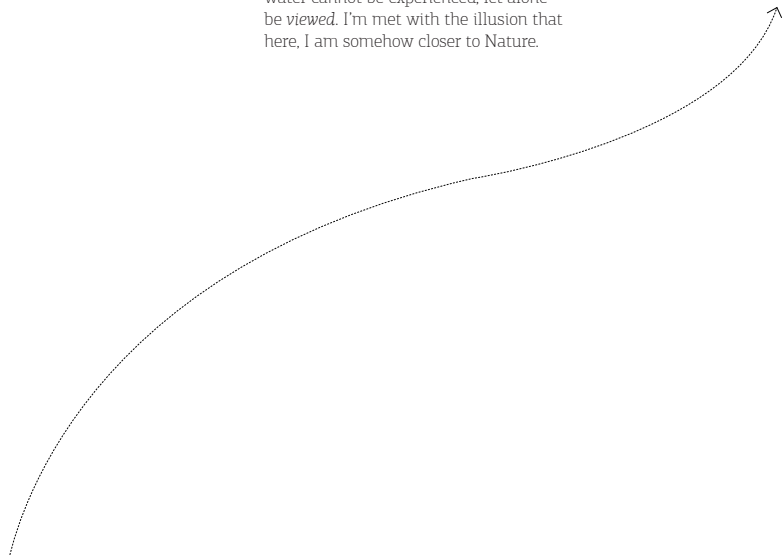




*Vignettes on  
Agriculture,  
Nature & Time*

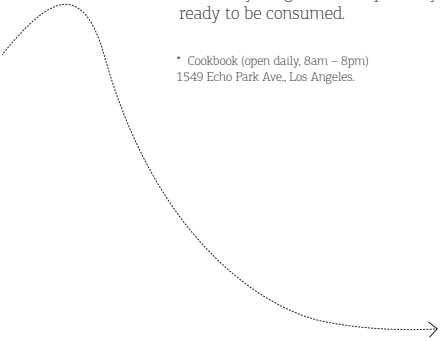
By Vivian Sming

Walking around the Silver Lake Reservoir,  
I am struck by a particular question:  
Why is it that so many people (myself  
included) choose to circle about this  
fenced-in body of irrigated water? This  
water cannot be experienced, let alone  
be viewed. I'm met with the illusion that  
here, I am somehow closer to Nature.



The words "real time" have popped up twice this week. At Cookbook\*, Marta Teegan speaks of her efforts in restoring the relationship between individuals and the food they consume. Cookbook is a greengrocer on Echo Park Ave. that offers a very *fine* selection of produce. These are the best of the best, delivered to this tiny neighborhood market four times a week. The selection is intricately labored with visits, discussions, and samplings—all with local growers. While the processes of food production are often overlooked (or fast-forwarded through in Farmville), Marta hopes to bring us back to "real time" to recognize the very deliberate methods and conditions that produce the foods we eat. Of course, it helps to know that everything in store is perfectly ripe, ready to be consumed.

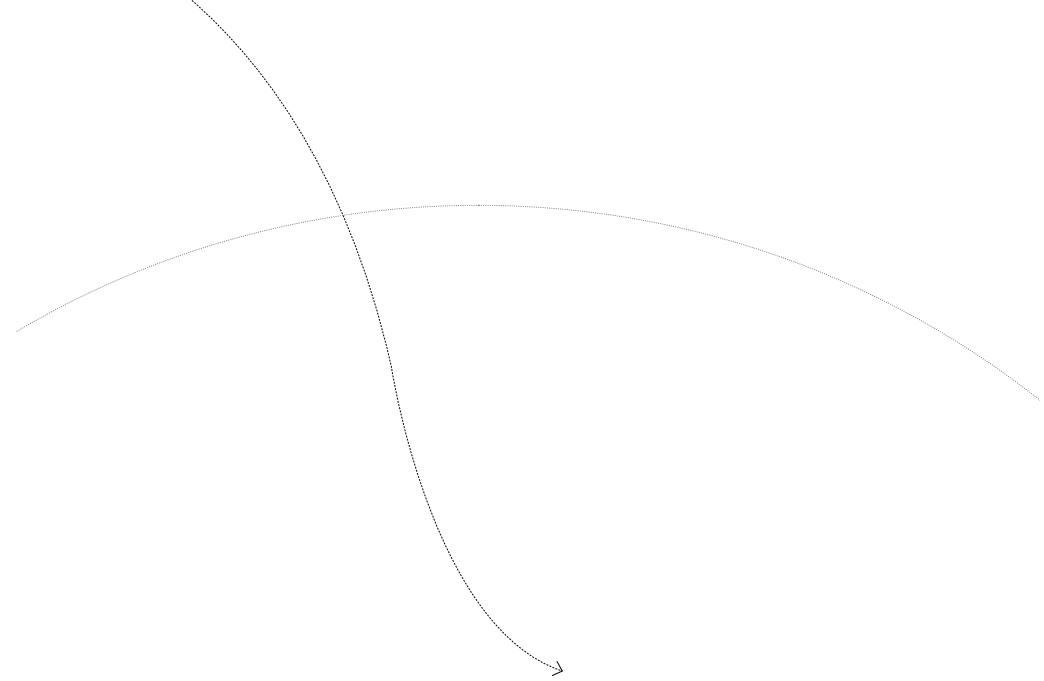
\* Cookbook (open daily, 8am - 8pm)  
1549 Echo Park Ave., Los Angeles.



Every week, I spend a day on Ellen's ranch\*. Well, they call it a ranch because it used to be one, but it's actually more of an orchard than it is a ranch. Once covered in chaparral, rows of citrus trees now form the cultivated landscape. Again, I am met with the illusion of Nature, for it is not actually easy to differentiate the natural from the cultivated, or native from the non-native. In fact, traces of the wild can only be seen with attention. On a walk with naturalist Joel Robinson\*, we spot a frog completely camouflaged in the dirt. Without a second glance, it's easy to miss. Watching the frog blink, we feel somehow proud to have even glimpsed something wild, something of Nature.


\* CalArts Photo Faculty Ellen Birell's "Site Work" class, Deep End Ranch, Santa Paula.

\* Naturalist For You, [www.naturalist-for-you.org](http://www.naturalist-for-you.org)



If there is a Venn Diagram with Nature circled on the left, and Culture on the right, Agriculture is perhaps where they intersect. Nature as wild, Culture as tamed, and Agriculture as the taming of the wild. Pauline von Bonsdorff\* argues that Agriculture may provide the missing link between Nature and Culture. Agriculture requires a negotiation with Nature, and it is precisely here that a relationship is formed. Rather than appreciating Nature as a distanced entity, Agriculture allows us to realize our own agency within Nature and reveals how that is then navigated. Von Bonsdorff claims that though often exploitative, this is in fact a genuine way of knowing, appreciating, and understanding Nature.

\* Pauline von Bonsdorff. "Agriculture, Aesthetic Appreciation and the Worlds of Nature" (2005)



Clam digger Jen Casad performs this relationship in Sharon Lockhart's film *Double Tide*\*. At the film's screening, curator Bérénice Reynaud sophisticatedly hints at the film's lengthiness by recounting an audience member who was angered by the film's pace, to which Jen had responded, "This is real time." The film frames Jen amongst the coastal landscape of Maine as she carries out her work during two low tides that are rarely both lit. Movement within the film is simplified to Jen's backbreaking labor, clearance of the morning fog, shifts within the clouds, and subtle change in stances of local birds. Every once in a while, Jen pauses in admiration of the landscape. After the film closes, someone notes that the amount Jen has dug for the day would not even be able to feed those seated in the audience. Indeed, this is "real time" and the products of it. "Real time" requires a pause, a consideration, but it is not so unattainable. It can be found daily in the most simple of actions, with a walk around the city or simply a visit to the market.

\* *Double Tide* (2009. 99 min. Dir. Sharon Lockhart)