

# Atenea



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José M. Irizarry, Nandita Batra ©

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Special Issue  
on **Humans and  
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and social sciences

# ATENEA

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REVISTA BILINGÜE DE LA FACULTAD DE ARTES Y CIENCIAS  
DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO, RECINTO DE MAYAGÜEZ

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## **ATENEA**

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## ÍNDICE / TABLE OF CONTENTS

Número especial sobre **los humanos y el ambiente**  
Special Edition on **Humans and the Environment**

### ENSAYOS / ESSAYS

ANTONIA NAVARRO-TEJERO - Placing Women and Ecology at the Heart of Modern Development Discourse: Vandana Shiva Interviewed by Antonia Navarro-Tejero .....	9
LAURA BRAVO - Reflexiones ecológicas: intervenciones artísticas en y por la naturaleza.....	17
J. SHANTZ - The Talking Nature Blues: Radical Ecology, Discursive Violence and the Constitution of Counter-hegemonic Politics .....	39
SABINE HÖHLER - "Carrying Capacity" – the Moral Economy of the "Coming Spaceship Earth" .....	59
OPHELIA SELAM - Ecofeminism or Death: Humans, Identity, and the Environment.....	75
JOSÉ ANAZAGASTY-RODRÍGUEZ - Re-valuing Nature: Environmental Justice Pedagogy, Environmental Justice Ecocriticism and the Textual Economies of Nature.....	93
KATHRYN FERGUSON - Submerged Realities: Shark Documentaries at Depth .....	115
HOLLY E. MARTIN - Hybrid Landscapes as Catalysts for Cultural Reconciliation in Leslie Marmon Silko's <i>Ceremony</i> and Rudolfo Anaya's <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> .....	131

THOMAS GIRSHIN - Preserving the Body of Earth: An Ethic of Intercorporeality in Morrison's <i>Be/loved</i> .....	151
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## **POESÍA / POETRY**

ASHTON NICHOLS - Swamp Dweller; A Message to the Muse; There is no Noonday; Fisherman; The Flowers are as Dead; The Tree House; Bobcat.....	167
ROHIT SHARMA - On a Summer's Night; Autumn; Winter .....	173

## **ENSAYOS / *ESSAYS***





## **PLACING WOMEN AND ECOLOGY AT THE HEART OF MODERN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE: VANDANA SHIVA INTERVIEWED BY ANTONIA NAVARRO-TEJERO**

*Antonia Navarro-Tejero*

Born in Dehra Dun, a town in India in the foothills of the Himalayas, in 1952, Vandana Shiva is a physicist, philosopher, ecofeminist, writer and science policy advocate. She got her Ph.D. from the University of Western Ontario in 1978, after which she did research at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore. Back in her native town, Dr. Vandana Shiva founded the “Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology” (RFSTE) in 1982, which has been working on biodiversity conservation and protecting people’s rights from threats to their livelihoods and environment by centralized systems of monoculture in forestry, agriculture and fisheries. Initiatives of this foundation are the organic farming programme, Navdanya, founded in 1991 as a national movement to protect the diversity and integrity of living resources, especially native seeds. Navdanya has also helped establish ARISE, a national alliance for organic agriculture which is the most broad-based and dynamic network to promote sustainable agriculture. Another of her initiatives is the Living Democracy Movement, and she is also a leader of the international campaign on Food Rights, for people’s right to knowledge and food security.

Vandana Shiva’s contributions range from agriculture, generic resources and food security to intellectual property rights, biodiversity, ecology and gender, using both intellectual inputs and grassroots campaigns. She has been an important figure in putting pressure on the World Bank, and initiated major movements in India on World Trade Organization issues. She has internationally campaigned against genetic engineering, and her contribution to gender issues has shifted the perception of “Third World” women. She participated in the 1970s in the Chipko movement, of women hugging the trees to prevent their felling. She founded the gender unit at the International

Centre for Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu. She also launched in 1998 an international movement of women working on food, agriculture, patents and biotechnology called “Diverse Women for Diversity.”

Vandana Shiva has lectured worldwide on environment, feminism and economic development issues, and is recipient of numerous international awards. Besides her academic and research contributions, Dr. Shiva has also served as an ecology adviser to governments in India and abroad as well as NGOs such as the International Forum on Globalisation, Women’s Environment and Development Organisation and Third World Network, and the Asia Pacific People’s Environment Network. She is also a figure of the Anti-globalization movement. A contributing editor to People-Centered Development Forum, she has also written numerous books, including *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1988), *Close to Home: Women Reconnect Ecology, Health and Development Worldwide* (1994), and edited *Minding Our Lives: Women From the South and North Reconnect Ecology and Health* (1993), *Ecofeminism* (1993) with Maria Mies, and *Biopolitics: A Feminist and Ecological Reader on Biotechnology* (1995) with Ingunn Moser.

This interview was conducted in the New Delhi RFSTE office, India, November 2004.<sup>1</sup>

**ANTONIA NAVARRO-TEJERO:** Doctor Shiva, could you tell us a little about the project that you are involved in at the moment?

**VANDANA SHIVA:** Well, you know, at one level I don’t think of what I do as projects because they don’t have a beginning and they don’t have an end in terms of resources that make things possible. I have engagement and my engagement is driven from issues of justice, particularly gender justice, ecological justice and also the urgency of certain things that must be done, otherwise the cost to nature, to human beings, is just too high. So in that context, you know, I started to work on environmental issues because of the *Chipko* movement, and the work I started then by diversity continues till today.

**ANT:** How successful is the Schumacher College in India?

**VS:** We’re having a course right now, and yeah, it’s going very well! In fact Satish is there teaching and then there is the Prime

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<sup>1</sup> I have to thank my graduate students at -Universidad de Córdoba, María Jesús López Sánchez-Vizcaíno and Nitesh Gurbanl, for having enthusiastically and patiently transcribed the interview.

Minister of Tibetan government in exile. This course is on Gandhi and non-violence and teaching. It's going very well, I'm very happy. We founded it. I was in Bhopal for the 20th anniversary, and one of the things that has come out of the Schumacher College in India is that some of the best minds of the country have got together and decided to open what they call the Freedom University, which in India translates into *Swaraj Vidhyapeeth*. Our Schumacher College is called *Beej Vidhyapeeth* which in English means School of the Seeds, literally because of where we sell our seeds and organic farming. So this Freedom University is going to be literally an open free University for giving young people an opportunity to have non-manipulated education, education that is about the real world, information about how things are really happening. And they just selected me as new chancellor for this new University that intellectuals of India are starting to keep our intellectual freedom alive.

**ANT:** Great, congratulations! How did the twist happen, from working in the Chipko movement to the Schumacher College?

**VS:** In the mid 80's largely as a result of the Bhopal disaster of which we've just had 20 years, Punjab violence or terrorism and the emergence of the new globalization, I decided to focus on seeds, saving seeds, promoting an agriculture that didn't need toxics, didn't need corporations, didn't need demonstrations. And the organizations I founded for doing that work continue to do that on a very big scale beyond, I would imagine. We are kind of the organization that gives the support. It holds all these movements, technical training, we do the practical work, we do the research, we do the analysis, we do everything. But to this got added issues of water in the last few years, and right now I'm involved in dealing with the cities' water being privatized by Suez, and I guess in half an hour I'll be sitting with the Water Unions to work out a strategy. I'm dealing with Coke and Pepsi mining ground water, we've just finished meetings for a national action in January in Bhopal. We were there to show that Bhopal, which killed 30,000 people because of a toxic gas leak from a pesticide plant, continues in other forms of pesticides, GMO's, as well as the toxics in the so-called soft drinks that are not very soft because they are loaded by all kinds of chemicals, and our farmers are now using this pesticide by the way. The spraying of Coke and Pepsi is more effective in killing pests than pesticides themselves. So we connected it all and then we just load that. In the way I can tie up our work, our current work in terms of trees, tree sovereignty, tree freedoms, freedom of the seed, the freedom of our food, and the freedom of our work.

**ANT:** Could you bring women into your discussion on the privatization of water?

**VS:** Well, for water it is very clear. In the Third World women carry the water to get it home. They are the first ones to know water is polluted. They are the first to know the well has run dry. They are the first to know water is saline. They are the canary of the eco-crisis. Many women are starting to commit suicide because they can't walk the water and the government of India has canceled every local water scheme in favor of Suez, the world's biggest water company which wants to privatize the Ganges. So not only are rural communities denied the water, they are denied the public investment to bring water if their own village has run dry. So we have women jumping into the Ganges because now the Ganges instead of being their mother for life has become a graveyard. So it is, in a way, a system of dispossessing the poor. Women in the hills are being denied water so that every drop of Ganges water can flow down to be sold. So globalization commodifies the resources that are necessary for survival. There is also a group of tribal women who are fighting Coca-Cola, in the South of India, which is sucking out 1.5 million liters a day of water for the bottling of what is called India. And the Coca-Cola bottled water. Interestingly, two miles radius, every tank, every well is dry. Women have no drinking water. That's how it plays out.

**ANT:** You also worked in the gender unit of the International Centre for Mountain Development in Kathmandu...

**VS:** I founded it. I don't work there any more—I founded it; I started it. I was there to start it for a year. I come from Dehra Dun, up in the mountains and my main area of work is the mountain area, so I took time off from my work here in India to be in Nepal, in Kathmandu, and started the International Centre. But in 1982 I made a personal decision that I would do research, academic research and teaching only part-time. I would give my time to building movements and creating sort of societies, institutions... So yeah, I mean, those are comfortable jobs that pay you very well, but there's only so much you can do through them.

**ANT:** Your book *Staying Alive* has been a valuable reference for ecofeminism since its publication. Did it change your career in any way?

**VS:** Totally, really, first of all because it shifted my perception. Being involved with Chipko, the involvement in the crushed roots environmental movements which were women's movements, elected my own mind going through a deep overhaul, it was like my mind got

whitewashed. And that led me initially to give up my job because I wanted to work more on these areas and I wanted to work more on the knowledge that the women had but was never from the Universities. And I wanted to work in a way that knowledge would have space. Someone asked me when I do the research for this. I never made the research: I lived it—that is my life. But that kind of knowledge that women have is not counted as knowledge in the formal systems so I decided to leave the formal systems and build alternative institutions, like the research foundation, international movement called “Diverse Women for Diversity,” just to give bigger space to all of that. So I changed, I mean, a fundamental change. I still would be a physicist if it wasn’t for that period. And the book changed things for me very dramatically, I suppose. You write a book like that, you are a standard physicist, you are an outcast in certain circles, and you are loved in others, you know. It totally changed my circles.

**ANT:** Actually my next question was about this movement, “Diverse Women for Diversity,” can you bring that into this discussion?

**VS:** Well, you know, some of us had been dealing with the issue of life patenting and genetic engineering. Now it is a 20 year movement. And some of us were very involved in the international negotiations. And I remember sitting around the negotiators one day and I looked around and I said “My God, every scientist here is a woman” and we decided that it was time to organize ourselves. And we literally sat, we were in a pizza shop and on a paper napkin, we wrote “What do we stand for?” You know, and four of us, all women scientists, wrote down a twisted form and started ‘Diverse Women for Diversity.’ And it’s a very self-organized kind of movement so we have steering committee members in each continent and as issues come up, you know, the kind of support, respond, but together we highlight certain priorities. We grew up out of the fight against genetic engineering and life patenting. But last year, though, earlier this year, there was the World Social Forum, we formed a whole new network on water issues and have all in our ways made a difference to the food politics in our countries and we have a very long campaign—I don’t know, millions of signatures—, around a statement that we wrote together about keeping food security in women’s hands and through that, major conferences were organized in our field. But we see ourselves as really catalysts that prevent the women’s movement from being redefined and strangulated by world banking; because of the world banking’s huge money to tell women ‘say this,’ ‘stop this,’ ‘write this.’ There are issues that affect women, our food, our water... You show me one law that comes to say how are women’s rights to water are

getting affected, you know, how are women's rights to food getting affected by this new global economy. So we are basically stubborn women who continue to raise the real issues, we won't be silenced. And the reason we call ourselves "Diverse Women for Diversity" is because we're very clear that cultural diversity is a very positive value, but in spite of cultural diversity, we have common values at the human level, you know. We have a common humanity, but we have huge diversity, and the two are not inconsistent with each other. And it is for that respect for diversity we call ourselves "Diverse Women for Diversity." We come from different places, we come from different continents, and some of us are white, and some of us are black, but it doesn't matter, you know. To all of us it's very clear, patenting of life is immoral, illogical, greedy, perverse.

**ANT:** But does the word "feminism" acquire any meaning for you?

**VS:** Well, you know, I'm not a very—well—deep person, you know. I never believed too much in the singular meaning of words. You know, I think all words have many meanings and I guess growing up in an Indian culture, you realize that part of what you are taught when you are little. In Sanskrit texts they give a word and you have to give it its thousand other words, equal words. So like, we have songs of the Ganges, which is all the thousand names of the Ganga, we have *Lalita*, which is a poem to the divine goddess, the thousand names of the goddess, you know, which are the different forms in which women's energy expresses itself; that's all it is, you know, anger and love and ferociousness and all the different dimensions. So for me, words themselves are one pluralistic multiple and I think feminism became meaningful to me when it started to get written decades—two decades—ago, that feminism was dead. We didn't need it any more because we'd had a Margaret Thatcher, we'd had a Madeleine Albright, so feminism was over. You know, I mean, I've come from a public background, doctoral thesis, I studied in North America, and I know this much: one Vandana Shiva getting a PhD doesn't change the status of ordinary Indian women and to say that feminism is not needed any more or the struggle for justice is not needed any more...what you put into the word "feminism" is up to the women, you know, but that we don't have to struggle for justice any more, I don't think that's true. I don't think, I don't think a few women making it in the patriarchal world makes patriarchy benign for the rest of women.

**ANT:** Right, so what is the connection of globalization to the life of women? Is it helping women in any way?

**VS:** No, it's not. We've just finished, my colleague, no this is not the one... just finished two studies for a national commission for women. This commission has to look at what WTO has done and globalization has done to women in agriculture and what it has done to women's rights work. And you know, we were required to hold public hearings on these issues, which meant we went into really remote areas and women would come, thousands of women would come and stand and give the evidence, so it was. Ah, you know, I have my own assessments but this, the stories we had showed us that the impact of globalization is much worse than what we had imagined. Globalization is destroying livelihoods on a very, very big scale, farmers' livelihoods, weavers' livelihood, you know, the basic livelihoods of people; when livelihoods go, people still have to survive. We found in very many areas, first of all large numbers of suicides which are studies we've done. But the women would be left behind to look after the children, with no land because the land is gone. Because the death was the cause of the suicide and the loss of the land, the loss of the house, so you have a woman who is now a landless woman. But the worst situation was that the villages, communities, regions where one third of the women are making their survival by selling their bodies. So the growth, if you were to ask me what has globalization done to women: it has taken every skill, every productive capacity, every aspect of their means of production at the largest social economic level and left them so destitute that the only way they can survive is by participating in the trafficking of women. And another thing that has happened, and another thing that our study has shown is in the pocket, you know, India is a very unequal country in the sense that there are pockets that are very poor, there are pockets that are high growth, there are pockets much more integrated to the global economy, some regions totally left out; and what our study showed was that areas that have most integrated themselves into the global economy and are high-growth regions, are also the areas with the female feticide as the highest. So there is direct correlation between patriarchal definitions of economic growth and what I call the disposability of women.

**ANT:** OK, so that is it—congratulations for all your work. I really thank you.

*Antonia Navarro-Tejero*  
Universidad de Córdoba  
Spain

and Fulbright Visiting Scholar at University of California at Berkeley  
United States of America





## REFLEXIONES ECOLÓGICAS: INTERVENCIONES ARTÍSTICAS EN Y POR LA NATURALEZA

Laura Bravo

Un desolador vaticinio, reflejo de la actualidad

Nadie puede tener una respuesta totalmente certera, pero intentemos por unos minutos imaginar cómo será la vida en nuestro planeta dentro de algunas décadas, varios siglos quizás. Si para ello hiciéramos uso del imaginario visual que el cine de tinte futurista o de ciencia ficción nos ha legado, con fragmentos de películas como *Mad Max*, *Blade Runner*, o las sagas de *Matrix* y *Terminator*, tendríamos en nuestra mente el retrato de un mundo caótico y apocalíptico, en el que la tecnología deshumaniza el sistema de vida y donde el paisaje natural ha sido destruido, es en ocasiones de horizontes desérticos y estériles, o donde impera la sobrepoblación y la inmundicia urbana.

Sin embargo, no estamos en el terreno de la ciencia ficción cuando exploramos algunos aspectos de la situación actual del planeta. El comportamiento generado por el ser humano y un nuevo estilo de vida construido sobre crecientes avances tecnológicos e industriales han arrastrado a tal extremo la degradación del medioambiente que la disminución progresiva de la biodiversidad se ha convertido en un asunto cotidiano, con decenas de miles de especies animales y vegetales en peligro de extinción.<sup>1</sup> El mundo del arte, nunca ajeno a la problemática social de cada época, se ha unido a la denuncia de los comportamientos que dañan la armonía medioambiental, a través de la concienciación sobre asuntos como la emisión de gases contaminantes, la deforestación, los vertidos de sustancias tóxicas en ríos y mares, los residuos nucleares o el cultivo de especies vegetales genéticamente modificadas.

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<sup>1</sup> Sobre este asunto, pueden consultarse algunas de las condiciones actuales del planeta en [www.redlist.org](http://www.redlist.org) y [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org).

## Pioneros en la confluencia entre arte y naturaleza

Uno de los primeros destellos de este espíritu que concentra sus intereses en la naturaleza comienza a surgir a finales de los años sesenta, a través de una diversidad de trabajos agrupados conceptualmente bajo el nombre de Land Art. Sería necesario indicar que esta tendencia artística no contaba entre sus planteamientos conceptuales o ideológicos con una reivindicación ecológica clara y estructurada (Hernando 58-59). La línea que se dirigiría en mayor medida hacia esta postura, calificable como “arte ecológico”, nacería en la exposición homónima (*Ecologic Art*) que se abrió en 1969 en la neoyorquina John Gibson Gallery, en la que toman parte artistas que estuvieron presentes un año anterior en la muestra llamada *Earthworks*, bandera del Land Art. Tal hecho denota que ambas tendencias compartían un ideario principal, centrado en atacar el tradicional concepto de obra de arte como objeto portátil, en sustituirlo por materiales naturales y en abandonar el espacio expositivo del museo como receptáculo sagrado que lo acogía y a la galería como base de su fin mercantil y lucrativo, para finalmente optar por un escenario en el entorno de la naturaleza (Hernando 59).

Artistas como Michael Heizer, que desarrolló su obra desde 1968, sin auspicio alguno, dentro de los parámetros del Land Art, anuncian su convicción de que los museos y sus colecciones se hallan repletas y de que sus suelos están hundiéndose, por lo que escapan a espacios naturales como los desiertos del Oeste americano, donde él afirmaba haber encontrado “esa especie de espacio no violado, pacífico y religioso que los artistas han tratado de introducir en su trabajo” (Michael Heizer 34). En este camino demuestran su fascinación por el espacio y la experiencia del paisaje, por el tiempo geológico y por su condición de fruto del pasado milenar (Fineberg 325). Sus actitudes, de hecho, son incluso emparentadas con la búsqueda de lo sublime en la naturaleza por el espíritu artístico americano de los años sesenta y setenta, el cual hundiría sus raíces más cercanas en el éxtasis a través de la creación artística, con ejemplos paradigmáticos en el *Lighting Field* de Walter de Maria o el *Spiral Jetty* de Smithson, cuya obra se comenta a continuación (Hughes 570).

Robert Smithson, uno de los pioneros más influyentes del Land Art, marcó un rumbo determinante en la elección de materiales o entornos naturales para sus obras, especialmente con su concepto de *sites* y *nonsites*, términos que eligió para denominar obras de arte concebidas para ser creadas y/o expuestas en un espacio natural concreto y determinado por el artista, con el fin de intensificar la armonía con el ambiente natural que circunda, o bien obras de esos

mismos materiales naturales pero disociadas de su original procedencia y que podrían ser expuestas en cualquier espacio (entrevista de Smithson editada por Lipke). Smithson continúa cuestionando de tal modo la idea renacentista de un arte centrado exclusivamente en el ser humano y apuesta por el protagonismo del paisaje, especialmente el de creación artificial por parte del artista, del que es un ejemplo paradigmático su *Spiral Jetty* [Ilust. 1]. Este muelle artificial de mil quinientos pies de longitud, creado en 1970 en el Great Salt Lake de Utah, con rocas de basalto y caliza, se halla hoy prácticamente desintegrado por la misma acción de las aguas del lago. Smithson escribiría dos años después de la consecución de su *Muelle en espiral* acerca del hallazgo de este *site*, un lugar que encontró inundado de residuos industriales y vehículos abandonados, del cual se había intentado sin fortuna extraer petróleo, relatando además sus razones para construirlo en esta particular forma geométrica (texto completo en Kepes 222-232).



Ilust. 1. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970.

Con aquella obra, junto con su *Spiral Hill and Broken Circle*, creados en 1971 en Emmem (Holanda), Smithson profundiza en su concienciación sobre el deterioro de los paisajes naturales, dando forma a su intención de que los espacios industriales, cubiertos de desperdicios y olvidados tras el abandono humano, fueran considerados como monumentos entrópicos y como ejemplos de una estética de la desesperanza (Fineberg 329). Por tanto, Smithson reflexiona acerca del estado de contaminación o de ruina industrial de

los *sítes* en los que trabaja, a los que a su vez dotaba de una solución práctica al problema que denunciaba, al reciclar agua o tierra de sus entornos, en unos términos compartidos por el *Earth Art* (Smithson citado por Beardsley 23). Este artista, fallecido en 1973, a los 35 años, mientras sobrevolaba en avioneta su *Spiral Jetty*, consideraba que las actividades industriales en el paisaje eran consecuencia inevitable de un estilo de vida que el ser humano había desarrollado para sí mismo, pero a su vez llamando la atención sobre la falta de sensibilidad hacia el paisaje que éste mostraba en sus intervenciones. Smithson comentaría cómo “el arte se puede convertir en una fuente intermediaria entre el ecologista y el industrial. La ecología y la industria no son calles de único sentido, y deberían ser calles que se cruzan. El arte puede ayudar a proveer la necesaria dialéctica entre ellas” (Smithson citado en Holt 220). Se trata, sin duda alguna, de un determinante pionero en el asunto que se tratará a continuación.

### **Arte como denuncia de la degradación medioambiental**

Entre la denuncia y la acción, y entre la obra de arte y el activismo ecologista, en los años setenta comienza a surgir un notable número de artistas que, más allá de lamentarse por la desoladora situación de algunos entornos naturales, emprenden su particular cruzada por la concienciación del público y las autoridades. Curiosamente, a espaldas de aquellas exposiciones anteriormente referidas como un hito en la fusión de intereses entre arte y naturaleza, uno de los primeros artistas que desarrollan su obra con una manifiesta voluntad de reflexión ecológica es el alemán Hans Haacke (Hernando 59). En 1970, Haacke levanta el *Monumento a la contaminación en la playa*, en la costa de la provincia española de Almería, conformado con tableros de madera y otros residuos abandonados y recogidos con tal fin en estas orillas del Mar Mediterráneo [Ilust. 2]. Tres años después, en *Planta depuradora de las aguas del Rhin*, en el museo alemán Haus Lange, exhibe un contenedor de metacrilato que recibía agua contaminada de este río alemán, cuyos residuos eran purificados a través de unos filtros y pasaba a un segundo recipiente de ese mismo material, donde vivían en óptimas condiciones unos peces introducidos en él.

En ese mismo sentido de puesta en evidencia de la contaminación medioambiental, un particular, aun en ocasiones velado, espíritu ecológico se manifestaría también a través de la atmósfera. El 4 de marzo de 1969, Robert Barry libera en el aire de las playas de Malibú un litro de argón, como parte de una serie de devoluciones de gases naturales a la atmósfera llamada *Inert Gas Series* que



Ilust. 2. Hans Haacke, *Monumento a la contaminación en la playa*, Almería, 1970.

este artista norteamericano realizó durante dos meses en la costa californiana. Según Barry, él elegía trabajar con gas inerte por su calidad imperceptible, diáfana, opuesta al tradicional objeto artístico material, y porque además no le es posible combinarse con otro elemento, continuando su expansión en la atmósfera y variando su forma constante e indefinidamente, sin que pueda ser observado por el ojo humano (Robert Barry en Osborne 82).

La conciencia generada ante la explotación de los recursos naturales y el almacenamiento indiscriminado de residuos tóxicos para el medioambiente trajo consigo una creciente y fortalecida reivindicación artística a través de la intervención directa en zonas perjudicadas. La neoyorquina Patricia Johanson trabajó en la restauración de un lago en Fair Park, Dallas, a través del diseño de senderos, puentes y vallas de similitudes morfológicas a las de la vegetación acuática local, que como material contaba con lirios, juncos o sauces reales, apelando a la conservación del ecosistema antes perdido [Ilust. 3]. Como otros artistas contemporáneos, Johanson intentaba reconciliar la creación artística de carácter medioambiental con unos propósitos sociales, debido al hastío que sentían por el hecho de que los centros de la cultura para los ciudadanos estuvieran solamente representados a través de cemento y piedra (Beardsley 101).

En el mismo sentido, Nancy Holt desarrolló un proyecto bautizado con el nombre de *Sky Mound*, entre 1984 y 1994, en el intento



Ilust. 3. Patricia Johanson, *Fair Park Lagoon*, Dallas, 1981-1986.

de convertir en un híbrido entre parque y obra de arte una zona del norte de New Jersey rodeada de vías de tren y que durante años había servido como vertedero de basura y residuos industriales [Ilust. 4]. Holt pretendía que este titánico proyecto se convirtiera “de una zona dañada, a un centro generador de vida” (citada por Bijvoet),



Ilust. 4. Nancy Holt, *Sky Mound*, New Jersey, 1984-1994.



en el cual se representarían además símbolos astronómicos a través de algunos de sus elementos naturales, como arcos de metal, pirámides de hierba o montículos de tierra. El proyecto, financiado por el National Endowment for the Arts y otras instituciones de diversa naturaleza, tendría como propósito principal el uso humano y el de la fauna salvaje que allí se reinstalaría (Beardsley 102-103).

Sin embargo, numerosos proyectos como los que aquí se están exponiendo encontrarían también puntos de vista detractores, en ocasiones entre la misma crítica de arte, que, lejos de encontrar un sentido ecologista o de denuncia sobre la situación del medioambiente en ellos, llegaban a considerar sus resultados como nocivos. Uno de los casos de mayor relevancia fue el de la obra *Double Negative*, de Michael Heizer, consistente en unos cortes en la superficie de una árida zona natural de Nevada, y exhibida documentalmente en la Dwan Gallery de Nueva York en 1968, de la que la crítica afirmó cómo “el *Earth Art*, con muy pocas excepciones, no sólo no mejora el medioambiente, sino que lo destruye” (traducción mía de Ausping 1) [Ilust. 5].

Una situación similar le sucede repetidamente a la pareja artística formada por Christo y Jeanne-Claude, un matrimonio de origen búlgaro y francoarroquí respectivamente, que ha dedicado toda su carrera a intervenciones temporales, financiadas exclusivamente por ellos mismos, en espacios naturales o en conocidos monumentos arquitectónicos con el recurrente empleo de grandes extensiones



Ilust. 5. Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, Overton, Nevada, 1969-1970.



de tela que cubren el espacio empleado en la obra. Así sucede en *Running Fence*, una larga valla compuesta de aluminio y unos cuarenta kilómetros de nylon que recorrieron durante dos semanas el Norte de California hasta llegar al Pacífico, o en *Wrapped Coast*, conformada por casi dos kilómetros y medio de tela que envolvían las costas de Little Bay, en Australia. Pero quizás las que en mayor medida conciernen al tema que nos ocupa son sus *Surrounded Islands*, once pequeñas islas de Biscayne Bay, en el Greater Miami en Florida, rodeadas de más de seiscientos mil metros cuadrados de tela rosa, por el espacio de dos semanas, en 1983. Estas pequeñas islas de construcción artificial, rodeadas de un típico paisaje urbano de rascacielos y autopistas, y que eran usadas principalmente como vertedero de basuras, fueron insufladas gracias a este proyecto de una particular belleza, tanto cromática como poética (texto completo en Baal-Teshuva 55-61) [Ilust. 6].



Ilust. 6. Christo y Jeanne-Claude, *Surrounded Islands*, Biscayne Bay, Miami, 1980-1983.

Para la consecución de sus proyectos, esta pareja de artistas debe enfrentarse a numerosas y arduas trabas políticas, legales, ambientales y de seguridad, de las que *Surrounded Islands* no fue una excepción. El permiso para este efímero trabajo fue finalmente obtenido gracias también a la exhaustiva cooperación de algunos miembros de su grupo de colaboradores, entre ellos cinco ingenieros (uno marino), biólogos marinos, un ornitólogo y un experto en mamíferos. Como resultado final, contrariamente a lo que se podría esperar en un comienzo de un proyecto de tal envergadura, el medio natural no solamente no sufrió daño alguno, sino que se benefició del trabajo de estos artistas, ya que de las islas fueron evacuadas unas cuarenta toneladas de los residuos que habitualmente las rodeaban, sin olvidar los pingües beneficios económicos que se obtuvieron a través del turismo, la publicidad o la propaganda política, a los que se suman las cuantiosas donaciones monetarias que la pareja otorgó a la ciudad de Miami para algunas de sus instituciones de preservación del medioambiente.

Retomando el asunto concreto de la concienciación de tipo ecologista, el legendario artista alemán Joseph Beuys fue protagonista de un destacable activismo político y artístico a favor de la recuperación del equilibrio medioambiental que estaba siendo destruido en progresión geométrica, y que incluso le llevó a presentarse como miembro del Partido alemán de los Verdes al Parlamento Europeo en 1979. Beuys realizaría intervenciones en la naturaleza, como cuando en 1971, junto a un grupo de colaboradores, barrió con escobas de abedul una sección del bosque Grafenberger de Dusseldorf, como medida de protesta por la tala de árboles que se planeaba con motivo de la expansión de un club de tenis en la zona. Pero uno de sus más ambiciosos proyectos de activismo por el equilibrio del medioambiente sería el de la reforestación de la ciudad alemana de Kassel, con la obra llamada *7000 Robles*, en ocasión de la exposición Documenta 7 en 1982, impulsado con las implicaciones espirituales, de fortaleza y de resistencia temporal que este árbol ha detentado tradicionalmente [Ilust. 7]. Esta acción llegaría a su fin cinco años después, cuando los últimos tres árboles se plantaron con motivo de la apertura de la Documenta 8, conformando una vasta reforestación urbana que hoy sobrevive bajo la consideración de ser una de las mayores “esculturas verdes” del mundo (Beardsley 159). Como Beuys señalaría, esta preocupación medioambiental le nacía del convencimiento de que, tras la desoladora degradación de la naturaleza, llegaría la degradación del alma humana (Hernando 65), algo que parecen ejemplificar visualmente los argumentos de las películas mencionadas al comienzo de estas páginas. Su concepto



Ilust. 7. Joseph Beuys, *7000 Robles*, Kassel, 1982-2000  
(fotografía de Günter Beer).

de la naturaleza era, por tanto, el de un sistema vivo del que somos parte y el cual modificamos, para bien o para mal, con nuestras propias acciones. En la mente de Beuys, ninguna intervención en el paisaje estaba aislada de implicaciones ecológicas o sociales, por lo que llegaría a perfilarse como un modelo de artista que lucha por el medioambiente y como un crítico cultural, un paradigma reflexivo-creativo que ha ido creciendo progresivamente desde sus trabajos (Beardsley 159).

Heredera de esta tradición inspirada por Joseph Beuys sería la también pareja artística compuesta por Helen Mayer y Newton Harrison, cuyo trabajo se concentra en viajar estudiando la problemática ecológica y de la biodiversidad de numerosas zonas de distintos continentes, con lo que han llegado a convertirse en embajadores virtuales del medioambiente a escala mundial. Así, sus proyectos, en numerosas ocasiones patrocinados por instituciones oceanográficas o auspiciados por ayudas como las Sea Grant, varían desde la creación de granjas portátiles a modo de instalaciones en museos al estudio de ecosistemas a través de mapas, fotografías, dibujos o videos que permitieran analizar y otorgar posibles soluciones para problemas de carácter medioambiental. Como ejemplo de ello nos queda la *Vision for the Green Heart of Holland*, una instalación expuesta en diversas instituciones museísticas desde 1995, en la que se proponía la construcción de un gran bosque en una zona de los Países Bajos.

Esta línea de trabajo llevada a cabo por los Harrison trae aquí a colación uno de los frentes artísticos con mayor poder de evidencia y de concienciación comunicativa en la batalla por la mejora del medioambiente. Éste es de la documentación fotográfica, al estilo del fotoperiodismo, de las agresiones inflingidas por diversos entes o personas, entre ellas la contaminación, la proliferación de vertidos residuales o la destrucción de espacios naturales a favor de construcciones industriales (sobre esta tendencia, ver Hernando 80-84), con trabajos ejemplares y de gran belleza por parte de Yann Arthus Bertrand o Alex S. MacLean, por mencionar algunos de ellos.

El escenario puertorriqueño también ha visto nacer diversas reivindicaciones de trasfondo artístico, político y ecológico, teniendo en mente las nefastas consecuencias del impacto que los ataques de la armada estadounidense perpetró sobre la isla de Vieques, entre ellas lagunas muertas, especies de aves endémicas, extensiones de terreno quemadas por bombas y napalm, municiones abandonadas por los suelos o desperdicios radiactivos que provocan la contaminación irreversible del medioambiente (Márquez y Fernández Porto 38-44). Así, el 28 de agosto de 2000, nueve artistas plásticos y de teatro, bajo la dirección de Rafael Trelles, entraron clandestinamente a la zona restringida de la Marina en defensa del paisaje viequense, ataviados con unos trajes que componían en conjunto un mapa de la isla protagonista **[Ilust. 8]**. Esta acción artística de desobediencia civil,



Ilust. 8. Rafael Trelles, *Creo en Vieques*, 28 de agosto de 2000.

que tuvo como final el arresto y juicio de todos sus componentes, serviría para manifestar ante la opinión pública mundial la situación por la que atraviesa la población de esta pequeña isla tras sesenta años de continuos bombardeos y prácticas bélicas del ejército estadounidense, especialmente la destrucción del medioambiente y de su paisaje natural (Adasme). Éste que podríamos considerar un arriesgado performance al estilo de las protestas políticas y culturales de Joseph Beuys, tendría también un paralelismo artístico-estético en las acciones de denuncia por parte de la organización internacional Greenpeace hacia las actividades, la mayor parte de las veces ilícitas, que día a día corrompen la armonía y el equilibrio del medioambiente, y que lo arrastran hacia la devastación irreversible del planeta.

Para finalizar en el retrato de este encuentro entre arte, naturaleza y lucha ecologista, y aprovechando el actual estado de escasez y encarecimiento de combustibles como el petróleo que vaticinan el cumplimiento de profecías como las planteadas por películas como *Mad Max*, cabría mencionar someramente otras reivindicaciones, en ocasiones de carácter más lúdico, pero sin restarle seriedad al asunto y efectividad a sus medios. Una de ellas es la protagonizada por el artista brasileño Cildo Meireles en la Documenta 11, en 2002, con *Disappearing Element- Disappeared Element*, la frase que aparecía en los palillos de refrescos helados, exclusivamente realizados con agua congelada, que eran vendidos en las entradas a los recintos de la exposición, y que trataba de concienciar acerca del grave problema de la escasez y el negligente uso de este vital elemento [Ilust. 9].

## **Paisajes y jardines como obras de arte**

Sin permanecer ajenos a la denuncia medioambiental, pero sí a un distinto nivel de las acciones o proyectos anteriormente comentados, existe desde estas últimas décadas una decantada atención hacia el paisaje, a su contemplación y a la experimentación sensorial de los humanos en el contacto directo con la naturaleza, realzando finalmente su estado ideal libre de la manipulación humana. El tratamiento del paisaje o el jardín como obra de arte no es un asunto novedoso de la actualidad, sino que entraña una prolongada tradición artística, que tendría su más significativa raíz en paradigmáticos complejos arquitectónicos como los Jardines Colgantes de Babilonia y en el diseño de palacios musulmanes como la Alhambra, o los europeos barrocos, como Versalles o Vaux-le-Vicomte.

Así, trasladados a la actualidad, desde los años ochenta se perfilará el interés de un grupo de creadores por el paisaje dentro



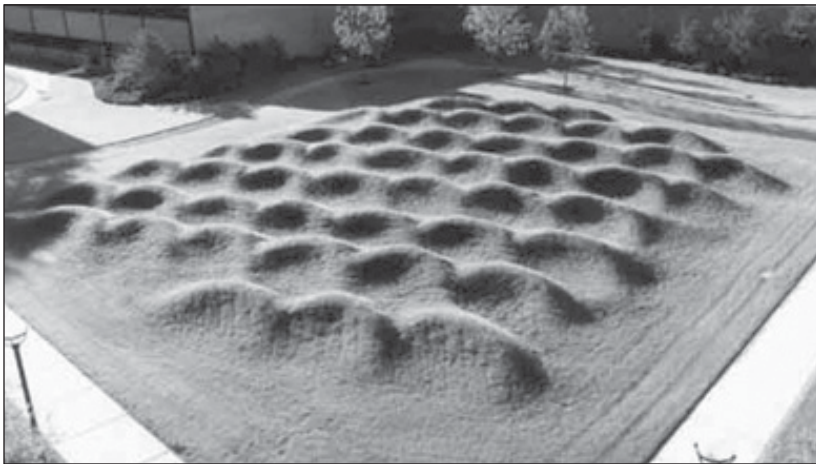
Ilust. 9. Cildo Meireles, *Disappearing Element - Disappeared Element*, Documenta 11, Kassel, 2002.

del entorno urbano, en un afán de democratización y lejos de la exclusividad de su disfrute para la realeza o la aristocracia. Como anticipo, el neoyorquino Alan Sonfist entrará en la escena del arte a través de reconstrucciones de bosques y espacios naturales, especialmente en 1977, cuando, a través del financiamiento prestado por el Departamento de Parques de la ciudad de Nueva York, terminó de levantarse en Greenwich Village su *Time Landscape*, una recreación del bosque indígena de Manhattan antes de la transformación que los europeos infligieran a la isla, con lo que lograba evocar la existencia de una naturaleza virgen previa a la colonización.

Otros artistas, como la chinoamericana Maya Lin, trabajan con un tipo de paisaje creado según unas intenciones y formas premeditadas. Lin lo afirma de esta manera: “lo que introduzco en la tierra no intenta dominar o sobrepasar el paisaje existente, sino que intenta



trabajar con él, produciendo una nueva experiencia” (traducción mía, de una conferencia citada por Beardsley 193). Así, para el Edificio de Ingeniería Aeroespacial de la Universidad de Michigan, Lin dio forma en 1995 a su *Wave Field*, un campo rectangular de cien pies cuadrados compuesto de tierra y hierba, el cual conforma montículos de hierba de formas y altura variables que recuerdan visualmente a olas marinas y que logran relacionar sus formas con la dinámica de fluidos, un asunto capital para la física de vuelo [Ilust. 10]. Lin comenta cómo su obra no es solamente una construcción paisajística, sino que también pretende tener un uso práctico, asociado a actividades recreativas para los espectadores, que en este caso concreto pueden sentarse en el interior de cada ola y, por ejemplo, leer un libro. De tal manera, otro de los objetivos de esta artista será el de evidenciar e intentar romper el daño que los humanos han ejercido sobre el medioambiente, a través de la idea de que somos también parte de la naturaleza.



Ilust. 10. Maya Lin, *Wave Field*, Michigan University, 1995.

Tal es el alcance de esta reflexión que los artistas provocan en la conciencia urbana y en el poder político, que se irá desarrollando paulatinamente el crecimiento de los proyectos de arte público como medida de mejora de las condiciones medioambientales en el entorno urbano. La tradición de estos trabajos se extiende a la preocupación decimonónica por insuflar con una “inyección de naturaleza” el grisáceo entorno cotidiano de hacinamiento, contaminación y cemento de la ciudad, con ejemplos culminantes como los Bulevares de Haussmann en el París de Napoleón III o como

los vastos parques en capitales cosmopolitas como el neoyorquino Central Park, el londinense Hyde Park, o los Jardins de Luxembourg y los Champs Elysées también en la capital francesa. Gracias a la presencia de la naturaleza, los beneficios de estos diseños repercutían en el mejoramiento de las condiciones salubres en el corazón de la ciudad, así como en la calidad de vida y las actividades recreativas de sus habitantes.

Herederos de esos parques paradigmáticos son el miamense Bayfront Park, diseñado por Isamu Noguchi, o los diseños de Martin Puryear para el neoyorquino Battery Park. El hecho de que estos espacios públicos sean comisionados a artistas o diseñadores denota, por tanto, una acusada intención de aplicar el arte a la consecución de la armonía humana con el medioambiente. De hecho, aquel mismo artista americano de raíces niponas, Isamu Noguchi, ha trabajado en numerosos encargos artístico-medioambientales, especialmente durante las décadas de los cincuenta y los sesenta, a través del diseño de parques, de herencia tradicional japonesa, como el del edificio de la UNESCO en París o el *Sunken Garden* en la Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza en Nueva York, redundando constantemente en su voluntad de mejorar la situación medioambiental de la ciudad a través del arte, y conformando finalmente a través de ellos la aparición de una revelación entre el escenario urbano y el mismo paisaje natural [Ilust. 11].



Ilust. 11. Isamu Noguchi, *Sunken Garden*, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, Nueva York, 1968.

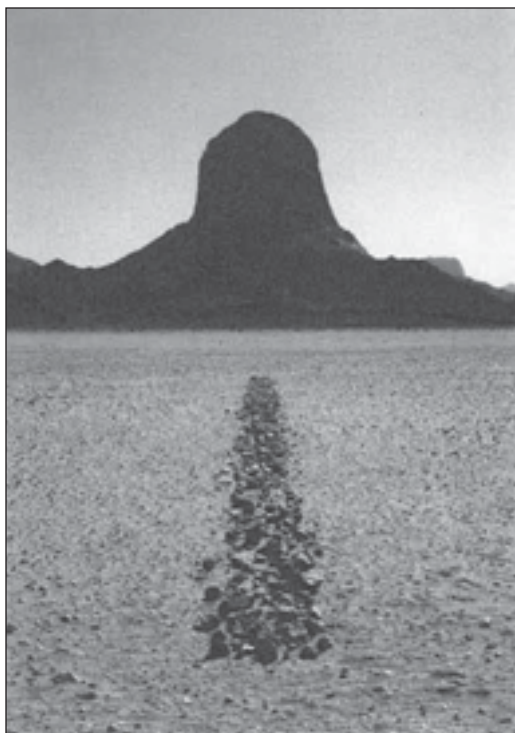


## La espiritualidad del arte como reverencia a la naturaleza

Hasta aquí hemos encontrado trabajos en los que numerosos artistas apuestan por reestructurar un equilibrio ideal entre humanidad y naturaleza a través del arte. Sin embargo, una peculiar tendencia que crece en progresión aritmética nos muestra una actitud reverencial del artista hacia el misterio y la grandiosidad de la naturaleza, la cual nace del inevitable deseo de usar y abusar de ella, un sentimiento que, por moderno que pueda parecernos, responde a ancestrales impulsos humanos (Beardsley 11). Ese peculiar valor de la espiritualidad en el arte contemporáneo es un asunto tratado por el historiador James Elkins, quien reconoce unas pulsiones de carácter religioso en la fascinación de algunos artistas por determinadas fuerzas de la naturaleza, que se llegan incluso a aproximarse a la experiencia estética de lo sublime (Elkins 95-103).

Así, en la mayor parte de los proyectos de esta tendencia actual en la que la vegetación es protagonista, ésta no aparece como doble o sustituta, a través de una confección humana, sino que funciona como la misma esencia de la Naturaleza, dispuesta para ser la materia de la experimentación del artista. En este tratamiento del paisaje natural como escenario místico, el cual tiene su caldo de cultivo en tradiciones japonesas, del Romanticismo inglés o del peregrinaje religioso, son pioneras las *Lines Made By Walking* del inglés Richard Long, una serie de obras que este artista desarrolla desde mediados de los años sesenta [Ilust. 12]. El trabajo de Long consiste en la realización de pasos repetidos hasta formar una línea recta en el suelo de parajes naturales de diversos países alrededor del mundo (Perú, Australia, Inglaterra, Nuevo México, etc.), y que en ocasiones acompaña de piedras, palos o pequeñas esculturas a lo largo de cada línea. Éstas funcionan para acentuar la huella de su experiencia en el contacto con la naturaleza y testifican finalmente su relación espacio-temporal con los entornos naturales en los que actúa (Long, en su página web).

Por su parte, el artista chino Cai Guo-Qiang ha trabajado desde 1989 en una serie de treinta proyectos aunados bajo el nombre de *Projects for Extraterrestrials*. Estos trabajos de carácter conceptual se presentan a una monumental escala, llegando incluso a transformar la superficie de la tierra, con la intención de conectar a los humanos con la fuerzas externas del universo, según expresa el propio artista. Buscando alcanzar un entendimiento más profundo de la existencia humana, Guo-Qiang pretende, a través de una experiencia primaria con la naturaleza por medio del arte, trazar su historia eterna en la Tierra y plasmar su poder intemporal. En su experimentación del



Ilust. 12. Richard Long, *Sahara Line*, 1988.

potencial del arte, él mismo defiende el respeto primario de la humanidad por la naturaleza, postulando que “cuando los humanos, el arte y la naturaleza estén unificados, el sistema perfecto emergerá” (traducción mía de Guo-Qiang citado por Dana Friis-Hansen 49). Como ejemplo paradigmático a este planteamiento queda su *Cultural Melting Bath*, una instalación creada en 1997 para el Queens Museum of Art de Nueva York, que propone una metáfora para la cura herbal y medicinal de diferentes individuos que comparten bañera en medio de un enorme despliegue de elementos naturales [Ilust. 13]. En el camino a su consecución, el paisaje es para este artista no solamente un espacio en el que trabajar, sino una fuente de inspiración, apareciendo como un todo en la Tierra, al estar intensamente conectado al cosmos y al ser humano (Dana Friis-Hansen 52). En concreto, para algunos de sus proyectos emplea plantas medicinales, flores locales, minerales o peces secos, no sólo como invitación a los espectadores a participar de la importancia de su empleo o del respeto hacia el medioambiente, sino también para explorar la geomancia o los principios del Feng Sui. Con ello, Gou-Qiang facilita la circulación



Ilust. 13. Cai Guo-Qiang, *Cultural Melting Bath*, 1997.

de la energía en el medioambiente local, algo que él describe como “acupuntura para la tierra” (Dana Friis-Hansen 62).

En ese mismo camino de adoración a la naturaleza como ente vivo superior, nos encontramos también con artistas que muestran esa actitud reverencial hacia ella, como sucedía en la obra de Ana Mendieta. Esta artista cubana jugaba, a través de rituales, con la creación de metáforas sexuales en las que ella como artista se fundía con la identificación femenina de la naturaleza, por medio de recreaciones de su silueta en la superficie de la tierra, como en su serie *Tree of Life* (1977), enfatizando el poder de la fertilidad como algo propio y único de su sexo, frente a la imposibilidad masculina de generar vida [Ilust. 14].

Exactamente esa misma línea de trabajo e idéntico concepto de la naturaleza como poder femenino de la procreación es el que sostiene James Pierce, quien entre 1976 y 1977 dio forma a su



Ilust. 14. Ana Mendieta, *Tree of Life*, 1977.

*Earthwoman*, una figura femenina realizada con hierba y tierra en la Pratt Farm de Maine, con medidas de unos treinta pies de largo por cinco de alto, y que estaba orientada hacia el punto de salida del sol en el solsticio de verano [Ilust. 15]. Inspirada en la prehistórica esculturilla de la *Venus de Willendorf*, con la que compartía metáfora de la fertilidad, esta “mujer terrestre” también sugiere elementos de adoración a fuerzas cósmicas, como a través de su estratégica orientación respecto al sol, un hecho con nítida referencia al millenario *Stonehenge*.

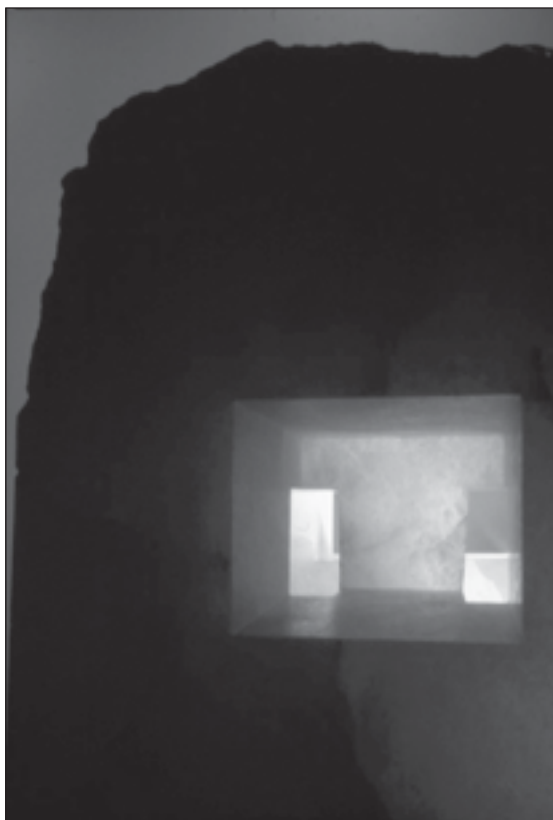
Aquella enigmática construcción megalítica servirá para poner punto final a las reflexiones que han ocupado estas páginas. Ese deseo del ser humano, del artista especialmente, de lograr comprender los poderes y los enigmas de la naturaleza, de fundirse con unas fuerzas cosmogónicas e incluso de simular ser Dios dominando sus formas, parece no llegar en algunas ocasiones a conocer límites. El



Ilust. 15. James Pierce, *Earthwoman*, Maine, 1976-77.

escultor español Eduardo Chillida, según él mismo relató, concibió en 1996, tras una especie de sueño-revelación, un descomunal proyecto que llegaría a convertirse en un destello de lo sublime, similar al cromlech antes mencionado. El llamado *Proyecto Tindaya*, nombre de la montaña de la isla canaria de Fuerteventura que Chillida eligió como protagonista, consiste en una perforación de unos ciento cincuenta pies cúbicos para crear un espacio interior visitable por el público, el cual tendría la posibilidad de observar un espectáculo de luz solar tanto desde su interior como desde las faldas de la montaña a través de ese determinado agujero de impresionantes dimensiones [Ilust. 16]. Este polémico proyecto, contra el que luchan con enconada crítica los Ecologistas y Verdes de aquella isla, junto con quienes pretenden proteger y preservar el carácter sagrado de esta montaña para los guanches —los habitantes indígenas de las Canarias—, provoca de un modo ejemplar nuestra reflexión acerca de los límites de la creación artística que tiene como materia y como asunto la naturaleza, su equilibrio y preservación. ¿Existirá en estos y en futuros proyectos una línea demasiado frágil entre reverencia y posesión nociva o entre adoración y destrucción?

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Ilust. 16. Eduardo Chillida, *Proyecto Tindaya*, Fuerteventura.

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# THE TALKING NATURE BLUES: RADICAL ECOLOGY, DISCURSIVE VIOLENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION OF COUNTER-HEGEMONIC POLITICS<sup>1</sup>

*J. Shantz*

## INTRODUCTION

Radical ecology has emerged as a potential point for linkage, or nodal point, of a wide plurality of anti-systemic struggles. Indeed, many have long expected that the “nature-society” question will provide the most likely focus for a coalescence of new social movements into a broadened counter-hegemonic movement (See Olofsson 15). However, one problem persists. Ecology as nodal point of solidarity has been wracked by conflict and torn by strife. While a radicalizing of movement discourses has been effected, there have been few alliances constructed around an ecological counter-hegemony. One might readily conclude that the connective possibilities of ecology have failed to live up to advance billing. Examining ecology exposes a rather troubled mythopoetic, for which even a tentative fixing of radicalizing struggles has proved difficult.

Radical ecology, in exposing the connecting of multiplex antagonisms, foregrounds those spaces where the presence of an anti-ecological other impedes movements of convergence around an ecological nodal point (See Simms). Deep green themes as expressed in animal rights, radical democracy, and ecocentrist narratives are here understood as asserting a symbolically constituted autonomy from the environment-destroying megamachine.

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Graeme MacQueen (60) suggests that social movement activists distinguish themselves from given structures and come to identify with anti-structure through simultaneous processes of “marking” and “binding” for which symbolic action in struggle is emphasized. Kenneth Burke has called this a process of “identification” through which is constructed “congregation” where there had been “segregation.” In the present analysis, I discuss these elements of identification in the context of radical ecology movements: 1) examples of association or the building of common ground; and 2) expressions of antithesis or the construction of an “external” common threat. These practices exemplify what Bourdieu calls a “group struggle”—those struggles by which people struggle for recognition of their interests (1). The capacity of radical ecology to articulate a sense of common ground through ecological symbols results from such discursive struggles.

The use of paradox, irony, parody and contradiction within radical ecology texts such as the *Earth First! Journal* and the *Fifth Estate* in the United States or *Green Anarchy* in Britain also offers means to recontextualize or desecrate unfavourable contexts within which radical ecologists try to organize. The discourses of both journals mobilize imagery of a break from an industrial “megamachine” which is destroying the planet and call for a return to a wilderness future. Both are replete with calls for a radical break with the anti-ecological present and the institution of a new wild age of nature. Each issue of *Green Anarchy* includes a regular report of seemingly unrelated acts (e.g. riots and disasters) which are presented as signs of the “collapse of civilization.”

Forms of confrontational rhetoric may be situated as the desecration or recontextualisation (*detournement*) of hegemonized contexts or identities. Laclau and Mouffe (114) suggest that subversion is manifested as “symbolization, metaphorization, paradox, which deform and question the literal character of every necessity.” Discursive desecration involves the production of controversial texts against the codified strictures governing acceptability. This strategy involves forms of rhetorical extremism. Recontextualisation “occurs when a text appears in but alters the expectations in which it is understood and evaluated. Reconstruction transforms the entire context; a rhetor rises to the occasion by changing it” (Lange 477). These acts of redescription are often, as we have seen, antagonistic or “violent.” Radical ecology is clearly engaged in the recontextualization of anthropocentric corporate practices through discursive tactics which invoke humiliation and condemnation. This is seen in the attempts to redescribe corporations, not as the guardians of community welfare they make themselves out to be, but as uncaring, voracious “land

rapists.” Within the ecology texts corporations are constructed not only as parasites—the traditional mockery—but as eco-terrorists in an inversion of the common corporate depiction of radical ecology. Thus, when viewing radical ecological discourses of recontextualization, as Jonathan Lange points out,

it soon becomes clear that the “good guys” are the ones *breaking* the law, since the law enables mining, logging, drilling, road building, developing and the accompanying concrete, steel, powerlines, parking lots, and wasteland, all of which replace wilderness and that which is *natural* and good. (Lange 485)

The irrational and unrealistic are redefined. After all, what could be more irrational than the destruction of one’s home? Recontextualization, thus, serves as a rejection of hegemonic definitions and the prevailing relations of power which only allow for a consideration of certain limited behaviours or outcomes.

Through the deployment of immoderate discursive practices radical ecology activists attempt a smashing and rebuilding of the social frontiers of ecology. Thus these discourses must be understood as a counter-articulation, largely through desecration and *detournement*, within a context in which activists have little material strength. Armed with little more than their senses of humour, the prankster guerrillas set upon their enemy with a fusillade of mockery. They thereby reject the entire context within which they can be either marginalized or assimilated; they occupy their own ground.

## LIGHT VERSUS DARK GREEN

Even recent approaches to new social movements are not sensitive enough to internal divisions. Yet one cannot even hope to understand the possibilities for radicalizing articulations around ecology without first coming to grips with the complex interactions and manifestations emerging from within the constellations of environmentalist *praxis*. These constellations, I argue, reveal to us the tentative and difficult constitution of emergent struggles over ecological mythopoetics.

In attempting to address the radically anti-hegemonic transformative possibilities created within ecology one must avoid the mistake of theorizing the environmental movement as a monolith, homogeneous in philosophy or practice. As is characteristic for other of the new social movements, the environmental movement is expressed through a complexity of struggles by which participants construct and reconstruct philosophical commitments and activist dispositions.

These constitutive practices variously arise through differences which are often contradictory and antagonistic rather than complementary. "There is thus not one 'environmentalism' but many. There are competing discursive practices whose social bases are constantly forming and dissolving" (Adkin, Counter-Hegemony 135).

The ecological destruction engendered through industrial capitalist enclosures provides a context within which human relations to nature, previously constructed as relations of subordination (differential positions within a legitimized hierarchy), can be rearticulated as relations of oppression. However, one must make further distinctions among the types of ecological resistance that one finds within these relations of oppression. Perhaps most significantly, it cannot be assumed that each of these environmentalisms contributes to a new political paradigm. Significantly, these discourses are not all subversive of the expansionist demands of industrial capital (See Simms). For example, the spectacle of "green corporatism" reveals that there is nothing inherently radical about articulating "nature" to existing discursive formations (Sandilands 170).

One of the difficulties facing efforts to constitute a radicalized articulation of ecology remains that nature has been more firmly affixed to hegemonic discourses, e.g. consumerism or "resourceism" than to liberatory discourses. "Ecology, as common sense, has been increasingly absorbed by dominant discursive formations and transformed into a narrow and limited environmentalism" (Sandilands 171). Environmentalist discourse of this sort acts, partly, as an inhibitor to the liberatory potential of "nature"/ecology, i.e. it interrupts attempts to constitute nature as a site of resistance. "The radical potential of ecology is undermined by the incorporation of concern for the environment into dominant discourses of growth, implying a project of continued exploitation" (Sandilands 165). This, however, tells us much about the indeterminate character of articulation. Environmentalism is possible because of the ambiguous character and radical unfixity of "nature". Quite simply, nature is open to a diversity of discursive constructions.

Ernesto Laclau (*New Reflections* 235) notes that "the radicality of a conflict can depend entirely on the extent to which the differences are articulated in chains of equivalence." In other words, for alliances between ecology and labour, for example, to be formed the demands of each have to be rendered commensurable in demands which unite yet transcend the particularities of each (See Shantz). While some environmental actors (i.e. Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth) have been able to construct spaces of legitimized equivalences, usually

around liberal reformist appeals to state authority, others (i.e. Earth First!, Sea Shepherd Society) have worked to radicalise chains of equivalence through confrontational rhetoric and “no compromise” discourses which identify the state as a key participant in ecological destruction. Inasmuch as ecology rejects the commodification and exploitation of nature upon which rest capitalist relations it is articulated in subversion of the hegemonic paradigm and might be considered “dark green” (See Dobson). Where environmentalism does not challenge the assumptions of productivism, growth, consumption and the hierarchical relations of humans with nature it remains “light green” (See Dobson). Within the present research the “light versus dark” spectrum is further applied to the social analyses and visions of transformation expressed through ecology.

Politically, it makes all the difference if ecological discourse, for example, is conceived as the need for authoritarian state intervention to protect the environment, or as part of a radical critique of the irrationality of the political and economic systems in which we live, in which case it establishes a relationship of equivalence with the emancipatory projects of other social movements (Laclau, *New Reflections* 230).

A variety of commentators<sup>2</sup> agree that environmentalist discourses diverge most passionately and virulently over understandings about the relationship of humans with non-human nature. For mainstream environmentalism, e.g. conservationism, green consumerism and resource management, humans are conceptually separated out of nature and mythically placed in privileged positions of authority and control over ecological communities and their non-human constituents. What emerges is the fiction that nature is solely or primarily a marketplace of “raw materials” and “resources” through which capitalist wants, constructed as needs, might be satisfied. The mainstream narratives are replete with such metaphors. Natural complexity, mutuality and diversity are rendered virtually meaningless given discursive parameters which reduce nature to discrete categories or units of exchange measuring extractive capacities. Demand and convenience largely establish which members of any eco-community are necessary within this politically constructed and imposed hierarchy.

The practices of mainstream environmentalism are largely confined within parameters marking hegemonic social discourses. Mainstream environmentalism (e.g. Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth) “does not bring into question the underlying notion that man [sic] must dominate nature; it seeks to facilitate domination by develop-

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<sup>2</sup> See Devall, Bookchin, Dobson, Scarce, Nash, Johnson, Aitchtey, Bari, Shantz.

ing techniques for diminishing the hazards caused by domination" (Bookchin, *Toward* 58). By disregarding the political articulations through which hegemonic assumptions have arisen and by adopting a utilitarian construction of nature, with ancillary narratives of domination, the mainstream is discursively led away from advocating any radical transformation of capitalist social relations. As Sandilands notes, "[d]ominant discourses of sustainable development, which represent the articulation of an environmental veneer with an agenda of continued capitalist expansion, have undermined attempts to link together processes of environmental and social change" (165). Typically proponents of the mainstream rely solely upon a rather narrow political process involving reformist appeals to legislative and judicial realms of the state. What most frequently results is a compromising pragmatism in which "winning almost always means losing something for the environment" (Scarce 7). Crucially overlooked are those relations of exploitation which sustain these hierarchical and utilitarian approaches to nature.

However, one of the most significant moments for the constitution of ecology movements as new political forces has been precisely the reframing of human relations with nature as relations of exploitation. It is upon this terrain that radical ecological formations have become possible.

For proponents of radical ecology, including deep ecology, eco-feminism, and social ecology, the emphasis is upon human embeddedness within nature and upon complementarity in relations among constituents of eco-communities. "By insisting upon the existence of a universe that is not subject to the ascription of mere otherness, seen logically as merely 'not living' or 'not human,' ecology proposes to undertake not only a searching critique of the domination of nature, but of science and technology as well" (Aronowitz 82). What is discursively constituted is an image of ecological relations as diverse but interconnected strands in an intricate and irreducible web of life which includes humans within its nexus. Radical ecology "explicitly rejects any notion either of human primacy or the separation of humans from the rest of nature, and any possibility of humankind achieving mastery over nature through 'progress' in science and technology" (Clow 174).

One might, therefore, ask: "Do the discourses of ecology suggest a renewal of political radicalism?" It is here argued that ecology emerges as a new radicalism which is launched against the machinism of the old Left. Traditional Leftist discourses still express a lingering attachment to Enlightenment conceits of control through

knowledge and reason and are properly understood as bourgeois inasmuch as they have supported progressivist ideas, albeit ones which are tempered with loving thoughts of redistribution.

Previously, radicalism of various types had been characterised chiefly by progressivism, the idea that “the natural,” with its mysterious and threatening forces might be brought under human control as society moved through new, improved stages of human development, leading towards the benefit of all humankind. Progressives of various stripes envisioned the taming of wild uncertainty in the post-scarcity march to the future. The making of history required that nature be made predictable. It was believed that the mastery of natural forces—especially through science and technology—would provide the basis for human freedom. Well into the first decade of the new millennium, however, the utopian fantasies have become ecological nightmares as the spectre of global ecological catastrophe—deforestation, toxic contamination, ozone depletion, desertification and species annihilation offer but a few examples—looms over us.

This becomes especially important when one attempts to understand the practices of radical ecology. Within the movements around ecology one finds a volatile interplay of anti-bourgeois discourses, both “progressive” and conservative. Indeed, radical ecology has emerged out of earlier critiques of capitalist and socialist categories. This explains, in part, the distance that persists between ecology and the projects of both capitalism and socialism.

## **ECOLOGICAL SCISSION**

For revolutionary syndicalist theorist Georges Sorel (*Reflections*), the consolidation of social blocs, united by political will (through the expressive factors in social myth), depends upon confrontation with opposing groups and worldviews. As Isin (10) notes: “In the formation of groups, narrative strategies value certain attributes and devalue others. These values become virtues in the process of the construction of myths and images, and of what is feasible in the undertaking of action. The result is the achievement of certain positionings toward other groups and the strategic government of its internal differentiations.” According to Laclau and Mouffe, whose works are indebted to Sorel, every antagonism derives from a symbolic dividing of the social space into two camps. Antagonism depends upon the construction of radical subjectivities, established through equivalences between groupings, which externalize those elements to which they stand opposed (See Laclau and Mouffe). Laclau and Mouffe refer to

the construction of a demarcation between two opposing systems of equivalences as “the crucial problem of politics” (151). In a similar fashion, Bowles and Gintis argue that the practices of demarcation are what politics is about.

The mythic character of demarcation renders it radically unstable, however. This represents the constitution of what I here term, following Sorel, *scission*. *Scission* entails a declaration of separateness from prevailing social relations, what Sorel (*Social Foundations*) calls “a spirit of separation.” Acts of *scission* engage processes by which “systems of differences are re-articulated in chains of equivalence that construct social polarity” (Laclau 235). Laclau and Mouffe argue that relations of subordination, which were previously unquestioned, emerge as relations of oppression when discursively constructed as an external imposition. Put another way, the constitution of any “us” is relational and requires the identification of a “them.” As Isin (8) notes, “social groups are not things but relations.”

We have seen that a relational perspective on group formation insists that no social group forms in isolation from others, and therefore the processes underlying the ways in which it *constitutes* itself with other groups are crucial to the manner in which it is defined by its members...Different social groups always orient toward each other and form their identities from this orientation...The fate of a social group is inextricably tied to at least another and more often many others. (Isin 11)

The construction of the ‘us’ often occurs through acts of power, violence and exclusion rather than any expansion of agreement or “community” which is beyond power or ideology (See Daly). Not surprisingly, then, war becomes the metaphor appropriate to the constituting of unity—witness the prevalence of warrior imagery in radical ecology. Accommodation or compromise can only lead to a weakening of resolve—thus, we see “no compromise” discourses. One might refer to *scission* and radical discord as what Dallmayr terms “an antidote to co-optation.” As such it reflects the institution of cleavage against the prevalence of accommodation. For radical environmentalists there can be no terms for compromise with bosses and capitalist relations. *Scission* appears as the affirmation of integrity and solidarity against the “outside” group—the planet-destroying anthropocentrists.

The construction of polarity, towards which acts of *scission* are directed, is constantly under threat from the other side of hegemony, that in which “transformist policies reabsorb discourses of polarity into a system of ‘legitimate’ differences” (Laclau 235). The construction of stable systems of differences (as between ecology and labour or



ecology and feminism) always faces the subversion of those systems by the presence of a “constitutive outside” (i.e. corporations or masculinist approaches to nature). As Laclau explains, “the constitution of all identity is based upon the presence of a constitutive ‘outside’ which affirms and denies such identity at the same time” (Laclau, *New Reflections* 235). Thus discursive attempts at *scission*, the rejection of a given context and the assertion of radical alternatives, come up against a certain dilemma. Radical discourses are always susceptible to being subsumed within the hegemonic context, especially where there is an attempt to “transcend themselves,” to articulate with outside (non-radical). Thus there is a tension between marginalism and co-optation; between being dismissed as too radical or unrealistic and coming to legitimize the conditions to which one is opposed.

*Scission* for ecology is largely metaphorical (we are talking about pacifists for the most part). As Isin reminds us: “In the reality of the social world, in the everyday experiences of beings, there are no clear group boundaries. Group identifications or affiliations and disassociation or differentiations are multiple, fluid and overlapping” (Isin 10). Within the organising mythic of ecology, therefore, *scission* must be understood as an ironic and largely satirical attempt at *creating* an “us/them” bifurcation under conditions of materiality disavowing such a separation. Such a metaphor must be constantly constructed and reconstructed. Furthermore, it is always tenuous and susceptible to collapse; activists must be vigorous and vigilant about maintaining it.

## ECOLOGY AND DISCURSIVE VIOLENCE

Here we see the important part played by discursive violence. The idea of emancipation as freedom from antagonism and violence implies a determined social, i.e. freedom as the recognition of some pre-established necessity which negates antagonism or difference (Daly 188). Because a decision to follow a certain path (assuming it is not pre-determined) depends upon the capacity to negate other possible paths it may be concluded that a radical conception of liberty must include antagonism and discursive violence (Daly 189). Indeed, Laclau and Mouffe go so far as to argue that discursive violence (the capacity to decide) provides the very possibility for liberty.

While particular forms of oppression can certainly be overcome through discursive violence (e.g. the repression/defeat of reactionary attitudes towards women, blacks, gays, etc.), the very possibility of this overcoming can only take place insofar as (i) discursive violence can always be practised, and (ii) total freedom (as an antagonism-free stasis) can never be established (Daly 189).



It is only through discursive violence and antagonism that any social order can be challenged by those who are marginalized or excluded because the denial of antagonism implies a (totalitarian) fixing of meaning in which all difference is obliterated. Any change raises the possibility of causing an injury to existing interests. Daly (189) concludes that “we can see that the writerly possibilities for taking up the logics of democracy in new affirmations of equality/self-determination depend upon widening the opportunities for authorial violence against real alternatives.” Thus radical ecology can be understood partially as a resistance to those mechanisms of enclosure by which the options for nature are diminished, denied or destroyed (See Shantz, “Radical Ecology”).

We return, then, to one of the major themes posed by Sorel within *Reflections on Violence*; the conception of movement identity as violently formed in struggle, through the constitution of collective wills.

Empowerment, as the capacity to commit acts of discursive violence, implies the ability to choose since a free decision (one which is not predetermined) depends upon the ability to negate (the act of violence) other options. Radical ecology can be about expanding the realm of choice in opposition to the enclosure of choice which results from ecological devastation. Viewed in this light ecological demands for diversity take on a new significance; ecological enclosure becomes an infringement upon the freedom to construct oneself outside of fixed and limited categories, i.e. “worker” or “consumer” (See Shantz, “Radical Ecology”). It could be argued, then, that opportunities for ecological self-determination depend upon the multiplication of spaces which allow for the articulation of a “dark green we” (See Daly). Following this line of discussion, we are empowered to engage in acts of discursive violence through identification with public discourses (e.g., ecological empowerment through public discourses of the inviolable rights of nature). Active assertions of the excluded require the multiplication of public realms; ones which are different and more diverse than those offered within the current hegemonic array. This multiplication allows for the articulation of new possibilities for self-determination or liberty and the disruption of power relations. For instance, radical ecology is partly an opening, as public space, of that which had previously been contained within the domain of the private—property. Whether as resource, as workplace, as product, etc., property is returned to its origins in social relations with nature and, thus, made susceptible to social, i.e. public intervention. The private is positioned as a realm of destruction, contamination, extinction, etc. To conclude, then, radical environmentalists are engaged in the

creation of new public spaces which allow novel possibilities for the constitution of ecological identities, or the expression of ecological rights in a plurality of realms (work, health, etc.), in a manner which disturbs such dichotomic constructs as public/private and wilderness/society (See Shantz, "Radical Ecology").

## TALKING NATURE BLUES

Human relations with nature exist within specific discursive structures. We present the materiality of the world to ourselves in discourse. These discourses do not belong to nature itself. Rather the elements of nature "exist" within the discourses constituting them. They are provided for and maintained by specific means of production which are in turn always discursive (See Laclau, *New Reflections*). What confronts people building alliances is the way in which nature is variously constructed within contestatory languages, i.e., how we talk with each other about "nature". As Laclau reminds us, "nature is also as discursive as a poem by Mallarmé, and the pressure it exerts on us always takes place in a discursive field" (218). While nature does not exist for us outside of all discursive contexts, this is not the same, however, as saying that nature has no existence independent of such contexts.

Rather, we may distinguish between a "real" nature and constructions of ecological values, keeping in mind that there is no necessary relationship between them (See Daly). This brings up a distinction between epistemological and political projects and returns us, once more, to the distinction that Sorel has drawn between *nature naturelle* and *nature artificielle*. In similar fashion, Daly reminds us of the distinction which Rorty makes "between the unobjectionable realist claim that 'the world is out there'—i.e. that the world exists independently of human language/mind/history—and the claim that 'truth is also out there'". Nature does not give voice to a set of truths which need only be discovered. As Daly argues, nature can be described only within specific discourses and is, therefore, always susceptible to competing depictions (176). This susceptibility raises the possibility for alternatives, i.e., a new nature, to emerge. As Daly observes:

For example, environmental and animal-rights campaigners are also, at some level, involved in a process of grammatical subversion in which the articulation of their demands transcends the traditional human/non-human distinction in an alternative construction of political identity which attempts to establish a new semantic authority over the idea of a 'we' and 'global belonging', etc. (199)

To speak of qualities inherent to nature, as the deep ecologists

are wont to do, is to speak an historically contextualized language. The qualities of nature are themselves open to redescription or rejection. Thus the character of these “inherent” qualities of nature is represented differently depending upon the social practices through which we encounter nature, or upon such contextual matters as region or era. Nature is always articulated from the struggle of competing discourses or language-games with which we describe the world. Nature is fixed within a vocabulary which allows us to make some sense of it. Categories such as “wilderness,” “environment,” “jobs” or “worker,” rather than merely signifying objectivities, emerge from specific articulatory practices.

As I have attempted to illustrate, nature can be articulated to widely ranging interpretations and discourses and can be deployed for vastly different purposes. This reflects the instability of nature as nodal point. Nature as pure possibility remains undefined—indeed it is undefinable—in any absolutist sense. This provides for the strength of nature as a realm of freedom but paradoxically leaves it open to discourses of unfreedom.

## **ECOLOGICAL EMANCIPATION?**

Within orthodox approaches to the question of emancipation the condition of radical otherness meant that emancipated identities had to pre-exist the moment of emancipation. While this still holds for situations of antagonism, as regards the pre-existence of the identity to be emancipated, if it is no longer possible for the dichotomization to be truly radical “then the identity of the oppressive forces has to be in some way inscribed in the identity searching for emancipation” (Laclau 136). Laclau concludes that if dichotomy “is not the result of an elimination of radical otherness but, on the contrary, of the very impossibility of its total eradication, partial and precarious dichotomies have to be constitutive of the social fabric” (136). The provisionality and incompleteness of social division allow for a recognition of “the contemporary possibility of a general autonomization of social struggles” (Laclau 136). In other words there is no longer the possibility of a unique source of social division within which we are able to subsume the new social movements. Neither is there the possibility of a foundational Revolutionary moment. The emphasis is shifted, in a manner reminiscent of Camus, from “Revolution” to “rebellions.” Radical environmentalism is just one such rebellion.

Within the present analysis, I have attempted to address this dilemma by referring to the created (or artificial, in the Sorelian

sense) character of both the dichotomic and ground dimensions as they appear within radical ecology discourses. Both the dichotomic (e.g. *scission* and recontextualization) and the ground (e.g. notions of green communities, demands for wilderness) are present in radical ecology. It should be noted, too, that these aspects are usually intermingled, such that, for example the construction of dichotomy also institutes an explanatory ground. We see this, for example, in the anti-consumerism discourses and the arguments for a reconstruction of working conditions.

Autonomy “from” something is also autonomy “for” something else. Radical ecology is, perhaps, guilty of stressing the dichotomic dimensions of its vision at the expense of a more detailed focus upon the ecological “grounding.” Certainly this relates to the libertarian sensibilities of the activists and their fears of any programmatic rigidification. Partly, the under-emphasis of ground is a result of interests in maintaining the openness of possibilities for a *radical articulation* and the constitution of *political radicalism* along ecological lines.

Laclau argues, however, that resolving this dilemma is not simply a matter of choosing one side and renouncing the other because an emancipatory discourse requires both sides in its construction (“Beyond”). Neither is he prepared simply to abandon the logic of emancipation. However, Laclau, in his analysis, offers a potential way out. Abandoning the notion of emancipation may not be necessary after all. Laclau believes that the logical incompatibilities within emancipatory discourse allow for the emergence of new liberatory discourses which are not “hindered by the antinomies and blind alleys to which the classical notion of emancipation has led” (Laclau, “Beyond” 122). For Laclau a possible answer rests in a recognition of the mutually subversive interplay of the dichotomic and ground logics. Laclau (“Beyond” 127) argues that “the social operation of two incompatible logics does not consist in a pure and simple annulment of their respective effects but in a specific set of mutual deformations. This is precisely what we understand by subversion.” Laclau turns towards a radical social interaction between the two incompatibilities. Thus, Laclau is drawn to speak of plural and partial emancipations rather than an emancipation which is ideal, unitary or complete.

Precariousness and ultimate failure (if we persist in measuring success by an old rationalistic standard) are certainly the destiny of these attempts [at making the world rational], but through this failure we gain something perhaps more precious than the certainty that we are losing: a freedom *vis-a-vis* the different forms of identification, which are impotent to imprison us within the network of an unappealable logic. (Laclau 135)

Thus, each dimension disappears as “possibility” but never as “necessity.” Restated, each logic becomes simultaneously necessary and impossible; all of our efforts become limited and finite, as we are limited and finite (Laclau 135). Recognition of this undecidable and unbridgeable tension offers new possibilities for democratic social change. We can now recognize the process of dividing the social into two antagonistic camps (*scission*) as constituted through hegemonic constructions. No longer do we say that it is constituted on an *a priori* basis from the data of social structure. There is not one foundational moment of rupture, be it political or natural. Any such rupture must be agitated for, must be constructed; it belongs to myth.

## CONCLUSION

Much of the impediment to radicalized green articulation derives from the location of ecological devastation within an anthropocentric discursive hierarchy, i.e. human society, which accepts it as necessary, thereby inhibiting its constitution as antagonism. This “common sense” perspective operates around a society/nature duality; a hierarchical opposition in which the first term is provided a position of superiority (associated with a machine myth, i.e. progress, efficiency, stability etc). This opposition serves to shape social practice as it enters institutions such as unions and is extended in consumer culture. Radical ecology seeks to displace this oppositional hierarchy, opening spaces of difference and autonomy.

A site of antagonism is constituted when a relation of subordination comes to be articulated as a relation of oppression. Relations of subordination, in themselves, only establish differential positions between social actors, and, as Laclau and Mouffe (153) contend, this only suggests oppression if we assume a “unified nature” or an “essential subject,” such that every deviation from it becomes an oppression. “It is only to the extent that the positive differential character of the subordinated subject position is subverted that the antagonism can emerge” (Laclau and Mouffe 154). Relations of subordination only become defined as relations of oppression through articulatory practices.

Within the discursive space of mainstream environmentalism and ecosocialism, relations of subordination between nature and humanity are contained as legitimate positions of difference. Terms such as “resources” or “environment” serve as markers for a system of differential positivity, in which case they do not designate positions of antagonism. Viewed in this light, a “jobs versus environment”

discourse might be understood as a stabilization attempt; ecological devastation is simply the price we pay for a high living standard (eco-socialist “jobs and environment” discourses just represent a lowering of the price).

Subversion of the differential positivity signaled by these categories requires the intervention of a different discursive formation, for example “inherent rights of nature,” “web of life” or “imbeddedness within nature”—the varied elements of an ecomyth. Radical ecology calls an end to the construction of “environment” as object, wherein “nature” and “human” become ideological separates. Rather than limiting their efforts within existing political configurations green activists have engaged a process of political reconstruction. These subversive strands emerge from various radical discourses, anarchist, libertarian, socialist and conservative, and are not strictly democratic discourses (Laclau and Mouffe might suggest that each of these reflects a specific articulation within the equivalential logic of the democratic revolution). Ecology has no essence in itself; it depends upon clusters of relations around it. And, only if ecological struggle is articulated with the struggles of workers, women minorities or the poor does it express a non-authoritarian (a large part of what I have termed radical) struggle. This returns us to the question of solidarity.

According to Daly a conviction to act in solidarity results from continuing political attempts to make competing descriptions “compatible with people’s wider descriptions (cultural, social, religious, etc.) of themselves and the world” (179). From this it may be inferred that peoples’ views about nature have nothing to do with the uncovering of a truth. Were that the case, radical ecology might be freed of many of the difficulties it now faces. Rather depictions of the “natural world” come to be accepted because of their compatibility with other discursive universes—such as those in which social and political hopes and desires are carried (See Daly).

This perspective also recognizes the attempts by ecological groups to extend humanist-type rights to animals and the environment, thus not only breaking with the tradition of fixing the identity of right-holders in advance, but also modifying the identity of right-holders in regard to the construction of a more integrated type of planetary belonging. (Daly 196 n.9)

Daly argues that deciding among values (humanist, ecologist, etc.) occurs through historical and political struggles over identification, not through progressive revelatory discoveries of what, for example, the human or the ecological really are. “What it is to be a human being, and the nature of personhood, cannot finally be

determined. These will always depend upon the social practices we share and the frontiers of social exclusion: in short, politics" (Daly 196 n.9). We may speak of non-human nature in the same manner when looking to the political constitution of "ecological identities" among humans. It is important to recognize that ecological mobilizations are largely engaged in struggles over the desecration of ancient dogmas or prejudices about the "natural" position of nature (as resource, as environment, as wilderness etc.). Radical ecology offers some new languages for speaking about nature, ones which restrict the frontiers of exclusion in favour of developing a more inclusive or encompassing tradition of nature (and the human). What is at stake is nothing less than a reconfiguration of what it means "to be" as a human—the construction of new human beings.

Throughout the present discussion certain themes have been explored. At a broad level there emerges a question concerning the extent to which the language games of radical ecology might express the problematic and uncertain constitution of a nodal point in an emergent anti-hegemonic formation or, in Sorelian terms, the forging of social myth. Recognizing this requires identification and understanding of the sustaining worldviews of radical environmentalism. Within activist *praxis* one sees evidence of "deep green" perspectives by which are expressed new conceptions of relations with nature and with society. These perspectives suggest tentative formulations of nonanthropocentrism, social radicalism and possibilities for some synthesis which unites yet transcends each.

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## **“CARRYING CAPACITY” – THE MORAL ECONOMY OF THE “COMING SPACESHIP EARTH”**

*Sabine Höhler*

### **Preface: The Age of the Spaceship**

The year: 2022. The Place: New York City. The population: 40 Million [Fig. 1]. Industrial pollution and greenhouse effect have destroyed the environment; food is hardly available. Smog and heat make life almost unbearable. Congestion, poverty, hunger, and corruption dominate the city. A huge police force is needed to keep the masses in control. Food production and distribution are controlled by a single company, the “Soylent Corporation.” Fresh vegetables, fruit, and meat are a luxury of the rich; the masses are fed with synthetic nutrients apparently based on proteins from soy beans and ocean plankton. Their food comes in small, tasteless bits and pieces: Soylent Yellow, Soylent Red, and Soylent Green, sold on Tuesdays to the starving crowd.

“Soylent Green” is a troubling dystopia produced in the US in 1972 and released in 1973. What commonly is classified as “Science Fiction” was, according to director Richard Fleischer, neither about science, nor about pure fiction or fantasy.<sup>1</sup> Fleischer’s scenario was designed to make a statement about some of the pressing issues of the late 1960s and early 1970s. His idea was to show the near future 50 years ahead as a result of humanity’s ignoring the pressing issues of population growth and environmental pollution.

Undeniably, this is a movie about limits and limitation. The screenplay was based on a novel by Harry Harrison called *Make Room! Make Room!*, which appeared in 1966. The title signifies an

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<sup>1</sup> The 2003 film DVD of “Soylent Green” provides informative supplementary material: first, an extra audio track from 2003 with retrospective commentaries by director Richard Fleischer and by the leading actress Leigh Taylor Young who played the figure of Shirl; second, a short documentary with the title “A Look into the World of Soylent Green.”



Fig. 1: "Soylent Green" (USA 1973), movie placard.

overcrowded world and at the same time the merciless police practices of riot control. The book's argument about extreme population growth, environmental degradation, scarcity, mass uprising, and mass mortality is quite common for its times and has been the topic of many texts of the era, like Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet* in 1948, and *The Limits of the Earth* in 1953, Karl Sax's *Standing Room Only* in 1955, Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* in 1968, or George Borgstrom's *Too Many* in 1969. Their question was "How Many People Can the World Support?" (Fremlin 285). Some predicted that, with the present rate of population growth, "in 600 years the entire earth would provide only one square yard of land per person" (Sax xii).

### **The Problem of the Spaceship: "Capacity"**

In the same time period, another scholar contributed to the discourse of limits, though with a different objective. In his lecture "Of Other Spaces" held in 1967, Michel Foucault labeled the 20<sup>th</sup> century the "epoch of space." He maintained "that the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space" (22-23). Foucault used demography, or what he called human topography, to argue that space in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had become an issue of siting and placement:

This problem of the human site or living space is not simply that of knowing whether there will be enough space for men in the world [...], but also that of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve a given end. (23)

My article is concerned with the scientific and technological regimes of efficiency within this broader discourse of a limited earth. I will focus on the concept of "carrying capacity," which today is defined as the "maximum number of organisms that an area or habitat can support without reducing its ability to support the same number of organisms in the future" (Barbier et al. 229). "Carrying capacity" is interesting in regard to Foucault's notion of "biopolitics," since its definition points to quantifiable life ("number of organisms"), to sustaining life ("support"), and to a limit of life ("maximum number") in relation to a spatial unit ("habitat"). My argument is therefore that "carrying capacity" involves not only the notion of spatiality and of finiteness, but also a certain technology of accounting, directed towards life and environment. The concept involves a mathematic and a moral economy, to use a term which Lorraine Daston introduced to science studies (Daston 3; Daston and Vidal). Limiting the earth to a sphere which was to contain and to sustain all life produced a fundamental

shift in the perception of the conditions of life. Reflecting on movies like “Soylent Green” and on Foucault’s claims, “carrying capacity” is not simply about limited space or too many people. It is about the *storage*, the *circulation*, and the *classification* of *human elements*. Still in the initial stages, my research provides a draft of the “moral economy” of populations in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, a draft of how a taxonomy of people framed notions and solutions of “sustainability.”

### **The Mathematics of the Spaceship: Storage**

In 1972, when the making of “Soylent Green” was in progress, the Club of Rome’s report *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al.) was published and the first global environmental conference took place, the United Nations Conference on “Human Environment” in Stockholm. It was the first “earth summit” to constitute global awareness of environmental pollution and depletion. Thus, “Soylent Green” linked two major concerns: “population explosion” and “ecocide,” to use two widespread terms of its times. In director Fleischer’s words, the film was all about “overpopulation” and “overpollution.”

This link was established by an impressive two-minute entrance sequence of images and music. The sequence draws a visual and aural tableau of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It starts out with some long shots showing the optimistic times of rising industrialization in the beginning of the century, signified by the first fragile cars and primitive airplanes. This rather moderate heading into modernity is accompanied by a slow waltz. We then observe the century proceeding: The pictures are replaced by modern industrial settings and the output of mass production; we see smoke stacks and arrays of cars coming from the assembly line. As the music picks up speed and changes to a quick beat, the succession of pictures accelerates as well; the screen splits as images double and then multiply, changing with rising frequency. Also, what we see changes: more and ever more people in frantic succession. The images come in colour now, denoting the post World War II modes of living and consumption. We see urban crowds of the 1950s and 1960s. Within this frenetic rhythm of pictures and music, we begin to recognize the effects of rising industrial pollution pointed out to us by dying trees, industrial waste, smog, and by people wearing masks. Then the music slows down to the beat from the start, the images slow down, and we know that we have again moved on in time: Now we watch waste areas, destroyed forests, barren industrial sites. The sequence, in Fleischer’s words, “comes to a grinding halt” with the sight of the thickly polluted cityscape of New York City.

This “cleverly devised” montage matches in its visual and acoustic structure the “Logistic Growth Curve” to which population ecologists referred to describe the development of a population over time [Fig. 2]. The S-shaped curve relates population size and time according to a “natural law” of growth or development, set up by the biologist Raymond Pearl and his colleague Lowell Reed in the early 1920s (Kingsland 50-76). The “constraining factor” in the growth pattern, biologists explained, was that many populations were confined to a limited area. Because of these limitations, their development was characterized by exponential growth up to a “point of inflection” when environmental feedback were to cut in, and subsequently, progressive deceleration would occur (Brown 70).

This mathematical model, derived from glass jar residents, was held valid to describe human development as well. It served as a warning to avoid “overshooting”—that is, to avoid growing too far and then collapsing. In 1978, Lester Brown gave another vivid example of this relation in his book *The Twenty-Ninth Day*. The president of the

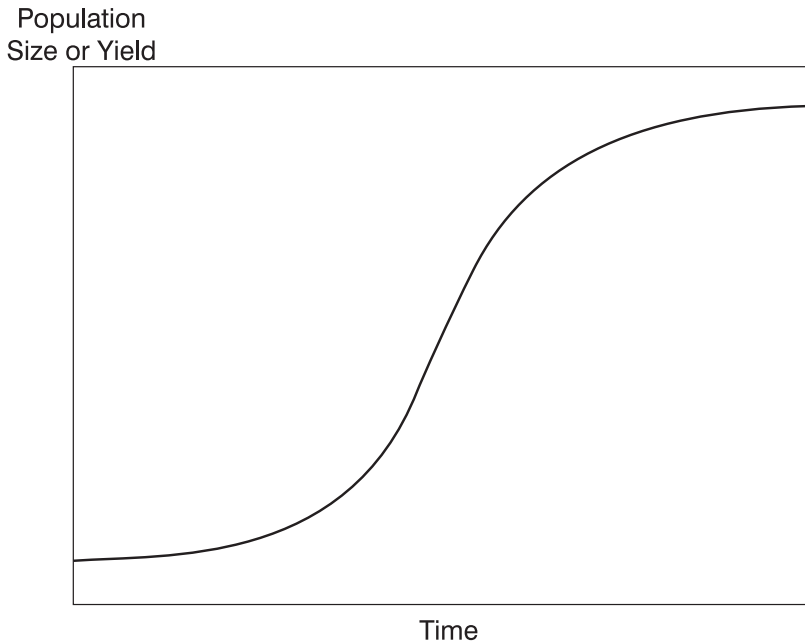


Fig. 2: “The S-Shaped Biological Growth Curve.” Brown, Lester R. *The Twenty-Ninth Day. Accommodating Human Needs and Numbers to the Earth’s Resources*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1978, p. 69.



World Watch Institute used the image of a “global lily pond”: If a lily pond of single leaves, he asked, whose number doubles each day, is completely full on the thirtieth day, when is it half full? The answer was: on the twenty-ninth day (Brown 1).<sup>2</sup> The global lily pond, so his warning, may already be half full.

The empirical world population growth curve presented in that time illustrates why the contemporaries deemed their situation so unique in history [Fig. 3]: It was not the population being roughly 3 billion people, but the “nature” of growth being considered exponential, that is, the population having doubled within less than a century and increasing at a rate that anticipated another doubling within one generation. Western society considered itself positioned at the end of an exponential process of growth where limits appear very suddenly. Physicist John Holdren and biologist Paul Ehrlich warned in 1974: “Clearly, a long history of exponential growth does not imply a long future” (290).

“Unprecedented Growth” may be the two words used most in the crucial documents of the “environmental age.” In his famous essay of 1798 Thomas Malthus had already published thoughts on the

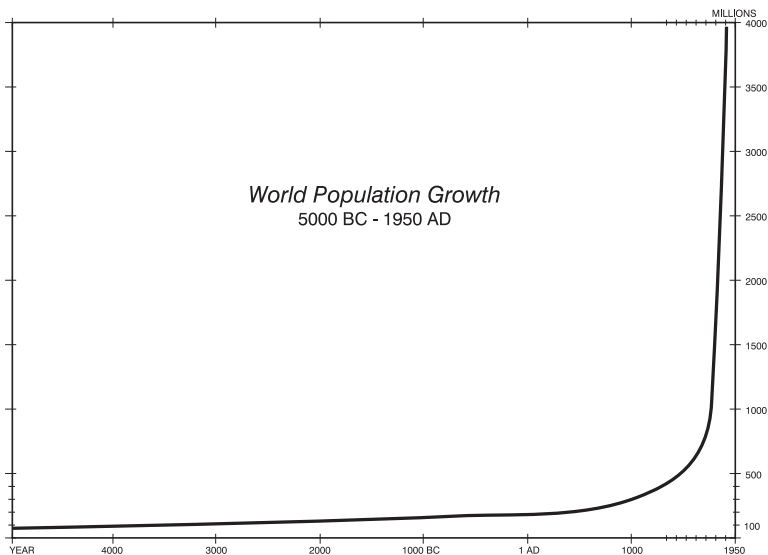


Fig. 3: “World Population Growth.” Sax, Karl. *Standing Room Only. The World’s Exploding Population*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1960 [1955], p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> The French riddle of the lily pond as an example for exponential growth was also used in the Club of Rome’s report *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 29).

“principle of population,” proposing simple mathematical structures to grasp the developments of population and food supply: According to Malthus, the number of people tended to increase geometrically, while food supply increased only arithmetically. This straightforward mathematical representation of a phenomenon became something like a “law.” In the early 1950s, Fairfield Osborn regarded the world “under the control of the eternal equation—the relationship between our resources and the numbers as well as the needs of our people” (“Limits” 77). The relation

finds expression in a simple ratio wherein the numerator can be defined as ‘resources of the earth’ and the denominator as ‘numbers of people.’ The numerator is *relatively* fixed and only partially subject to control by man. The denominator is subject to substantial change and is largely, if not entirely, subject to control by man. (207)

Combining “pressures” and “resources” in a basic ratio, a mathematical fraction, opened up new perspectives of managing the problem, framed as an accounting problem: Osborn concluded: “We have now arrived at a day when the books should be balanced. But can they be?” (“Plundered Planet” 43).

To Paul Ehrlich and his colleagues, it was not the hydrogen bomb but “the Population Bomb” which kept “ticking” [Fig. 4]; “all [problems of the world at present] can be traced easily to too many people” (67). “In just two or three years [!] it became possible to question growth, to suggest that DNA was greater than GNP” (14). Ehrlich, entomologist and in 1968 Professor of Biological Sciences at Stanford University, took an interest in human population studies and environmental ecology and became a leading figure in what was called “human ecology.” He turned the population-resources-environment relation into a mathematical equation which held that “Environmental disruption = population x consumption per person x damage per unit of consumption” (Holdren and Ehrlich 288). Within this mathematical frame, the question was not simply “How Many People Can the World Support?” Instead, it became: “What is the *optimum number* of human beings that the earth can support?” (Ehrlich 167, my emphasis). This question was explicitly stated as a problem of *storage*, of efficient allocation of humans to a limited cargo space.

### **The Economy of the Spaceship: Circulation**

A concept of constraint had long been familiar to biologists, determined by the “maximum sustainable yield of a natural biological system” (Brown 13). The yield in turn varied according to a local

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POPULATION CONTROL OR  
RACE TO OBLIVION?

# THE POPULATION BOMB

WHILE YOU ARE READING THESE WORDS  
FOUR PEOPLE WILL HAVE DIED FROM  
STARVATION. MOST OF THEM CHILDREN.

DR. PAUL R. EHRLICH



Foreword by David Brower—  
Executive Director, Sierra Club

Fig. 4: “The Population Bomb Keeps Ticking.” Ehrlich, Paul R. *The Population Bomb*. New York: Ballantine, 1969 [1968], title page.

system's size and regenerative powers. This notion goes back to Justus von Liebig's "Law of the Minimum" of agricultural chemistry, formulated in the mid-19th century. "Liebig's law" was generalized to predict that populations of any species will be constrained by whatever survival "resource" is in shortest supply (Liebig 223). It was newly theorized by the economist Kenneth Boulding. On the occasion of a conference on "environmental quality" in Washington in 1966, Boulding reflected on the "economics of the coming spaceship earth," signifying the "transition from the illimitable plane to the closed sphere" (4). Earlier civilizations, he stated, had made the experience that there "was almost always somewhere beyond the known limits of human habitation," "there was always some place else to go when things got too difficult" (3).<sup>3</sup> The "closed earth of the future" (9) however would require a new economy: The "cowboy economy," the throughput-oriented economy of the illimitable plains, would have to be superceded by the "spaceman economy," the cyclical system of the closed sphere, capable of material reproduction, and externally sustained by energy inputs only (9).<sup>4</sup>

"Spaceship earth" framed and directed the discourse on population in a specific way: It designed an economy of "circulation" and a technology of flows, of material exchange and renewal. Although to Ehrlich the day seemed "far away when food for billions is grown on synthetic nutrients in greenhouses free of pests and plant diseases, when the wastes of civilization are recycled entirely by technological means, and when all mankind lives in surroundings as sterile and as thoroughly managed as those of [...] an Apollo space capsule" (Holdren and Ehrlich 283), serious attempts were made at the time to chemically synthesize food, to study artificial photosynthesis, and to mass-cultivate fungi or single-celled algae like "Chlorella,"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Boulding dates the notion of the "global nature of the planet" (Boulding 3) back to the time past World War II and to space flight. Currently, mankind experienced the "transition from the open to the closed earth" (4). On "Whole Earth" and "Full Earth" as pictured first in extraterrestrial photography realized through the technoscientific venture of space flight see Cosgrove and Jasanoff.

<sup>4</sup> "I am tempted to call the open economy the 'cowboy economy,' the cowboy being symbolic of the illimitable plains and also associated with reckless, exploitative, romantic, and violent behavior, which is characteristic of open societies. The closed economy of the future might similarly be called the 'spaceman' economy, in which the earth has become a single spaceship, without unlimited reservoirs of anything, either for extraction or for pollution, and in which, therefore, man must find his place in a cyclical ecological system which is capable of continuous reproduction of material form even though it cannot escape having inputs of energy" (Boulding 9).

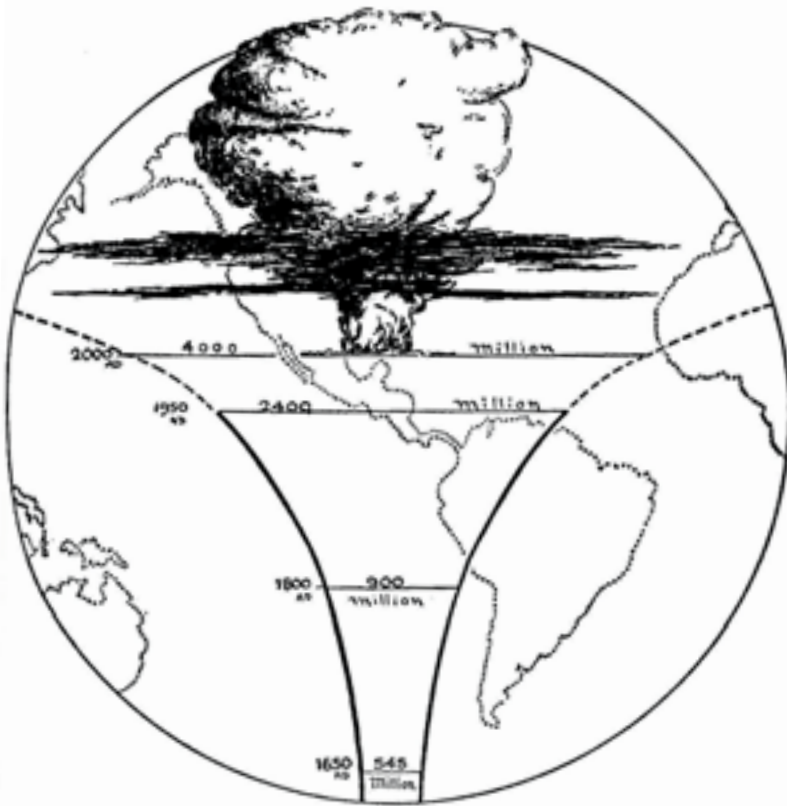
<sup>5</sup> The "Chlorella" project of the Carnegie Institution was a project of mass cultivating single-celled algae (Sax 110).

substitutes which indeed make the leap easy to futurist visions like “Soylent Green.” The image of the “spaceship earth” was strained with hopeful or sarcastic assessments of the possibilities of interstellar transportation and colonization of far away planets. Paul Ehrlich and Richard Harriman organized their entire book *How to be a Survivor: A Plan to Save Spaceship Earth* in 1971 around the metaphor of spaceship earth, from the “Size of the Crew” via the “Control Systems” to a new culture of “Spacemen” needed.

Spaceship Earth formulated instructions as to the technology and the people it involved. Both the cynicism of population biologists like Ehrlich and the technocratic optimism of the so-called “Cargoists” (Catton) illustrate that the difference between the technical “life-support system” of the space-capsule and the biospheric system of the earth had become marginal. “We are all astronauts,” Richard Buckminster Fuller asserted in his 1963 book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (46), and he argued: “We have not been seeing our Spaceship Earth as an integrally-designed machine which to be persistently successful must be comprehended and serviced in total” (52). Since “no instruction book came with it,” (52) Fuller considered humankind confronted with the challenge of self-instruction to become the operator of Spaceship Earth and “its complex life-supporting and regenerating systems” (54).

### **The Moral of the Spaceship: Classification**

It is unclear whose “global brain” would steer Spaceship Earth (Sachs 204). It is clear, however, that the figure of Spaceship Earth marked the planet as a *temporary* environment. “Men in a spaceship are not locked in one place, but become perpetual travelers” (Kuhns 222). The ship is a cultural image of temporality, transition, and transience. It is the figure of the early modern “voyages of discovery” but, likewise, of the end of the “lost horizon” which according to Osborn closed the “World Frontier” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (“Limits” 78). To Foucault, it is the “heterotopia par excellence,” indicating its spatial singularity, and the “greatest reserve of the imagination” (27). The ship is also the figure of confinement and of complete dependence, as Ehrlich’s picture of the “ever-shrinking planet” (Ehrlich 81; Ehrlich and Harriman 1) conveys: “It is obvious that we cannot exist unaffected by the fate of our fellows on the other end of the good ship Earth. If their end of the ship sinks, we shall at the very least have to put up with the spectacle of their drowning and listen to their screams [...] Will they starve gracefully, without rocking the boat?” (Ehrlich 132-133). Within the last decades, paroles like “the boat is



#### THE CHALLENGE OF OVERPOPULATION

The present species of man has lived on this earth for at least 50,000 years and his primitive ancestors for more than 500,000 years. But the world population did not reach 500 million until the sixteenth century A.D. Since 1650 the world population has increased from about 600 million to 2,500 million; at present growth rates it will reach 4,000 million by the year 2000 A.D.

Nearly two-thirds of the world's people live at little above subsistence levels; yet these are the people who have the highest birth rates. The greatest population growth, or potential growth, is in countries that do not now produce adequate food for their present populations. All advances in agriculture and industry could be absorbed by excessive population growth — and the only result of increased production would be more people living in poverty. Poverty and ignorance are greater threats to our modern civilization than the hydrogen bomb.

Fig. 5: "The Challenge of Overpopulation." Sax, Karl. *Standing Room Only. The World's Exploding Population*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1960 [1955], p. 177.

full” served to limit migration within the globalized world, especially to detain “them”—refugees from developing countries.

It is not surprising then, that the term “carrying capacity” in the 1960s began to creep from biology into human ecology and demography, later seeping into the vocabulary of UN officials and of political decision makers and economic advisers on a global scale.<sup>6</sup> With this move, the research question changed again. The question *What is the “optimum number” of people which Spaceship Earth is able to carry?* was extended to *Who may go?* Biologist Karl Sax, Professor of Botany at Harvard University, with regard to Malthus recommended either “positive checks”—high death rates—or “preventive checks”—low birth rates. One of these, he claimed, would be needed to control population growth and effect the Demographic Transition (11).<sup>7</sup> “The Challenge of Overpopulation,” he maintained, was that “nearly two-thirds of the world’s people live at little above subsistence levels; yet these are the people who have the highest birth rates.” What mattered to him was that “[a]ll advances in agriculture and industry could be absorbed by excessive population growth” (177). Who exactly felt threatened becomes clear when looking at the picture to the text, where we see North America go up in flames [Fig. 5].

“Too many people—that is why we are on the verge of the ‘death rate solution’” (Ehrlich 69). Although Ehrlich cynically speaks of the “surplus people” (21) to be taken care of, he is serious in his option for “population control” as “the conscious regulation of the numbers of human beings to meet the needs, not just of individual families, but of society as a whole” (11). He suggests a “triage” system for the “classification of nations” into those who are in the situation to give international aid (“us,” the Western world, particularly the US), those who may undergo the demographic transition without drastic help, those who may succeed to self-sufficiency with food aid, and, finally, the tragic category of undeveloped countries without hope that should not receive more food (59).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> According to Lester Brown, it was only since the 1977 UN conference on Desertification that the term began to creep from biology into the vocabulary of the UN officials and to political decision makers and economic advisers on a global scale (Brown 12). It was again Ehrlich who pointed out that “human carrying capacity” is an appropriate measure of population.

<sup>7</sup> The corresponding study Sax points to is Myrdal and Vincent.

<sup>8</sup> Ehrlich categorized Libya into the first, Pakistan into the second and India into the last group. The system of “triage” was first suggested for use with entire nations in William and Paul Paddock’s book *Famine—1975!* (Paddock and Paddock 205).



## The Resolution of the Spaceship: “Sustainability”

In 2022, living people are “surplus” and encouraged to consent to euthanasia. The dead are waste; their bodies are disposed of by garbage trucks. We learn that the Soylent Corporation handles the great numbers of human corpses in a most efficient and profitable way by transforming them directly into food for the living. “Soylent Green is people!” This outcry at the end of the movie has acquired cult status in the last decades.

Even though this form of “circulation” has not been realized, the late 20<sup>th</sup> century *has* devised new ways to control and regulate the lives and deaths of people on a global scale.<sup>9</sup> What I have tried to point out is that notions of “life support” were mainly based on scientific and technological reasoning and design. Paul Ehrlich’s equation was later turned into the well-known “I=PAT”-formula, calculating the human “Impact” on the environment from the product of “Population” (number of people), “Affluence” (average per-capita consumption of resources), and “Technology” (inflicted environmental damage) (Daily and Ehrlich 762). Formulas such as this are *prescriptions*; they are instructions on how to see and perceive a problem, which often divert from understanding global distributions of power and of wealth.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the question I would like to close this article with is not *Who may go?* but *Where?* A concept like “carrying capacity,” based on effective calculus, tends to produce categories like “overpopulation” or “surplus.”<sup>11</sup> It is crucial to study this “moral economy” of efficiency

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<sup>9</sup> A historical change can be discerned from the humanism of the fifties (for example Fairfield Osborn, who, much concerned, tries to convince by outlining certain points of view) to the pragmatism of the late sixties and early seventies (Paul Ehrlich and his colleagues, who, rather cynically, demonstrate and make predictions), to the veritable biologism of the eighties (ecological “realists” like William Catton, who, certain of their statements, give and prove facts).

<sup>10</sup> My aim in this paper was not to discuss environmental strategies or measures and strategies of “population control”. On these strategies see Höhler. Nor was my aim to resolve the ongoing debates between “doomsayers” and technological optimists. On these debates see Taylor and Mendelsohn; on “survivalism” see Dryzek; a good outline of the different discourses of the environment of the time is given by Jamison. It would be interesting further to explore the fierce debate and famous bet that Paul Ehrlich lost to the technocratic optimist Julian Simon about the future state of the world; see Simon; Simon and Kahn.

<sup>11</sup> In today’s ecosystems literature, “carrier functions” have become a central element of the earth’s “life support functions,” and numbers of people have become the “load.” “Systems,” “limits,” and “functions” have become evident foundations to count and reason with: “In ecology, the notion of ecological limits is generally linked



and liability resulting from the arithmetic of the “coming spaceship earth” that also shaped contemporary terms of “sustainability” as a (population) management problem.

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to the system's carrying capacity.” (Barbier et al. 44-45). Malthus' principle of 1798 has been reformulated accordingly: “The cumulative biotic potential of the human species exceeds the carrying capacity of its habitat” (Catton 126).

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## ECOFEMINISM OR DEATH: HUMANS, IDENTITY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

*Ophelia Selam*

A feminist response has always been about making the invisible visible. It has always been a *response* to something deemed unjust and in need of change. A feminist response is, at its core, a political reaction built on dissent; it is one that illustrates the historical setting of a time. Women, through their imposed strict roles, have always symbolized an accepted essentialist vision of the world. But this very essentialist vision has prompted feminists to complicate and problematize the category of “woman.” It has, in fact, been this very insistence on essentialism that has pushed feminist thought and identity into the paradoxical; it is what has made feminist thought flourish. For the situation has always been far from purely “logical” or “coherent.” Masked by rigid and so-called “natural” labels, this paradox makes itself apparent when “natural difference” needs to be justified over and over again, or when this seeming universal and eternal category called “woman” constantly shifts: “now you are unequal because of this;” “now you are unequal because of that.” Indeed, how can a paradox not emerge when (universal) human rights are advocated on the one hand *and* “sexual difference” on the other? As a result, the basic feminist paradox can be articulated as follows: gender, and hence “sexual difference,” are both irrelevant and relevant, both reasonable and unreasonable, both inside and outside of language, both clear-cut and confusing. The situation is only further complicated when categories such as race, sexuality, and class are mixed with the category of “gender.”

Far from having a stunting effect, the presence of this paradox actually propels feminist thought into the very act of liberation, a *practice* that cannot be thought of as stagnant, but instead necessitates transgression in the Foucauldian sense, one that demands constant rethinking, constant restating, and constant retelling of stories (or the multiplication and complication of the entity called “history”). In other words, a feminist perspective can only complicate the actual telling

of stories by employing a tone that defies typical academic writing without undermining it. It can also create stories that cannot define a reader, but that instead play with limits of storytelling and understanding. Within this framework, so-called “history” can now be seen as the effect of discursive attribution rather than as an attribute of individual will (Scott 124). Concurrently, “feminist thought” can create a polemic, one that is both epistemological *and* a provocation to action. It is through these kinds of exercises that a feminist—and especially an ecofeminist perspective—bring forth the need to question an entity such as “feminine writing,” and hence, “feminine identity.”

But this text’s endeavor does not arrogantly assume the possibility of creating a fixed and definite “feminine writing” or “feminine identity” or even a “feminist argument.” The point, instead, is to witness the necessary slipperiness of these very concepts. And to help this slipperiness and to make it more “tangible,” we will turn our attention to the advent of ecofeminism as such and to what it makes possible within the paradoxical “nature” of feminist practice. For a feminist text exists due to our inherently denied paradoxical existence. And with the help of a field such as ecofeminism, a practice that re-works dualism and provides a means in which to think of feminism outside of the expression of a shared identity, our identity can then be placed outside of accepted categories, outside of the “you are not this” parameter.

However, if questions of writing and identity are at the center here, it is the concept of oppression (and the necessity to keep this very word) that acts as a driving force (the drive, that is, to end oppression). However banal the existence of oppression may be, the point here is to maintain the emotional standing of the word without reducing it to something meaningless. For in its most basic form, oppression refers to forces, which prevent a being, from growing to its (her/his) full potential physically and/or mentally. In addition, oppression implies a certain form of structure which operates at the level of knowledge; it implies a system of thought that is present within every fiber of society: its language, its actions, its morals, its laws, etc. The fight against oppression, therefore, is a fight against what most consider vital to the existence and co-existence of life itself. In the end, when knowledge and power are joined through discourse (Foucault 100), neither can be seen as stable and binary. And within this “multiplicity of discursive elements” (Foucault 100), any form of resistance to power is going to be plural. As a result, oppression is power when it has become non-negotiable and naturalized. Oppression, as a system, stays the same. What changes are the ways in which this system is maintained and how, in the end, it permeates our

relations with other beings. In order to address all the issues above, we will now turn to Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature*, and the collection of essays edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein entitled *Reweaving the World*.

According to Merchant, social change directly influences the treatment of nature and the ways in which we actually see the world. Beginning in the sixteenth century, our language and images underwent a drastic change. This change marked the beginning of "the great opposition": organic cosmology of the "old days" on one side, and the Scientific Revolution and rise of a market-oriented culture in Modern Europe on the other (Merchant xx). This rise, compelled by a vision of exploitation and a "linear mentality of forward progress," (Merchant xxi) disrupted nature's balance with industrialization and overpopulation, causing the many natural disasters we know today. In other words, despite the 25 years that separate us from the publication of Merchant's book, her point remains the same today: our current situation is no accident, no mere coincidence, but the constant bombardment of a certain type of system that, as she puts it, can literally turn the world upside-down. Merchant's goal is therefore to reevaluate "history" and, through this, revisit the "founding fathers" of modern science (Francis Bacon, William Harvey, René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, and Isaac Newton) who are all responsible, in some way or another, in creating our vision of nature/the world. This reevaluation is a revisiting of history (a fundamentally feminist practice), which begins with the most simple and most basic association: that of "woman" and "nature."

Prior to the Scientific Revolution, people's view of an identity was based on the notion of organism. This "organismic theory" implied a more holistic approach to the human body and to the "outside" of this human body. The perception included "interdependence among the parts of the human body, subordination of individual to communal purposes in family, community, and state, and vital life permeating the cosmos to the lowliest stone" (Merchant 1). The interdependence, crucial here, implies the recognition of being part of a world; it recognizes the presence of others within the world, and it recognizes the impact of the self on the world. Within this framework, nature was both a caring, loving, and ordered "mother," but also wild, uncontrollable, and the creator of chaos (Merchant 2). Nature was thus something (perhaps "someone") to be both loved and feared. Nature, in other words, was alive.

But, as Merchant and others have pointed out, as mechanization grew, so did the urge to dominate and control this unpredictable

and bountiful nature. The image of the caring and powerful female nature began to be replaced, starting in the sixteenth century, first by the image of the greedy mother earth who hides and keeps her secrets and bounties (read metals) to herself, and then by the more popular (and still popular) image of the machine. While the organic cosmos was a world filled with vitality and energies all emanating from nature (or God or both), the mechanistic world was filled with dead and passive matter (Merchant 105). In addition, the manipulation of nature within this dead world was no longer one of individual efforts, but became associated with “general collaborative social interests that sanctioned the expansion of commercial capitalism” (Merchant 111). Far from being innocent, the attitude toward nature changed in order to socially and, more importantly, morally sanction the “need” to exploit it. The declaration of the death of nature only further sanctioned this supposed “need.”

This tension, between technological development and the organic images of nature (Merchant 2), only heightened through time. As Merchant illustrates, Greek philosophy and the Christian religion both entertained the idea of the dominion over the earth, but it wasn't until this Scientific Revolution that this domination metaphor spread beyond the religious sphere to permeate the social and the political (Merchant 3). The domination metaphor actually spread to its own loss of origin (its own loss of history), to become the only (read “natural”) way to see nature, the outside, and ourselves.

For the Scientific Revolution utilized previously established views of nature to its advantage. This image mainly operated around the parameters of cultivation and gardens. Using, as its basis, the age-old association of nature with women, both entities were then viewed as comforting, nurturing, but also providers and hence care-takers for the well-being of males (Merchant 9). This was not merely a benevolent and generous characteristic of nature, it was *her* unarguable duty. Nature and women were then provided with their roles, which were primarily passive, hence manageable and rapable (Merchant 39). The passivity of matter could therefore be incorporated within the “new mechanical philosophy in the form of “dead” atoms, constituents of a new machine-like world” (Merchant 20). Within this world, change could only be achieved through external forces (Merchant 20), thus reinforcing the connection between this model and commercial/exploitative structures (for both nature and women).

This changing view of nature was accompanied and caused by a turn to capitalistic control for the purpose of profit (Merchant 43). Prior to this shift, farming worked on an agrarian ecosystem that

closely connected the peasant community to the land (Merchant 43). These “traditional patterns of cooperation” (Merchant 44), however, hid problems that would soon become assets in the ascension of the capitalistic system. Merchant explains, “through force and the need for military security, a hierarchical structure of landlord domination had imposed itself on the communal structure of agrarian society, extracting surplus value in the form of labor, services, rent and taxes” (Merchant 44). In the end, the one who controls technology therefore controls the land.

In addition to this exploitative model, the Scientific Revolution also brought the development of inorganic, nonrenewable metallic materials that, predictably, caused (and cause) vast ecological disasters (Merchant 61). The most obvious victim, forests, had already been threatened and partially destroyed due to population expansion, and hence expansion of living and growing space. But by the sixteenth century, the problem had become painfully obvious through actual shortages of wood and hence the need for coal as substitute fuel (Merchant 63). Adding to the growing need for this polluting substance (coal), the sixteenth century also saw its mining operations quadruple as the trade of metals expanded (Merchant 63).

Nature, having thusly been redefined from the nurturing/benevolent mother/God(dess), to a site of chaos, disorder, and danger, suffered another blow: for the safety and longevity of humanity, Mother Earth had to be tamed; the female image had to be turned negative. After all, *she* was responsible for famines, plagues, tempests, etc. (Merchant 127). In the end, the beginning of the Scientific Revolution and hence “pre-industrial capitalism” (Merchant 150), marked a shift in women’s roles, roles that were now more strictly defined in terms of their sex (reproductive machines) rather than their class (Merchant 150).

But nature was not the only entity to be changed to a machine; the view of the body also interestingly morphed into this image. The body was now seen as something one could *fix*; it was something that was fixable (as long as the technologies kept multiplying). Predictably, the image did not stop there: women’s bodies were “naturally” inferior to that of the male’s, the ovaries were passive, the semen active, etc. Women were therefore “inferior” machines. As a result, nature slowly turned into a sight to be experimented on, forced into submission, and forced into “understanding.” As mentioned above, these changes were done with the help of various key (new) scientists like Francis Bacon (1561-1626), whose ideas morally sanctioned the probing, exploiting, and controlling of “the outside” for the sake of



knowledge (read “human benefit”). More importantly, this exploitation was sanctioned in the *name of life itself* (for humans).

In the end, this mechanical process went directly against a vision of wholeness by furthering the fragmentation of the world into independent parts (Merchant 182). But the connections were lost in more than just symbolic ways. Research became fragmented from its environment. For the mechanical world redefined reality into a predictable and rational system of laws (Merchant 193). It was (and still is) a reality that gravitated around two major interconnected constituents of human experience: order and power (216). Descartes, Hobbes, and Mersenne (seventeenth-century thinkers), as Merchant extensively describes, were solely concerned with finding certainties within nature (203). The way to “intelligibility” was through mathematics and its logic (the “then” deemed only valid form of knowledge). In fact, this kind of thinking will *force* rationality onto the object of confusion; it leaves no space for paradox, and plainly denies its presence. It calls as “truth” that which has been proven, clearly and distinctly, *scientifically*.

As mentioned earlier, Merchant’s work posits this exercise in history as key to understanding the current ecological problems as “not new in kind but in degree” (67). In the words of Ynestra Kind, “it is my contention that the systemic denigration of working-class people and people of color, women, and animals is connected to the basic dualism that lies at the root of Western civilization” (*Reweaving the World* 107). Ecofeminism therefore grew out of a history that relentlessly justified the abuse, domination, and hence oppression of nature, women, and all other “lower orders of society.” Ecofeminism also grew out of a hidden history of societies bound to the earth and based on nature religions of the Goddess. The discovery of this lost history has brought some feminists within the realm of ecology to see the connections that Merchant so skillfully exposed. As with feminism, environmentalism becomes a way to make *visible* the effects that power can have on the earth. Some are more obvious than others (a forest is cut), and some are less so (like global warming). It is based on Merchant’s findings that we begin our discussion on ecofeminism.

Originating from Françoise d’Eaubonne’s work (*Le féminisme ou la mort* or *Feminism or Death*), ecofeminism followed the rise in ecological concerns during the 1970’s. These ecological concerns clearly exposed the distancing of humans from nature, the shortsightedness of technological endeavors, and the “obsessions of dominance and control” (Merchant 10). Feminists added two crucial words to the

discussion: patriarchy and capitalism. In the end, feminists—and in accordance ecofeminists—provided a new way of interpreting science, scientific findings, and hence the world as a whole.

One can also trace the influence of ecofeminism within the more radical section of the environmental movement called “deep ecology.” As Michael Zimmerman explains, deep ecology “maintains that the environment crisis is the inevitable outcome of the history of Western culture” (*Reweaving the World* 139). And within this movement lie variations in interpretation that are all visible within much of ecofeminist theory. Ecology begins with the idea of conservation, which stems from our obligation to future generations. Following this idea, ecology then introduces the concept of “moral extensionism,” which asserts that the environmental problems arise from our “unethical treatment of nonhuman beings” (*Reweaving the World* 139). Through this approach, non human beings are worthy of moral consideration and legal standing (*Reweaving the World* 139). The next stage of ecological consciousness is ecological sensibility, or deep ecology, which asserts that “the industrial pollution, species extinction, biospheric degradation, and nuclear annihilation facing the Earth are all symptoms of anthropocentrism” (*Reweaving the World* 139-140). Deep ecology denies the “human versus everything else” dichotomy and thinks “nondualistically” (*Reweaving the World* 140), rejecting ideas such as atomism, hierarchalism, rigid autonomy and abstract rationalism (*Reweaving the World* 141). Here again, ecology is not in opposition to science; rather it opposes its “enslavement to economic and nationalistic interests” (*Reweaving the World* 141). Further, as with ecofeminism, deep ecology presents the need to change laws immediately as *well as* presenting the urgent need to “revolutionize” humanity’s understanding of itself and the world around it.

As mentioned earlier, the main contribution that ecofeminism brings to deep ecology is the realization that so called “humanity” is divided though issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, geography, etc. In other words, it is not only Western culture that is at fault; it is also patriarchy (and with it, capitalism). As a result, ecofeminism necessitates a critique of abstraction (so present within deep ecological thought), and hence a turn to concrete and personal relationships to other people and the Earth (*Reweaving the World* 146). Without this, deep ecology falls into the very trap of patriarchy by hiding difference or pretending that so-called “true” equality really exists. Or, as Vandana Shiva eloquently puts it, “it cannot understand equality in diversity” (*Reweaving the World* 192).

Furthermore, ecofeminism acts as a new way to interpret the

so-called outside. Read, for instance, the following premise by Brian Swimme: “what I would like to do here is to take a couple of central and extraordinary facts provided by scientists and interpret them according to the vision of some brilliant ecofeminists” (*Reweaving the World* 17). According to him, inspired interpretations can only “come alive within an ecofeminist consciousness” (*Reweaving the World* 21), something that is impossible within the traditional reductionist interpretation of current scientists (*Reweaving the World* 20). Consider also his following conclusion:

we need to *imagine* this cosmogonic myth as *alive* in our educational processes [we will learn that we] and all beings and every thing in existence come from a common birth [...] Kin. Not an external relationship; not a legal bond set up by the state. Rather a deep and undeniable communion, from within [...] (*Reweaving the World* 21-22 *italics mine*).

But we must note here that not all ecofeminists advocate a kind of melancholic return to the past. Many do not discredit technology, but wish for a more positive way of using technology, a different approach to its usage, and, more importantly, a drastic shift in the way we see ourselves and the world around us. The point is to rethink the way we look at the outside and attempt to answer some of the following questions:

why does patriarchal society want to forget its biological connections with nature? And why does it seek to gain control over life in the form of women, other peoples, and nature? And what can we do about dismantling this process of domination? What kind of society could live in harmony with its environment? (*Reweaving the World* 156-157)

The task is one of a rewriting of history, an exposure of different models of existence, and, sometimes, a return to previous forgotten myths (see Mara Lynn Keller for instance). As mentioned earlier, many ecofeminists have provided us with this, Merchant being one of them, as well as Riane Eisler.

In her essay “The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: an Ecofeminist Manifesto,” Eisler explains and describes the presence of prehistoric societies that were not warlike or exploitative in terms of gender or nature (*Reweaving the World* 23). Here again, I pause in order to make their point clear: the goal is not to return to these societies (that is indeed impossible). Rather, it is simply a matter of opening our imagination to the possibility of other models, and to the possibility of change. Quite simply, these “myths” put forth the presence of societies that functioned without the usage of intolerant dualisms (woman/man; nature/culture; passive/active etc.). In this way, Eisler can avoid the common assumption that these kinds of

societies were “primitive” and “hence” “backward” (both technologically and morally).

Looking back at the Gaia tradition therefore serves one major purpose: dissipating the stereotypes about the supposed “nature” of human beings.<sup>1</sup> Eisler begins this task by refuting the image of “man’s nature” as a “self-centered, greedy, brutal, ‘born-killer’” (*Reweaving the World* 24). She returns to the Paleolithic period (about 25,000 years ago) and explains the presence of domestication of plants, which some anthropologists believe was invented by women. And, looking back at the data on the first agrarian and Neolithic societies, she discovers that these societies were not warlike or dominated by males (*Reweaving the World* 25). This mere fact disproves the conventional idea that correlates the beginning of the domestication of plants (and hence technology) with the development of male dominance, warfare, and slavery (*Reweaving the World* 25). This new interpretation has led to what is now called the “Gaia hypothesis” (*Reweaving the World* 26).

This new scientific theory, Riane Eisler explains, presents the earth as a living system, designed to maintain and nurture life (*Reweaving the World* 26). The origins of this theory are of no surprise: the belief system of Goddess-worshipping prehistoric societies (*Reweaving the World* 26), nature as a big mother figure, nurturing and giving. But this theory also brings to light the importance of the relation between females and males; it is a relation that can decide the fate of a whole society as potentially peaceful or not, in harmony or not. It shows that gender is not a minor element within oppression, but that it shapes other oppressions; it shapes an oppressive mind-frame. This does not mean that gender trumps race or class or sexuality (to name a few); it merely reasserts the importance of a discourse on gender when speaking of oppression. As a result, the point for Riane Eisler is to orient her text towards what she calls a “partnership model” (*Reweaving the World* 31).

But while speaking of diversity, ecofeminist theory emphasizes the concept of interconnectedness and the realization that “we are, as is everything that is, an instance of becoming-in-relation. Nothing is independent of anything else” (*Reweaving the World* 257). Susan Griffin’s *Woman and Nature*, for instance, illustrates the possibility for interconnectedness. This text, full of word-play, contains animals,

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<sup>1</sup> It is not, however, about proving the existence of supposed “matriarchies,” which would only be evidence of the binary nature of our thinking.

trees (etc.) who speak to the reader through a non-linear narrative. While playing with language and its expectations (*Reweaving the World* 61), Griffin brings nature (including animals) within a philosophical and scientific discourse; she integrates them within the whole of experience as beings worthy of consideration and respect, whose lives affect the lives of humans. This is reminiscent of the shamanic worldview reintroduced by many ecofeminists such as Sally Abbotfor, which posits the human relationship to animals as central to life on earth (*Reweaving the World* 36).

The point here is to step away from alienation, and to reconnect experience as a whole with “the whole.” As Merchant explains in her essay “Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory,” “both women and nature are exploited by men as part of the progressive liberation of humans from the constraints imposed by nature. The consequence is the alienation of women and men from each other and both from nature” (*Reweaving the World* 103). This interconnectedness must therefore begin with a respect for all beings on the planet (including trees and plants and so on) and the realization that they are all *alive*. In this sense, we are trying to derail the vision that upholds the death of nature, which, as said above, does not necessarily imply a return to the “old days.” According to Starhawk, “when you understand the universe as a living being, [...] then science becomes our way of looking more deeply into this living being *that we're all in*” (*Reweaving the World* 73 emphasis mine). The earth becomes a kind of “living community” (*Reweaving the World* 74). In the end, this is crucial since “a disregard for the natural ecology of a region goes hand in hand with a disregard for the natural rights of people to determine their own fate and to live in the way they choose” (*Reweaving the World* 95).

The interconnectedness therefore acts within the realm of consciousness as well. Susan Griffin explains, “we think of intellectual knowledge as separate from sensual knowledge, and the spirit as belonging to a different realm entirely” (*Reweaving the World* 87). The result is henceforth predictable: “our experience of the world is fragmented” (*Reweaving the World* 87). Along with Starhawk, Griffin further explains, “it takes a bending of language at this point to speak of consciousness as embedded in the way we breathe, the way we stand, all the intricate numbers of relationships we have, where we live on the planet, the trees next to us” (*Reweaving the World* 93). This bending is especially necessary in order to avoid associating wholeness with an erasure of difference. As Chris J. Cuomo points out:

a crucial challenge for those engaged in ecofeminist projects is taking seriously connections, patterns, similarities, and interwoven features of different forms of domination and exploitation without either

obscuring difference and particularity through reduction, or resting in preoccupation with various forms of domination *only* in so far as they are related to each other" (30).

An ecofeminist perspective must therefore emphasize difference while, *at the same moment*, seeing our interconnectedness. As a result, it is through this concoction of stories, voices, and language, that ecofeminism becomes an almost soothing expression of confusion and paradox. It inhabits this paradox and enables the freeing of expression. Far from exhibiting a fear of the unknown, it recognizes its presence with a certain amount of joy and excitement. In the end, interconnectedness creates *new* relations among humans and between humans and nature based on a respect for all living beings as part of one place. These new relationships compel a drastic restructuring of capitalistic patriarchy (*Reweaving the World* 100) that bases its view of nature on the machine model (one that can be controlled and repaired from the outside), (*Reweaving the World* 101). Again, it is a complete restructuring that is at stake here, not a regression; what needs to occur is not the end of an association of woman and nature, but the end of a *negative* association between the two, and the end of this sole association. The point is quite simple: humans and nature are connected; humans and nature are not separate.

Starhawk puts it in basic terms,

we all know we have to breathe; we all know we have to drink water; we all know we have to eat food; and, we all know it's got to come from somewhere. So why isn't the preservation of the environment our first priority? It makes such logical sense that it's irritating to have to say it. (*Reweaving the World* 78)

We commonly assume that the system at work is a system that works. As a result, ecofeminism posits that a system that "works" does not make for a "good" system, or the only system that could "work." The system in place, as mentioned earlier, is indeed one that posits clean, clear-cut visions of the world devoid of chaos.

Indeed, and quite ironically, the world is simplified not only through language—through the erasure of certain cultures and histories—but literally through the destruction of hundreds of species each year. In fact, it is this simplification that causes disorder, for "diverse, complex ecosystems are more stable than simple ones" (*Reweaving the World* 108). As mentioned above, the "Gaia hypothesis" proposes that the planet is one single living organism and that cooperation, through difference, has always been a stronger force in evolution than competition (*Reweaving the World* 112). Whatever the scientific merits of this theory, it remains an important thought. And through this very

simple act, it prevents ecofeminism from being a dualistic world-view. Indeed, ecofeminism attempts to mimic nature by creating balance within difference, balance within chaos, and therefore seeing chaos as balance. Here again, the irony should not go unnoticed: it is this simplification of nature, cultures, and beings that continues to create new problems (ecological disasters, wars...).

Vandana Shiva provides us with an example of this kind of methodology when speaking of colonialism. In her essay "Development as a New Project of Western Patriarchy," she explains that "a replication of economic development based on commercialization of resource use of commodity production in the newly independent countries created internal colonies" (*Reweaving the World* 189). So called "development" and hence colonialization result in the destruction of diversity in nature, other cultures etc. It removes people from the land, water, and forests by destroying an individual's direct link and control over "her or his" part of land. In fact, so-called "development" brought to the Third World has proven time and time again to be detrimental to women who have typically bore the costs but have been excluded from the benefits (*Reweaving the World* 190). Women are affected more deeply by famines because they hold the role of the feeder, the caretaker of children, the aged, and the infirm, while, in many cases, men are forced to migrate and work for industries.

In the end, "maldevelopment is thus synonymous with women's underdevelopment (increasing sexist domination) and with nature's underdevelopment (deepening ecological crisis)" (*Reweaving the World* 193). The reasons, as said above, are very simple: first, there is a disregard for the diversity of things, and second, Western patriarchal bourgeois world's self-interest is deemed universal. It in turn imposes it on others (*Reweaving the World* 193) and calls it "economic growth," progress, and civilization. This so-called progress, civilization, and economic growth all guide us into poverty: monetary poverty for most, cultural poverty for all. As Shiva puts it, "the paradox and crises of development arise from the mistaken identification of culturally perceived poverty as real material poverty and the mistaken identification of growth of commodity production as solving basic needs" (*Reweaving the World* 199). This is, again, because development brings impoverished water, land, and genetic wealth (*Reweaving the World* 199); it brings simplification and hence chaos.

So here we are, in the twenty first century, with this history to base our theories and an environment that is still degrading rapidly. What do we learn from this? The problems have origins (emphasis on the plural), they are deeply imbedded in our everyday practice,



and they are slowly (or not so slowly) actually killing us. We therefore begin from this point: the problem is urgent; change is needed NOW. The very person who coined the term “ecofeminism,” Françoise d’Eaubonne (*Le féminisme ou la mort (Feminism or Death)*), understood this fact completely. What does it mean to read a text, published in 1974, that alarmingly informs the reader of the problems of overpopulation and air pollution (the growing presence of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere in Paris for example)? Sighing with exasperation, the reader remembers that CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the air have only grown since 1974 and have now, in 2006, reached unprecedented height. And with further alarm, the reader looks out the window and perhaps notices the changes in climate, the growing distressing documentaries on the melting of ice caps, species on their way to extinction, failed efforts to stop the destruction of the rain forest, the multiplication of sandstorms and hence desertification, erosion of the top soil, etc. So with these few realizations in mind, we understand that whatever the semantics chosen to speak of the problem, the fact remains that there really is a problem and that it will, in due time, affect everyone on the planet.

What else have we learned? Well, that the destruction of the earth is just another sign of the destructive powers in the hands of human beings that base their vision of the world on supposed clear cut binaries (read Truths) which, in turn, transform themselves into hierarchies. And from these hierarchies comes a specific assigned treatment. This, as we have said, is called “oppression.” So what do we do? Ecofeminism tells us that unless we understand the full scope of the possibilities of oppressive acts, then we cannot effectively end oppressive practices, discourse, etc. The point, as Karen Warren herself once made (in *Feminism and Ecology*), is that feminism without ecology cannot be true feminism; it becomes a blind feminism that fights oppression on the one end, but perhaps perpetuates it on the other. With this in mind, how can one motivate others to embrace some of ecofeminism’s major principles?

Well, here lies the problem. The point is that the association of feminism with ecology can be exhilarating for some, and completely repellent for others. This, I’m afraid, cannot be helped. But it is in the analysis of these (sometimes) opposing reactions that the interest lays. Indeed, why would some reject ecology? Why would we not want to protect our environment? Are we inherently self-destructive? As mentioned above, since the mid 1990’s, ecofeminism has been subject to quite a bit of backlash (which has, predictably, been quite beneficial to ecofeminism or its practice). Ranging from the political impracticality of spirituality, the (mis)interpretation of ecofeminism as



a coherent “movement,” to the criticism of its own confused, convoluted *and* essentialist theories, ecofeminism has somewhat lost its momentum. Many feminists refuse to broach the subject, some refuse to call themselves “ecofeminist,” and some have stopped associating with it at all. So here again, what do we do? Adopt a different name? Create a different name? Propose some kind of coherent all-encompassing “path”? What is the point in throwing ecofeminism’s history in the garbage? Do we want to say: “well, that didn’t work, let me create something else”? Well, not necessarily.

The point is not to convince the reader to be both spiritual and reasonable, or to worship goddesses and fight for democracy. The point is to realize that, far from being binaries, the few elements present in the previous sentence could perhaps be combined and used within a political strategy. For whatever the path may be, ecofeminism is merely one way to recognize systems of oppression and attempt to dismantle them; it is merely one way to motivate us into global change. Nonetheless, what every attempt to end oppression **MUST** take into consideration is the need for interdisciplinary approaches that can keep the big picture in mind while focusing on individual situations. But it does not mean that everyone is obliged to call themselves “ecofeminists,” or “ecological feminists.” However, it does seem imperative to espouse some of the basic principles originating from the practice of ecofeminism without reserve. Being an ecofeminist is, at its basis, a belief that calls for the end of oppression and a rethinking of the ways in which we see ourselves and others within the world. This, I feel, anyone would adhere to. What is a bit more difficult for some to swallow is that, quite simply, the ecofeminist practice pushes one outside of oneself, it highlights the presence of anthropocentrism, and includes, without reservation, the notion of “nature” (including animals), within a typical human discourse. This is its most basic and powerful point.

As a result, ecofeminism demands a rethinking of “nature” itself. As said by Chris J. Cuomo, “feminists who first drew attention to connections among the mistreatment of women, animals, and nature, took these entities at face value, and to a large degree relied on common discursive understandings instead of questioning the accuracy and universality of categories like ‘woman’ and ‘nature’” (24). Many are aware of the vast literature criticizing the short-sightedness of many feminists when speaking of “women.” The same needs to be done when speaking of “nature.” Within an ecofeminist perspective, nature does not stand outside of our lives, but stands at the heart of society, it is the computer, the telephone; it is technology. As said time and time again, the idea of preserving nature does not constitute returning to

some embellished past (a pre-capitalistic, or pre-patriarchal, or even pre-agricultural era). Nature is fundamentally linked with our lives, it is our lives, it is where we are, what keeps us alive and healthy; it is everything within the planet. In the end, our interconnections can be articulated in the following: we are nature. We are merely part of the balance, which we have the power to offset in irredeemable ways. With this basis, we can continue to bring nature back to the forefront of typical human discourse. In fact, this can enable us to place “the body” at the center of ecological and feminist principles.

So I ask the following question: if an end to oppression and oppressive *thinking* are at stake, then does the perpetuation of, let’s say the oppression of animals (by eating them) not constitute a clear sign that oppression has not ended? The controversy has been stated before, but I would like to bring it to the forefront again: when given the chance/means/access, how can one be a feminist or even a peace activist without being a vegan? How can that awareness not be present? The way we live, for many of us, has turned past levels of survival to actual privilege. We actually can choose the way we live (to some extent of course). But, at the very least, we can choose the way we EAT. And, if responsibility follows privilege, that very responsibility lies in our potential concessions: we choose to *not* eat meat for instance. We choose to *not* eat pizza. It is that simple. For truly, what is the excuse for not doing so? That we “don’t care about animals”? That only “snobs” are vegan? That veganism is an elitist diet? That buying organic is an elitist move? That there are “more important things to care about”? Is it that difficult for us to inform ourselves on the simple choices we make every day? Is it that difficult for us to act upon that information? Is it that difficult to place importance on our seemingly banal habits? As Chris J. Cuomo explains, “any consideration of ‘community problems’ that does not include the lives of women and non-human beings is grossly inadequate, as is any analysis that is not highly attentive to the racial formations within environmental issues” (37).

When speaking of animals in the food industry for instance, or while informing ourselves on the state of the planet, the information is not only reprehensible, it is sickening: our health, our environment, and of course, the ways in which we justify some of the practices are all symbolic of this mind-frame that ecofeminism attempts to eradicate. Can this kind of information propel one into change? Can it propel one into “ecofeminism”? Speaking from personal experience, the answer to that question is undeniably “yes.” The situation is clearly alarming, unbelievable even, and it is sustained every day by a series of thoughtless actions. The situation places everything

in perspective, certainly bringing some of us down from our ivory towers. As mentioned earlier, feminism needs to be motivated; it needs tangibility. In this way only must it return to its roots. And in the end, it is this kind of information that demands a place within academic thought (especially within feminism). As some of us have undoubtedly witnessed in ourselves or others, researching, thinking, writing etc. does not always correlate with our everyday basic action. Within this context, ecofeminism can, for some, create a connection between academia (or theory) and practice. It can bring the disconnection within discourse. It does not mean that every ecofeminist is necessarily an activist, but that some level of activism is present within any ecofeminist thought. Ecofeminism brings that feeling, that urgency back to the forefront (without, of course, denying the need for theory).

For why is activism so problematic within the eyes of many theorists? Because any act is going to be, one way or another, problematic. But can we really afford to wait for a supposed perfect approach that will solve all the potential problems before we decide to act? Yes, ecofeminism is essentialist at time, but really, I ask, what isn't? Is it not part of language's unavoidable downfall? If we base political action on issues rather than identities, we *still* cannot avoid essentialism. So do we embrace it? Do we, perhaps, embrace essentialism in order to complicate it? Do we tolerate it in order to create political strategies? If I, as a white woman, bring ecology at the center of my politics, is that really problematic? If the sight of an animal being tortured and killed in a slaughter house brings me to tears, am I negating the history of feminist practice by adhering to typical "feminine traits"? Am I even performing an anthropocentric act?

To be fair, we do run into problems when trying to create political strategies, when attempting to give a voice to "everybody." This indeed was well documented by Noël Sturgeon in her book *Ecofeminist Nature: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*. Within her account of the rising of ecofeminism in the 1980's, Sturgeon illustrates the problem of forcing a discourse on difference within the realm of practice. Using Native American history to instill a discourse on difference is indeed problematic. Using binaries ("white and non-white") within a discourse on race is also problematic. In their efforts to include "everybody" within the realm of discourse (in conferences for instance), the organizers allotted time to each individual depending on their race. They turned the whole process into a scientific calculation and, by this very move, further reinstated the boundaries they were so desperate to complicate. This, I must be clear, is not due to malice on their part, or even stupidity, but rather to the very

problems that occur when speaking and *practicing* difference. So again, the question imposes itself: what do we base political strategies on? Diversity? How is that possible? Is perhaps the question of a basis the wrong question?

## Conclusion:

Feminism exposes the presence of oppression both within the visible and invisible realms, and ideally creates an idea of freedom or “liberation” that is neither antisocial nor antinatural (*Reweaving the World* 120). It creates a kind of feminism that does not succumb to the “totalizing impulses of masculinist politics” (*Reweaving the World* 123), “a politics of resistance that runs counter to the will to totalize” (*Reweaving the World* 126); it creates a kind of feminism that does not pin others as objects on which we can base our identity (the “I am not this”); it creates a kind of world view that does not deny the experience of each individual being, but instead turns to the interconnectedness of all life as a “*lived* awareness that we experience in relation to *particular* beings as well as the larger whole” (*Reweaving the World* 137). But how must we practice this in our everyday practice? How do we unite theory and its will to deconstruct everything before acting? These questions are huge and tiring to say the least. This, again, is where ecofeminism can help. This approach reminds us that we are part of the same planet, and we have arbitrarily bestowed value on each being of this very planet. And *basically*, this move has had horrendous affects. The importance of an ecofeminist approach is that it brings about a “unifying” aspect that is neither arguable nor problematic. It states, quite *simply*, that in the face of ecological disaster, we eventually ALL suffer.

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## RE-VALUING NATURE: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ECOCRITICISM AND THE TEXTUAL ECONOMIES OF NATURE

José Anazagasty-Rodríguez

At the September 2004 *Globalization and the Environmental Justice Movement Symposium*, I had the opportunity to be a part of a roundtable called *Environmental Justice as Critical Pedagogy*, together with John Hausdoerffer, Janis Johnson, Jia-Yi Cheng Levine and Paul Vaughn.<sup>1</sup> The objective of the roundtable was to explore the ways in which the literature of the environmental justice movement offers possibilities for teaching the intricate issues of environmental justice in undergraduate settings, as well as the complex and critical theories that academics use to examine these issues. During that discussion, I drew attention to the pedagogical and political importance of bringing perspective to our environmental justice courses about the ways texts produce and allocate value with regard to nature. In this article I expand on this argument while affirming the usefulness of texts and textual analyses as pedagogical tools in exposing students to the history of humans' valuations of nature.

I begin by asserting the political quality of environmental justice pedagogy and the efforts of various educators to animate their students' political imagination with respect to environmental justice issues. Next, while insisting on the pedagogical and political importance of texts in teaching the complex issues of environmental justice, I exhort educators to do so from the perspective of environmental justice ecocriticism. After that, I draw attention to the question of nature's value—specifically to how valuations of nature figure in texts—and its use as a pedagogical tool. Then, I introduce Subramanian Shankar's

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<sup>1</sup> Activist Zoppie Lhotte and scholar Timothy Luke were also members of the roundtable but unfortunately were not able to participate in the roundtable discussion.

(13-16) concepts of “textual economics” and “textual economies” while suggesting, through examples, the usefulness of these concepts to introduce students to the ways nature is valued textually.

### **Environmental Justice Pedagogy and the Process of Conscientization**

For various educators, the act of teaching environmental justice should not stray the field from its roots and status as a social movement.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, educators advocate a closer relationship between the environmental justice movement and the academy, especially since the teaching of environmental justice, as rightly noted by Robert Figueroa, brings the teacher to a critical position in the teaching process, a spot from which the teacher must place the classroom and its teaching within the context of the environmental justice movement and the environmental inequalities that characterizes our world today (311).<sup>3</sup> For environmental justice educators the classroom is a “space where citizens can generate and discuss their visions for transforming our social and political world in ways that ameliorate environmental injustices” (Figueroa 311).

Within a politicized classroom, environmental justice teachers aim at what Paulo Freire calls *conscientization*, by which he means the process whereby learners, not as mere receivers, but as meaningful and knowing subjects, accomplish a deepening awareness both of the social and cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their ability to change that reality (27).<sup>4</sup> It means achieving understanding of their existence in and with the world. For students of environmental justice it means achieving a better and deeper understanding of the reality of environmental inequalities and of their ability to ameliorate these inequalities.

This same process of eco-justice conscientization underlies, for example, Figueroa’s transformative teaching and his concept

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the environmental justice movement itself encourages environmental education, one that emphasizes social and ecological issues for past and present generations and that promotes cultural diversity (Taylor 539).

<sup>3</sup> The notion of environmental inequality allows focus on the broader dimensions of the relationship between environmental quality and social hierarchies, not just environmental racism, and on the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. For further examination of the notion of environmental inequalities and environmental inequality formations, see Pellow (582).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the process of *conscientization*, see also Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

of “moral imagination” (325-326). Figueroa’s goal in teaching environmental justice is to stretch his students’ moral imagination, their cognitive ability to apprehend the moral experience, feelings, and judgment of others, to recognize environmental inequalities and to envision social and political changes to overcome these inequalities. He describes his radical teaching thus:

Radical pedagogy may be understood as teaching with attitudes and approaches that politicize the classroom and the curriculum. By identifying the classroom as a place of reproducing institutional processes in a political economy, which in turn generates political actors, we can enliven the student’s political imagination. The academic’s pursuit of environmental justice carries political baggage and obligation that many subjects lack. The study of a contemporary social movement lends itself to the use of pedagogy as a form of activism. The social activism is a consciousness raising that utilizes the moral and political imagination of the student to seriously consider the options for transforming current social conditions. Students feel compelled to ask, “What can we do?” and “What is our responsibility?” By asking these questions, the classroom is transformed into a place where citizens can think these matters through without losing sight that the matters are upon us. (326)

Politicizing the classroom in order to aid his students achieve a deeper awareness and understanding of the actuality of environmental inequalities and of their ability to defeat these inequalities also inspires Steve Chase’s “constructivist pedagogy” (355-357). Two books, *The Human Rights Education Handbook* edited by Nancy Flowers and Jacqueline G. Brooks and Martin G. Brooks’ *In Search of Understanding* inspire Chase’s teaching. Based on the former, Chase’s teaching stresses the concrete experience of his students, active learning activities, student participation, horizontal communication, critical thinking, the expression of feelings, cooperation among students, and the integration of knowledge, action and feelings (356). Furthermore, Chase’s environmental justice education is not just about liberatory knowledge but also about liberatory practices—thus, training students as activists. Finally, the constructivist dimension of Chase’s teaching, based on *In Search of Understanding*, inquires about his students’ understanding of concepts before sharing his own understanding of these concepts; encourages students’ inquiry by asking thoughtful, open-ended questions; and engages students in experiences that might engender contradictions to their initial positions about a particular issue (360-361).

Jia-Yi Cheng Levine also implements this idea of *conscientization* in her classroom, her goal being the production of “critical consciousness,” which in her view is essential to help students “be responsible and responsive world citizens” (371). That is, assisting her students



attain a deeper consciousness and knowledge of environmental inequalities and of their ability to develop alternatives to the structures of environmental inequalities is what motivates Jia-Yi Cheng Levine's educational efforts to form political subjects capable of opposing environmental injustices and inequalities. In her essay "Teaching Literature of Environmental Justice in an Advanced Gender Studies Course," Jia-Yi Cheng Levine refers to a particular course about women and the environment in which she introduced the literature of the environmental justice movement to her students, exposing them to various political, social and ecological issues. As she explains: "By introducing literature of environmental justice to our students, we help form political subjects who would seek to dismantle racism, sexism, classism, and unbridle capitalism, which wreak havoc on our planet and our people" (378). Her teaching is certainly aimed at conscientization, as she makes clear:

Teaching is more than transmitting knowledge or modes of thinking; it helps form political subjects who will determine the future of this planet we call home. My goal for teaching literature of environmental justice was to foster a literacy of the environment in my students' everyday lives, to call their attention to the power structures of society and the political struggles of the impoverished, as well as to encourage them to examine configurations of knowledge and the dispensation of power. By addressing the interrelated issues of race, gender, class, and the environment, I wanted to bring environmental and social justice education into the class. (368)

Jia-Yi Cheng Levine's teaching then seeks to empower students as critical and conscientious political subjects while asking them to study, question and confront the history, and ideological frameworks that have contributed both to the environmental degradation we experience nowadays and to the production of environmental inequalities. In her particular gender studies course, literature greatly facilitated the process of *conscientization*, thus assigning a significant role to literature as a liberatory pedagogical tool for environmental justice educators. Although perhaps more suitable for literature courses, the study of literature helps students in any course reach a reflective awareness and a thoughtful understanding of the material and ideological character of environmental inequalities and of their ability to transform unequal conditions. The usefulness and effectiveness of literature as a pedagogical tool, I insist, is not limited to literature courses. Rather, literature, and its analysis, is a practical, helpful and constructive tool in a wide variety of courses, especially if we use the word "literature" vaguely to include not just poetry, fictional prose and nature writing but also non-fictional writing and any other kinds of texts in which issues of environmental justice appear, or that might

provide us with the opportunity to address these issues in the classroom.<sup>5</sup> Enabling students to examine how texts produce meaning and value provides them with a larger picture of political, social and cultural processes that shape daily life and various social struggles, including environmental justice struggles.

## **Integrating Environmental Justice Ecocriticism to the Classroom**

The fundamental question behind environmental justice educators integrating texts containing environmental justice issues and its analysis into their classrooms is this: How can texts and textual analysis further our efforts as teachers to help our students achieve a deeper awareness and understanding of the reality of environmental inequities and of their ability to ameliorate these inequalities? Hence, these teachers presuppose, as Jia-Yi Cheng Levine's teaching exemplifies, that the introduction of texts, including environmental justice literature and its study and criticism, into the classroom is useful in helping our students grow to be political subjects who would seek to question and challenge environmental inequalities while proposing alternatives that promote justice, equality and democracy.<sup>6</sup>

Analyzing texts that contain environmental justice issues in

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<sup>5</sup> Reed also points to the importance of addressing not only the body of poetry and fictional prose directly treating environmental justice issues, but also any writing on a given subject, thus keeping a wider meaning of literature to include even the environmental justice movement's manifestos and the documents of the Environmental Protection Agency (153). The importance of analyzing these "other" documents is exemplified by Janis Johnson's (273-280) study of the Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi-Wa-Kish-Wit or "spirit of the Salmon" a salmon recovery and preservation plan prepared by the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and an ad campaign of a coalition of organizations supporting the removal of the four Snake River dams.

<sup>6</sup> One could argue that rather than fostering critical inquiry critical educators might be nurturing propaganda, imposing their values and worldviews on their students. However, as Freire insists, liberating education consists of cognition operations and not transfers of information, thus emphasizing dialogue and communication while simultaneously promoting "problem-posing education." Liberating education attempts from the outset to resolve the teacher-student contradiction typical of banking education. As Freire explains in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on 'authority' are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it." (61)

undergraduate courses has various purposes for environmental justice educators—uses similar to those that such texts themselves bring to environmental justice studies. First, texts and their analysis offer our students new means of understanding environmental justice, through cultural representations, for example, instead of through traditional perspectives of quantitative methodologies, environmental sociology, public policy, environmental law, environmental ethics and related disciplines and fields. Karen Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* is a good example. As Sze shows, Yamashita's novel clarifies our understanding of the geography of free trade, the genesis of environmental racism, and the gender politics of environmental justice (173). *Tropic of Orange* makes various linkages between past and present and between global and local struggles for environmental justice. And it makes clear the social and environmental costs of capitalist globalization. But more broadly, it offers a critique of social hierarchies and power, and the particular load they place on the subaltern. Hence, by blending the social, the ecological, the historical, the economical and the cultural, environmental justice literature, as *Tropic of Orange* exemplifies, helps our students understand multiple dimensions of environmental justice and their interrelation.

Besides providing new ways of looking at environmental justice, teaching literature, literary theory, and the various ecocritical schools together with textual analysis allows teachers to expand the ways they engage students in the process of *conscientization*. For instance, using the work of the growing number of scholars concerned with the literature of environmental justice can broaden our students' experiences into textual analysis and environmental justice ecocriticism. A good example is Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism*, which—from the standpoint of environmental justice—explores the writings of Sherman Alexie, Louise Erdrich, Simon Ortiz, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Joy Harjo as examples of ecological criticism regarding Euro-American conceptions of nature. The book also offers a critique of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* from the viewpoint of the environmental justice movement. Used in the classroom, this book can broaden our students' experiences into areas such as social theory, literary theory, ecological criticism, intellectual history and cultural studies.

Introducing texts and their study into the classroom also offers possibilities for using teaching methods that augment rather than accede to demographic and statistical data, namely textual and narrative analysis. Demographic and statistical tools still dominate environmental justice studies. Yet, as Sze demonstrates, these are not the only way to understand environmental justice, environmental

inequities, the formation of environmental inequalities and environmental justice struggles (165). Textual analysis can also be of help, especially since it provides us with unique ways to understand critically and appreciate the ideological frameworks and cultural representations of the various stakeholders involved in environmental justice struggles.

The literature of environmental justice also offers particular possibilities. First, the literature of environmental justice, to the extent that it contributes to the production of shared meanings with respect to environmental justice issues, while also providing interpretations of these issues, presents us with unique insights into the ideology and interpretative frameworks of the environmental justice movement. Reading the literature of environmental justice is thus important in understanding the movement's responses to environmental justice issues and in informing our understanding of what Taylor calls the "environmental justice paradigm" (533-545). Second, the literature of environmental justice offers possibilities for exposing students to the imaginative and creative ways in which environmental justice writers, activists and scholars enact through writing genuine political alternatives to environmental inequalities and injustices, voice community concerns, and convey the issues at stake in environmental justice struggles. Such experience could trigger our students' political, moral and cultural imagination, perhaps eliciting them to produce creatively their own ways to voice community concerns, suggest political alternatives and convey the issues involved in environmental justice struggles.

The study of texts in the classroom is undeniably a useful educational tool. Nonetheless, helping our students grow to be political subjects who would seek to question and challenge environmental inequalities while proposing alternatives that promote justice, equality and democracy, can be significantly improved if it is founded more deeply on what Reed calls "environmental justice ecocriticism" (149-157). Let me then lay out the essential qualities of environmental justice ecocriticism as conveyed by Reed.

First, this ecocritical school, like other schools, looks at the intricate relationship between literature, nature and society but from the viewpoint of environmental justice. Second, the school also looks at how literature brings to the attention the ways in which environmental degradation unequally affects poor people and other marginalized groups. Third, environmental justice ecocriticism uses textual analysis to look at the intersection between environmental quality and the unequal distribution of power and resources in the context of social

hierarchies and various forms of discrimination, including environmental racism, both locally and globally. Fourth, the school draws attention to different traditions in nature writing by the poor, by ethnic minorities and women, and other marginalized groups. Fifth, environmental justice ecocritics look at how environmental health hazards can be brought more fully to public attention through literature and criticism. Sixth, environmental justice ecocriticism calls attention to the ways by which texts and literary criticism encourage justice and a better use of natural resources around the world. Finally, environmental justice ecocritics examine how other eco-critical schools, namely conservationist ecocriticism, ecological criticism, deep ecological ecocriticism and ecofeminist ecocriticism, have been ethnocentric and insensitive to race, class, and gender hierarchies.

Despite its importance and value, environmental justice ecocriticism is for the most part underdeveloped. Still, Reed outlines some directions to further develop this ecocritical school and identifies three “prime levels of work” for environmental justice ecocritics: identifying images and stereotypes; uncovering and mapping traditions; and theorizing particular approaches within the field (152). This model could also be transferred to environmental justice pedagogy. In the classroom, environmental justice educators and their students can look at the relationship between racist, classist, and sexist stereotypes and environmental stereotypes and biases in various texts. They could also study other than white traditions in nature writing. They could also explore how issues of environmental justice figure in other genres produced by other than Euro-American writers. Finally, environmental justice educators and their students can explore the importance of theory in examining texts and identify possibilities for bringing together diverse theoretical tools to develop environmental justice ecocriticism further.

Besides these three levels of inquiry, there are numerous other levels of work for environmental justice educators to bring into the classroom, such as discussing nature’s value in texts and questioning how different valuations of nature are represented in these texts. There are two main reasons to bring the question of nature’s value to the classroom. First, if teaching environmental justice should not stray from its roots and status as a social movement, to the extent that valuing nature is part of the movement’s ideological framework, then we have no choice but to integrate the question of the movement’s valuation of nature into the classroom, together with that of other stakeholders involved in environmental justice struggles. We must acknowledge and bring into our classroom the fact that besides confronting environmental inequalities, eco-justice activists and scholars,

like most environmentalists, advise their supporters to value nature, live in harmony with it, and stop destroying it, which contrasts with the capitalist relation with nature. Ecocritics not only critique that relationship, but also the economic valuation of nature that such a relation entails.

Second, if the goal of environmental justice education is to stimulate our students' moral and political imagination to envision ways to ameliorate environmental inequalities, then we have no choice but to address the question of values, including the long and intricate history of how humans value nature. This is so because as Gayatri Spivak argues: "You take positions in terms not of the discovery of historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding" (228), or as David Harvey asserts, "we have no option except to articulate values and stick by them if emancipatory change is to be produced" (12).

### **Environmental Justice Pedagogy, Environmental Justice Ecocriticism and the Question of Nature's Value**

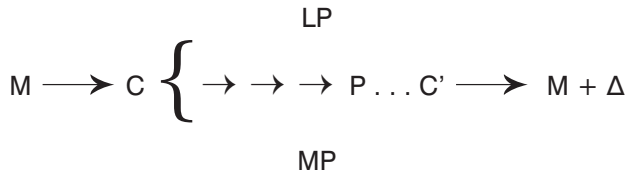
Today, the dominant valuation of nature is precisely the capitalist valuation, one that stresses nature's exchange-value. As Harvey explains, bourgeois political economy conceives of nature as a resource and is always appealing to the centrality of money as the universal means to measure and assess the diversity of human needs and wants, of use values and of "natural" elements and processes (150-151). Additionally, he identifies four arguments made to legitimate monetary valuations of nature. First, it is argued that money is the means whereby we all value significant aspects of our environment (i.e., money value assigned to natural resources). Second, money is the only "universal yardstick" of value that we currently possess, one that we all use and understand. Third, money is the basic form of social power. Finally, to speak the language of money is to speak the language of those holding positions of power.

The capitalist monetary valuation of nature legitimated by these four arguments is deeply connected to the "capitalist production of nature."<sup>7</sup> The capitalist production of nature is the process by which nature is changed, capitalized, circulated, exchanged and consumed, materially and ideologically, as a commodity from within the abstract framework of exchange-value: the same overarching logic of the

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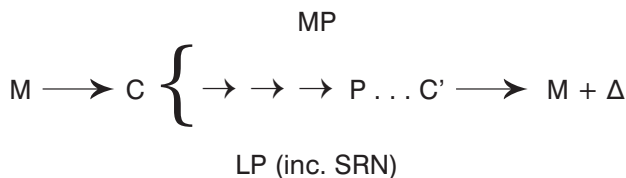
<sup>7</sup> Marxian geographer Neil Smith in his book *Uneven Development* published in 1984 coined the notion of the production of nature (33-65).

production process under the capitalist mode of production. With the capitalist mode of production—today’s dominant and wide-reaching economic system—goods are produced according to the following logic:<sup>8</sup>



where M (money) is spent to purchase C (commodities)—namely, MP (means of productions) and LP (labor power)—which are united in the productive process (P) to produce a new product (C’), which is then sold for the original money invested, plus a profit (Δ). The profit is then reinvested to facilitate a new cycle of production to accumulate still more money and profit.

In this system, commodities are not produced for their practical value or use value, but for their exchange value. Within the logic of the capitalist mode of production, nature too becomes part of this system, but in two opposing ways (Castree 195). On the one hand, we have a materially resistant nature, which seemingly cannot, in and of itself, be altered as a means of realizing profits. But, on the other hand, we have scientific research into nature, where scientists are employed by capitalist corporations to investigate how nature can be transformed to become an “accumulation strategy.”<sup>9</sup> Castree (195) represents the process as follows:



where SRN denotes scientific research into nature. This schema suggests that capitalism, an inherently expansive mode of production, is also a mode of ordering economic activities in which all manner

<sup>8</sup> The diagram was adapted from Castree (192).

<sup>9</sup> Cindi Katz’s concept of nature as an accumulation strategy (46) denotes the fact that faced with the loss of extensive nature, capital regrouped to examine and ransack an everyday more intensive nature, a shift largely propelled by corporate environmentalism, and which is now linked to the privatization of nature and the instrumentalist view of nature as a source of value (48-51).

of things, including nature, are brought together into the same overarching logic and spiral of growth. Thus, capitalism is always not only seeking to control all the lasting and non-capitalized social and symbolic relations to nature in terms of the code of production, but also to transform further already-capitalized nature in the name of profit. For this reason, the capitalist production of nature implies the capitalization of nature, the process by which nature and its resources become reservoirs of capital, and by which these stocks are made property saleable and exchangeable in the marketplace (O'Connor 10-16). That is, capitalism brings nature and concrete labor processes upon it together in an abstract framework of exchange value.

Under capitalism, the socially mediated relation with nature is then determined by the abstract determinations at the level of value that are continually translated into concrete activity in the relation with nature (Smith 54). This relation is therefore a use-value relation only in the greatest subordinate sense. It is, before anything else, an exchange-value relation. Thus, the theory of the production of nature “alerts us to the way that capitalism commodifies whole landscapes, constructs and reconstructs them in particular (profit-motivated) ways—to how it determines particular constellations of ‘natural’ products in particular places” (Castree 19). As shown by O'Connor, nature becomes “capital incarnate,” integrated in a rational computation of time by an equally rational management of investment around the globe, all integrated in a rational calculus of production and exchange through the price system that continues to expand spatially (16).

To empower students as critical beings we must ask them to examine, challenge, and dispute how capitalism produces and reproduces nature in particular profit-motivated ways, namely the capitalist production of nature. Environmental justice teaching is certainly valuable in repealing, challenging, and demystifying the capitalist production of nature and its apparatus of value coding concerning nature. It is also useful, to the degree that it motivates the political imagination of our students, in encouraging the growth and advancement of new valuations of nature, as well as a different production of nature that would challenge the capitalist valuation of nature by stressing the importance of use-values. If capitalism subordinates the use-values of nature to its exchange-value, then any environmental justice intervention seeking the production of alternative natures and the elimination of the structures of environmental inequality, including interventions in the classroom, cannot avoid the reaffirmation of use-values, without the mediation of exchange-value. And the re-establishment of use-values is to insist on cultural diversity, on the cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic uses of nature, uses valued by the



environmental justice movement.

Contesting the capitalist valuation of nature means also challenging the various ideologies, discourses, and representations of nature connected to it. The valuation of nature entails material and ideological developments, meaning that beyond an economic process, the valuation of nature is a cultural practice. And the various ideologies, discourses, and symbolic representations of nature connected to the process, all containing valuations of nature, are often produced and reproduced through texts, which makes texts and textual analysis pedagogically and politically useful for environmental justice educators and their students in the process of scrutinizing the capitalist valuation of nature.

However, revealing to our students the capitalist production of nature and its monetary valuation of nature is not enough. We must also expose them to alternative representations and valuations of nature, especially to the environmental justice movement's depiction and evaluation of nature. In contrast to the "exploitative capitalist paradigm" (Taylor 537-545), environmental justice activists advise their supporters to value nature, live in harmony with it, and stop destroying it. While capitalism values nature monetarily, the environmental justice movement rejects both the 'resourcing' of nature and its transformation into a commodity. That is, it rejects the capitalist production of nature. Moreover, the movement assigns more value to the use-values of nature than to the exchange-values of nature; it assigns more worth to the cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic uses of nature. Finally, the movement rejects the domination of nature characteristic of capitalist practices of extracting and using resources, and favors environmental protection over unchecked economic growth. With regard to the valuation of nature, people embracing the "environmental justice paradigm" are not different from people embracing the "new ecological paradigm" (Taylor 537-545). Table 1 offers a comparison between the three paradigms with respect to their valuation of nature.

Table 1 shows how both the new ecological paradigm and the environmental justice paradigm consign intrinsic values to nature. The benefit of seeing values as being inherent in nature is that it offers a sense of ontological security and durability. From this view, as Harvey explains, nature offers a "rich, variegated, and permanent candidate for induction into the hall of universal and permanent values to inform human action and to give meaning to otherwise ephemeral and fragmented lives" (157). Nevertheless, the environmental justice movement's emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature is not

TABLE 1: Comparison Between the Exploitative Capitalist Paradigm, the New Ecological Paradigm, and the Environmental Justice Paradigm and their Valuation of Nature

<i>Valuation of Nature</i>	<i>Exploitative Capitalist Paradigm</i>	<i>New Environmental Paradigm</i>	<i>Environmental Justice Paradigm</i>
Nature exists to produce resources for humans	Yes	No	No
Humans dominate nature	Yes	No	No
Humans exist in harmony with nature	No	Yes	Yes
Nature has intrinsic value	No	Yes	Yes
Environmental protection precedes economic growth	No	Yes	Yes

\* Adapted from Dorceta E. Taylor’s article, “The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm,” published in *American Behavioral Scientists*, 43.4 (2000): 508-580.

unproblematic. The problem with this view is that we don’t know for sure what the values residing in nature really are. All versions of the argument of values residing in nature depend deeply upon human mediations, mediations that Harvey argues can only produce human discourses about the inherent values of nature (158).

The ability to determine intrinsic values depends on the ability of humans endowed with perceptive, reflexive, and practical capacities to become neutral intermediaries of what those values might be. But is this possible? No. We have no way of learning what these values intrinsic to nature are separately from the values contained in the metaphors used in constructing particular lines of inquiry about those values (Harvey 162). So the choice of values lies within us and not in nature. Humans perceive no more than the values that their value-laden images let them envisage in their observations of nature.

To argue that the choice of “intrinsic” values in nature lies within us and not in nature does not mean that the metaphors are purely products of the human imagination. Rather it is to insist these metaphors are not independent of material practices, power, and other social relations, beliefs systems, and social institutions (Harvey

164).<sup>10</sup> Metaphors derive their power precisely from their relationship to material practices, social relations, belief systems, and social institutions. As Harvey shows, concrete conditions constitute our experience and how we create meaning, which refutes any relativist perspective (162-164). Since our metaphors depend on their relationship to other moments in the social process, and since we cannot see beyond our value-laden metaphors, then we have but only one choice, a choice best described by Harvey:

We can, therefore, only reflect critically upon the dialectical properties (internalizations) of the metaphors in use and watch carefully as human beings amass scientific and other evidence for a particular “naturalized” set of values. And then we find that the values supposedly inherent in nature are properties of the metaphors, of the human imaginary internalizing and working on the multiple effects of other moments in the social process, most conspicuously those of material social practices. “We can never speak about nature,” says Capra “without, at the same time, speaking about ourselves.” (164)

For environmental justice teachers and students, this does not mean that we must abandon the environmental justice movement’s valuation of nature but that we must reflect critically upon both the capitalist valuation of nature and its metaphors, and upon the environmental justice movement’s representations and valuations of nature. As such, we must create pedagogical spaces for critical reflection upon diverse valuations of nature, including both the capitalist value system as well as that of the environmental justice movement. In the classroom, we must pose valuations of nature as a problem to address through dialogue and communication. And the study of texts in the classroom is a useful tool in compelling our students to examine critically such diverse valuations of nature, especially if we acknowledge from the outset that texts allocate and distribute value with regard to nature.

### **Textual Economics, Textual Economies of Nature, and Environmental Justice Pedagogy**

Examining textual valuations of nature requires that texts be examined as economies. Shankar’s call for a move toward an economic look at texts, for a textual economics, is especially useful in this matter (13-25). For Shankar any text is, essentially, an economy.

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<sup>10</sup> Harvey is referring to the six moments of the social process he identified in his cognitive map of the social process, namely discourses, power, social relations, beliefs, values and desires, and social institutions (78).

Such an approach, I propose, is especially useful for teachers and students examining the ways in which texts produce and distribute value with regard to nature. It then seems necessary to lay down the essential qualities of what Shankar calls textual economics and the textual economies (13-16).

Textual economics is concerned with the examination of the particular manner in which a text produces, distributes, and allocates value, namely the evaluative structures of a text.<sup>11</sup> For example, one can examine how narratives of travel, including the movie *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, realize and assign more value to the traveler and the place from which he began his journey, namely Indiana Jones and the United States, while devaluing the people of the overexploited world: India in this case (Shankar 37-47). Additionally, one can easily demonstrate that American travel texts about Puerto Rico not only mediate between representations of the colonizer and the colonized through different narrative, rhetorical, and discursive strategies but that they also, in effect, code the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico in evaluative terms. In these narratives, greater value is assigned to the U.S. traveler/writer protagonist and the United States. By contrast, Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rico are devalued, a devaluing that most often takes the form of racial debasement.<sup>12</sup>

Shankar's textual economics goes beyond mere attention to textual economies. His textual economics also engages the relationship between the evaluative structures of a text and its practical and/or historical context. From the vantage point of textual economics, the textual economy is an open system:

And so it follows that a textual economy is not a closed system. Rather, its currents of meaning—its structures of values—flow into the surrounding sea of human praxis, which is, as Lukács reminds us, history itself. At the same time, currents from the surrounding sea flow into it and determine its structures of value. It is in the realm of praxis, the sea of history, that the evaluative structures and the value that they distribute have their origin. (15).

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<sup>11</sup> Shankar's notion of the value of the text is similar to, yet different from, value in a political economy. However, just as one can explain the latter in terms of labor, an expression of praxis, then one can also explain the former by recourse to praxis (6-9).

<sup>12</sup> Like classification, the rhetorical strategy of debasement constructs a hierarchical order that normalizes, naturalizes and essentializes differences by placing human beings into categories in which they "naturally" belong. But in what Spurr calls debasement, the object of humiliation—the colonized other—provides the negative end of a value system (76-91). Fanon too describes such debasement in *The Wretched of the Earth* (41-43).

Textual economics then draws attention to praxis, with praxis understood as “human sensuous activity” or as a general human social activity that, emanating from the social character of human social existence, finds expression in purposeful social organization and transformational practices (Shankar 16-25).<sup>13</sup> More specifically, praxis is any process of transformation of raw materials into a product, a change produced by a determinate human labor using a determinate means of production (San Juan 77). In consequence, cultural production, including literature, is understood as a distinctive mode of production that transforms raw materials (elements of lived experiences) into a specific product (novel, painting, sculpture and so on) by means of a labor process. This argument implies, of course, that cultural production, in all its forms, is united to material practices and conditions, activities, and circumstances where the textual economy finds its genesis. That is, cultural production does not belong to ghostly places, having nothing to do with the mundane—the historical-practical context. It is actually largely influenced by these ordinary planes of social activity, which is to say that production relations and the sociopolitical order shaped by these relations *overdetermine* the full range of texts and their evaluative structures.

Shankar’s textual economics is useful for examining textual economies of nature and their relationship to a particular socio-historical context with our students. Let me then end this section with two brief examples of the kind of analysis that educators and students can bring to bear from their study of texts and their economies of nature in the classroom. I will begin with Robert D. Hall’s *Porto Rico: Its History, Products and Possibilities*, a book written shortly after the United States’ invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898. Hall certainly treated “Porto

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<sup>13</sup> Praxis implies the dialectical relation between humans and nature. In any practice, the determinant instance or element are not the raw materials nor the product, but rather the practice in the narrow sense itself—namely, labor—of changing materials through means of production and knowledge regarding their use (San Juan 77). Shankar supports a shift to matters of praxis. Although he recognizes the importance of praxis as conscious political action, he stresses praxis as a mode of being active in the world—meaning the way in which human beings relate to one another and the environment. In recovering the category of praxis, his textual economics attempt to evade the inadequacy of the “cultural politics of representation” by counter posing it to what he refers to as the “cultural politics of praxis” (19). With the latter, more weight is given to doing and feeling than to speaking and writing, or rather to praxis in its relationship to representations. The goal is to examine how a specific text is the expression of a particular praxis, how that praxis is a theme within a text and the relationship between praxis and the evaluative structures of the text in question. Indeed, raising questions about the textual economy of a specific text will eventually lead to questions of praxis.

Rico” as a repository of use-values available for colonialist-capitalist exploitation. The whole island, conceived as a precious commodity, had a price: “Uncle Sam will certainly find this beautiful and fertile island a most valuable possession, every foot of which he could sell at a large substantial price, if he chose to do so” (7). For Hall, “Porto Rico”—immensely wealthy due to the fertility of its soil—was simply “one of the finest pieces of property on the earth’s surface” (43). Of course, only the American presence in the island could increase the value of the island: “The island, without much exaggeration, can really be called the garden spot of the world, and there is no doubt but that when the Stars and Stripes wave permanently over it, and there is an influx of American enterprise and wealth, there will be a marvelous increase in values of all kinds” (7-8).

Hall’s *Porto Rico* certainly contains a textual economy of nature, one that attaches value to certain natural resources, especially the land and agricultural resources, while subordinating their use-value to their exchange-value. As such, Hall engaged in the prospecting of Puerto Rico and its resources, in the anticipation of profits: “With the island in the possession of the United States and with the abolishment of the differential duties in favor of the Spanish government, its geographical position will undoubtedly cause most of its commerce to flow to and from the United States” (43). He adds:

There will be a market furnished for great quantities of food products, textiles, fabrics, iron, steel and coal. From the island to the United States will chiefly be received coffee, tobacco, and sugar. Indeed, it may be said that in the line of coffee cultivation, the greatest development of Porto Rico may be expected in the near future. (43)

Hall also engaged in the “stocking” of the island’s natural resources, producing an inventory of profitable resources, as his reference to trees illustrates: “More than five hundred varieties of trees can be found in the forests of the island, many of which are very valuable, and the plains are full of palms, oranges and other fruit-bearing trees” (43). Hall’s book shows that, as San Juan reminds us, many hegemonic texts are indeed the textualization of the problem of searching for the universal equivalent form of value, which, not unexpectedly, is often found in the money form (91-120). Hall’s text certainly appealed to the centrality of money as the universal means to measure not just the island’s natural resources but also the island itself. Hall’s book, then affords all students of environmental justice a glimpse into the American-colonialist attempt to delineate and assert a land’s economic value.

Textual economics is also pedagogically useful in exposing students to critics of the capitalist valuation of nature, to counter-

hegemonic valuations of nature. Let me illustrate with a poem by Victor Hernández Cruz called “The Land,” a poem referring to Puerto Rico (11). In Puerto Rico, colonial capitalism, like capitalism everywhere, cannot function without the exploitation of natural resources, including the land—a point made strongly by Hernández Cruz’s poem. The poem, dedicated to Pedro Albizu Campos, the celebrated and legendary nationalist leader, speaks of the U.S. colonization of Puerto Rico, and more specifically, of the ways in which nature, and especially the land, is tainted, capitalized, distributed, traded and consumed as a commodity in the context of colonial capitalism:

Our blue sea  
now filled with cheap scum-bags  
made in the USA  
the continuous forests  
now interrupted by Coca-Cola signs  
the land something to buy  
the Yankee man touch everything  
touch the sand  
that saw Columbus  
and our grass stepped on by Hush Puppies  
the pueblo of my mother  
of pretty music  
of midnight songs  
now sold in stocks  
the Yankee hand  
touching my land  
the touch of hate  
the touch of death

Hernández Cruz narrates here, poetically, the capitalist-imperialist, deadly and hateful touching of nature, a handling that turns nature into “something to buy,” a commodity “sold in stocks.” Hernández Cruz’s poem is an instance of the fact that artistic expressions—poetry in this case—narrate, communicate, and depict the production of nature. Indeed, the poem’s subject matter is largely the process of people altering nature, namely producing nature, and in so doing acting and changing themselves and society under a given mode of production. As Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o reminds us: “Art is a way of seeing, or apprehending, the world of man and nature through visual, sound or mental images.” (55).

However, the poem does more than simply narrate the capitalist production of nature for us to comprehend our relation to our environment. It is a critique of the capitalist production of nature, one that also summarizes and denounces the effects of such production of nature while also confronting U.S. imperialism. Hernández Cruz uses poetry to help us take a certain view of the capitalist production of nature, an oppositional critical view entailing a different valuation of

the land. Through his poetic images Hernández Cruz uses his art, as Ngũgĩ would argue, to “assault our consciousness to make us take a certain view of the World of Man and Nature.” (55). Hernández Cruz tries to make us not only see and understand our relation with nature in the context of United State imperialism, but to see and understand that relationship in a certain way, from what Ngũgĩ calls “the angle of vision of the artist” (57).

Hernández Cruz’s poem, as a form of art, presents a different valuation of land—more specifically, Albizu’s nationalism, which also contained a critique of the American colonization of Puerto Rican land. In relation to national sovereignty, Albizu framed the protection of land in nationalist terms, where land and, by extension, nature, are perceived as national heritage, a national inheritance that needed to be defended from U.S. capitalist-colonialist interests. From this position, Albizu struggled for national sovereignty and control over Puerto Rico’s natural resources by establishing greater autonomy vis-à-vis the more exploitive features of the U.S. capitalist colonialism. Hernández Cruz’s poem, then, affords all students of environmental justice one glimpse into the struggle to define and claim a land’s—in this case, Puerto Rico’s—value.

As the prior examples show, texts are concerned with and thematize valuations of nature, which demonstrates that texts constitute an important tool in teaching environmental justice issues, issues that entail articulations of value. From these examples and my previous exposition, we can discern some propositions regarding the uses of textual economics for the study and teaching of valuations of nature. Textual economics offers, first, an excellent way for students to look at and understand textual valuations of nature in their historical context, especially since texts play a dynamic role in producing and reproducing such valuations. Second, textual economics provides students with powerful means to help them critique, contest and demystify the capitalist monetary valuation of nature. Finally, textual economies provide students with an excellent way of examining the imaginative and creative ways in which environmental justice writers, activists and scholars enact alternative valuations of nature.

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## SUBMERGED REALITIES: SHARK DOCUMENTARIES AT DEPTH

*Kathryn Ferguson*

There isn't any symbolism. The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The sharks are all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that people say is shit. What goes beyond is what you see beyond when you know.

Ernest Hemingway (780)

Richard Fitzpatrick caught his first Epaulette shark from the Coral Sea when he was eleven years old. He took it home, put it in his aquarium, and then transported the whole thing to school for show and tell. Some twenty years later, he is still playing show and tell with sharks, but to a much larger audience. His work has been seen on, amongst others, the Discovery Channel, the National Geographic Channel, the ABC, the BBC, the CBC, and Japan's NHK and TBS. As both a marine scientist and a director of Digital Dimensions in Townsville Australia, Fitzpatrick has been a subject of several documentaries, has filming credits on a wide range of documentary, corporate, and mainstream film projects, and has, with his business partner Brett Shorthouse, created a number of award-winning nature documentaries. Fitzpatrick has been senior biologist at Manly Oceanworld and Maui Ocean Center, a biologist at the Great Barrier Reef Aquarium, and has spent well over eight thousand hours underwater, a goodly percentage of that time with sharks. His aquarium has grown into a fully-tended aquatic film studio which includes a sixty cubic-metre tank and four thousand-litre tanks. In both studying and filming sharks, he has navigated through the maze of corporate television expectations, and put them to the use of shark research and conservation.<sup>1</sup> Fitzpatrick's

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<sup>1</sup> The commercial success of Digital Dimensions has also allowed the company to offer stock footage to specific environmental protection groups.

argument is straightforward and pragmatic: “very little is known about the basic biology and ecology of tropical sharks” (Fitzpatrick). We need to know more about sharks’ biology, habits, and haunts before we can implement a successful and responsible preservation strategy for these animals and their environments. His assessment of commercial shark fishing is even more succinct: “shark fishing is just—it’s unsustainable” (Fitzpatrick in Brook). Putting premises into practice, Fitzpatrick and Digital Dimensions have forged a unique relationship with Undersea Explorer, an environmentally responsible charter diving operation, that combines scientific research, documentary production, and eco-tourism: a sustainable shark industry in Australia’s Coral Sea.

What I propose here is an historically contextualised examination of specific segments of the documentary work of Richard Fitzpatrick; Australia’s “Shark Tracker.” Fitzpatrick’s work is a particularly apt point of departure, as he has been both the cameraman and the subject of underwater documentary films. Admittedly, my article looks at only a tiny portion of Fitzpatrick’s documentary work, which is itself only a minute fraction of a vastly under-analysed genre, and thus must be considered as a discrete example rather than as representative of an entire sphere. My discussion stems from Bill Nichols’ notion of an ‘historical reality’ wherein documentary representations of any given reality are understood as ontologically, rather than simply analogically, linked to the ‘real world’ (“The Voice of Documentary”; *Representing Reality*). Understanding any documentary reality as an historically constituted reality—one which is defined by its own contemporaneous positioning, which has, in turn, been shaped by historical forces—is particularly significant to any understanding of underwater documentaries because of the ‘Otherness’ of the environment which is depicted.

In thinking of ‘the environment,’ we too often neglect the vast submerged eco-systems that make up a huge portion of our world. This may be due in part to the fact that we tend to translate ‘the environment’ to ‘*our* environment’ which is, for the most part, limited to land; we are terrestrial creatures. As Hemingway’s disgruntled comment, which serves as an epigraph to this article, suggests, there is a well-established tradition of reading an oceanic text, not as a descriptive narrative of a unique environment, but as a simplified simulacrum symbolic of our own *a priori* world. Historically, this way of thinking has been mirrored in documentary commentary and theory. For example, in his 1974 otherwise inclusive history of non-fiction films, Erik Barnouw dismissed underwater documentary with a quick nod to the fact that Jacques Cousteau chronicled “a strange world” (210).

I contend that it is precisely *because* of the ostensible ‘Otherness’ and ‘strangeness’ of the underwater environments—our alienation from them and our lack of understanding of them—that we need to recognise the historical bases and biases of our own prejudices and perceptions of that immense underwater bionetwork. As Fitzpatrick notes in *Richard Fitzpatrick and his Sharks*:

Everything is related together.... Biodiversity is very important. There are things out there and inter-relationships we just don’t know anything about at all, and we may not know about for generations. And if we destroy them now, we could be having a *huge* detrimental effect to the eco-system—the whole world.

Keeping in mind John Corner’s warning that theoretical work on documentaries “has often increasingly divorced itself from attention to specific practices and artefacts, setting up as a relatively autonomous discursive activity ‘above’ the level of both practice and practical criticism” (9), my article does not propose to institute a coherent or cohesive theory of underwater or shark documentary. Instead, I will put forward a brief examination of some of the specific elements of the historical reality that lies beyond and beneath a very small sampling of Fitzpatrick’s underwater documentary endeavours. My article is, somewhat ironically, grounded in the water.

Anchor, Bruce, and Chum, Pixar’s cartoon trio of twelve-stepping vegetarian sharks (2003), the internet’s favourite digitally merged photograph of a South African Great White leaping at an American military helicopter in San Francisco Bay (Danielson), and Damien Hirst’s pickled Australian Tiger shark (1991) all point towards the increasing lack of distinction between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘illusion,’ and do so specifically in the world of sharks. Indeed, in a world where eighty percent of shark species may be endangered, and humans still kill up to a hundred million sharks annually; where flavourless shark fin is an illicit gourmet status symbol while the cheapest choice on the menu at the local fish and chip shop is most likely to be flake; and the redolent 1975 soundtrack from *Jaws* still has cultural currency, it is arguable that such a line has been practically erased.<sup>2</sup> The uneasy oscillations of fear and fascination, fact and fiction, art and science that thrum through our contemporary impressions of sharks seem to portend a particularly thorny state of affairs confronting shark documentarists aiming to portray sharks and their underwater environments

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<sup>2</sup> *Jaws*’s lingering ability to contaminate our perceptions of sharks may go even further than imagined. In *Jaws* (1975) a Louisiana licence plate is removed from the belly of a Tiger shark. In *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) the exact same plate is removed from the teeth of a Tiger shark.

realistically. With a market increasingly demanding their nature and wildlife documentaries 'red in tooth and claw' with "higher tempo—much more action" (Landin 16), there seems little space for anything but spectacular scenes showing as much blood, gore, and carnage as possible. Peter Steinhart has labelled the exaggerated emphasis on death and violence in nature films as "eco-porn" ("Ecoporn") or "outdoor porn" ("Wildlife Films" 41), suggesting that 'the kill shot' in nature documentaries has become equivalent to 'the money shot' in pornography. The histrionic combination of blood and bubbles in rigidly segmented timeframes is increasingly being demanded and expected of underwater documentaries. Fitzpatrick sums up the filmic conundrum facing shark documentarists neatly: "we are probably responsible for people's [exaggerated] perceptions of sharks.... Yeah, documentary makers have been responsible for changing people's perceptions of these animals" but adds that if he were "to make a shark documentary about what sharks are doing normally, people would fall asleep" (Fitzpatrick in R. Williams).

The creation of a shark documentary is thus no simple process of relentlessly recording 'what sharks are doing normally': on the contrary, it would seem that the documentary, albeit perhaps reluctantly, reinscribes at least some portion of the exaggerated mythologies and fictions about what sharks are *not* doing normally. With this knowledge, one might glibly conclude that there is no real possibility of any inherent biological or ecological reality to be found in shark documentaries, and consequently the only pertinent questions remaining entail quantifying the value of such documentaries as highly stylised nautical fiction.<sup>3</sup> This line of reasoning, however, would not go far in explaining the long-standing dearth of critical or theoretical discussions, not only about shark documentaries specifically, but about underwater wildlife documentaries as a whole. Theorists have been debating the 'truth' content of documentaries for long enough that critics, such as Brian McIlroy, were confident in claiming over ten years ago that "it is now common to read that, theoretically speaking, documentary and narrative fiction film 'proper' are indistinguishable

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<sup>3</sup> For a history of the truth/fiction debate specifically in terms of wildlife documentary, Bous   offers an excellent recounting in his third chapter, "Science and Storytelling" (86-123). A valuable point to emerge in the truth/fiction debate regarding wildlife documentary is the issue of animal cruelty. George James brought this point to horrifying precedence in 1983 in his own animal documentary *Cruel Camera* on the CBC's *Fifth Estate*. The program showed that many 'natural' events in wildlife films had been ruthlessly staged. The most notorious was Disney's *White Wilderness* (1958) that passed off the intentional herding of pet lemmings off a cliff, several hundred kilometres south of their natural habitat, as natural behaviour. It is important to note here that *not all* animal documentarists practice, condone, or allow these practices.

as constructed realities” (288). Linda Williams, alternatively suggested in 1993, that “an overly simplified dichotomy between truth and fiction is at the root of our difficulty in thinking about the truth in documentary” (20). That same year, Brian Winston argued that, in order to survive, the documentary form needed to once and for all privilege art over science that that, in the end, it would be “necessary for the documentary, to negotiate and escape from the embrace of science” (56-57). Science and storytelling, it would seem, make each other uneasy. Or, as Julian Petley neatly summed it up in 1996: “Fact plus fiction equals friction” (11).

Bill Nichols has noted that although in recent years the linkage of documentary and fictional space within single texts has led to a questioning of the reality of documentary footage, he believes that in documentary films “some quality of the moment persists outside the grip of textual organization” (*Representing Reality* 231). If, as Susan Sontag contends, photographs not only “give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure” (9), it follows that underwater films about sharks might well be construed, especially by those preferring to remain top-side, as the ultimate in psychologically satisfying photography, as they facilitate the comfortable imaginative appropriation of ‘some quality of the moment’ from a largely unknown and particularly precarious space. However, even within the specialised realm of animal documentary, underwater criticism is conspicuous by its scarcity. In 1966, John Warham’s *The Technique of Wildlife Cinematography* justified the fact that it did not include marine animals in its topics by asserting that “those whose subjects are laboratory animals like fish...have available to them techniques and specialized gear generally quite inapplicable in the free world outside of the laboratory” (9). Perhaps that is understandable for an author writing during an era when Jacques Cousteau, Peter Parks, and Hans and Lotte Hass were still trailblazers in the field of openwater underwater film production, and the BBC2’s June 1968 programme on plankton had not yet “astounded viewers, most of whom had no idea that such life forms existed” (Parsons 253). However, some thirty-four years later it is less understandable when Derek Bousé admits in 2000 that, in his historical study of *Wildlife Films*, he had

not dealt with films about underwater creatures—cetaceans, crustaceans, fish, and so on. I see underwater films...operating by somewhat different codes and conventions because of the conditions under which they are made, the behaviour of underwater creatures themselves, and several other factors. (xiii)

Bousé does not explain what the ‘several other factors’ are, but does



go on to suggest that a book, such as his own, “can and should be written about films dealing with underwater life” (xiii). The elision of underwater documentary from critical discourse has meant that we have not thought, to any significant degree, about what exactly it means to film an underwater environment, about the documentary representation of that underwater environment itself, or how we have come to think what we do about that ‘Othered’ space and its inhabitants.

In 1997, Fitzpatrick financed a portion of his ongoing research on the White Tip Reef sharks at Osprey Reef by agreeing to be the subject of *Australie: Les Requins de la Grande Barrière* (1997) as a part of Canal Plus’ *Dans la Nature* series.<sup>4</sup> In 2002, he similarly agreed to be the subject of *Shark Tracker* (2002) and *Richard Fitzpatrick and his Sharks* (2002) at Raine Island to partially finance the first successful satellite tagging of a Tiger shark in Australian waters.<sup>5</sup> In 2003 he returned to tag three more Tiger sharks and be a part of *Raine Island: Nature’s Warzone* (2003). All of these documentaries highlight the fact that humans and documentary cameras are visitors to the reef rather than inhabitants. The mechanical sound of breathing through a regulator during underwater scenes, an emphasis on means and length of travel, the gear required to get into the water and stay there for a longer than a breath-length, and footage of humans on land all serve as reminders of the very basic differences between living *on* land and living *in* the sea. Fitzpatrick makes the point clear: “we must always remember that in here [the ocean] that’s the sharks’ home—that’s their home—its not ours, and we’re visitors to that.... It’s their world; we have to be respectful when we visit.” In 2004 it seems rather obvious that to represent the lives of sharks accurately and effectively one

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<sup>4</sup> Osprey Reef is an isolated seamount approximately 330 Kilometres northeast of Cairns in the Coral Sea. It is about 70 nautical miles outside of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority’s jurisdiction, and thus extremely vulnerable to raiding by floating fish processing plants. Fitzpatrick has been studying the White Tips at North Horn since 1995, and, to date, has captured and tagged twenty-eight of the thirty identified White Tips. With Andy Dunstan of Undersea Explorer, a database is maintained that monitors the growth and reproductive rate of the population. The data collected thus far clearly indicates that if the resident population of sharks were to be significantly depleted, the slow growth and reproductive rates of sharks would guarantee that the health of the entire reef would be detrimentally affected by the loss of its apex predators.

<sup>5</sup> Raine Island is a thirty-two hectare coral cay six hundred and twenty kilometres northwest of Cairns near the northern tip of Cape York. As the largest green turtle rookery in the world and the most significant tropical seabird nesting site, Raine Island is Australia’s most protected natural space and closed to all except a limited number of researchers. Each year, as thousands of turtles migrate to the island, Tiger sharks (usually solitary and elusive creatures) gather to prey on the turtles.

must get in the water; we must visit their world. There are between 465 and 480 species of sharks in the world, and although some live in fresh water and some live in salt water, they all live in water. For our contemporary sophisticated tastes, any documentary that presented sharks exclusively by looking down on them from the dry perspectives of land or deck would be laughable, and even a documentary shot exclusively in a large aquarium would be disappointing.

What is easy to forget is that, until the last half of the nineteenth century, almost all depictions of sea creatures were conventionally described from the perspective of the shore. Marine animals were usually portrayed either alive at the water's surface or dead and desiccating on land. In 1731, for example, J.J. Scheuchzer published his very successful 750-plate tome depicting a natural science perspective of the Biblical scenes wherein all aquatic animals are depicted on top of or out of the water. When John Singleton Copely painted *Watson and the Shark* in 1778 and showed only the parts of the shark that are above the water line, not only was he creating a dramatic representation of man's struggle against nature, he was also adhering to the 'natural' and naturalists' way of illustrating sharks. Even by 1852, Sir William Jardine's *Fishes of British Guiana* in The Naturalist's Library series has most of its fish posed unconvincingly on dry rocks at the water's edge. There was no underwater perspective to expect or demand from those who took it upon themselves to represent the submerged world. Most people did not know how to swim, and although Aristotle discusses the use of diving bells, it was not until 1535 that the first true diving bell was invented. Even though the first diving suit was tested in the Thames in February of 1715, it was not until 1825 that a workable, yet still dangerous, model for a breathing apparatus was designed.

It would not be until after the English aquarium craze of the 1850s that the 'natural' and 'correct' way of depicting marine life would shift from looking downwards on the subject to an edge-on perspective.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, the 'proper' way of depicting marine life was dependent more upon the lifting of the exorbitant British tax on glass in 1845 and the English middle-classes' obsession with domestic fashion, than it was on a scientifically driven campaign for biological accuracy. Before the English aquarium fad it was close to unthinkable to view marine life face to face, as the only natural perspective hitherto had been from the shore. Although some marine naturalists may well have known exactly what a shark would look like head on or from the side

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Jay Gould discusses this transition in "Seeing Eye to Eye, Through a Glass Clearly" (57-73)

in, say 1806, it simply was not done to illustrate a shark from any perspective but from above; the perspective from which most people would have seen marine life. With the introduction of the domestic aquarium in the last half of the century, everyone came to know that the 'correct' way of viewing sea creatures was up close and eye-to-eye. However, even by the summer of 1922, when E.J. Pratt wrote "The Shark," underwater perspectives of pelagic creatures, those which did not fit in the household tank, were still largely reserved for educated specialists and enthusiastic naturalists.<sup>7</sup> Pratt's 'common man' narrator watches a shark from a Newfoundland wharf on the east coast of Canada, describing only that which is above the surface; the way that sharks would be seen 'naturally':

He seemed to know the harbour,  
So leisurely he swam;  
His fin,  
Like a piece of sheet-iron,  
Three-cornered,  
And with knife-edge,  
Stirred not a bubble  
As it moved  
With its base-line on the water (1-9).

In 1958, all of that would change, at least in Britain, when Hans and Lotte Hass began their *Diving to Adventure* television series for the BBC. Ten years later, Jacques Cousteau was asked to make a television series on underwater life. For the next eight years, *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* brought the underwater world to countless homes around the world—in colour. Although Cousteau's *The Silent World* (1956) and *World Without Sun* (1966) had both won Academy Awards for best documentary, it was with the paradigm shift, again domestic rather than scientific, of television programming that radically changed the 'correct' and 'common' way to depict sharks.<sup>8</sup> It was not until television brought the ocean into the homes of the western world in the last half of the twentieth century that audiences

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<sup>7</sup> There was a brief period from 1870-1890 where public aquariums were popular. However, as Lynn Barber points out, when experts began to garner better and more sophisticated research facilities, "the public aquaria...sank into mere vulgar amusement" and most public aquariums were re-fitted for other uses (124).

<sup>8</sup> In 1998 it would be admitted that a diver had faked the bends for *The Silent World*. Much more troubling, however, was the revelation that on the *Undersea World* documentaries, Cousteau crew had poured chlorine bleach into a tank containing an octopus to get the famous footage of an octopus climbing out of a tank onboard the *Calypso* and throwing itself back into the ocean. Even more problematic is the death of two sea lions who died because of the amount of time they had been kept out of the water in order to get sufficient footage for *Undersea World*.

generally came to expect to be able to see a shark portrayed in his or her own natural habitat—from a 360-degree perspective in colour.

Obviously, that radically truncated account elides a myriad of detail and a great deal of both naturalist and technological history. However, the argument I would like to draw from that brief recounting is that sharks have, for quite some time now, looked the same. What has changed is the human perspective of what is to be expected when we see sharks represented. Admittedly, something of an obvious pair of statements, but what is implicit in that pairing is a recognition, not only that strategies of sight and thinking arise within social contexts, but that our contemporary notions of what it means to document a shark accurately, truthfully, and even scientifically have a very brief pedigree in the world of natural history. Most of us have taken pleasure in watching the work of underwater documentarists, and it is, for many of us, the only glimpses we have had of submerged worlds beyond the city aquarium. Although we may not have watched a full documentary on the undersea world since grade school, when presented with an underwater documentary, we still fully expect our sharks and other aquatic animals to be presented to us in a certain way, and within their own marine environment.

Fitzpatrick, who has been fascinated with sharks for most of his thirty-four years, and is an articulate and able speaker, could very quickly, easily, and efficiently stand beside a whiteboard and explain to most members of a television audience pretty much all they could understand about shark biology and the importance of apex predators in maintaining a healthy reef ecosystem. He could probably even do it without a whiteboard. But that is not how we want or expect our environmental science to be served; we want real images of the real world showing us things we are not likely to see, ironically, outside of our own lounge rooms. We want our fish and marine scientists in the water, and we want our water bottled. As Susan Sontag points out, “reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by images, but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, with the invention of photography, that “the new age of non-belief strengthened the allegiance to images” to the extent that they became a supplement rather than a complement to the real (153). Sontag goes on to argue that, to some extent, we have begun to rely entirely upon images for our perceptions of reality, and that “the primitive notion of the efficacy of images presumes that images possess the qualities of real things, but our inclination is to attribute to real things the qualities of an image” (158). We have begun to interpret reality through the images presented to us by popular media, as much as we interpret those same images from our own experiential reality. This

is particularly true of the underwater environment, which is, for many of us, 'known' and 'experienced' exclusively through filmic mediums. Unfortunately, the highly fictionalised realms of movies such as *Jaws* and *Deep Blue Sea* have tended to eclipse, by simple popular sensationalism, any realistic appreciation of sharks as a natural, indeed necessary, part of a healthy reef ecosystem.

Today, images are premised on a certain epistemology and have an always already authority to dictate our expectations of reality. Our estimations of what is the 'correct' way of seeing marine life have been modified dramatically over the years, as has the experiential weight that we attribute to those images. Watching documentary footage in which Fitzpatrick tail ropes a 3.4 metre Tiger shark, measures her, attaches a tracking device to her dorsal fin, releases her, swims with her to make sure she is fine, and then sends her on her way with a hug and fond pat is quite a different experience than reading this relatively bland sentence. Indeed, what Fitzpatrick actually does with sharks is almost impossible to believe *until* we see the entire process laid out in front of us as a fully explicated and evidenced process of valuable environmental research. The process is not quite believable, intellectually intelligible, or environmentally relevant until we see the practical processes and scientific reasons for tagging a huge fish represented sequentially as part of a coherent whole. The documentary thus emerges as a highly effective way to communicate information that would otherwise be incredible—or, as Fitzpatrick would have it, put us to sleep. Indeed, our alienation from the underwater environment makes, not only the practical physical realities of Fitzpatrick's research almost beyond belief, but leaves much of the everyday moment to moment and mundane realities of the underwater world as inconceivable and unknown. Fish that change sexes, snails with harpoons, curious cod, amiable poisonous snakes, technicolour octopi, and sharks that like a bit of a scratch once they get to know you are just a sampling of those things which have to be seen to be believed; and we want to see them underwater, not from shore and *definitely* not dead and dehydrated on a biologist's bench.

When the *Endeavour's* naturalist, Joseph Banks, sailed the east coast of Australia with Captain Cook in 1770 he paid scant scientific attention to the one-hundred and twenty-three species of sharks that reside on the Great Barrier Reef. A journal entry from earlier in the journey suggests that may have been, at least in part, due to the fact that, at least for that expedition, sharks were more interesting as crew rations than biological subjects:

Up at 5 this morn to examine the shark who proves to be A blew Shark  
*Squalus glaucus*, while we were doing it 3 more came under the Stern

of which we soon caught 2 which were common grey Sharks *Squalus Carcharias*, on one of whom were some sucking fish *Echinus remora*. The seamen tell us that the blew shark is worst of all sharks to eat, indeed his smell is abominably strong so as we had two of the better sort he was hove overboard (Banks, *Endeavour Journal*).

Banks' interest in sharks as a comestible commodity,<sup>9</sup> rather than an intrinsic part of a fascinating ecosystem has been, thankfully, challenged by contemporary naturalists and scientists who are beginning, albeit slowly, to convince the western world that sharks are worth more alive than dead. This would seem particularly true of the Great Barrier Reef where tourism to the reef in 1998 was estimated to be worth over a billion dollars (*State of the GBR: Tourism*) whilst controlled commercial fishing on the reef in 1996 accounted for the relatively small amount of \$143,000,000 (*State of the GBR: Fisheries*). Dean Miller's ongoing research at James Cook University in Townsville has unequivocally convinced him that, in regard to the responsible and sustainable use of sharks at the Great Barrier Reef, "there is no better avenue than tourism" especially "when compared to extractive industries" (Miller). Live sharks can be re-visited and respected: dead sharks are, per pound, worth half as much as halibut—once.<sup>10</sup>

Many of Fitzpatrick's documentaries are filmed onboard the *Undersea Explorer*, which is a recognized leader in responsible Australian marine eco-tourism. The shark attract dives offered by Undersea Explorer are featured in several shark documentaries, and are, in Miller's estimation, "a great conservation tool for sharks"

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<sup>9</sup> Here, it should also be recalled here that Banks was, in part, the instigator of Australia's disastrous whaling and sealing industries that blunderingly exhausted their resources within fifty years. In 1806, his advice was:

After the seals have been once effectually disturbs their diminished quantities will not then afford sufficient encouragement to induce Americans or Frenchmen to interfere with our colonists; but there can be no doubt that at all times hereafter seals will be attainable in great quantities ... by stationary fishers, who know the course they take in their migrations, and can intercept them in their progress by nets and other contrivances. Thus, if we encourage our new settlers to disturb as speedily as possible every seal station they can discover, we shall receive from them an immense supply of skins and oil, in the first instance; shall prevent the interference of foreign nations in future in the sealing fishery; and secure ourselves a permanent fishery hereafter, because it will be carried out by means which none but stationary fisherman can provide. (Banks, "Remarks").

<sup>10</sup> In *Richard Fitzpatrick and his Sharks*, Brett Shorthouse notes that the same might be said of Fitzpatrick: "He's worth a lot more to me alive and in one piece than he is dead."

as they allow tourists to see firsthand, and television audiences to witness vicariously, that, despite the bad media spin, sharks are not “senseless eating machines with a taste for human flesh, but are amazing animals born from millions of years of evolution” (Miller). Sharks indubitably play a role in attracting tourist, especially diving tourist, dollars to the Great Barrier Reef, and thus are key players as well as primary stakeholders in the success of their own preservation. Digital Dimensions and Undersea Explorer are currently engaged in lobbying to have the perimeters of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park expanded to protect a larger area of the vulnerable world heritage site, and thus protect more of the isolated communities of sharks inhabiting the outer, and so far unprotected, reefs.

In his book *Age of Extremes*, Eric Hobsbawm highlights the difficulty of writing contemporary histories: “If the historian can make sense of this century,” he contends, “it is in large part because of watching and listening” (x). As air-breathing land animals, our own reality-based experience of the underwater world, and particularly the realm of sharks, may well be largely limited to watching and listening to the work of documentarists. Fitzpatrick’s work plays a pivotal role in what is an ongoing process of scientific evaluation and increasing public awareness of an oceanic environment that might otherwise remain a largely misunderstood and concomitantly neglected realm. The ‘otherness’ of the underwater world, renders it an environment more vulnerable than most to misrepresentation and exploitation. As Bill Nichols points out, documentary films have the ability to change the way we see our world, and sometimes to ‘correct’ the erroneous impressions given by popular sensationalism:

Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare—these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself, they can effect action and entail consequences (*Representing Reality* 3).

Documentary’s often unique way of directly connecting a reality to an expositional purpose has been brought to good use by Fitzpatrick and others like him.

Rather than expounding upon the ever-popular and unrealistic themes of ‘eco-porn,’ Fitzpatrick leans towards showing us how little we actually know about sharks, and how that ignorance is far more dangerous to us and to the welfare of reef eco-systems than any shark is likely ever to be. It would be very easy to sensationalise what Fitzpatrick does with sharks; there are lots of teeth, thrashing tails, and anxious moments. However, rather than demonstrating how



vulnerable humans are to sharks, we begin to see how vulnerable sharks, and concomitantly the ecologies of the underwater world, are to us. The three species with which Fitzpatrick's research is primarily concerned are unprotected and dangerously exposed not only to commercial over-fishing, sports fishing, and illegal finning, but also to death as discarded bycatch. In *Les Requins De La Grande Barrière*, Fitzpatrick loses Jesabel, a White Tip at Osprey reef. In *Richard Fitzpatrick and His Sharks* Jesabel is still missing, and Nicole, the Tiger shark that is tagged in the documentary, is post-scripted as being found suffocated in Barramundi fishing nets less than four months after she was tagged. A sad reminder of what animal is in peril underwater—it is not human, and it is not a metaphor.

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**HYBRID LANDSCAPES AS CATALYSTS FOR  
CULTURAL RECONCILIATION IN LESLIE MARMON  
SILKO'S *CEREMONY* AND RUDOLFO ANAYA'S  
*BLESS ME, ULTIMA***

*Holly E. Martin*

In contemporary ethnic literature of the southwestern United States, when a character in a novel is struggling to reconcile a bi-cultural heritage, landscape often plays a dynamic role in leading the character toward a self reconciliation. Although in literature landscapes often function as holders of tradition, either as designated sacred spaces or simply as reminders of the histories that have been enacted within them, in each of the two works discussed here, landscape goes further and actually serves as a catalyst that jolts the character into a heightened state of awareness of his own cultural hybridity. Such realization occurs when the land itself embodies hybrid characteristics, containing the histories of both conflicting cultural groups, and thereby, reflects the cultural conflict occurring within the character. When the character contemplates such a landscape (or landscapes), an anxiety arises within him or her that leads to a moment of crisis. To resolve the crisis, the character *usually* works out a self reconciliation of the two disparate parts of his or her identity.<sup>1</sup> The two novels discussed in this study demonstrate how landscape itself may induce a character to reconcile a fragmented identity. In Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, several landscapes carry a double meaning, simultaneously encompassing the conflicting histories of Tayo's two different cultures: Native American and white. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Rudolfo Anaya uses two variant landscapes (the river valley and the plain) to represent the dual, conflicting aspects of Antonio's cultural environment. Each landscape represents one of the two

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<sup>1</sup> Emo, Harley and Pinkie would be examples of characters in *Ceremony* who do not resolve the cultural conflict, as are Antonio's older brothers in *Bless Me, Ultima*.

cultures in conflict: the farmers in the river valley vs. the *vaqueros* on the plain. In both novels, the landscapes take an active role, actually leading the characters into a reconciliation of the opposing cultural pulls warring within them. In *Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction*, Robert Nelson acknowledges the agency of landscape pointing out the tendency of critics to overlook the possibility of an active landscape: "Generally speaking, literary criticism resists the notion that the land has a life of its own and tends instead to proceed as though vitality were a quality imposed on the land by human imagination but not vice-versa" (8). Nelson here refers to landscape in Native American novels particularly, but the occurrence of landscape as an active participant applies to other works, such as Rudolfo Anaya's, as well.

For the white, non-minority culture in the U.S., landscape has often stood as a national symbol for the rich natural abundance and the assumed inherent goodness of the United States of America and its peoples. One need only look at the lyrics of songs such as "America the Beautiful" to see the connection popularly believed to exist between beautiful nature, God, and the people believed to be blessed by God by virtue of living in such a beautiful place. Landscapes in many works of ethnic American literature, however, more deeply underscore the crucial importance of land to culture and identity. For ethnic American authors, landscapes present alternative histories to the mainstream culture and question accepted notions about the meanings of places by exposing the lingering traces upon the land of violence, oppression, forced labor and ecological damage. These more unpleasant aspects of landscape also contribute to the formation of the identity of the people who live within the land, and the land bears the scars of the struggles for political power that have been enacted upon it. In *Landscapes of the New West*, Krista Comer discusses the "new regionalists"—those writing about the U.S. American west in the postmodern age, including women and members of minority groups who in the past were often excluded from the scope of western literature: "Many of the new regionalists are as invested in rewriting history, and in reimagining the spatial terrain on which particular histories play out their various power struggles, as they are in producing something like Art or a Great American Novel" (10).

In works written by ethnic American authors of the new west, landscapes are reconceived, respatialized, and given added or alternative meanings. A landscape may seem to be a stable, fixed category, a topographical reality that everyone can agree upon and that can be observed objectively as being a mountain, a valley, a lake, a forest, etc.; but landscape goes beyond the physical and can

be used to present a variety of cultural and political meanings, some that conflict with each other within the one physical space. For some ethnic minority groups, the land cannot be separated from the people who inhabit it. As Paula Gunn Allen notes:

We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea embedded in Native American life and culture in the Southwest. More than remembered, the earth is the mind of the people as we are the mind of the earth. The land is not really the place (separate from ourselves) where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies. It is not a means of survival, a setting for our affairs, a resource on which we draw in order to keep our own act functioning. It is not the ever-present "Other" which supplies us with a sense of "I." It is rather a part of our being, dynamic, significant, real. (191)

Mick McAllister similarly emphasizes the connection of land to identity for Native Americans in his article "Homeward Bound: Wilderness and Frontier in American Indian Literature": "Indians define themselves by their place in the land, by their homes. All the tribes mentioned [earlier in his article]—Hopi and Kiowa, Aztec and Navajo—describe creation as an emergence. They came from the earth, through holes in trees, from caves, from lakes. They began under the earth, and most of them define themselves in relation to the place of the beginning" (150).

Likewise, Rudolfo Anaya expresses his views from a Chicano perspective about the connection of land and identity in an interview conducted with David Johnson and David Apodaca in 1979. For Anaya, landscape necessarily plays a role in self-actualization, because people live within an environment and cannot become self-actualized without working out their relationship to the environment in which they live. In response to a question by Apodaca asking for a clarification of the connection Anaya sees among roots, land and self-actualization, Anaya answers:

...we very often talk in modern terms only of being self-actualized with other people. That is, to be congruent with other people. What I am talking about is that there are many more ways which complete the person. A person to me is the pole of a metaphor. Always searching for the other pole. Usually in tension with it. Male in tension with female. You complete the metaphor by dissolving the tension with the other pole, social or communal, finding some kind of a meeting ground. You also complete that by rediscovering the naturalness of the poles and the metaphor of man in his environment. So that if we have been alienated or disassociated or torn apart from the earth itself, to self-actualize you have to rediscover that. (Johnson and Apodaca 34)

Within the broader connection of landscape to identity, hybrid landscapes have a special role to play in relation to bicultural identities. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* also discusses such

a crisis, or “tension” in Anaya’s words, which occurs when two opposing cultures meet. Bhabha refers to the simultaneous occurrence of two conflicting cultures within the same space as “the margin of hybridity, where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch....” Living within the borderline contact point of two polarized cultures, individuals may experience an inversion of their cultural norms. Their cultural references may be “displaced and turned inside-out” through contact with the other culture, resulting in an anxiety that “becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience” (207). According to Bhabha, the borderline experience results in the breakdown of the opposition of the two cultures: “It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups...as homogenous polarized political consciousnesses” (207). Although such a breakdown of binaries may lead to displacement and dislocation on both sides, in the books discussed in this article, the breakdown of binaries results in a hybrid reconciliation of the two conflicting cultures. Although the reconciliation may not be a *complete* integration of both cultures, the character comes to an understanding and acceptance of both aspects of his heritage. For Anaya’s character Antonio, for example, the river and the plain are the two poles in tension that represent the cultural conflict within him. The tension must be dissolved for Antonio to find the “meeting ground” between his two cultural heritages.

In “Silence of the *Llano*,” Anaya discusses the same type of clash between the ranchers and the farmers from his own cultural history on the plains of New Mexico: “There was the obvious shock and turmoil which is always present when two different cultures meet; sometimes there was a sharing, many times bloodshed” (50). This violence which ensues from cultural conflict is present in both *Ceremony* and *Bless Me, Ultima*, but through acknowledging and contemplating the hybridity of the land, both characters learn to live within the land and within their own hybrid identities.

Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* centers on the relationship of land to culture and its crucial role in Native American identity. Tayo, the main character of Silko's novel, is not a full-blood Indian: he is half white and half Laguna. Culturally, he was raised as a Laguna Indian and was taught traditional ways of life by his Uncle Josiah. Tayo must, nevertheless, learn how to control and integrate his white heritage before he can be healed from his war trauma and take his place as a member of the tribe. Much of the evil doings in the book seem to come from whites, but Silko did not make Tayo half Laguna and half white for nothing. Whites are presented in the novel not as evil in and of themselves, but as tools brought into existence by evil witchery set into motion in primordial time. An evil witch, in order to

win a contest as the most evil of all witches, set loose in the world a craving for killing and destroying, hoping humankind would eventually destroy itself. The evil witch conceived of, and thereby created the destroyers, through thought: "The destroyers: they work to see how much can be lost, how much can be forgotten. They destroy the feeling people have for each other. ...Their highest ambition is to gut human beings while they are still breathing, to hold the heart still beating so the victim will never feel anything again. When they finish, you watch yourself from a distance and you can't even cry—not even for yourself" (229). The destroyers invented the whites and find them easy to manipulate into carrying out their destructive acts. Tayo has white in him, and as part of his healing ceremony—the most important part—he needs to reconcile the two conflicting halves of his identity as part of learning to resist the manipulations of the destroyers. Traveling the Laguna land, the land of his cultural identity, helps him accomplish this reconciliation. As Gayle Ruth Siebert notes in "Frontiering Tayo's *Interior Landscapes*," the exterior landscape has a direct connection with the interior spaces of Tayo's mind. As she observes about Tayo's confining mental illness at the beginning of the book, describing the physical barriers that similarly restrict him: "...Tayo discovers his fragmented self embodied in metaphors of boundaries—hospital walls and fences—which signify his exploration of the frontier within himself" (198).

Early in the novel, Tayo joins the army along with his cousin Rocky to fight in the Pacific during World War II. While in the war, Tayo suffers from confusion of people and places. For Tayo, the Philippines, where he is stationed, and the Laguna reservation converge at one moment into one hybrid place, and he sees his Uncle Josiah as one of the Japanese soldiers he has been ordered to shoot:

When the sergeant told them to kill all the Japanese soldiers lined up in front of the cave with their hands on their heads, Tayo could not pull the trigger. ...in that instant he saw Josiah standing there; the face was dark from the sun, and the eyes were squinting as though he were about to smile at Tayo. So Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he *knew* it was Josiah....Rocky had reasoned it out with him; it was impossible for the dead man to be Josiah, because Josiah was an old Laguna man, thousands of miles from the Philippine jungles and Japanese armies. (7-8)

In spite of Rocky's assurances, Tayo cannot escape the feeling that his uncle has been killed, and sure enough, when he returns to Laguna, Josiah has died during the time Tayo was fighting the Japanese.

In another incident from the war, the Philippines and the Laguna



pueblo again interconnect. Rocky is severely wounded and he and Tayo are prisoners of the Japanese. They are forced to travel, and Tayo and a corporal carry Rocky between them on a blanket. The rain pours down unceasingly, making it difficult to walk, difficult to carry Rocky, and causing Rocky's wounds to fester.

The sound of the rain got louder, pounding on the leaves, splashing into the ruts; it splattered on his head, and the sound echoed inside his skull. It streamed down his face and neck like jungle flies with crawling feet. ...The corporal fell, jerking the ends of the blanket from his hands, ...and he started repeating "Goddamn, goddamn!"; it flooded out of the last warm core in his chest and echoed inside his head. He damned the rain until the words were a chant, and he sang it while he crawled through the mud to find the corporal and get him up before the Japanese saw them. (12)

Although Tayo has good reason to curse the rain, when he returns to Laguna, he finds the pueblo caught up in a severe drought. The drought and Josiah's death in relation to Tayo's actions in the Philippines may seem to be coincidences, but Tayo, through killing Japanese soldiers and through cursing the rain, has become a participant in the overall plan of the destroyers. He has failed to see the interconnections of his actions in one place with the consequences that appear in another. As such, his actions have fed the network of destruction and he has indeed, unintentionally, contributed to Josiah's death and the drought. As Jeff Karem argues in "Keeping the Native on the Reservation," what Tayo did not realize was that "...all natural forces are 'part of life,' and that you ought not to 'swear at them,' because disaster can result from upsetting those forces..." (26). The white doctors who treat Tayo for battle fatigue try to convince him that the convergences of person and place he experienced were only the results of his illness, but Tayo feels responsible.

Tayo returns home from the war, but the medical profession has not cured him. Nor do traditional healing ceremonies work for Tayo, or for the other Laguna veterans returning from the war. The traditional ceremonies for warriors, such as the Scalp Ceremony which Tayo's friends have undergone, prove to be ineffective against modern realities. The scalp ceremony does not work because it fails to integrate opposite compulsions of attraction and repulsion that Tayo and his friends have felt in their encounters with the white world. The power of the scalp ceremony is no match for the modern power of destruction that with the discovery of nuclear energy has reached a level that did not exist in traditional times:

The Scalp Ceremony lay to rest the Japanese souls in the green humid jungles, and it satisfied the female giant who fed on the dreams of warriors. But there was something else now, as Betonie [a medi-

cine man] said: it was everything they had seen—the cities, the tall buildings, the noise and the lights, the power of their weapons and machines. They were never the same after that: they had seen what the white people had made from the stolen land....Every day they had to look at the land, from horizon to horizon, and every day the loss was with them; it was the dead unburied, and the mourning of the lost going on forever. (169)

Tayo's mental illness results not only from his direct experiences in the war, but also from the full realization of what he and his people have lost: their culture, their family members, and particularly, their land. He faces the immense power, even within himself, of the unleashed compulsion to destroy. To heal himself, as Patricia Clarkson Smith and Paula Gunn Allen suggest in "Earthly Relations, Carnal Knowledge," Tayo "must 'close the gap between isolate human beings and lonely landscape' brought about through old witchery that has led not only to Tayo's illness but also to World War II, strip-mining, nuclear weapons, racism, and a drought-plagued land" (191).

In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen confirms that Tayo must reestablish his connection with the land through ceremony. As she observes, "Tayo's illness is a result of separation from the ancient unity of person, ceremony, and land, and his healing is a result of his recognition of this unity" (119). To become well again, Tayo must reintegrate himself back into his traditional life and place in the world, but he also must understand the part of him, symbolically represented by his white blood, that seeks to follow the pattern set by the destroyers. Such a healing requires an encounter with the landscape of the Laguna pueblo and its surrounding area, not just as Indian land, but as land containing both Indian heritage and white destruction.

To right himself after having encountered the overwhelming evil of the war, Tayo visits a medicine man, Betonie, who lives on the edge of Gallup, New Mexico and the open desert. Silko depicts Gallup as an absolute hell-hole of a town where Indians suffer from exploitation by whites. Betonie's position on the land bordering Gallup indicates that he himself has found a way to live both between and among whites and Indians, and he knows Tayo must learn the same. As part of his healing ceremony, Betonie gives Tayo several tasks to perform. Tayo must find four things: 1) a woman, 2) a particular pattern of stars, 3) his uncle Josiah's lost cattle, and 4) a particular mountain. As Tayo goes about his quest for these items, he encounters Ts'eh, a woman who on the one hand is a helping mountain spirit, and on the other is a physical, tangible woman who teaches Tayo how to love again. With the guidance of Ts'eh, Tayo travels to certain specific sites that circumscribe the physical boundaries and the spiritual places of

the pueblo.<sup>2</sup> As Robert Nelson has noted in *Place and Vision*, Tayo must visit particular places, “these helpers/healers must be visited at *certain places*—which is to say Tayo must re-visit the land itself in order to reestablish contact with the power of healing that he may find there” (14).

In *Landscapes of the New West*, Krista Comer argues that Tayo becomes well again as a result of his reconnection with the earth, and she criticizes Silko for maintaining and perpetuating a stereotypical myth that nature has the ability to “rejuvenate, redeem, restore sanity and right relation to self, to local community, and to global community...” (133). However, Comer oversimplifies Tayo’s healing ceremony. James Tarter in “Locating the Uranium Mine,” explains that “Laguna culture has developed intricate meanings tied to specific plants, animals, and geographical features like water holes, knobs of rock, or *Tse’pi’na*, Mount Taylor, the Old Woman in the clouds, around which Tayo’s quest revolves” (100). And Paula Gunn Allen spells out the intricacy of the relationship of land and identity in “Iyani: It Goes This Way,” observing that “...this relationship [is not] one of mere ‘affinity’ for the Earth. It is not a matter of being ‘close to nature.’ The relationship is more one of identity, in the mathematical sense, than of affinity. The Earth is, in a very real sense, the same as ourself (or selves)...” (191). Tayo’s recovery entails much more than just a simple reinvolverment with nature. Tayo does become well again as a result of his wilderness journey, but he has to resolve conflicting histories that he sees have taken place on the land. Comer herself claims that Betonie is a modern medicine man who “works his magic as much through telephone books, old newspapers, and Coca Cola-advertising train calendars as he does through the expected items in a medicine man’s bag...” (132). Betonie’s eclecticism and integration of the old with the new make it clear that the remedy for Tayo’s illness is not simply a traditional reintegration with nature in a pure, untouched state. Although Tayo does need to reestablish himself with his former rituals and traditions, including a relationship to the natural world, he must also learn to live with change, change which sometimes causes a destruction of the natural world. The destruction of mining and fencing is visible in the landscapes that Tayo visits, and the double significance these lands hold creates an incongruity and an anxiety in Tayo that he must resolve. The incongruity is the same disjunction

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Nelson in his book *Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction* carefully traces the path Tayo takes in the novel as it relates to the actual geographic spaces of the Four Corners area, where New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and Colorado meet (see Nelson Chapter 1).

he feels within himself as a member of both the white and the Indian world and as both a destroyer and a person who hates destruction.

As mentioned above, Tayo receives guidance from Ts'eh during his ceremony. Lorelei Cederstrom in "Myth and Ceremony in Contemporary North American Native Fiction" identifies her as Corn Woman from Pueblo mythology (295). But Ts'eh herself is a hybrid character. Robert Nelson in *Place and Vision* connects all of the female spirits who appear in the novel (Night Swan, Spider Grandmother and Ts'eh) as different avatars of the same "life-giving spirit" (20). As one of these avatars, Ts'eh also clearly is the manifestation in human form of the spirit of Tse-pi'na, the Indian name for Mount Taylor. Nelson explains her connection with the mountain:

...this lady, who stands figuratively at both the entrance and the exit to the spirit mountain Tse-pi'na, is clearly at home here where she is...and the suggestion of Ka't'sina [Kachina, mountain spirit] identity in the description we're given of her...both imply that she functions, here in the evolving ceremony, as a spirit belonging to this place in ways that Tayo does not yet belong. Because she is encountered where she is, and because she seems so "at home" in this place, she should probably be taken as the mountain avatar of the genetrix spirit—a version of Tse-pi'na, "the woman veiled in clouds," as well as a more youthful version of both Spider Grandmother and the Night Swan. Further, since she is assigned no name in this episode, and since physiognomically she appears...to be identical with the one who calls herself "Ts'eh" later in the novel, and since "Ts'eh" as a nickname could be taken to be a shortened form of either "Ts'its'tsi'nako" or "Tse-pi'na," we can hear at this stage of the ceremony of the novel a significant coming-together of heretofore uncomfortably separated aspects or avatars of the regenerative force Tayo seeks—and seeks to integrate into his own vision and experience. (20-21)

Paula Gunn Allen in *The Sacred Hoop* further discusses the life-giving spirit of Ts'eh: "Ts'eh is the matrix, the creative and life-restoring power, and those who cooperate with her designs serve her and, through her, serve life" (118). However, Ts'eh is also a woman in the physical sense, and what is most important, as argued by Lisa Orr in her article "Theorizing the Earth," Ts'eh "is someone Tayo learns from, not worships" (155).

While on his wilderness quest, Tayo travels to the mountain that Betonie has asked him to find. The mountain scenery simultaneously contains two histories—one Laguna and one white. First, the Laguna history:

The white ranchers called this place North Top, but he remembered it by the story Josiah had told him about a hunter who walked into a grassy meadow up here and found a mountain-lion cub chasing butterflies; as long as the hunter sang a song to the cub, it continued to play. But when the hunter thought of the cub's mother and was

afraid, the mountain-lion cub was startled and ran away. The Laguna people had always hunted up there....

#### And the white history:

All but a small part of the mountain had been taken. The reservation boundary included only a canyon above Encinal and a few miles of timber on the plateau. The rest of the land was taken by the National Forest and by the state which later sold it to white ranchers who came from Texas in the early 1900s. In the twenties and thirties the loggers had come, and they stripped the canyons below the rim and cut great clearings on the plateau slopes....The loggers shot the bears and mountain lions for sport. And it was then the Laguna people understood that the land had been taken, because they couldn't stop these white people from coming to destroy the animals and the land. (185-86)

Since Tayo has traveled in his quest through other mountains where there has been no sign of the whites, it seems that Betonie must have a purpose for sending Tayo to this particular mountain (Mount Taylor/Tse-pi'na). It is on this mountain that Tayo's own history and loss are simultaneously made apparent through the contrast of the remaining natural features of the mountain with the scars left by the whites.

While searching the mountain for his uncle Josiah's cattle, Tayo finds a high fence of heavy-gauge steel mesh with barbed wire strung across the top and the wire buried into the ground to prevent animals from digging under it. Although the white owner of the land on the other side of the fence claims that it is to keep animals out, "the people knew what the fence was for: a thousand dollars a mile to keep Indians and Mexicans out; a thousand dollars a mile to lock the mountain in steel wire, to make the land his" (188). Tayo's cattle, a particularly tough, hybrid breed from Mexico, are on the other side of the fence; so Tayo, in an effort both practical and symbolic, spends the entire night cutting through the thick wires, leaving a hole twenty feet wide for the cattle to pass through. As Tayo cuts through the fence, he also removes some of the barriers within himself that have prevented him from seeing connections between times and places. The effort to find the cattle and to cut through the fence so intensely occupies Tayo that he ceases to remember and think about the past. He experiences a sense of timelessness on the mountain which he expresses in his thoughts by thinking about the absence of verb tenses in the traditional Laguna language:

The ride into the mountain had branched into all directions of time. He knew then why the oldtimers could only speak of yesterday and tomorrow in terms of the present moment: the only certainty; and this present sense of being was qualified with bare hints of yesterday or tomorrow, by saying, "I go up to the mountain yesterday or I go

up to the mountain tomorrow." The ck'o'yo Kaup'a'ta<sup>3</sup> somewhere is stacking his gambling sticks and waiting for a visitor; Rocky and I are walking across the ridge in the moonlight; Josiah and Robert are waiting for us. This night is a single night; and there has never been any other. (192)

This merging of time, of the mythic with the ordinary, and of people already dead with people still living, all occurring in Tayo's thoughts on a single night on the mountain, leads Tayo to a realization that the past continues to exist within the present, and that the people he has lost, and the lands the Laguna people have lost, continue to exist in his thoughts and stories as they were. As long as the memories, the love and the stories still exist, the land and the people continue. In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen addresses this notion of the continuous presence of the dead as follows: "Perhaps no one has told him [Tayo] that the departed souls are always within and part of the people on earth, that they are still obligated to those living on earth and come back in the form of rain regularly (when all is well), so that death is a blessing on the people, not their destruction" (124). Complete loss, loss even of memories and stories, is what the destroyers aim to achieve; and it is this sense of complete loss, the forgetting of the continued presence of the dead, that drives people into permanent despair.

Although Tayo is not at the end of his ceremony while on the mountain, his realization that loss is neither final nor complete leads him to overcome his fear of loss and eventually to become well again. The presence of the double history on the mountain, not simply an encounter with nature, prompts Tayo's realization. Near the end of the book, with his healing ceremony almost complete, Tayo again realizes the simultaneity of being:

He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (246)

Tayo's final encounter with a hybrid landscape occurs near the end of the book. Tayo has been living with the mountain spirit woman, Ts'eh, near Pa'to'ch, a sacred mesa to the south of Laguna, when the people of the pueblo become disturbed by Tayo's absence and reportedly odd behavior. His evil rival and a fellow war veteran, Emo has convinced the people that Tayo is crazy and that he should be

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<sup>3</sup> A gambling spirit who takes advantage of unwary visitors.

captured and taken to an institution. Ts'eh warns Tayo to leave and hide. She also tells him that the conclusion of the ceremony is almost at hand. Tayo leaves, and as he walks along the road, he is picked up by two old friends who, like Tayo and Emo, are also war veterans. Unknown to Tayo, however, the two friends are in on the plot to capture him. Tayo realizes this in time and escapes. He runs to a location where the view is dominated by the Jackpile uranium mine. Here Tayo, while gazing at the mine, contemplates the connection of this sacred area and surrounding locations with the destruction of nuclear weapons:

Trinity site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb, was only three hundred miles to the southeast, at White Sands. And the top-secret laboratories where the bomb had been created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on the land the government took from Cochiti Pueblo: Los Alamos, only a hundred miles northeast of him now, still surrounded by high electric fences and the ponderosa pine and tawny sandrock of the Jemez mountain canyon where the shrine of the twin mountain lions had always been. There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid. (246)

As Tayo walks into the mine shaft, he finds yet another sign of hybridity in the rocks of uranium ore that combine the power of destruction and the natural landscape: "The gray stone was streaked with powdery yellow uranium, bright and alive as pollen; veins of sooty black formed lines with the yellow, making mountain ranges and rivers across the stone" (246).

Looking to the sky, Tayo sees again the constellation of stars Betonie had originally told him to find, a constellation that has periodically appeared to Tayo as he has made progress in his quest. This time, however, Tayo notices the constellation forms a map of the places he has visited as part of his ceremony. Land and sky have converged. "For each star there was a night and a place; this was the last night and the last place, when the darkness of night and the light of day were balanced. His protection was there in the sky, in the position of the sun, in the pattern of the stars" (247). This convergence of the earth and the sky at the site of the Jackpile Uranium Mine place Tayo at the center of the conflict where the life-giving natural forces and the destructive powers of the destroyers meet. As Reyes Garcia notes, "...this fused image of earth and sky helps Tayo to feel he is in a place he belongs, at home, part of something larger than himself and which finally encompasses him" (42). If Tayo can survive this last night, the destroyers, temporarily, will be outmaneuvered.

As Tayo hides from his would-be captors, Emo, Leroy, and Tayo's former companions Harley and Pinkie, arrive at the mine. Emo, Leroy

and Pinkie gruesomely torture Harley, hoping Tayo will hear his screams and come out to rescue his former friend. Tayo, hiding in the rocks nearby, finds a screwdriver in his pocket and imagines killing Emo, driving the screwdriver into his brain. Tayo, however, ultimately resists the urge to commit violence, thereby thwarting the plan of the destroyers. "He crouched between the boulders and laid his head against the rock to look up at the sky. Big clouds covered the moon, but he could still see the stars. He had arrived at a convergence of patterns; he could see them clearly now. The stars had always been with them, existing beyond memory, and they were all held together there. ...the story goes on with these stars..." (253-254). Of Tayo's rejection of violence, Cyrus Patell writes in "The Violence of Hybridity in Silko and Alexie," "It is only when he [Tayo] can reject the temptation to kill Emo, can renounce the violence that is Emo's way of life, that Tayo is finally cured. It is, finally, the rejection of violence that proves to be the culmination of Tayo's ceremony" (7). By resisting the urge to commit violence, Tayo has successfully faced and contained the destroyer within himself, symbolized by his white blood. He returns to the Pueblo, now cured, and the elders welcome him into the kiva. And as for the witchery of the destroyers:

It is dead for now.  
It is dead for now.  
It is dead for now.  
It is dead for now. (261)

After completing his ceremony, Tayo has earned the right to pass his story on to the elders. The telling of the story confirms his connection to the land. In an article titled "Writing Nature: Silko and Native Americans as Nature Writers," Lee Scheninger explains the obligation to tell the story: "...language (that unique characteristic that distinguishes humans from other animals) and nature are inextricably connected. The obligation of being human is to see the human connection to nature and to speak it, to tell the earth's story" (52). "...the earth, the word, the speaker of the word, and the story are inseparable" (57).

Tayo confronts several instances of hybridity both during the war and during the course of his healing ceremony. During the war, he experiences the convergences of the Japanese soldier and Uncle Josiah and of the Philippines and the Laguna Pueblo. During the ceremony, he finds Josiah's tough, hybrid cattle and a hybrid lover in Ts'eh as spirit and Ts'eh as woman. Most importantly, however, he encounters two hybrid landscapes: Mount Taylor with its conflicting histories, and finally, the Jackpile Uranium Mine where the ceremony reaches its conclusion, and where Tayo sees the pattern of stars



that reflect the sacred places of the land in the constellation of the sky. At each of these convergences Tayo experiences what Homi Bhabha refers to as “the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience...[and] resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups” (207). As a result of these encounters, Tayo comes to a realization of his own strength and adaptability as a hybrid being, drawing upon his experiences with both cultures. He reconciles the white and the Native American parts of his identity, recognizing within himself the desire to resist destruction, but also, the need to control the powerful urge to destroy.

Instead of using single landscapes with double meanings, as Silko does in *Ceremony*, Rudolfo Anaya in *Bless Me, Ultima* uses two landscapes to portray the two conflicting cultures that the young protagonist of the novel, Antonio Márez, has inherited from his parents. When Antonio learns to integrate the two landscapes, he reconciles the cultural split he has felt since birth. Antonio is only six years old when the book opens, yet he is aware of a split between his mother and his father. The split extends throughout the families on both sides and is tied to a dichotomy between the families’ different ways of life as symbolized by the landscapes in which they live—the Lunas, on the mother’s side, are a farming family who live in the river valley; the Márezs, the father’s family, are *vaqueros* who herd cattle on the plain (*llano*). This split in his heritage lives within Antonio, and he has felt torn between his mother and his father all of his young life. In a dream, Antonio learns of the events that surrounded his birth and of the conflict between the two families that has caused the split in his own identity:

*This one will be a Luna, the old man said, he will be a farmer and keep our customs and traditions. Perhaps God will bless our family and make the baby a priest.*

*And to show their hope they rubbed the dark earth of the river valley on the baby’s forehead, and they surrounded the bed with the fruits of their harvest so the small room smelled of fresh green chile and corn, ripe apples and peaches, pumpkins and green beans.*

*Then the silence was shattered with the thunder of hoofbeats; vaqueros surrounded the small house with shouts and gunshots, and when they entered the room they were laughing and singing and drinking.*

*Gabriel, they shouted, you have a fine son! He will make a fine vaquero!*

*And they smashed the fruits and vegetables that surrounded the bed and replaced them with a saddle, horse blankets, bottles of whiskey, a new rope, bridles, chapas, and an old guitar. And they rubbed*

*the stain of earth from the baby's forehead because man was not to be tied to the earth but free upon it. (5-6)*<sup>4</sup>

Antonio often wonders how two people as opposite as his mother and father could ever have married. Throughout the novel, he struggles with this dichotomy that permeates every important aspect of his life, including his beliefs about religion and his notions about what is real. Fortunately, he has the help and guidance of Ultima, an elderly woman who was the midwife at his birth and who comes to live with his family when he is six. Ultima is a *curandera*, a healer who cures with a combination of medicinal herbs and magic. Even as a young child of six, Antonio is aware of her power and senses this awareness through how he views the land on the day Ultima arrives to stay with his family:

When she came the beauty of the llano unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth. The magical time of childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its mystery into my living blood. She took my hand, and the silent, magic powers she possessed made beauty from the raw, sunbaked llano, the green river valley, and the blue bowl which was the white sun's home. (1)

Ultima senses a power within Antonio as well, and she trains him as her apprentice and takes him with her when she goes to heal people or to exorcize evil spirits from their homes. But although Antonio's love for Ultima is strong, he sometimes wonders about the nature of her powers. He wonders if she uses her powers only to do good, or if, as some others believe, she can play the role of the *bruja*, the witch, and use her powers for evil as well.

The nature of both good and evil are just one set of opposites Antonio must deal with. He also struggles with the opposition of orthodox Catholicism, represented by his mother's family, and a pagan religion, based on the legend of a god who turns into a golden carp, represented by his father's family. When Antonio hears the story of the golden carp from his friend Samuel, he is disturbed. "It made me shiver, not because it was cold but because the roots of everything I had ever believed in seemed shaken" (81). And when Antonio actually sees the golden carp swim by him in the river, he experiences a feeling of the miraculous, a feeling he has not gotten from orthodox religion. Upon seeing the carp, Antonio exclaims, "This is what I had expected God to do at my first holy communion!" (114). Antonio does

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<sup>4</sup> The italics used in this and some of the other quotes from *Bless Me, Ultima* indicate passages from Antonio's dreams.

not abandon Catholicism, but he is confused by having an alternative choice just as he is confused about what life style to follow, the farming life of the river valley or the herding life of the plains.

The answer as to how to integrate the dichotomies of his life comes to Antonio in a dream, a dream in which Ultima appears and explains to him the relationship of the river to the ocean and the moon to the sun. The vastness of the ocean and of the plains are frequently linked together within the book.

*...the sweet water of the moon which falls as rain is the same water that gathers into rivers and flows to fill the seas. Without the waters of the moon to replenish the oceans there would be no oceans. And the same salt waters of the oceans are drawn by the sun to the heavens, and in turn become again the waters of the moon. Without the sun there would be no waters formed to slake the dark earth's thirst.*

*The waters are one, Antonio....*

*You have been seeing only parts...and not looking beyond into the great cycle that binds us all. (121)*

As a result of this dream, which integrates the river (and the river valley) with the ocean (associated with the plain), Antonio begins to envision a life that is not torn by dichotomy, but that holds the possibility of finding a third alternative that combines both of his heritages. On a drive with his father, Antonio learns that his father is ready to put aside the differences he has had with his wife's family, the Lunas, and he encourages Antonio to find an alternative path:

"...Perhaps it is time we gave up the old differences—"

"Then maybe I do not have to be just Márez, or Luna, perhaps I can be both—" I [Antonio] said.

"Yes," he said, but I knew he was as proud as ever of being Márez.

"It seems I am so much a part of the past—" I said.

"Ay, every generation, every man is a part of his past. He cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials, make something new—"

"Take the llano and the river valley, the moon and the sea, God and the golden carp—and make something new," I said to myself. (247)

As William Clements observes in "The Way to Individuation in Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*," "the river...not only separates, but also provides a linkage between *llano* and village, the two heritages" (135). By seeing the interconnections of the sun and the moon, the river and the ocean, Antonio breaks down the binary oppositions that have characterized his life.

The posing of dichotomous relationships and their eventual resolution is a structure that governs much of Anaya's work. In order

for a character to know his or her identity, he or she must struggle with opposing dualities and find either some middle ground, or a third alternative that takes from the two opposing forces and forms something new. According to Manuel Broncano in "Landscapes of the Magical," Ultima "is the link between opposing worlds that seek harmony and quietude, the connection resolving the irreconcilable dichotomies..." (128). The two opposing landscapes are what Antonio must resolve within this book, and with the help of the dream sent to him by Ultima, he realizes that he need not make an either/or choice but can create a hybrid identity.

Landscapes in literature may often serve as symbolic holders of history and cultural meaning. By using landscapes to express the conflicts between different cultures, either through separate landscapes or through a single landscape with a double history, authors make concrete the conflicts between cultural groups and also reflect the dichotomies of the self that occur within the complex identities of multicultural characters. But the landscapes discussed above extend beyond symbolic purposes. In both novels the land acts as a catalyst to lead the character through a process that results in a reconciliation of the fragmented parts of his identity. Through contemplating the culturally hybrid nature of the land, the character develops a heightened awareness of the incongruity of the two cultures. This awareness causes anxiety within the character, who fears an inverting of his cultural norms and beliefs as a result of the contact between the two cultures. But ultimately, this anxiety forces the character into a reconciliation; contemplating the land, both Tayo and Antonio go beyond dichotomy and come to understand, and ultimately to integrate, the disparate parts of their own identities.

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## PRESERVING THE BODY OF EARTH: AN ETHIC OF INTERCORPOREALITY IN MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

Thomas Girshin

The history of the United States has long been grounded in white racism. The nation was founded on the principles of "free land" (stolen from Native Americans and Mexicans), "free labor" (cruelly extracted from African slaves), and "free men" (white men with property).

--Robert D. Bullard, *Anatomy of Environmental Racism*

In her novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison renders an undifferentiated connection between the human body and the myriad other organic and inorganic bodies that compose planet Earth, in order to represent what is known in environmental discourse as an ethic of interdependence. Morrison blurs the boundary between the "body" and the "Earth" in contrast to the usual separation that arises out of traditional Western ideology—the anthropocentrism that constructs "human" as a privileged category, thereby establishing a hierarchical opposition between "Man," and "Nature." Arguing against this tradition, which also privileges mind over body, reason over emotion, and use value over intrinsic value, Morrison posits an ethic that respects the human body and its material environment. In so doing, she provides a base from which to battle environmental exploitation, and the racism intrinsic to that exploitation. In this article, I argue that Morrison constructs an ethic of corporeality as an antidote to the Western tradition based on rationalism—an ethic that is in alignment with the interests of much of the contemporary environmental justice movement.

One of the main goals of the deep ecology movement has been to depart from a worldview of "use-value." Environmentalist Robert Paehlke defines the use-value paradigm as one in which "the living world" is seen as nothing but "'resources,' ... open to ... human settlement, exploitation and/or management" (Paehlke 149). The use-value paradigm is destructive, because those who subscribe to it



justify the infliction of suffering or physical damage on those entities that are perceived to be resources, as well as those that are not deemed “valuable” enough to be resources. In opposition to this use-value (or instrumentalist) rationalism, deep ecologist Dave Foreman describes the concept of intrinsic value: “This philosophy states simply and essentially that all living creatures and communities possess intrinsic value, inherent worth. Natural things live for their own sake, which is another way of saying they have value. [This worldview] denies the modern concept of ‘resources’” (Foreman 359). If one adopts the belief that all living things have value in and of themselves, then one is less likely to view another creature as a resource. The intrinsic-value paradigm is a challenge to many Western thinkers because it forces one to question the dichotomy of “self” and “other,” a concept that is fundamental to modernist thinking. The use-value rationalism has been so ingrained into the minds of the majority of Westerners that even some environmentalists argue under it.<sup>1</sup>

One of the main arguments for the idea that all entities are valuable in and of themselves is that nothing exists in isolation. Because of this, the well being of any one body is always inextricably linked to the well being of those bodies that surround it—although not always in a knowable way. These surrounding bodies are in turn dependent on those adjacent to them, until we have a kind of web. According to one environmentalist, the “‘first law of ecology’ is that ‘everything is connected to everything else’” (Thiele 196). The famous eco-philosopher, Arne Naess, says, “[t]he study of ecology indicates an approach, a methodology which can be suggested by the simple maxim ‘all things hang together’” (Thiele 196). This idea that all things are connected and dependent on each other is known as “interdependence.” The principle of interdependence is grounded on the understanding that the health and well being of any one part of the holistic ecosystem is inextricably—even if unequally—dependent on the entire

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1 See, for example, Terry L. Anderson and Donald T. Leal’s “Visions of the Environment and Rethinking the Way We Think,” in which they argue for private ownership of ecosystems, especially land. According to Anderson and Leal, the use-value paradigm is not simply a social construction; it arises out of a fundamental aspect of human nature. Anderson and Leal believe that because of this, the best way to preserve the environment is through private ownership, because it is in people’s self-interest to take good care of their own property. The problem with this of course (and one that Anderson and Leal fail to address), is that – even setting aside the destructive nature of the use-value paradigm – opportunities for land ownership are far from equal across social and cultural positions. Free market environmentalism perpetuates the economic disparities that are at the heart of social inequities.

remainder of the ecosystem (Thiele 31-3). If one recognizes the truth of interdependence, then it becomes easier to acknowledge the intrinsic worth of "all creatures and communities." If all things are interdependent, then the worth of an individual entity can be seen in its representation of the well being of the entire "web of life."

Like these environmentalists, in *Beloved* Morrison argues against the use-value paradigm. For Morrison, this vision is destructive in essence, because it is this vision that allowed Blacks to be seen as resources and made slaves. Literary critic Cynthia Dobbs argues that "*Beloved* ... attacks ... the [assumption] ... that 'blackness' is equivalent to a useable, marketable 'body'" (Dobbs 564). As such, "blackness" was "Other" to the dominant "whiteness"—it was objectified and open to appropriation. But Morrison is not suggesting simply a separation of blackness from the body; she wishes also to debunk the assumption that the body itself is the always unintelligible and amorphous "Other." "Morrison never shies away from recognizing the insidious notion of these bodies as mere commodities and units of (re)production in nineteenth-century America" (Dobbs 564). She posits a conception of the body as primary, as having value that exceeds any possible calculation. By foregrounding the body, Morrison is calling attention to a dimension of our existence that has taken a back seat in the "dominant philosophies of our time," which hold the world around them and its inhabitants as "resources" (Foreman 359). Morrison argues in *Beloved* for a shift in the eligible subject of valuation. No longer, she argues, should the silent body be exploited as a resource for economic gain.

Much of Morrison's *Beloved* can be seen as an indictment of this use-value paradigm. Not only is this ideology dangerous in that it reduces all "Other[s]" (blacks, but also women, the poor, animals, plants, etc.) to their lowest common economic denominator, but also because this way of thinking is contagious. Inextricably tied to power, a dominant ideology gains girth and momentum as more and more people literally *buy into it*. Because the economy of the American South from the middle of the seventeenth century to the late nineteenth was dependent on slavery, the superstructure which arises from this will seek to reinforce and justify this dependence. The result is the spread of an ideology that de-substantiates the "Other" by reducing it to its utility for the "Self." Morrison's character Stamp Paid articulates this idea that "value" is a social construction that can spread: "Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood" (198). In this passage, Morrison shows that in

the Western paradigm based on the separation of white from black, and man from nature, there is something intrinsically savage, or uncivilized, about everyone with a “dark skin.” Those who believed that a black body signified a certain unalienable savagery believed that even those black people who had manners similar to those of the white “civilized” people were performing against their nature. Given the circumstances, perhaps when no longer under the watchful supervision of white people, these seemingly civilized or educated black people would revert to their natural, savage selves. Nowhere is the operation of this belief clearer than when the four horsemen ride up to 124 to retrieve the “fugitive” Sethe and her children. The narrator, presumably white in this scene, describes, in broad terms that encompass the race, the danger in this “false civility” common to black people, which hides their animal nature.

The quietest ones, the ones you pulled from a press, a hayloft, or, that once, from a chimney, would go along nicely for two or three seconds.... Even when you reached for the rope to tie him, well, even then you couldn't tell. The very nigger with his head hanging and a little jelly-jar smile on his face could all of a sudden roar, like a bull or some such, and commence to do unbelievable things. (148)

The error obvious in this reasoning is of course that the seemingly savage actions are brought about by the whites' truly savage behaviors that leave no other recourse. While I agree that violence is in most cases “uncivilized,” in the case of the above scenario it is wholly justified. It is, in fact, the most right action to take, because it combats a fundamental injustice and violation of human rights. The white narrator, describing the “hunt” for Sethe and her children, argues in terms of the use-value paradigm. “Unlike a snake or a bear,” he argues, “a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coin” (148). But it is this instrumentalist rationalism that Morrison depicts as truly savage. This white narrator evaluates certain acts committed by black people against others (both black and white) as savage, while justifying far worse acts that are committed by white people against black people. He—and others like him—possesses a mode of thought that purports to be based on objective and empirical knowledge, but does not acknowledge that this knowledge is in fact predetermined by the assumptions about “savagery” that inform it. In order to justify an ideology that devalues others as resources, racists and slaveowners engaged in brutal acts of domination that forced the oppressed to react in a way that feeds and sustains their beliefs. This is the “jungle whitefolks planted in [black people]” (198). Morrison shows that it is not that the bodies of black people are inherently savage, but that this essentialist ideology

is itself savage, and its use in justifying whites' brutally savage acts produces other savage acts.

Perhaps the most insidious quality of the use-value philosophy is that it works both ways: it can mar, disfigure, and dehumanize both the subject and object of the ideology. As Stamp Paid says, it can "spread, until it invade[s] the whites who had made it," but it also infects the Black body that it appropriates, partially constructing the beliefs under which this body operates. Morrison's *Beloved* is a stark look at the dehumanizing and devaluing effects of ownership and the use-value paradigm. And it is precisely from this ideology that Sethe saves her baby, as described by Denver:

Leave before Sethe could make her realize that worse than [what it took to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin]—far worse—was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. (251)

To "dirty you," is to reduce you with this use-value perspective. For *Beloved* or any other slave or former slave to see themselves as their white owners see them—as property, as breeding stock, as having no intrinsic worth—is to see themselves as worthless, to "dirty [them] so bad [they] couldn't like [themselves] anymore." Because the use-value perspective is "contagious," so to speak, it does not draw itself solely along racial lines. Paul D is unable to love Sethe because he is trapped within this paradigm. When Paul D first returns to Sethe he recalls the days back at Sweet Home, and the arrival of Sethe to the plantation as "a year of yearning, when rape seemed the solitary gift of life" (10). It is clear here that he sees the body of others as a gift that nature gives to the taker, to be ravaged, exploited, violated, without regard for the will of that body. His early fear to love ("You've got to love just a little bit") is a parallel to this sense of the body. He realizes much later in the novel that this way of thinking is wrong, as in this passage, recalling his escape from slavery: "And in all those escapes he could not help being astonished by the beauty of this land *that was not his*. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water and *tried not to love it*" (268, my emphasis). Only when he escapes the value system that posits ownership as a prerequisite to love is he able to finally let himself love—beginning with Sethe. In place of the use-value paradigm, Paul D adopts a value system that values all human life for its intrinsic worth.

In depicting the moral growth of Paul D, Morrison argues for a paradigm that values all human life. She posits an ethic in *Beloved*

in which the intrinsic value of the body is central. Upon being freed from slavery, Baby Suggs does not see the point of her freedom. "What does a sixty-odd-year-old slave woman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for?" she asks (141). Although she no longer belongs to anyone, she still feels owned, and because of this does not see her intrinsic worth. But when she feels her heart beat in her chest and realizes that that heart is hers, and when she sees her hands and says, "These hands belong to me. These *my* hands," she realizes that her formerly owned body now belongs to her (141). It is a fundamental part of her identity, and has value for no other reason. Later, in her sermons, Baby Suggs helps other former slaves reclaim their bodies, reaffirming their intrinsic value (87-89). Dobbs notes that there is a danger in focusing on "black bodies in a culture that equates blackness and bodies, denying such bodies intellect and emotion" (Dobbs 565). Perhaps, but it is a larger culture Morrison wants to move away from—the culture that privileges intellect over the body to begin with. Morrison wants to move away from an ideology that would justify the pain of the body for the economic gain of another. She argues that there should be no valuation of the intrinsic differences between Blacks and Whites, as there shouldn't be of the intrinsic differences between human and non-human entities, because there are no *intrinsic* differences.

This conception of the unified body is what is unique about Morrison's ethic. She is not concerned only with the black body or the human body in general, but also with the bodies of all living things—the body of earth. It is a connection among the entirety of the body of earth that Morrison strives to develop throughout much of *Beloved*. Image after image in the novel posits a fundamental connection between the human body and the earthly body. Sixo, meeting a fate typical of trees when he is burned alive, is associated with trees throughout the novel; Sethe's hair is "like the dark delicate roots of good plants (271), *Beloved* seems to be born of pure earth and water, and Paul D is at first able to have real communication only with non-human earthly bodies. Morrison posits this undifferentiated connection between the bodies of all living things in order to illustrate a fundamental aspect of her ethic. She describes a belief in what I call "intercorporeality," in which the bodies of all living and non-living entities are interconnected, and by doing so argues for an extension of the moral standing and intrinsic value of the human body to all bodies. This ethic is based on two of the guiding principles of current environmental discourse—interdependence and biospherical egalitarianism. Biospherical egalitarianism is the "deep-seated respect, or even veneration, for ways and forms of life. [It is] *the equal right to*

*live and blossom*" for all forms of life (Naess 353-4). Morrison's intercorporeality combines these two principles: first, by illustrating the interconnectedness between the bodies of human and non-human entities (interdependence), and second by foregrounding a respect for the living breathing body (biospherical egalitarianism).

In addition to these, a fundamental aspect of Morrison's ethic is its focus on communication. Paul D comes to empathize with Sethe's decision to kill her daughter to save her from slavery only when he learns to communicate with the body of others by entering into the community. When Stamp Paid comes to him and offers him a place in the home of anyone in the local community, Paul is given the opportunity to juxtapose his feelings and experiences with Stamp Paid's, and consequently Sethe herself. In order to act in an objective—and therefore ethical—way, one must offer up one's own past experiences to communication with those of others. Alone, the past is either something to avoid, to escape, to keep separate from the present in order to avoid repeating it in the future, or mysterious and overwhelmingly frightening (Mohanty 218-21; Mohanty 226). But an engagement with the bodily experiences of others allows for an objectivism unavailable otherwise, and this coalition can provide a base for political action.

Morrison's ethic of intercorporeality has a great deal in common with the ecological visions of many environmentalists. Literary environmentalist Lawrence Buell suggests that empathy with nature, provided by an appreciation of the similarities common to all bodies, is key to the development of an environmental ethic. "Both the awakening of obligation to become a reinhabitor and the awakening of a sense of environmental determinism require at some point reconceiving the human relation to the nonhuman, and the ethical borderline between these" (Buell 170). But Morrison's interdependency is in accordance with the beliefs of writers and organizations associated primarily with social justice issues as well. They make the same connection between the human and non-human. At the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, a "re-establish[ment of] spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth" was stated as necessary to fight the destruction of minority community (Principles of Environmental Justice 469). Likewise bell hooks describes a connection between the position of Earth and the position of black people: both oppressed by the exploitative nature of the dominant ideology.

Recalling the legacy of our ancestors who knew that the way we regard land and nature will determine the level of our self-regard, black people must reclaim a spiritual legacy where we connect our

well-being to the well-being of the earth.... Collective black self-recovery takes place when we begin to renew our relationship to the earth, when we remember the way of our ancestors. When the earth is sacred to us, our bodies can also be sacred to us. (hooks 173)

Morrison does not fail to recognize that humans are invested in a radically complex and interdependent ecological structure. She develops an environmental ethic not because she is more concerned with the environment than with racism and civil rights, but because these issues are interdependent. Environmentalist Leslie Paul Thiele writes, "Community-based environmentalism goes hand in glove with a focus on civil and economic rights" (Thiele 156). The well being of black people must be connected with the well being of the earth because both are exploited by the same structures of oppression, and as studies of environmental racism have shown, people of color are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards such as pollution, exposure to chemicals, and toxic waste.<sup>2</sup>

It is no coincidence that the gravest crimes against nature are committed in areas with a high minority population. According to environmental justice writer Robert D. Bullard, "Racism plays a key factor in environmental planning and decisionmaking.... Whether by conscious design or institutional neglect, communities of color in urban ghettos, in rural 'poverty pockets,' or on economically impoverished Native-American reservations face some of the worst environmental devastation in the nation" (Bullard 472). As evidenced above, political power is tightly connected to economic power: the economically disadvantaged lack political representation and agency. This ensures that these people will have little power to resist exploitation by entities with enormous economic and political power. Bullard points to a 1984 document provided to the California Waste Management Board, which outlines which neighborhoods are "most likely to organize effective resistance against incinerators. People skeptical of the assertion that poor people and people of color are targeted for waste-disposal sites should consider [this report]," which states: "All socioeconomic groupings tend to resent the nearby siting of major facilities, but middle and upper socioeconomic strata possess better resources to effectuate their opposition. Middle and higher socioeconomic strata neighborhoods should not fall within the one-mile and

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2 Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster provide numerous case studies to support this in *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*, as does *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice* by Laura Westra and Bill E. Lawson.



five-mile radius of the proposed site.” Instead, these waste-disposal facilities will be placed in lower income neighborhoods (Bullard 473). The instrumentalist rationalism that dictates that it is more acceptable to place an incinerator in a minority neighborhood is the same rationalism that justified the torture and beatings of slaves. Those entities with the greater power exploit those with little or no power.

Perhaps paradoxically, the greatest catalyst for change in this system of exploitation may be located in the most exploited segments of society. Literary critic Satya Mohanty points out that because we live in “a world that is constitutively defined by relations of domination ... certain social arrangements and conditions [such as] social struggles of dominated groups ... can help produce more objective knowledge” (Mohanty 232). The “exploited” are in the best position to recognize faults in the system that exploits them. Morrison depicts this truth while illustrating the moral growth of Paul D, who, after spending most of his life as a slave, was indoctrinated to the use-value mentality. Although Paul D was affected by this ideology (he was afraid to love because his conception of love meant own; he judged Sethe in the same way as Schoolteacher), he was able to escape it because its inherent values were incongruous with his bodily experience. And it is this incongruent experience of suffering that allows Paul D to see the error inherent in the view that reduces natural bodies to indices of gains and losses. As the “owned,” he is in a better position to see the negative effects of ownership than the “owner.” Recognizing this, says Mohanty, “would help explain why granting the possibility of epistemic privilege to the oppressed might be more than a sentimental gesture; in many cases in fact it is the only way to push us toward greater social objectivity” (Mohanty 232-3).

For these reasons—the epistemic privilege of the oppressed groups and the interconnectedness of their oppression—many environmental justice activists advocate a grassroots effort against environmental exploitation. “Historically, the mainstream environmental movement in the United States has ... been primarily supported by middle- and upper-middle-class whites. Although concern for the environment cuts across class and racial lines, ecology activists have traditionally been individuals with above-average education, greater access to economic resources, and a greater sense of personal power” (Bullard 476). In response to this, according to Bullard, many minority activists “have begun to challenge both the industrial polluters and the often indifferent mainstream environmental movement by actively fighting environmental threats in their communities and raising the call for environmental justice” (Bullard 477).



Combating environmental degradation locally soon leads one to acknowledge that the local effects are indicative of a related larger problem. For instance, grassroots activists fighting for environmental justice in Mexican *maquiladoras* don't have to look far to see that the local pollution stems from a multinational economic system. Sierra Club writer Bruce Selcraig evidences this as he is led on a tour of a maquila by environmental activist Domingo González:

Few scenes in the Third World, and nothing in the United States, not even the neighborhoods around the world's largest concentration of petrochemical plants near where I grew up in Houston, prepared me for the sight of a tiny Matamoros colonia called Privada Uniones.... No more than a patch of land roughly 50 by 200 yards, Privada Uniones contains some 30 homes made mostly of plywood and corrugated tin.... The residents of this industrial hell, who all seem to have wracking coughs, don't just live close to the chemical plants—their tiny homes virtually adjoin them.... In 1983, a chemical leak at Retzlöff killed most of the colonia's chickens and dogs; in December 1990, two 55-gallon drums of methamidophos pesticide exploded, lofting a chemical cloud over Matamoros that sent 90 people to the hospital. (Selcraig)

The horrendous poisoning of the earth and its inhabitants in Privada Uniones is the result of a decision made far away from the suffering that it caused. This exploitation is made possible by the overwhelming power of the polluting companies and the governments that support them. It was a decision that would provide U.S. companies not only with cheap foreign labor, but a cheap and quiet waste disposal as well. Gonzalez looked to bring international attention to the atrocities of Privada Uniones because the cause was not local. "The local problem, activists learn, represents a small part of a much larger, unsustainable economic pattern of externalizing ecological costs" (Thiele 137). Morrison also acknowledges that environmental concerns are global in their scope. As with the disposal of toxic waste, it is with the treatment of the bodies of slaves, and with oppression and prejudice in general: those entities with the greater power exploit those with little or no power. As Robert Bullard says, "social inequality and imbalances of social power are at the heart of environmental degradation, resource depletion, pollution, and even overpopulation" (Bullard 477). As body, Earth too is open to inscription, to the situating of "incinerators or other polluting facilities" (Bullard, 473). She argues for the preservation of the material dimension of reality because we all belong to the same body—there is nothing external—and an injury in one place should be felt and healed by all.

Morrison's ethic of intercorporeality shares with other environmental ethics the principles of interdependence and biospherical egalitarianism, and it is similar in another way as well. Environmen-

talists place great stress on the need for human action—as well as an ethic that would govern that action—to be tentative. An ethic should be dynamic and flexible; it should be able to adapt as human knowledge changes. Because Morrison's ethic is grounded in communication with the body, it can do just that. For, although the body is universal and stable in its recognition of pain and physical damage, this does not mean that the body is wholly stable and independent from social constructions. Many aspects of the body—such as emotions—are mediated and open to interpretation. Under some conditions, Morrison argues, one is justified in causing bodily damage, as Sethe is when she kills her baby, just as in some cases the infliction of environmental damage is acceptable. The key is to have a system of values that allows for the evaluation of actions, but also for the system itself. The relative instability that justifies corporal injury under certain circumstances while condemning it under others is an asset rather than a drawback, because it is this very instability that allows the body to evolve in relation to ideology—both influencing and being influenced by it. In this way, Morrison's ethic of intercorporeality is very much in line with a standard ecological ethic, which “is characterized in evolutionary terms as a ‘product of social evolution,’ a project still in progress” (Buell, 187). Because the—partially universal—ethic is itself mediated by theory and social practice, it is prevented from becoming *universalist*, and as a result totalitarian and subjective. Theory, Morrison argues, is not unimportant; the body is not all there is. It too can become totalitarian. Morrison uses *Beloved* to demonstrate the danger inherent in a body unmediated by ideology. She describes *Beloved* as having no lines in her hands (252, 254). She is uninscribed—pure body. In a dominant position, she is overconsumptive, consuming all Sethe can offer her and more, and getting fat in the process. Morrison's ethic is not one that excludes ideology altogether, but unlike a use-value ethic, it does not exclude the body either.

According to Morrison, the use-value paradigm pales and falls away when judged in relation to the material reality of suffering and bodily damage. *Beloved* is the story of the moral progression from the use-value to the intrinsic value paradigm, told from the point of view of those who were most oppressed by the use-value paradigm themselves. By connecting the well being of the oppressed to that of the oppressor, and the well being of humans to that of non-humans, Morrison is able to posit an ethic that would preserve the material web of life. Her novel, *Beloved*, gives body and voice to the principles of interdependence and biospherical egalitarianism. In so doing, it provides a base from which to argue against the use-value paradigm

and its destructive effects, such as environmental exploitation and environmental racism.

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## **POESÍA / *POETRY***



## SWAMP DWELLER

Ashton Nichols

“Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps.”

—Henry David Thoreau, *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1862

I was a swamp dweller once,  
crouched low in peat water and duckweed,  
stepping slowly from muck to muck,  
a transparent eyeball seeking the sights  
of frog eye and newt tail,  
marsh mallow and turtle shell.

I had no goal in those days,  
seeking only the sights I could see,  
wanting whatever the muck might provide,  
longing for nothing so much  
as swamp gas, a smell that pervaded  
my dumb eyes and ears.

Now the swamps are long gone,  
child space replaced by silence.  
But some nights, when the moon is high,  
I hear a light note that carries  
low water in its ripples,  
a dark sound, a deep swamp echoing.



## EPIPHANY

The hawk screams at the sun  
shooting light across unbroken fields.  
In the sky the day lies warm  
against the hillside of a hot spring rising.  
Along the ridge from every angle,  
every vantage, webbed branches climb,  
scattering shadows sharp and black as  
rock hard roots through the forest falling.  
Then light ceases, mountains harden  
solid blue-black against a dusk dark sky.  
A moon, new lived, thin as a splinter  
curves deep, a cold crack on night's stream.

## A MESSAGE TO THE MUSE

In spring the singer says, "strange things happen  
where you sing." How should anyone imagine  
but those who have heard your wanderings?

"Seek patiently and you shall find"  
under burning blackthorn and flaming furze  
the secret of mistletoe crowning spiked locust.

When the willow of April bends its boughs  
against June's sacred oak,  
you smile at the lion, your defiance.

White thorn, not in winter's wear,  
mantles each sound silently. Countless echoes  
fill your grove with unearthly fire,

while the serpent turns into a vine that winds  
toward no apple but the one you sing,  
asking only that ripe branches rise to listen.

Let yew and quaking poplar bow down  
before your multitudinous voice; the song you bring  
is strange, as startling as the silver fir in winter.

## **THERE IS NO NOONDAY**

High above the rose of the sun  
shines the silent sea-hanging moon.  
Rocking ships of leaves in the air  
spike this moon-hung sky like wings.

Down to the river float waves of wheat,  
worn dry by the day,  
damped down by dusk.

Buckled earth rocks windless, turning  
undulates silent, still unmoving:  
all time stops dead in this stillness.

## **FISHERMAN**

Waves scoop out the shoreline near Merlin's  
dark cave, leaving boulders in the afternoon sun.

The woman walks ahead; I follow with the child  
whose clear blue eyes have never seen the sea.

Kelp wraps around the mother's legs; my ears  
hear the echo of foam in wet rocks.

In the surf two corks bob slowly toward land.  
I shout as I run, I have seen them.

The crab trap rolls as it tumbles toward land.  
The fisherman's legs grab the line.

In salt and cold foam, with the child looking on,  
we drag the full trap to the shore.

And there, as we stand, the child looks at the fisher,  
at the crabs, and at me, and says, "Aaiiee."

## THE FLOWERS ARE AS DEAD

The flowers are as dead  
as a body of flesh,  
yet instead of rotting putrid  
the flowers simply flake;  
like dry scraps of life  
they float to the ground  
to crack into dust  
without odor or sound.

## THE TREE HOUSE

We worked all summer on that tree house  
trying hard to finish it, trying to make sure  
it was strong enough to hold us in the aspen  
for a night. We had old boards and new  
boards, some new nails, mostly old nails  
that we had straightened by hitting them hard  
with a hammer against flat rocks. By August  
the tree house was almost complete; it had a floor,  
shallow sides and a ladder, but no roof.  
Open to the sky: that's alright we thought;  
we'll just sleep under the stars, twenty-five feet  
above the ground. So we dragged up our sleeping  
bags, our rusty flashlights, and our comic books.  
The bark beside us was pock-marked and stained.  
As the sun set the chilled air rolled in and the wind  
started quaking that aspen's leaves like praying  
monks. The tree swayed slowly and occasionally  
shuddered when a gust blew. We were warm at  
first, soon cold and scared. Of course who wanted  
to admit failure; who wanted to crawl back down  
to the house in defeat. We were silent until our  
agreement was simultaneous; that way there was no  
question as to who had chickened out, or why.

We said nothing as we descended, but we looked  
up for a long time as we left our branching roost.  
We came down from the poplar; that's true,  
and for sure: but, oh, from the top of that tree  
how the moon looked, and the stars!

## **BOBCAT**

Could there be any bobcats left in these woods?  
That's what we always wondered when I was a child.  
We had never seen one, but we had heard lots of tales.  
Some hunter had killed a bobcat. One neighbor had seen one  
while picking wild huckleberries. But we had never even heard one.  
That night we were sitting on the rock, the rock we always  
sat on: my father, my mother, and me. The sun had gone down,  
the moon was up, the stars were out. We were quiet. We must  
have said all we had to say. The first sound was almost like a bird,  
or maybe a fox. The second sound was a scream, that was all you  
could call it: a scream pure and simple, like a young girl being  
stabbed. My father stood up slowly. He had the flashlight, and he  
walked quietly. I followed. We got down the path into the woods.  
He shone his light on a huge rock, a rock as big as a car at least.  
The cat's two eyes were green, green like no green I had ever seen.  
The two eyes were all we could clearly see, except for ear-tufts of fur  
like a halo. There was no sound now. The eyes did not stay still for  
five seconds. We heard no noise at all as the bobcat dropped off  
the rock. I have never heard or seen a bobcat since then, and that  
one and only time was thirty-five years ago, when I was just a boy.

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## ON A SUMMER'S NIGHT

*Rohit Sharma*

"Peculiar travel suggestions are dancing lessons  
from God."

– Kurt Vonnegut. *A Cat's Cradle*

Lunge of sinew bone and muscle  
Motion incarnate  
Frozen in cold halogen glare.  
Desperate plunge of a piston  
Hydraulics inadequate  
A bludgeoning thump.

Coquettish *coquis*  
Loud as trophies  
On a mantle shelf -  
Crowning glory of my faux fireplace.

The purr of contentment  
Loud and rumbling  
The design of malcontent rage  
– My car's engine  
Loud and grumbling.

Vonnegut's dance lessons from God  
Rendered empty  
Of all didactic content,  
Much to Brecht's dismay.  
Travel turned to slaughter.

Bugs dogs cats  
Life denied into submission, or run down.

*Festina lente* lost with the language of its genealogy  
*Lentamente* as antiquated as a love  
Of lives' equality.

Love itself a red stain on a bumper sticker  
The bumper  
An essential  
In our festinate lives,  
Even as we carve hearts for dinner.

## Autumn

Today  
My maple trees have donned an orange eventuality  
As if to say  
Fall is here to stay.

Eight floors of a parking garage  
Lit in aseptic orange  
Form the backdrop to my two maple trees.  
But where do the yellow emergency phones fit in?  
And where the reflections off the glazed hoods of Sunday-morning-  
waxed cars?

And the roller-blading couple –  
Where does it fit in?  
As she stops to kiss him right underneath my trees.

I thrust a gray window at them  
It says: Wait till spring is here  
Wait! For fall is here to stay.

And then in one instant  
My maple trees shed their leaves.  
In unison they fall  
Announcing in chorus the lurking winter.

Buried under orange leaves  
The young couple blends with the orange screams of a passing  
ambulance  
As it makes its way to the aseptic orange neon interior of a hospital  
Carrying life or perhaps death.

And all at once  
A passer-by thrusts my gray window back at me with a scythe.

## Winter

From within the warmth  
Of my cozy studio  
I stare in mesmerized longing  
At all the snow flakes  
This early winter flurry  
Sends drifting to my windowpane.

I gaze intently at them  
Trying to freeze the individuality  
Of their crystalline construct  
Even as they melt and disappear almost instantly.

I wish it were colder  
I wish all crystals froze  
I wish I gave them names  
Pertinent to their individualities.  
Gave them names  
And assorted them in my circle of acquaintances.  
Acquaintanceships that could only be sustained in the cold  
Acquaintanceships that I could extinguish at whim  
With the minimum of an exhaled breath.



## Spring

The town's abuzz  
Winter is past  
As spring approaches  
Life's blood stirs fast

The hive has thinned  
Some to hunger fell  
Some to burning brush  
Where the Joneses now dwell

With the equinox sun  
Warm and shining bright  
Our young bee awakes  
And takes to maiden flight

Messengers have sung'n danced  
Much pollen promises their ditty  
What seems to us random flight  
Is impeccably planned activity

With the sun in its sights  
Dodging the bee-eater's voracious bill  
Driven by decisive instinct  
Our bee finds wild lilies by the local landfill

Millennia of instinct  
Have encoded its genes  
It does naturally what GPS  
Has just only started to do in our machines

Thus hind legs laden with pollen  
Our bee is hive-ward bound  
It flies high and safe above cars  
That on the new highway abound

Flies high and low  
Flies fast and slow

With the sun ready to set  
Fast approaching hive and rest

But what devilry does it see  
40-watt bulb where no light ought to be

Forgotten its flight pattern  
Disoriented, it struggles

Its bane  
A windowpane

Crawling desperately over glass  
A niche a crevice to pass

It finally manages to enter  
(In background the Joneses banter)

Furiously it attacks the light  
Singed wings sustaining flight

All through the night its struggles grow  
Morning finds it weary disoriented dying  
Fresh promises of earthen spring forgotten like  
Scattered fallen pollen from a hind leg still twitching

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