnest but absurd efforts to restore the planet. Multiple vignettes pull viewers into the ongoing mysterious drama of Everyman's actions. Robert ParkeHarrison elaborated on the creative process and goal of the work:

We constantly find ourselves wanting, with a single image, to evoke a transformation. Sometimes it happens accidentally, whereby we see a connection between an image we are making and a certain myth or archetype. Most often we attempt to recombine or layer meanings from various sources within one image, including literature, art, theater, religion, and science. We do this to make the work universal, accessible, and open to multiple interpretations. More and more, we are interested in creating a moment for the viewer to think: Wait, what's going on here? (Balancing Act, 2004, p. 39)

"Layering meanings" reminiscent of *Everyman* (nd), *The Little Prince* (1942), and *Unchopping a Tree* (1970), *The Architect's Brother* constructs images that present disquieting possibilities. Although the three narratives provide broad rhetorical themes for ParkeHarrison's imagination, it is the unique visual work of the artists that confront viewers with compelling questions about human relationship to earth's environment. Like the visual parables found in advertising, fine art, and film, *The Architect's*

*Brother* builds an aesthetic based largely on visual exaggeration of familiar actions, visual representation of conflicting ideas in juxtaposition, and the manipulation of archetypal visual icons. A few representative images from the series will serve as examples.

The major narrative of *The Architect's Brother* is framed by a reinterpretation of the medieval drama *Everyman* through visual iconography that poetically juxtaposes environmental despair and hope for renewal. Like his medieval ancestor,<sup>4</sup> ParkeHarrison's *Everyman* attempts to perform good deeds on his spiritual journey, but it is the salvation of the earth that determines *Everyman's* fate.

ParkeHarrison creates an *Everyman* whose scruffy shoes, ill-fitting suit, and serious demeanor are more akin to Charlie Chaplin's little tramp than to a prosperous medieval Christian. The character is an exaggerated symbol for common humanity, symbolized by the tools he uses. He is naïve rather than worldly, and his "good deeds" to save the planet are simplistic—even ridiculous. Yet he persists. In vignettes that juxtapose the ineffectiveness of *Everyman's* efforts with his determination, viewers are invited to consider their own relationship to the living planet, and to think about the technologies appropriate to the task of environmental restoration. For example, "Cloud Cleaner" (this issue's cover image) like "The Clearing" (Figure 2) is whimsical in its literal portrayal of attacking pollution with a mop, bucket, and rags. Familiar chores and tools are visually associated with the enormous task of "cleaning" the earth. Yet the dirty cloud reinforces viewers' knowledge of a seriously degraded atmosphere. In this image, *Everyman's* upward turned face, his serious contemplation, the wooden ladder and handmade sack of tools present him as a rather delusional optimist—but one viewers can look upon with fondness. His earnest labors enact responsibility for the future of earth.

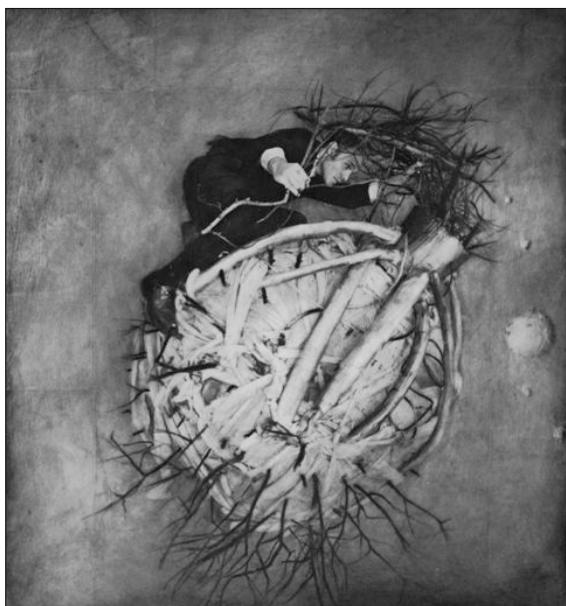
The images involve the viewer in consideration of what it means to heal the planet. *What is the work that needs to be done? What labors can save the life of the planet and human life as well?* "The scenes I depict display futile attempts to save or rejuvenate nature," says ParkeHarrison and the futility



**Figure 5. "Departure," (Series, Exhausted Globe, 1997). Copyright Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison 2000. Courtesy of the George Eastman House. Used with permission.**

of Everyman's efforts challenge viewers to ponder their own environmental actions (Hirsch & Valentino, 2001, p. 97). For the viewer, Everyman's good deeds become symbolic rituals that decry the folly of technological solutions in the face of planetary death.

The sincerity of Everyman's efforts makes them even more absurd in viewers' eyes and challenge the connections between Everyman's world and our own. Everyman's efforts and inventions are like those of a child working industriously in elaborate



**Figure 6. "Consumption," (Series, Exhausted Globe, 1997). Copyright Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison 2000. Courtesy of the George Eastman House. Used with permission.**

mimicry of serious labor. As viewers ponder the inexplicable hopefulness of this unseemly character, the actions of Everyman cast uneasy light on contemporary "solutions" to environmental degradation. Although the earth he inhabits is barren and desolate with no signs of any life but his own, Everyman persists in his work. It is his very persistence that disturbs viewer complacency about environmental actions: *Are we Everyman? Do we perform good environmental deeds as "feel good" but futile exercises?* The bizarre actions of the fictional Everyman mirror the reality of ongoing environmental politics. For example, the U.S.-led international move to focus on the development of technologies for *adaptation* to the consequences of global warming, rather than on prevention of further climate change provides an eerie reflector of Everyman's journey (Revkin, 2002).

Visual references to *The Little Prince* reinforce the childlike nature of Everyman's good deeds (Figures 5 and 6). Like the child prince, Everyman is the sole caretaker of his planet. And like the prince, Everyman must learn that his life is measured by his devotion to the plants he tends. Enlarging the visual vocabulary of Antoine de

Saint-Exupery's illustrations, in spite of the progress of technology, ParkeHarrisons' images of a small planet speak of loss and loneliness. Yet the implicit hope in Everyman's actions comments on the interdependence of the state of the earth and the future of humankind. As the little prince must care for his demanding flower, Everyman must care for trees, but ParkHarrison's symbolic trees are without life.

As an archetypal symbol for nature, images of trees are powerful icons in visual representations of wilderness and fertility. Conversely, in medieval art the leafless tree was a visual icon for death. Felled logs and standing stumps have symbolized the beginning of the death of nature since the earliest artistic renderings of North American exploration and progress. "National identity is both constructed and threatened by the double-edged symbol of progress, the axe that destroys and builds, builds and destroys" (Novak, 1980, p. 157). For example, the large tree stump in Thomas Cole's *Course of Empire: The Pastoral or Arcadian State*, "indicates that man's quest for progress is won at the cost of the natural environment" (Wilton & Barringer, 2002, p. 100). In the parable of *The Architect's Brother*, the life nurtured by Everyman is symbolized by dead twigs, barren roots, and branches, or in a number of especially evocative images, by constructions that are artificial resemblances of trees.

*Unchopping A Tree* (Merwin, 1970) the third narrative source for *The Architect's Brother* is appended to the Twin-Palms edition of ParkeHarrisons' work. Cited frequently by environmentalists and peace activists,<sup>5</sup> the poem describes in eerie detail the surreal fantasy of reconstructing a felled tree with glue and tape, nails, and chains. The poem is a witness to irreparability. It begins, "Start with the leaves, the small twigs, and the nests that have been shaken, ripped or broken by the fall; these must be gathered and attached once again to their respective places" (Merwin, 1970, p. 85).

"In the Orchard" (Figure 7) depicts an artificial tree constructed of broken boards and nails, strings, and manufactured fruit. This piece is one of the darkest in the collection. The barren land,



**Figure 7. "In the Orchard" (Series: The Architect's Brother 1993–1994). Copyright Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison 2000. Used with permission.**



**Figure 8.** Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Hunter Mountain, "Twilight,"* 1866. Oil on canvas. Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1999. Used with permission.



**Figure 9.** "Arbor Day" (Series: Kingdom, 2000) Copyright Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison 2000, used with permission.

**Figure 10 (next pages).** "Tree Stories" (Series: Kingdom, 2000). Copyright Robert & Shana ParkeHarrison 2000. Used with permission.





Everyman's running figure, and the makeshift tree foretell a world where to all intents and purposes, life has been diminished to an imitation of itself. None of ParkeHarrison's trees cast shade, none shelter birds, and none give living seed or fruit, but in image after image Everyman attempts to make dead trees live. Merwin ends his plea, "What more can you do? What more can you do? But there is nothing more you can do. /Others are waiting. /Everything is going to have to be put back" (Merwin, 1970, p. 88). Everyman too can do nothing but continue his efforts.

ParkeHarrison's use of the tree stump as iconic symbol of earth's demise is sharply revealed in the comparison of images from *The Architect's Brother* with classic images. For instance, Sanford Gifford's painting "Twilight," (Figure 8) presented a foreground of stumps, focusing viewers' attention on what Novak calls "so many fallen soldiers.... in ...a special kind of ...war" (p. 164).<sup>6</sup> ParkeHarrison's "Arbor Day" (Figure 9) uses the archetypal icon to create images of the aftermath of that war. Everyman's resourcefulness, juxtaposed with the forest of stumps, illuminates Merwin's poem and includes the primary visual devices in *The Architect's Brother*—surreal scenes of Everyman's dogged persistence, archetypal icons, simple tools, and monochromatic photographic vignettes.

Everyman's undaunted spirit and indefatigable labor may, in fact, *unchop a tree*. The stumps, bandaged limbs, and inadequate watering can construct a scene in which human effort to save the planet may prevail. This optimism inherent in *The Architect's Brother* is rooted in the moral choices presented to viewers. The series of images presents an argument for a renewed environmental ethic by depicting an exemplary journey toward earth's redemption—a visual parable.

The challenge of Everyman's optimism in the face of planetary death is most compelling in ParkeHarrison's visions that depict the interdependence of human and earth. In the poignant "Tree Stories" (Figure 10), Everyman is engaged in the work of transcribing the stories of the

trees, learning from them, transcribing what the trees know. The rows of felled logs that frame Everyman and his inventive transcription machine recede into a distant glowing sky. At the center is Everyman, doing his job, reporting to viewers that the future is at hand.

## Conclusion

*The Architect's Brother* places the audience at the center of a visual drama that pulls the audience into a moral refiguring. Constructed from icons of labor and tools, the earth's globe, trees, and the common man, the work confronts viewing audiences with bleak and surreal monochromatic photographic images. Yet, Everyman's illusionary efforts and imagination know neither boundaries nor recognition of failed effort. The primary strategy of the visual parable of an irreparable earth is to confront viewers with a stark vision of a planetary future devoid of life as we know it. The parable makes a visual argument akin to the *World Scientists Warning to Humanity* written by Nobel Laureate Henry Kendall:

Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about (Kendall, 1992).

On the "present course" irreparable damage to the earth is unavoidable. In the tradition of parables, ParkeHarrison's modern morality tale depends on viewers to complete the story by choosing to act. In order to remake the story, survival of earth and humankind must be secured by human agency rooted in environmental ethics. Everyman will persist if we confront the truth, if we "see" the future consequences of our actions or inactions. Through the use of visual devices such as exaggeration, juxtaposition, creative

manipulation of iconic symbols, and monochromatic color, Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison envision a future viewers can see. Offering images of a bleak landscape, the parable yet allows us to see a way to change the inevitable. With labor, invention, and care, in spite of death all around, we can save the planet and ourselves by emulating Everyman's journey.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The author is indebted to Therese Mulligan for providing access to her exhibition notes of *The Architect's Brother*, and to Patrick Scanlon for his suggestions and careful reading of this manuscript.

<sup>2</sup>The series are *The Architect's Brother* (1993–1994); *Cardboard Sky* (1994); *Witnessland* (1995–1996); *Exhausted Globe* (1997); *Industrial Land* (1997); *Promised Land* (1998); *Earth Elegies* (1999–2000); *Kingdom* (2000); and *Passage* (2001).

<sup>3</sup>*The Architect's Brother* is the collaborative work of Shana and Robert ParkeHarrison, the former Robert Harrison and Shana Parke. As their name indicates, the project joins the husband and wife partners in artistic production. Although *The Architect's Brother* was the work of both, it was exhibited and published under the name Robert ParkeHarrison. Subsequent and current work uses both names.

<sup>4</sup>The 15th century Christian morality play, *Everyman*, tells the story of a "complacent" and worldly Everyman, summoned by death for the journey to his end. Everyman is quickly deserted by friends and relatives and his wealth will not save his life. He enlists *Strength, Beauty, Intelligence, and Knowledge* and they do help guide his preparations, but finally it is only his *Good Deeds* that accompany him to the grave and redemption beyond (Jokinen, 2002).

<sup>5</sup>A web search of "Unchopping a Tree" turns up a number of books and speeches that use the poem to address questions of injustice and war, as well as environment. See, for example, Villa-Vicencio (2002).

<sup>6</sup>For a brief review of the significant influence Sanford Gifford's "Twilight On Hunter Mountain" had on Gifford Pinchot's efforts to restore the forests in the New York State Catskills, see Johnson (2001).

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