

CONTROL VS. KINSHIP IN AVALANCHE COUNTRY: DOLORES LACHAPELLE AND THE WAY OF THE MOUNTAIN

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ABSTRACT: Dolores LaChapelle, author of *Deep Powder Snow: 40 Years of Ecstatic Skiing, Avalanches, and Earth Wisdom*, was an activist and independent scholar in pursuit of knowledge about appropriate human relationship with place. Known as the Godmother of Powder Skiing, she practiced a highly ceremonial, embodied land ethic that emerged from her experiences as a skier. She rejected longstanding global narratives about progress as Euro-American civilization's liberation from and domination of nature. LaChapelle challenged this paradigm with *The Way of the Mountain*, a method for producing ethical knowledge that emphasizes more-than-human agency and the intelligence of non-human relations. Three case studies describe events where LaChapelle developed this method of thinking in Aspen, Colorado, and Alta, Utah during the post-World War II era.

KEYWORDS: Snow culture, acquiring knowledge, avalanche control, history, land ethic

1. INTRODUCTION

Dolores LaChapelle died at 80 years old on January 21, 2007. Soon before her passing, a caretaker sat by the window at her home in Silverton, Colorado. Venus was perched on the silhouetted shoulder of Sultan Mountain. The bright planet looked like a skier on fire—like LaChapelle, a person whose entire existence was ignited by skiing.

Writing ambitiously and broadly from her rural alpine margins, LaChapelle addressed “all of us who are heirs to European thought.” (LaChapelle, 1978) She wrote to people like herself who came from cultures that normalized a sense of separation from nature as well as its conquest. People who, as a result of this heritage, felt like they were strangers with the land. She urged her readers to dismantle their inherited predisposition to seek control. Her theory of change focused on reforming relationships with non-human things by conceptualizing them as beings. Powder snow, mountains, and gravity were the beings that mattered to LaChapelle, a skier and mountaineer living in alpine places. But everyone has particular non-human beings in their place: flora and fauna, water features, geology, atmospheric phenomena, and so on. She argued that people can learn “valid” conduct through kin relationships. Over time, with deepening respect, emotion, and awareness, they can observe patterns and pathways for reciprocity.

In the late 1970s, LaChapelle's work to understand and develop these ideas brought her into the modern U.S. environmental movement.

She fell in with early radicals, deep ecologists, bioregionalists, and Earth Firsters. The movement had its direct-action activists, but LaChapelle was a theorist, arguing that humans have moral obligations to support and respect the self-realization of all beings, with an idea of selfhood that extended beyond humans. (Woodhouse, 2020) She was also a practitioner, devoted to living out her beliefs through mountain recreation, earth ritual, and Tai Chi. Originally a schoolteacher, she began supporting herself by leading deep ecology workshops. She also sold literature, including her own, through her annual *Way of the Mountain* newsletter, a mail-order catalogue of “hard-to-find books and other materials on deep ecology, place, the ‘old’ ways & other earth-centered topics.”

It is tempting to dive straight into LaChapelle's more scholarly works—like her massive textbook *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex, Rapture of the Deep: Concerning Deep Ecology and Celebrating Life*—to see how her arguments unfold. There is much to appreciate and critically engage with there. But whenever she looked at the ideas of a scholar, she always looked to their life experience first, because their relationship with place provided the most important context for their thinking. “Everything I know, I have learned from skiing powder,” she wrote and said repeatedly. (LaChapelle, 1993) Adopting her own approach, which aligns well with environmental history methods, this Masters research takes her claim seriously. She was literal, clear, and consistent about her argument that, through skiing, she found her way out of a moral system that undervalued and subjugated non-human nature. This study takes interest in the story of how LaChapelle began to see snow, gravity, and mountains as beings who could teach her about belonging.

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2. HISTORY METHODS

2.1 *Archival Materials*

Archival sources are at the heart of historical research. The private LaChapelle family estate in Durango, Colorado, contains childhood journals, correspondence with colleagues and family, and the quotidian records of daily life, like receipts, to-do lists, and scraps of paper where she scribbled down ideas. LaChapelle saved an abundant record of her source work in her “compendiums,” which are basically research scrapbooks. She filled their pages with handwritten and typewritten notes, poems, illustrations, and photocopied literature. In addition to written records, there are hundreds of photos in the Durango collection, most taken by glaciologist Ed LaChapelle, her husband from 1950 to the mid-1970s, mostly depicting their life and work in Utah and Washington. This study also draws, though more lightly, on a second private collection of LaChapelle’s papers, in Aspen, Colorado. This collection has additional research notes, as well as 20 or 30 bank boxes containing her heavily annotated library. This study is the first to access these collections in the 15 years since LaChapelle’s passing. Other primary sources include auto-biographical essays included in her published works. Sometimes, the archives corroborated and elaborated on these stories. Other times, there were inconsistencies and outright contradictions between her records and rhetoric. Both offered productive analytical opportunities and insight into how she made meaning of her life experience.

2.2 *Historical Agency*

History is often a study of power: How it has been generated, wielded, maintained, and contested in service of shaping change in human experience over time. The capacity to make this kind of historically significant change is known as “agency.” Traditionally, historians and other humanists in the Western academy have construed agency as a strictly human characteristic. Non-human things might complicate or support human destiny, but they do not act with intent to produce identity, knowledge, or culture. This view of agency is especially favored in the realm of ethics, where LaChapelle worked.

But an alternate theory of agency asserts that it is neither a human trait, nor even a possession of individually acting bodies. Distributed, more-than-human agency has been described as an event with spatial and temporal boundaries. (LeCain, 2017; Nash, 2005; Bennett, 2019; Tsing, 2015) Agency *happens* when heterogeneous bodies

gather in “assemblages,” shaping history through relational and collective, if not coordinated, action. Moments of agency begin and end. They happen somewhere, in a place. This approach does not construct anthropomorphized agency in non-human actors; it seeks to account for the broadest possible distribution of agency.

Avalanche country is a land governed by weather, terrain, gravity, and time. The diversity of environmental variables equips this place with the capacity to generate an extraordinary range of expression. Add humans to the assemblage, and things get much more complicated and beautiful. With the lens of distributed agency, the abundant products of the encounters between human and avalanche country (myriad cultures, economies, fields of scientific research, methods for urban planning, and so much more) are not merely the product of human ingenuity. They come from the particular creativity of the more-than-human assemblage.

LaChapelle’s work and life come into sharper focus with this approach to agency. Few would fail to recognize the causal power of avalanche country in motion: vigorous agency erupts when miniscule bodies—billions of crystals—move into mass action, flowing around trees, over cliffs, and into all the curves of the land. A fleeting breakdown in entropy, a momentary alliance of action. “Snow, gift of the sky, when too deep or unstable, is drawn down by the gravity of the earth, and this mutual appropriation of one to the other is called avalanche,” LaChapelle wrote, describing agency with the language of German philosopher Martin Heidegger. (LaChapelle, 1993) She experienced one of avalanche country’s most chaotic and traumatic assemblages—but it was generative nonetheless, as the final case study explores.

An avalanche is over in moments. The rush of agency passes and, eventually, the landscape returns to stability. But stability is not a fixed, inactive background state. It is also an assemblage, also a passing event with atmospheric and geologic forces acting on snow. This is the assemblage that bonded LaChapelle deeply to snow, mountains, and gravity. She felt lucky to be from a place with such powerful teachers. They were subtle and blissful at times, yes, but ferocious and unforgiving at others. Over years, through repeated encounters, she received the wide spectrum of what avalanche country could teach.

2.3 *Historiography*

Historical frameworks for interpreting the archives emerge through historiography: veins of research

into particular topics. By providing content into what LaChapelle rebelled against, we can better understand the stakes and magnitude of her critique. This study is grounded in the histories of recreation, science, and the American West, with particular focus on attitudes and beliefs about human relationship with nature.

Since the European annexation of Indigenous lands in North America, the model of relationship with place that has most successfully organized power on this continent is one that views nature as raw matter to be harnessed to serve humans and their material needs. (Estes, 2019; Grandin, 2019; Gilio-Whitaker, 2019; Spence, 199; Wyckoff, 1999) Fossil fuel industrialization in the late nineteenth century remade economies and cultures within global capitalist regimes, removing the ceiling on the expansion of production. (Andrews 2008; Demuth, 2019; Needham, 2014) In the modern era, “nearly limitless ambition to transform nature to suit man’s purposes” drew scientific and technological knowledge into the pursuit of perpetual progress. (Scott, 1999; Latour, 2018)

During the early twentieth century, national trends in leisure, middle-class affluence, and automobile culture kicked off a process of transformation. During this time, “places themselves became products: manufactured, packaged, branded, and marketed like so many consumer goods.” (Philpott, 2013) Surging consumerism and the rapid growth of new industries after World War II rapidly commodified the alpine experience in the Mountain West. (Coleman, 2004; Philpott, 2013; Rothman, 1998; Denning, 2014; Di Stefano, 2015; Flynt, 2018; Miller, 2021) This is the historical explanation for why LaChapelle’s voice resonates so well with skiers. Her life perfectly mirrors the development of modern American alpine skiing, as it grew first into an American pastime and then a billion-dollar industry. Almost everything about LaChapelle, down to her signature hairstyle of two long braids, seems rooted in this history. She perfectly threaded the needle of the era’s tensions and contradictions between access and development, always dancing away from the front of change remaking the mountains.

2.4 *The Changing Meaning of Skiing*

LaChapelle was born in 1926, at the beginning of the Great Depression. During her early childhood, only two types of Coloradans skied: residents of remote mining towns, and elites traveling to Europe or Sun Valley. World War II was a melting pot, homogenizing the cultural meaning of skiing and producing a patriotic sport. When LaChapelle was in high school, she learned to ski on

affordable surplus skis from the 10th Mountain Division on trips with the Colorado Mountain Club. When she graduated from the University of Denver with degrees in history, education, and botany, she took a teaching job in Aspen because the ski area had just installed the longest chairlift in the world. Her timing was bittersweet. She arrived on the tail end of the “quiet years,” a short lull between the economic and political dominance of two formidable extractive industries: mining and skiing. Aspen, the epicenter of the post-war recreation industry, was culturally re-created and re-scripted right beneath LaChapelle’s feet. The changes that unfolded were nothing short of “the cultural, environmental, and psychic transformation of place.” (Rothman, 1998) Though she spent only three years in Aspen, they had an outsized impact on her, revealing both the antagonist to relationship with place (modern industry, with its roots in Western traditions of control) and the alternative (kinship through skiing).

LaChapelle left Aspen in 1950, just as the post-war transformations gained momentum. As skiers, she and Ed couldn’t have timed their arrival in Alta better. Snow rangers were on the edge of harnessing Little Cottonwood Canyon for commercial ski area development. Before the modernist optimism of the mid-twentieth century, few would have aspired to control the avalanches. But just like in Aspen, the post-war context brought rapid change and development to Alta. Utah boosterist efforts stoked the fires of consumer demand, and the US Forest Service mobilized scientific research to generate new, proactive risk management practices to maximize skiers’ time safely on snow. (Miller, 2021) During peacetime, avalanche hunters recreated the drama of war to re-script avalanche activity within the narratives of the tourism industry. “What we perfected at Alta was a fast and effective technique of pacifying what we defined as the lift-served area,” head avalanche hunter Monty Atwater wrote. (Atwater, 1968) These accomplishments were deeply modernist. Atwater, Ed LaChapelle, and other early snow researchers produced valuable scientific knowledge, but the greater context that enabled their work had everything to do with the longstanding cultural objective of subjugating nature.

In the 1970s, the LaChapelles moved to Silverton for Ed to work as a rainmaker on Project Skywater, a weather modification program. (Harper, 2017) She watched as the ski industry gathered steam in the 1980s and 1990s, going corporate and mainstream. Not in Silverton, though, a tiny town guarded by fierce avalanche

paths and some of the most harrowing highway passes in the Mountain West. She felt like her way of life was safe here, beyond the reach of that juggernaut so capable of swiftly rearranging power structures and relationships with the land.

3. CASE STUDY: LEARNING TO SKI POWDER

LaChapelle moved to Aspen in 1947, when she was 21. During her first winter, she honed the fundamentals of the sport on packed trails. She bought a discounted ten-pack of tickets and skied on the weekends when there was no school. Occasionally, she took lessons at Friedl Pfeifer's ski school, which taught the Arlberg ski technique, an Austrian import. Instructors taught her to control the turn by driving from the upper body—a wrenching motion, as she described it. Soon, she began teaching weekend lessons herself. But this way of skiing didn't satisfy her. She was more interested in skiing deep powder off-piste, like she had with the Colorado Mountain Club. The Arlberg technique did not adapt well to soft uncut snow, or for the steep chutes and tight trees she went to find it.

Some friends taught her a new technique, the Dipsy Doodle, an Alta creation. Named after a popular big band tune, it had “a very bouncy rhythm,” she wrote. (LaChapelle, 1993) Apparently, it was the perfect rhythm for steep powder. Whether or not she actually hummed the tune while she skied, she weighted both skis and relaxed her chest. She moved like a climber descending a loose scree slope, setting her heels in and flowing along with the cascading stone, rather than trying to power through the substrate. She held onto a vivid memory of the first time it truly clicked, a stormy, gray day with poor visibility.

“Because of a snowfall so heavy that I could not see the steep angle of the slope, I learned to ski quite suddenly, when I discovered that I was not turning the skis, but that... the snow and gravity together were turning the skis. I then quit trying to control the skis and turned them over to these forces.” (LaChapelle, 1993)

In order to experience this particular sensation, “you had to turn yourself over to the mountain in a way that the skiers of that day couldn't handle,” she wrote. (LaChapelle, 1993) European ski culture before World War II accommodated the modernist tensions between “harmony with and mastery over nature,” but the scale tipped definitively over to mastery in the post-war era. (Denning, 2014) Arlberg instructors understood and taught their students to understand “their

sport as an act of raw power and masculine dominance.” (Coleman, 2004) For many of these skiers, the sport was nothing less than a “quest against nature.” (Philpott, 2013). Suddenly limited in her ability to control her path of descent, LaChapelle learned that she hadn't needed to control so much in the first place. There was actually no need—and in fact, giving up control made it *better*. She loved how the snow, terrain, and gravity worked together to guide her movements, physically leading her through the world. Deep powder was the most pleasurable snow to turn control over to, and for this reason, it became the fundamental countercultural and spiritual presence in her life.

4. CASE STUDY: NOT ALWAYS BLISS

In fall 1994, the LaChapelles, not yet engaged, began their courtship by exchanging letters between Aspen and Washington, Ed's home state, where he was studying physics. As they talked about their future together, they found that their values aligned. They cared about being in the mountains rather than, as she wrote, “thinking only of making money or getting ahead in the world.” (LaChapelle Estate, Durango) Ed attempted to spark deeper conversations beyond this, but she always deferred them to their next in-person meeting. She hated expressing herself on the page. As she told Ed, it seemed like whenever she wrote, the words that came out were never what she wanted to say. What she did feel more comfortable writing about was the skiing and the snow.

As her letters to Ed from fall 1949 to spring 1950 show, weather that brought powder made her happy; dry, warm, or windy weather soured her whole mood. It preoccupied her. This was a major adjustment LaChapelle made in her 20s, acquainting herself with bigger geophysical processes and longer timescales: the life cycle of a winter's snowpack, and the cyclical rhythm of many winters. To a skier, snow is not just light or deep. It is early or late, it is consistent or erratic, it is abundant or not enough.

Writing almost daily, she reported on what was happening in the environment to make powder—or, conversely, what was happening to prevent powder. The season began later than she expected with spotty, sad storms. She reported the first snowfall in a letter dated October 13. “A very wet one,” she commented. Five days later, she wrote, darkly, “This is the worst part of the year to me—It's too cold and dreary to go hiking and not enough snow to go skiing.” The following day, she wrote him another lonely letter. “There's nothing to do but miss you. I think it will be better when skiing starts.” In early November, she

wrote, “So you are getting the same disgusting weather we are here—no snow, I mean. That’s too bad... Everyone is just getting rather irritable waiting and wishing for snow.” A few days after Thanksgiving, she complained, “Absolutely nothing of interest is going on here and everyone is getting discouraged, disgusted, disconsolate, and anything else you can think of which indicates extreme dissatisfaction.” The whole fall of 1949 was a total disappointment. Debating the differences between her continental snow climate and Ed’s maritime climate, she solidified her affinity for fine powder. Even though he had more snow, she preferred to wait. The drought continued into the new year. Her situation did not improve until—finally—on January 15, everything lined up. The big storm came on a weekend, when LaChapelle was off work. She wrote to Ed, “We had lots of fresh powder snow and a large group of us went down together having lots of fun, doodling and turning with no effort at all.” (LaChapelle Estate, Durango)

Nearly 50 years later, LaChapelle wrote that in Aspen they “had unlimited powder all of the time.” (LaChapelle, 1993) The nostalgia makes sense. Her audience of skiers would understand that these were the halcyon days. Perhaps she thought they would receive her point better if she focused on the pleasure of powder, even if it wasn’t actually all bliss. But in reality, she had learned that happiness was more than pleasure. Constant, daily environmental awareness made skiing more meaningful, if not always more fun. Just the fact that she could not manipulate the weather or the snow clarified for her the role humans should play in the world. She took this to mean that humans abide by forces in the environment, not the other way around. Accepting this double-edge sword was another way to turn over control. Community blossomed among other skiers who hitched their hearts to this particular type of snow, sharing cycles of longing for new powder as well as the euphoric release of its arrival. The letters LaChapelle wrote to Ed during the winter of 1949-1950, seemingly just about the weather, are in fact a front-row seat to her consciousness raising.

5. CASE STUDY: THE PERUVIAN GULCH AVALANCHE OF 1963

LaChapelle’s 12th winter in Alta, the season of 1962-1963, began with an even worse drought. “All of us powder snow skiers were on edge with the continual hope that each time it clouded up it would snow, but each time the clouds vanished, and day after day no snow fell... For a powder skier this is devastating,” she wrote. (LaChapelle, 1993) As the pattern wore on week after week,

jittery antsiness and unfulfilled expectations hardened into real tension. She and Ed bickered. There was only waiting, only skiing the same packed-down, cut up, “dead” snow again and again. There was enough to cover the ski trails, but off-piste conditions were hairy, littered with downed trees, stumps, and other obstacles. January and February came in dry and went out dry. There was no doodling.

On March 1, the weather shifted. “Finally, the new snow arrived—beautiful powder—longed for, anticipated, delighted in now that it had arrived,” she wrote. (LaChapelle, 1993) The storm was “short but intense,” loading the skimpy snowpack with 6 to 8 inches of snow during the morning. (Gallagher, 1967) Heightened winds during the heaviest period of precipitation may have drifted snow much deeper on leeward slopes. Alta’s avalanche workers judged conditions stable by the afternoon and opened ski runs across the mountain.

By the end of the following day, with all the new powder gone, “the only thing left was the steepest of them all, the rarely skied, somewhat feared slopes above Peruvian Gulch,” LaChapelle wrote. (LaChapelle, 1993) This terrain—a wilderness outside the island of avalanche control—is steep, complex, and avalanche-prone. Accepting the risk, LaChapelle and five other skiers gathered to ski it around 5 p.m. on March 2. They practiced defensive travel protocol, like skiing one at a time and stopping to wait in protected places. After trailing behind to handle a gear malfunction, LaChapelle was at the end group. The slope allowed the first five skiers to descend through tight trees near the ridgeline into more open conifers. She followed.

But she made it only a few turns before a crack in the snow surface shot 100 feet across the slope. She shouted a warning to her companions, as the moving snow drew her into its flow. A 6 to 10-inch soft slab of new storm snow surrendered to the combination of gravity’s pull and the steep slope angle, sliding on a slick sun crust formed during the drought. The slab gained speed and mass in the open terrain at the top of the run, and when it barreled into the narrow mid-slope gullies, layers deeper down in the snowpack responded. She was pulled over two cliff bands, dragged her through trees, and smashed into rocks exposed by the shallow snowpack.

This was before the invention of avalanche transceivers, so LaChapelle’s survival hinged on staying near the top of the torrential debris. She swam towards the surface, fighting to stick out her arm. Five hundred feet below its crown, the slide

slammed into the bottom of the gulch and erupted in a cloud of snow, billowing above the aspen and willow. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of chaos lithified and the avalanche was over. “I gave up. I was completely conquered and fought not in the least when the full weight of the whole slope of snow came down on me,” LaChapelle wrote. (LaChapelle, 1993) She was fully buried except for one gloved hand.

She woke up in the hospital the following morning encased in plaster from her chest to her toes. Lucky to survive, she dislocated her right hip and fractured bones in her left leg. Between visitors, LaChapelle reflected on her nearly fatal obsession with powder, revisiting years of memorable avalanche encounters as far back as her Colorado Mountain Club days. This was not the first avalanche she had experienced, but it was by far the most brutal. At night, when she could not sleep, she began to fantasize about her love of powder snow, literally imagining an affair with a wily but magnetic and satisfying partner. Later, this evolved into a short, untitled satire, likely drafted while healing in her Little Cottonwood cabin that spring.

Published in *Deep Powder Snow*, the essay described her avalanche encounters as a cat-and-mouse affair. As the flirtation progressed, her lover grew stealthier and more cunning, she in turn developed better tactics, and their encounters became more thrilling. The narrative moved through passion, jealousy, trickery, and betrayal. She coyly tried to maintain her upper hand, but just as often as she evaded him, he caught her. When she dropped into the Peruvian Gulch in March 1963, the love affair was peaking in its intensity, and she was at the pinnacle of her self-delusion that she was the powerful one.

“Always a new slope to conquer, always a new man—much the same thing until there comes a day when the slope does not yield to you but instead picks you up and hurls you through the air over cliffs, smashing you against trees and almost having its final way—of destroying you, the would-be conqueror.”

She lampooned herself for acting like someone who hadn’t learned what she had learned from doodling in powder. She hadn’t fully internalized the lesson of giving up control, assuming that just because she wanted powder, she could have it. While an avalanche encounter should never be understood as a moral failure, the suggestion her essay makes is that countercultural ethics could help in avoiding them.

In the weeks and years after this near-death experience, she began writing. A folder in the Durango collection, dated 1963 and titled “When I first began writing,” contains a few short, typewritten stories about watching rain, hiking to a cave, and skiing. One vignette describes skiing Yellow Trail at Alta late in the day. She and her partners sped to the untouched snow, scoping out their lines while traversing across the top. Two friends behind her shouted that they were dropping into an early gully, and moments later, she turned, too. She wrote,

“I pointed my skis downhill and went into the first turn. It was good. The snow responded beautifully and the skis came up of their own power and slid sensuously into the next turn. Now it was right. Just the yielding perfection of powder. No effort... Pushing the skis down into the snow. The soft yielding of the snow, the gentle resistance almost sensuous as the snow responds, raising your skis into position for the next turn. Then again the yielding flow of the snow.”

Again and again, in this and the other vignettes, LaChapelle described the climax of experience as powder yielding to her, and her to it. She returned to skiing after a near-death experience with a longing for this feeling, which may have seemed like the opposite of conquering: consent. And it wasn’t just her duty to yield, it was also her *pleasure*. As an emerging writer and scholarly thinker, these were the ideas she worked through first. They remained core values in her land ethic, for decades to come. Few things yield better than snow, the being LaChapelle named as her most significant teacher. It is intimately sensitive to weather, gravity, humans, and all the other beings it interacts with. Deep powder snow depends on especially temporary conditions. LaChapelle tried to be just as open to letting the environment change *her*.

6. DISCUSSION: KINSHIP VS. CONTROL

LaChapelle wrote about “ritual sayings” that she and her partners used to “prevent the arrogance of humanism.” Sometimes solemn, sometimes silly, they’d pause at the top of a run and ask each other, “do you think it’s ready for us?” (LaChapelle, 1993) On the day of the Peruvian Gulch slide, she and her partners did discuss the hazard before deciding to ski that zone. What answer could they have heard in response to a “ritual saying” that would have made a difference? The actual answers lie in evidence-based, scientific methods. Perhaps, for ethical considerations, nailing down an answer is less important than being a person who asks.

Assemblages do not come together and fall apart innocently and equally. There is a basic shared obligation to the assemblage itself, an obligation to show up and participate without the intention of preventing the expression of others. All beings bring needs, desires, or agendas to assemblages, but the most powerful beings like humans (or avalanches) sometimes express themselves so forcefully that they appropriate all the agency. LaChapelle worried that Euro-American attitudes of conquest and control limit the participation of most other beings, human and non-human. A discussion of the technical aspects of LaChapelle's ethics calls for engagement with Heidegger's work on the fourfold and mutual appropriation. (Heidegger, 1971, 1977)

But even without that, the denizens of avalanche country—those subject to the governance of snow and gravity—can draw some normative claims from her LaChapelle's experience. Her ethics lie in her on-going relationships with non-human beings, not in any particular claims about what to do or not to do. As she wrote in a note to herself, undated but likely from the early 1980s, "Answers are not an accomplished fact... nothing is the answer in itself—the answer lies in the coming together of events, processes." (Durango Private Collection)

Given the assemblages that currently exist in avalanche country, control is needed to keep people safe. Millions of people live near, travel through, work in, recreate on, and otherwise engage with potentially fatal combinations of snow and gravity on a daily basis. Even if a yielding approach to avalanche mitigation is impractical (or at least very radical), kin relations are not. LaChapelle's story is not a hero's arc; she did not stride along a journey towards an ever-more-perfect understanding of reality, and an ever-more-perfect practice of right relationship. She did not have (or need) a pure, pristine landscape in order to explore these questions. Developing the Way of the Mountain was a life-long learning process for LaChapelle. She didn't always ask first. She didn't always yield. She overlooked some of her own implications. What did she think about the bombing that echoed through Little Cottonwood Canyon? Did she have reservations about Ed treating lab-grown depth hoar with chemical vapors? (E. LaChapelle, 1962) Did it bother her that everyone around her talked about avalanches as man's natural enemy? Despite her interest in exactly this kind of power dynamic, she never turned her attention to critique avalanche control. But avalanche workers know the power of snow better than anyone. Atwater asked his snow rangers to report the "framus of the frumentum," a "pretentious

expression with no meaning," invented to poke fun at the hubris of attempting to pin down something so spirited. (Atwater, 1968) This testifies to the possibility for intimate and reciprocal relationship with non-human nature even when the assemblage is dominated by capitalism and colonialism. Even when the powder snow is not unlimited. What matters most is the commitment to developing bonds with places and the beings there, and the openness to their influence.

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Figure 1: (L-R) Ed, Randy, and Dolores LaChapelle at Alta. LaChapelle Estate, Durango.

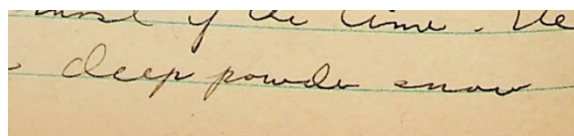


Figure 2: Possibly the first mention of "deep powder snow" in LaChapelle's journals. February 2, 1946, age 19. LaChapelle Estate, Durango.

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