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"Charting Environmental Concerns: Reactions to Hydraulic Public Works in Eighteenth-Century France"

Reynard, Pierre Claude

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[doi:10.3197/096734003129342845](https://doi.org/10.3197/096734003129342845). The optimism characteristic of the Enlightenment multiplied initiatives designed to secure and improve the milieus within which Europeans earned a precarious living, notably through greater control of hydraulic resources. This paper examines the reactions triggered by many such important public works undertaken in Old Regime France. The debates that accompanied most projects did not systematically challenge the positivist assumptions standing behind these improving ambitions, nor did they formulate an alternative vision centred around an appreciation of the intrinsic value of nature. However, they greatly advanced reflections on natural phenomena, drawing attention to their geographical and temporal limits, their internal complexity, as well as crucial socio-cultural frontiers. They mark an important stage toward the conceptualisation of ecosystems and the formation of ecology, and remind us that these forward-looking ventures were, like all human interventions upon the natural environment, hybrid ventures—both conditioned by nature and bound to alter it. All rights reserved. © 2003 The White Horse Press

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