

Williams Bids Adieu to Sheafe Satterthwaite

An Increased Appreciation for Ambiguity Through the Juxtaposition of Disparate Elements

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"It is a great art to saunter." (Thoreau, Journal)

"Landscapes have a history, just as humans do, and much of their history is the history of what people do. ... All people can learn to be historians of their home ground." (Jan Albers, *Hands on the Land: A History of the Vermont Landscape*)

"An increased appreciation for ambiguity through the juxtaposition of disparate elements..." That's how Sheafe Satterthwaite began his statement of what he wanted students to come away with from the newly launched interdisciplinary E.S. 350: *Perspectives on Environmental Analysis*, in the spring of 1971. It conveys well Sheafe's philosophy in his 44-year career at Williams, a career that ended in June. While we earnestly hope he will "be around" the Center for years to come, we take this opportunity to pay tribute to his gifts to us so far. He has been influential in the education of environmental studies students, and many other students, at Williams, and indeed the education of his faculty colleagues. He has been one of the most remarkable members of our community.

Recently Lizzy Kildahl, '14, recalled that Prof. E. J. Johnson once told her, "The great thing about Sheafe, both as a teacher and a human being, is that to him everything and everyone is interesting." Lizzie also mentioned three things about Sheafe's teaching: he insists that "students ask 'dumb' questions; his teaching method in which digressions are the point, not a useless amendment; and his sharing of students' essays with the entire class in bound volumes, with the idea that we may learn more from one another than we do from him" [1]. In 2006 Sheafe told students: "I am ... interested in inculcating ... a certain kind of academic personality: given to inquiry; given to discussion and disputation and argument; comfortable with self expression" [2]. Sheafe came to Williams in 1968 as a Research Associate in Environmental Studies, very soon after CES was born. He worked with President Sawyer, Andy Scheffey, and others to develop the missions of the new center. A notable achievement was his *Leisure Homes in the Berkshires*, published by CES in 1969. It combined extensive research and fine prose, and touched on topics ranging from real estate finance to unreliable septic tanks. It is still worth reading today. He also helped plan a conference, "The Corporation and the Environment," at Mt. Hope Farm in 1968, a gathering of really quite illustrious public, business, and academic leaders. Sheafe helped Roger Bolton write a report on it, also published by CES in 1969. Sheafe became Director of Publications for CES. In that early period of our history a lot of our work, including Sheafe's, reflected the idea that the Berkshires were part of a "metropolitan hinterland."

Sheafe was no wet-behind-the-ears fellow in 1968. He had grown up in New Jersey, graduated from the Putney School in Ver-

mont and the University of Virginia ("Mr. Jefferson's academical village," he called it, or sometimes, "The University"). He had worked for Wildlife Preserves, a land preservation organization, and occasionally was a chicken farmer. Some of the work for Wildlife Preserves was in North Carolina, and he wrote a book, *Smith Island and the Cape Fear Peninsula*, with forest ecologist Arthur Cooper [3]. (Later Sheafe took a leave from Williams in the spring of 1970 to teach in North Carolina State University's landscape architecture department.)

Although he never obtained advanced degrees, he was appointed to the faculty in the Art Department in the fall of 1970, and began to teach his signature course, Art 201/Environmental Studies 201: American Landscape History, identified with him ever since. It became a key course in CES's curricular program, and for many years it was required (along with a course on ecology and the introductory course in economics) for the "coordinate program" in environmental studies. Gradually he added other courses—that's an understatement, as eventually he developed a total of seventeen different courses, covering topics like campuses, cities, suburbs, dwellings, transport history, and agricultural history, and documentary film. Many but not all were listed under both Art and Environmental Studies. Except for a few years at the beginning, he was a Lecturer. He regularly taught Art 101-102 conference sections in the later years. As we read on the Art Department web site, "A major focus of [Sheafe's] courses is the spatial or visual impress [on environments] of the constituent elements designed and re-designed by human action, be they road or lawn or dwelling, and the evolution or layering of these forms. ... No course of his veers far from the documentary instinct, whether photographic, written, or oral" (accessed May 22, 2012).

Some of Sheafe's most notable teaching has been in encouraging talented students in work that was not "academic" in the usual sense. We mention only two examples, and apologize for not including any of the scores of others. He advised Mark Livingston, '72, who drew the wonderful detailed and annotated Portraiture of Stone Hill, copies of which still adorn the Center's home and, probably, the homes of some alumni from the period (published by CES, 1972). It originated in conversation with Sheafe and in an Art 201 project. In Mark's own words: "My experience typified the sense of a blank check drawn on his [Sheafe's] time, the painstaking, ever thoughtful attention, and the polymathic wealth of knowledge that I've watched Sheafe lavish on his students one after another over the years: a whorl of learning synergy" [4]. Sheafe also influenced Bill Carney, '70, who wrote *Man, Land: Williams College Center for Environmental Studies: The First Two Years* (CES, 1969) [5]. Sheafe also frequently taught E.S. 350, mentioned above, which for some years was required for the coordinate program. He taught the very first version of the course in the spring of 1971, along with Hank Art, Roger Bolton, and Carl Reidel, who with Sheafe set out as a team to educate themselves along with the students. In later years Sheafe taught it jointly with other faculty members, including Hank, Roger, and the economist Bob Schneider. One year he joined Hank and Roger in teaching the environmental planning workshop.



Harry Kangis '72, Dave Blanchard '72, Carl Reidel, Sheafe Satterthwaite, and in background Jim Cornell '72 on ENVI 350 Field Trip to Fire Island April, 1971.

We have always been thankful for Sheafe's constant urging that the Williams environmental studies program include substantial content on urban life and built environments. He was eagerly interested in, and deeply respected, students' concerns with wilderness and other natural environments, the love of nature, and natural sciences, but often he worried the Center overemphasized those sorts of things. Sheafe always wanted to broaden "environment" to include buildings, roads, human communities, cities. On the Art Department web site we find: "[Sheafe] explores in his courses a wide swath of (mainly North American) environments, ranging from innermost cities to wilderness (itself a human artifact with costumes and regulations and conceptualizing?)." The question mark is the most important part of the sentence. His courses have often included extensive field trips to nearby cities (a lot bigger than North Adams or Pittsfield!). Some courses had enrollment limits dictated by how many students college vans could hold.

During June's Alumni Weekend, Hank and Pam Art hosted a grand dinner for Sheafe and many former students, some of whom helped Hank organize the event.

Notes:

1. Letter to Williams Record, May 2, 2012, available at <http://thewilliamsrecord.com/2012/05/02/a-teacher-not-a-professor/>.
2. Sheafe's personal history distributed to Art 201 students in 2006, available at http://wso.williams.edu/wiki/index.php/Sheafe_Satterthwaite. Along with Hank and Roger's personal memories, it is the basis for other factual information in this article.
3. Arthur Cooper and Sheafe Satterthwaite, *Smith Island and the Cape Fear Peninsula: A Comprehensive Report on an Outstanding Natural Area*, Wildlife Preserves, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1964, in cooperation with the North Carolina Academy of Sciences.
4. Letter to Dean William Wagner, January 28, 2011, available at <http://sheafesatterthwaitewilliams.blogspot.com/2011/02/letter-from-mark-livingston-75.html>, accessed May 25, 2012.
5. Appreciations from many students can be found on the blog: <http://sheafesatterthwaitewilliams.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2011-01-17T08%3A59%3A00-08%3A00>.