



"BUT IN FACT, ISN'T THAT MAN'S PURPOSE ON EARTH—TO DO THINGS, CHANGE THINGS, RUN THINGS, MAKE A BETTER WORLD?"
"WHAT IS HIS PURPOSE, THEN?"
"I DON'T KNOW. THINGS DON'T HAVE PURPOSE. THE UNIVERSE
WE'RE A MACHINE. WHERE EVERY
PART HAS A USEFUL FUNCTION."
"WHAT'S THE FUNCTION OF A GALAXY?"
"I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN TELL YOU.
YOU CAN'T SEE THAT IT
MATTERS. WHAT MATTERS IS THAT
WE'RE A PART LIKE A THREAD ON A
CLOTH OR A COUSIN'S DADE IN A FIELD.
THESE ARE THE FUNCTIONS.
LIVE WIND BLOWING ON THE GRASS."

THE FAITH OF HEAVEN
BY URSULA K. LE GUIN

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Hi Professor ☺ this is Leona

Hi! Ready when you are

Great, I like to start with a very serious question.
What's your favorite animal and why?

I like owls. Beyond the obvious symbolic association, I'm amazed by their abilities: their incredible eyesight even at night; their flexible necks; their feathers.

So what sort of things were you curious about as a kid?

I learned French in school and was curious about how speaking another language allowed you to almost become another person with a different kind of expression.

What do you think about different languages in relation to your experience in advertising or writing?

It's tightly connected. I worked in advertising when I lived in Montréal and part of my job involved translating French ad concepts into English. Of course you couldn't directly translate. You had to make sense of the concepts in the other cultural context. I adored that work.

Speaking another language helps my writing all the time. I have more "reach." I can borrow other expressions, words, thought patterns.

I wanna pivot and ask what drew you from examining nation branding to environmental public relations?

Even before I wrote *Branding the Nation* I was very interested in national identity—what it meant to claim to be Canadian or Japanese or whatever.

I started writing about how some countries, like Canada, relied on their status as environmentally friendly (symbolized to some extent by the maple leaf on the flag) even as they invested heavily in the tar sands which are incredibly polluting. I became interested in the contradictions of environmentalism. So I turned my focus to the way the environmental PR industry realized that the PR industry was closely linked with the rise of environmental awareness, because PR was created to help big polluting industries smooth over their increasingly poor reputation in the communities where they operated.

So the new book, *A Strategic Nature*, details that double history.

Wow I didn't know that's how PR started.
You would think that scientific knowledge and truth have more authority. But it also makes more sense that people respond better to narrative than facts.

What I found super interesting about working on the book was how we think about what "the public" is and what power it has.

So do you have advice for how to raise environmental awareness in the public sphere?

I don't know if what I do could be called "advice," but my approach is often to look at the language used and try to unpack what's behind it.

For instance, right now I'm looking at how some people are promoting "solutions" to climate change. When you frame something as having a solution, it means you think you can "fix" it. But maybe that isn't the right way to think about climate change.

Professor of human geography Mike Hulme wrote about that. His book, *Why We Disagree about Climate Change*, argues that climate change is a cultural condition, not a problem to be solved. As a cultural condition, climate change underlies everything we do.

Actually there's effort in the design field to shift from problem-solving to problem-finding, as well as asking critical questions.

Well, I don't want to make you late for your next appointment. I really enjoyed our chat. Feels like we just scratched the surface.

Yes! Thank you for reaching out. It was fun to talk.