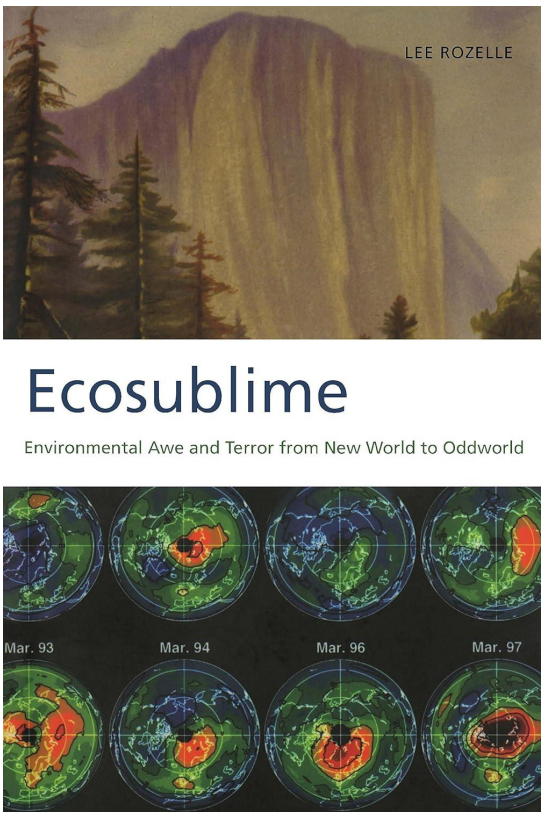
Ecosublime

Environmental Awe and Terror from New World to Oddworld

Lee Rozelle



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My own ecosublime moment occurred in 1991 when I was a cook in the first Persian Gulf conflict. My unit was providing medical support for the Seventh Corps, and I was sent to Kuwait City just after the Iraqi retreat and ensuing massacre. In the desert I hadn't seen the images of "ambush alley" and the oil fires until I saw Kuwait City for myself. As we walked along the line of twisted cars, charred human body parts, unused weaponry, and scattered clothing I was shocked by the click of an E-8's camera as he focused on a piece of human flesh in the sand. The towering oil fires stretching across the desert left me, a nineteen-year-old Alabama bubba, with a strange new attentiveness to my own material and political situation. George Bush and the U.S. Army must therefore be acknowledged for their part in my instruction.

Introduction

This book proposes the notion of an "ecosublime" to analyze nineteenthcentury, modern, and contemporary literary reactions to the changing ecological face of America. It aims to establish new biocentric critiques to address environmental issues from the premodern to the millennial. By turning away from ecocriticism that is unwilling to acknowledge the transcendence of the postnatural, *Ecosublime* uses post-Kantian aesthetic theory and cultural studies to etch in literary scholarship a new referentiality of place. From the Greek *oikos, eco* (which roughly means "home"), joined with the word *sublime, ecosublime* can be defined as the awe and terror of a heightened awareness of the ecological home.

When does an awareness of home provoke terror and awe?

When it's burning.

Ecosublime alters the essential question, "Who am I?" to "Where am I?" within the context of our current crisis as it emotively and materially relocates the human self as ecological niche. Ecosublimity can thus be thought of as the awe and terror that occurs when literary figures experience the infinite complexity and contingency of place. This aesthetic moment prompts responsible engagements with natural spaces, and it recalls crucial links between human subject and nonhuman world.

Ecosublime encourages readers to rethink the proposition that "realist epistemologies are a thing of the past; that truth-values in criticism have now been discredited . . . that history and politics are textual (= Active) phenomena" (Norris 52). This critical loss of connection between thinking self and the external real has given rise to an aura of lack—an indistinct sense of futility—in academia and activism. But millennial ecocriticism seems ready to come forth and actively promote environmental agency, deep ecological principles, and sustainability.[1] Millennial ecocritics are increasingly dissatisfied with approaching nature from the detached posture of the corporate academician.[2] Despite this impulse, most of our works still cling to the well-defined parameters of legal, social, political, or economic ideological structures; these systems give the impression that the real lies within their boundaries. We must decide whether

[1] Ecocritical books and articles currently proliferate from academic presses at a remarkable pace. Journals linked to the ecocritical movement include *Western American Literature, Environmental Ethics, ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment,* and the *Environmental History Review.*

[2] A most important primer for millennial ecocriticism is Love's *Practical Ecocriticism* (2003), published in the "Under the Sign of Nature" series by the University of Virginia Press. It includes chapters on ecocriticism and science, the pastoral, Cather, Hemingway, and Howells.

we will live within the symbolic frame or the material—the simulated or the sustainable. By calling attention to a perhaps dubious polarity, this book has the task of thinking the unthinkable in literary studies; *Ecosublime* questions the critical axiom that "any position we take to nature is one that culture has constructed" (Lotto 254). Most green readers are left "weary of critiques that reveal nature's constructedness only to leave us strangely enervated and let down, as if all along the game had been merely to remain critical" (McMurry 8). We must unlock the constructionist's cage and remember a wider range of human links to the outside. And I'll start simple: the snakebite. How many of us have stepped dangerously close to a rattlesnake coiled to strike? Seen a cottonmouth on a brush pile inches from your arm? Is the position one takes to being bitten by a copperhead based on an understanding of the words "snake," "venom," "hospital," or "death"? Something *must* precede our cultural understanding of the snake. *Ecosublime* argues that interactions among living things, water, air, and substrate can exist outside of language and culture, that the landscape garden and the forest are not transposable. This recognition can be sparked by an aesthetic impulse that prompts characters in literary texts to become revived in an increasingly disposable culture. This reintroduction of self and place advances our emotional and behavioral relationships to the outside.

Although linguistic and written representations often mediate between the subject and referential nature,[3] many have attempted to disrupt this intellectual boundary through imaginative or emotive transcendence. In the West, a term used to describe such moments of affecting sensation is "sublime" or "the sublime."[4] Christine L. Oravec provides a most efficient description of the sublime, recalling that the conventions of the sublime from Longinus to the German romantics include three stages:

> The three stages were, first, apprehension, in which the individual subject encounters an object larger and greater than the self; second, awe, oppression, or even depression—in some versions fear or potential fear—in which the individual recognizes the relative greatness of the object and the relative weakness or limits of the self; and, third, exaltation, in which the individual is conceptually or psychically enlarged as the greatness of the object is realized and the individual identifies with that greatness. (67)

Since the sublime transports literary figures from an apprehension of the natural world to a fear of its greatness and finally a newly acquired identification with that "world," this ancient concept can prove useful to green literary and cultural study from the context of our current environmental crisis. The ecological referent in literature and culture can be understood through an analysis of the sublime so that sustainability, human overpopulation, biocentrism, and decentralization might be more effectively

[3] Nature in this book might be defined as second nature, natural evolution altered by humans, rather than pristine "first nature." But within these two definitions there is distinct slippage, as first nature is transformed into second nature from the nineteenth century to the present.

[4] Four books that I draw heavily upon are Longinus's *On the Sublime,* Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* Kant's *The Critique of Judgement,* and Lyotard's *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime.*

employed as ecocritical and cultural guides. In doing so, this work seeks to study American relationships to the natural world in a millennial context, thereby hoping to avoid Dana Phillips's ecocritical chasm where "creaky old traditions have found refuge and are giving off an odor of moldy fig" *(Ecology* ix).

With this challenge in mind, I wrote a graduate essay in 1999 entitled "The Ozone Hole That the Imagination Seeks to Fill: Ecocriticism and the Postmodern Sublime." In it I compared Burkean, Kantian, and Lyotardian notions of the sublime for a cultural analysis of aquarium exhibits, Total Ozone Mapping Spectrometer readings, and Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart* (1990). I argued that the sublime, from an ecocritical standpoint, need not allow for the indeterminacy found in postmodern renderings of the "presence in question."[5] Instead, visual representations of human population increase and ozone depletion prompt a sublime moment that returns the viewer to an active defense of a realized stratosphere. Writing that essay helped me to understand that as the human relationship with nature has become increasingly mediated since the nineteenth century, a realization of ecological crisis can also be acquired through mediated or represented environments. What I mean to suggest is that there is no affective difference between the natural sublime and the rhetorical ecosublime; both have the power to bring the viewer, reader, or player to heightened awareness of real natural environments. Both can promote advocacy. My work thus argues that mountain peaks, ozone holes, books, DVDs, advertisements, and even video games have the potential to spark environmental awe and terror.

Later I read Christopher Hitt's essay "Toward an Ecological Sublime," a work that expanded the possibilities of my own project. Both Hitt and I distance ourselves from psychoanalytic nature writing, and we find in Neil Evernden's work a key to extending "the boundary of the self into the environment' " (101). I obviously agree with Hitt that "there has been a scholarly neglect on the part of ecocriticism to interrogate the discourse of the sublime" (605), and I also support his argument that "an ecological sublime would offer a new kind of transcendence which would resist the traditional reinscription of humankind's supremacy over nature" (609). For me, an ecocritique of the problematic concept of the sublime in American literature was essential for ecocriticism and green cultural studies. But I sought to break from Hitt's "reconfigured version of the sublime" (607) because his approach seemed to historicize the natural sublime in earlier periods, making it marginally useful for my explorations into modern and millennial eco-catastrophe. I decided that my work must analyze this issue with the literature of ecocidal as well as ecological awe and terror on the contemporary scene. My primary focus, then, became the American literature after World War I and "The Waste Land," global warming and green movements in America.[6] Multiple revisions of this initial idea have led me to understand that rather than stage a predictable polemic

[5] Also important to this discussion is the collection of essays *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question,* edited by Rodolphe Gasche and Mark C. Taylor.

[6] A number of noteworthy books have recently been published on global warming and the Kyoto Protocol. These include Schneider and Root's *Wildlife Responses to Climate Change;* the National

against postmodernist theory, *Ecosublime* would realize a broader conceptual framework based in part upon systems theory found in Andrew McMurry's *Environmental Renaissance* and the technological conflations of Joseph Tabbi's *Postmodern Sublime.* Differentiating my critique of (post)modernity from its messengers —postmodernist critics—enables this book to reuse contemporary criticism in ways that promote effective action. This transition from contemporary inertia to energized consciousness corresponds to my realization that the moment of sublimity is no longer staged against an unchanging natural backdrop. No longer are we inspired by a sublime collapse of self, but we now also feel awe and terror in the face of global breakdown.

Although scholars from Longinus to Lyotard have developed our current conception of the sublime, the most significant rendering for this book can be found in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790). The transition from the Burkean to the Kantian sublime is most important to this work, as Kant is responsible for shifting the primacy of aesthetic vision—the horror, terror, awe, or beauty—from an object-centered activity to a subject-centered activity. Thus the post-Kantian sublime no longer resides on Mount Blanc itself but rather somewhere between the craggy, snow-capped peak and the mind of the observer. For the ecocritic, this shift from noumenon to phenomenon provides a stumbling block, one negotiated in the course of this book. Joseph Priestly relates the sublime to "corporeal magnitude, extension, and elevation," arguing that the sublime presents "the idea of vastness to the mind" (121). Just as Kant observes the mathematical sublime as the stimulus for the subject's relation to the infinite, Priestly uses the language of extension and elevation to depict the sublime as a catalyst for the apprehension of physical space. The sublime in both iterations can be understood as that which supersedes the human ability to quantify as it propels the subject to the edge of supersensibility,[7] exaltation, and terror.

Burke argues that infinity "has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime" (67). He also associates the sublime with terror by relating nature to simultaneous fear and exhilaration. He explains that the "passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature,* when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment," and that astonishment "is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree" (53). The natural environment, then, astonishes the subject to the highest when "the mind is so entirely filled with the object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (53). The all-encompassing mental representation of the natural object engrosses the subject to the point that he or she can no longer reason, speak, or act. Burke's "object" itself cannot contain the subject's mind; only the subject's mental

Assessment Synthesis Team's *Climate Change Impacts on the United States;* and Johansen's *The Global Warming Desk Reference.*

[7] Kant describes the supersensible feeling: "there is a striving in our imagination towards progress *ad infinitum* while reason demands totality, as a real idea," explaining that the "same inability on the part of our faculty for the estimation of the magnitude of things of the world of sense to attain to this idea, is the awakening of a feeling of a supersensible faculty within us" (97).

conception of the object and its accompanying sensations (terror, awe, horror) can rob "the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning" (53). Similarly, Kant describes the sublime moment as being "the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful" (91). He deviates from the Burkean model by describing the subject's ability to feel as if he or she transcends the stimulus in an aesthetic discharge. Nature provokes terror at the moment when the subject becomes overwhelmed by its power and magnitude. The natural object's "strength, violence . .. and terror" (Burke 60) demands a respectful awe that both Burke and Kant associate with the sublime moment.

The sublime is itself a system, one that morphs and adapts to each period's critical caprice. From romantic to postmodern sublimities, artists and critics have depicted movement and engagement with their ever-shifting surroundings. Ecocriticism challenges readers to reassess the sublime in our current environmental context, but most studies haven't successfully advanced a literary ecocentrism that promotes millennial advocacy. Steven Rosendale's *The Greening of Literary Scholarship* includes three chapters that seek to apply the sublime to the ecocritical movement, and I see in them tentative movements toward an ecological referent. Each of these essays (in the section titled "Rethinking Representation and the Sublime") answers Christopher Hitt's call for ecocritical investigations into environmental awe and terror, though I do find it odd that none of the authors cite Hitt's work. After a discussion of eighteenth-century renderings of the presence in question, James Kirwan's "Vicarious Edification" ends this book by repeating the constructionist axiom that what "we find on the other side of this border between books and nature is that very self that we thought would, at this point, lie behind us," reiterating that what "we call 'nature' is ineluctably a story, one we have known since childhood" (243). Rather than questioning antiquated nature-culture notions, the final chapter of *The Greening of Literary Scholarship* regrettably reads: "I should find myself catching, in the closing sentences, the strains of an elegy upon a lost nature. The intention of this essay, however, has rather been to suggest that there never was or could be a nature of this kind to lose—except as a matter of faith" (243-244). After rethinking what "a nature of this kind" might mean to an academic readership, the author might have gained from Lawrence Buell's introduction to *Writing for an Endangered World,* where, in recalling McKibben and Marx to clarify the first/second nature dichotomy, the author explains that what "we loosely call 'nature' has often long since become 'organic machine'" (3). Buell also reminds us, "the nature-culture distinction itself is an anthropogenic product" (3).[8] This essay's vicarious relationship to the natural sciences makes it an elegy to the writer's own loss of faith in "a nature," ending *The Greening of Literary Scholarship* with conclusions oddly Baudrillardian.

[8] Buell's introduction includes references to McKibben's *The End of Nature* and Karl Marx's *Selected Writings.* Also important to this discussion is Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden.*

Aaron Dunckel comes closest to offering what one might call a green theoretical take on the sublime, but his reading also shies away from the promotion of millennial thinking about the outside. After explaining that there is "much to be said for the theoretical and rhetorical value of insisting on the profound intimacy—in fact the inseparability—of the environment in relation to ourselves from an ecological point of view," Dunckel examines Shelley in the light of "purely external aspects of the environment" (221). He adds that this externality "enables if not a permanent release from, at least a deep questioning of cultural (perhaps even 'multicultural') solipsism. This is what I would like to mean by 'sublime' " (221).[9] Dunckel's sublime, then, lets the observer of Mount Blanc witness the ecological not-me to question one's own egoism and the reality of the noumenon. This seems a promising start, but the first chapter of Buell's *Writing for an Endangered World* undoes Dunckel's me/not-me dichotomy by calling attention to essential networks that connect humans and place. An aesthetic observation of distant and dislocated natural environments changes when literary figures experience connections that encompass both human subject and natural object. Without an active interdependence between observer and observed—cognitive, material, and emotional links—the moment of awareness is merely Burkean.

Looking forward, I began to interrogate the aesthetic possibilities of second nature; crises of progress such as Exxon Valdez and Three Mile Island have the capacity to transfigure our conceptual hardware from delimitation to niche consciousness. Fear and awe make us aware of boundaries, but they also make us grope for the familial networks that support and protect us. This is why *Ecosublime* strives for literary recognition of self-organized systems and "dynamic, differential relations of exchange":

It has been variously claimed that ecological thought is postmodern thought, in that it enjoins us to imagine the relations between culture and nature as relations neither of identity, nor of subordination and antagonism, but as dynamic, differential relations of exchange. Ecological theory proposes a move from a "restricted economy" of value, which suggests that the natural world is available as raw material to be transformed into use-value for humanity, to a "general economy," which assumes that value is not produced out of, but is rather in some sense immanent in the relations between the natural and the human. (Connor 279)

The following chapters depict selves revised and perspectives radically altered with the recognition of the immanent value of complex relationships. This book therefore seeks to include second nature in the critical distinction "between mind arid world" like "systems of information and communication that must ultimately remain outside the representing mind and separate from the representation" (Tabbi 216).

Ecosublime presents a wide assortment of literary works and cultural artifacts to give imperiled ecologies voice. It does this by focusing on subjects who, in their inter-

[9] I'm not sure if I understand the text's suggestion that multiculturalism is solip- sistic and at odds with ecocriticism or environmentalism generally; every significant environmental organization and ecocritical book in my experience embraces the diversity of cultures as crucial to our understanding of place.

actions with rapidly changing environments, either get lost in mediation or become environmentally connected. Poe's Julius Rodman and Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts are two characters in following chapters who do not experience ecosublimity, but their inability to actualize the referent perhaps enables readers to perceive the world anew. Figures such as Wendell Berry's speaker in *A Timbered Choir* and Agent Cooper from *Twin Peaks* do experience the ecosublime moment. This occurs because their interactions generate in them the awe of integration with the ecological (apprehension) and the terror in realizing the tentativeness and incalculable uncertainty of their world (comprehension). In the latter examples, the viewing subject experiences an ecosublime strength, violence, and terror in the realizations that an infinitely complex natural ecology has been fragmented by human intervention, that humankind may not know how to reconfigure the natural machine as it dies, and that there may be no real way to sustain human life on the planet after the inconceivably complex system becomes irreparably disassembled. Images of human overpopulation, species extinction, decentralization, and ozone layer depletion challenge Kantian reason and propel the imagination to grapple with harsh realities; this cognitive negotiation sparks a sublime jolt and subsequent awareness. William Bowen notes that this " 'great web'... is not only more complex than we think. It is more complex than we *can* think" (4; emphasis added). Bowen might have significantly used the Kantian term *supersensible* to describe his attempts to discuss the incalculability of our global network.

And environmental catastrophes do manifest themselves as supersensible occurrences to Americans intellectually estranged from ecological systems. Rivers catch on fire. Food webs that lose integral species collapse and humans starve. Pollutants rise into the air and cut holes into the earth's protective outer layer. As the possibility of reconstructing nature to its preindustrial stability becomes hopeless, the terror of nature's displacement by a numbed humankind jerks literary figures and human subjects into the ecosublime with ominous clarity. The violence and terror of ecocide give the contemporary observer glimpses into postnatural death and the exquisite horrors of knowing that we are losing our ability to take the helm of the global vessel. Entropy, chaos, and degeneration obliterate the natural object, and Burke's terrific vision of natural disaster becomes part of a larger Kantian configuration based on the human subject's tentative relationship to the wild. What occurs for American spectators as scenes of material collapse permeate the media-enhanced image bubble is the emergence of an ecocidal imagination, a toxic second self that festers just below the ego's surface until the awe and terror of environmental destruction moves members of American commodity culture from our extended adolescence.

Don't get me wrong. Ecological maturity does not propel one to buy tiedye or to delude one's self into utopian fantasies of a pristine nonhuman world. Instead, as green thinkers we must see ourselves as integral and legitimate parts of current historical processes. Central to this piece is the argument that ecosublimity doesn't usher the literary figure or reader into a hyperreal flux devoid of judgment or action. Rather, this moment prompts both viewers and readers to realize their purpose as a niche in

a realized organic system. Functioning as niche necessitates changes in attitude and behavior, acceptance one of personal convergence with ecological principles. For those of us who live in the industrialized West, these changes don't have to be volatile or theatrical; some might include buying in bulk, taking public transportation, composting, local democracy, civic involvement, and bio-restricted trade. Vital is the active remembrance of place by becoming learned in the biological sciences. If we are to stalk the millennial gaps in order to experience a "transgression of boundaries that frame conventional thought and experience of a world shared with the Other" (Tallmadge and Harrington x), we must think like a mountain ... and feel like a toxic waste dump.

1. Oceanic Terrain

The Journal of Julius Rodman* and *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains

Edgar Allan Poe's virtually unexplored *The Journal of Julius Rodman* claims to detail the exploits of a trapping crew that crossed the Rocky Mountains in 1792, one year before Alexander Mackenzie's trek and twelve before the Lewis and Clark expedition. Serialized in *Burtons Gentlemans Magazine* from January to June of 1840, Poe's hoax journal purports in its first chapter to embody

a relation of *the first* successful attempt to cross the gigantic barriers of that immense chain of mountains which stretches from the Polar Sea in the north, to the Isthmus of Darien in the south, forming a craggy and snow-capped rampart throughout its whole course, but, what is of still greater importance, gives the particulars of a tour, beyond these mountains, through an immense extent of territory, which, *at this day,* is looked upon as totally untravelled and unknown, and which, in every map of the country to which we can obtain access, is marked as an " *unexplored region."* (521)

Drawing heavily from the *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark* (1814) and Washington Irving's *Astoria* (1836), Poe patches together an uncharted territory suitable for easy installments, with well-placed crags and savages and bears imposed at every turn.

But after lukewarm reception and problems with the staff at *Burtons,* Poe abandons Rodman and his crew in "the far distant Yukon ... on the [Missouri] river in Montana, with no inkling given us of the means whereby he was to fulfill his promise to cross the Rockies" (653). Rodman never reaches the passage that typified in the nineteenth-century imagination what the craggy surface of Mars might represent to the millennial American; the Rocky Mountains were for Poe's readership a metonym and repository for that which remained untamed in the expanse between the Mississippi River and America's Manifest Destiny. To blaze a trail through the Rockies, to impose linear inscriptions upon biospheres with axes or pens, was to take part in processes of beautification and debasement of a seemingly endless wild. Pioneers, speculators, and writers of the nineteenth century represented the Rocky Mountains in conflicting ways, and Poe's *Journal of Julius Rodman* (1840) and Isabella Bird's *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879) track and survey these oppositional approaches. Rodman's editor and Bird's narrator discuss their surroundings in terms of the landscape gardening conventions of the day, and both use the language of aestheticism and the period's well-worn romantic conventions to describe the terrain. Rodman's journal represents

nature as either landscape garden or as woods/forest,[1] rendering the natural environment merely beautiful or horrific. Bird, on the other hand, describes a demystified yet revered Rocky Mountains that defies depictions of natural environment as garden or resource, enabling its narrator to reach the ecosublime. Both Poe and Bird are able to represent ecological comprehension through depictions of uncertainty in the face of change, but Poe fails to depict the apprehension of human characters immersed within a tentative ecological whole.

Joan Dayan suggests that perhaps "all of Poe's work is finally about radical dehumanization: one can dematerialize—idealize—by turning humans into animals or by turning them into angels" (183). Poe's texts reconfigure nonhuman ladies and slaves by either adding spirit or removing mind. Dayan adds that "both processes, etherialization and brutalization (turning into angel or brute), involve displacement of the human element. We are dealing with a process of sublimation, either up or down. . . . What remains unmentioned, and unencoded, is the *manhood* at the center of these operations. It is the powerfully absent construction that Poe intentionally probes" (183-84). Unlike angel and brute, Poe's "universal man" (184) exists because he can reason. Because reason falls short for creatures of heart and slavery's mindless hands, maltreatment comes as a means to improve or cultivate. In nineteenth-century expansion literature, this rationale also justifies the mismanagement of untouched wilderness. Propaganda portraying quaint prairie settlements with bountiful resources, vicious Native Americans, or monstrous bears idealizes and degrades the indigenous to perpetuate the mult fine) far ious agendas of divine right. For *The Journal of Julius*

Rodman, this process of displacement situates nature as either convertible model (the landscape garden) or debased monstrosity (the forest). Poe's narrator thus desires nature either as feminized ideal or savage slave.

Stephen Mainville states that "Poe's frontier is the frontier of the unconscious, the unknown, the limit of consciousness, a frontier that is experienced rather than located," adding that "Poe's unexplored frontiers are not to be found on any map, in any external geography; they are interior frontiers" (347). Mainville's use of "to be" verbs highlights accepted Western notions of mind-body, nature-culture, and inside-outside. His title separates meaning and "dumb nature" (354), or the "void." This approach sheds light on the unexhumed corpus that Poe scholarship has been slow to forget: the text can provide a key to the internal mechanisms of the mind, and like a visitation from the ghosts of critics past Wimsatt and Beardsley, it provides keys to the mind of "Poe." Such bodies of criticism must be laid to rest in order to further a critique of that which lies outside: historical forces, cultural markers, and ecological processes. Ecocriticism must make as its object of inquiry the void itself. In *The Journal of Julius Rodman* the void speaks the voice of the absent woman, the debased slave, and the forest. As

[1] Hochman discusses forest representation and marginalization. The forest is that which functions ecologically, and the woods is timber in its nascent state. Rodman's journal employs the terms "forest," "woods," and "timber" to represent environments as either sites to be feared or resource areas.

Mainville notes, Rodman does "step outside of language," but he does not engage a fantastic supernature; his interactions with the "pretext of humanity" can be seen as either beautiful or horrible connections to biome. Rodman's journey marks a dilemma in nineteenth-century American culture, one that involved the use of romantic rhetoric to etherialize natural space while killing it. Lofty tones that accompanied the language of western expansion thinly mask the impulse to murder and devour the beloved.

The narrator of chapter 1 of Poe's *Journal* explains that Rodman "was possessed with a burning love of Nature; and worshipped her, perhaps, more in her dreary and savage aspects, than in her manifestations of placidity and joy" as he "stalked through that immense and often terrible wilderness with an evident rapture at his heart" (524). Rodman stalks his beloved as did Lewis and Clark; both texts seek to inscribe their names upon objects of desire. These inscriptions—trapping, mapmaking, trailblazing, and note taking—victimize the natural environment in expansive acts. The animal remains, cartographic and physical openings of biospheres, naming of rivers, and denuded timber and mineral deposits found in cavernous mines mark the possessive actions of an erratic lover (stalker) upon a molested ecology. Poe's dramatizations of possession thus link *The Journal of Julius Rodman* to the social realities of clear-cutting, strip mining, and species decline in nineteenth-century America.

Poe was also familiar with the techniques of the English Landscape School, which flourished between 1712 and 1790, his interest possibly stimulated by his own childhood experiences abroad. In his landscape sketches,[2] particularly "The Domain of Arnheim," the text struggles with synthetic scenes and the defects of natural space. Ellison explains: "In the most enchanting of natural landscapes there will always be found a defect or an excess—many excesses and defects. Why the component parts may defy, individually, the highest skill of the artist, the arrangement of these parts will always be susceptible of improvement" (182). Before his conferences with Ellison, the narrator thought that "the primitive intention of nature would have so arranged the earth's surface as to have fulfilled at all points man's sense of the perfection of the beautiful, the sublime, or the picturesque." But because of natural disturbances "of form and color-grouping," it "was Ellison who suggested that they were prognostic of *death"* (184). Like the poet, the landscape artist must make order, sequence, and harmony out of raw material. A poorly constructed thought or poem is thus likened to the seemingly disarranged forest. Poe's artist, hovering between man and God, must reconfigure feelings, events, and natural environments to find the ethereal within the base. Otherwise, Ellison indicates, the world lacks completion. In "The Domain of Arnheim," Ellison and the narrator get a glimpse into a perfect balance between the natural and the cultural, where the "thought of nature still remained, but her character seemed to have undergone modification: there was a weird symmetry, a thrilling uniformity." In this place there was not "a dead branch—not a withered leaf—not a stray pebble—not a

[2] Poe's literary landscape sketches—"The Domain of Arnheim," "Landor's Cottage," and "The Island of the Fay"—echo the influential work of landscape gardeners such as Andrew Jackson Downing.

patch of the brown earth was anywhere visible" (191). Ellison finds beauty in the symmetrical and the uniform; perfection comes when he reaches a place that looks similar enough to ecological space to have aesthetic appeal but is not rustic enough to disturb or threaten. The narrator notes with pleasure that this place lacks dead branches, withered leaves, disorganized pebbles, and dirt. Arnheim's domain appears sanitized, devoid of the forest's degenerative processes and more like the lobby of a comfortable inn. For Rodman and Ellison, aesthetics and nature merge as convolutions of literary anxiety in the face of a complex wall of green. More importantly, these projections kill any chances for either one of them to experience the ecosublime.

Although Poe himself may well have deemed the sublime an incomplete descriptor of aesthetic experience, Burkean renderings of the sublime and beautiful permeate *The Journal of Julius Rodman.* Poe's reproachful critical posture toward Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* has been detailed,[3] but Rodman's descriptions of sights beautiful or awful often parallel those of Burke and, indirectly, Kant.

Within the "vegetable creation," Burke argues, "we find nothing so beautiful as flowers" (86), citing smoothness, unimposing size, delicacy, and "colours clear and bright" (107) as determining factors of beauty. Most of Rodman's early descriptions of terrain lack the harshness, grandeur, cragginess, and obscurity associated with the Burkean sublime, but his polished surfaces signify an attempt to beautify the wild as a means of displacement. Rodman and his crew attempt to inscribe the codes of domesticated, contained space onto the frontier but find the results incomplete. Rodman's first attempts to contain river eddies, prairies, and forests suggest a desire to wish away discomfort and confusion in the chaotic wild. He explains that the prairies "exceeded in beauty any thing told in the tales of the Arabian Nights" and that on "the edges of the creeks there was a wild mass of flowers which looked more like Art than Nature, so profusely and fantastically were their vivid colors blended together" (542). Even river flora takes on the attributes of an "English flower-garden" (542).

At this stage, Rodman delights in finding aesthetic form in flowering plant arrangements. He notices that one prairie "bore a wonderful resemblance to an artificial flower garden, but was infinitely more beautiful— looking rather like some of those scenes of enchantment which we read of in old books" (543). The crew becomes gleeful, even ecstatic, by that which reminds them of familiar landscapes. Their tentative sense of empowerment comes from constructing synthetic pattern, or beauty. Rodman describes the "romantic enterprise" (565) that prompts him to make his trek. He explains:

[As I] looked up the stream (which here stretched away to the westward, until the waters apparently met the sky in the great distance) and reflected on the immensity of territory through which those waters had probably passed, a territory as yet altogether unknown to white people, and perhaps abounding in the magnificent works of God, I felt an excitement of soul such as I had never before experienced... At that moment

[3] See Voller and Howes.

I seemed possessed of an energy more than human; and my animal spirits rose to so high a degree that I could with difficulty content myself in the narrow limits of the boat. I longed to be with the Greelys on the bank, that I might give full vent to the feelings which inspired me, by leaping and running in the prairie. (536-37)

Rodman's joyous rhetoric at the beginning of his journey echoes literary depictions of romantic sublimity. His reflections on the seeming infinitude of the river, the immensity of the territory, the divine presence in nature, and his own inspiration transform him briefly into a Wordsworthian vessel.

But as the journey continues, Rodman finds himself incapable of negotiating the terrain on those terms. As he physically and psychologically adapts to his changing surroundings, his descriptions of the terrain also change. Notations of utility replace bookish visions of beauty; he takes on the role of capitalist, inscribing value upon the wild on the basis of exchange. In one passage almost directly purloined from Lewis and Clark, he writes that "the low grounds began to spread out here more than usual, and were well supplied with timber ... the country extended in one immense plain without wood of any kind. The soil was remarkably rich," adding, "the game was more abundant than we had ever yet seen it" (566). Rodman now refers to the forest as timber, appraising the countryside for that which can be processed. Richness in soil indicates the potential for monoculture, and the abundance of "game" indicates the strategy and pleasure derived from animal entrapment and execution. At this point Rodman affirms that his exploring adventure is also a business trip. Wealth will be gained from animal skins by processing them into monetary abstractions. He explains: "The skins which were considered as the leading objects of the expedition were to be obtained, principally, by hunting and trapping," adding, "The furs usually collected by previous adventurers upon our contemplated route, included beaver, otter, marten, lynx, mink, musquash, bear, fox, kitt-fox, wolverine, raccoon, fisher, wolf, buffalo, deer, and elk; but we proposed to confine ourselves to the more costly kinds" (536). Rodman arranges animals hierarchically by dollar value, interrupting ecological webs by a process of proprietary stratification. The actual headshots, evisceration, skinning, stretching, and tanning of animals sound oddly like the trading of jewelry or gold bullion. The "leading objects" are "obtained" and "collected" as the group confines itself to "the more costly kinds" of commodity.

But after some hard traveling, Rodman's representations of his surroundings again shift, becoming more topsy-turvy. His confusion as to how to apprehend the terrain causes him to impose nonhuman characteristics onto human entities (theriomorphism) and to impose human characteristics onto nonhuman entities (anthropomorphism). Jhan Hochman describes these displacement behaviors as a means to create distance between human culture and the fifth world of "plants, animals, and elements" (17). But Rodman's minute advancement toward an intellectual and emotional link to biome actually comes with his anthropomorphic attempts to observe and describe the animals that he kills. He observes beaver behavior, going so far as to describe characteristics such as fixed action patterns, display behavior, and cooperation. This section of text

that blatantly swipes from Washington Irving's *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (1837) adds human-like characteristics to animals that function with machine-like efficiency.

Rodman's beavers repair "a portion of their dam, and every step of their progress was distinctly seen"; each architect procures a twig and proceeds to the dam, placing it "carefully, and longitudinally, on the part which had given way." After jumping into the water, one beaver reappears "above the surface with a quantity of stiff mud, which he first squeezed so as to drain it of its moisture in a great degree." He then applies the mud "with its feet and tail (using the latter as a trowel) to the branch which he had just laid upon the breach" (544). Other peculiar operations include the cutting of trees, in which one "small sycamore had been felled, apparently, and was now nearly denuded of all its fine branches . . . and proceeding with them to the dam. In the mean time a great number of the animals surrounded a much older and larger tree, which they were busily occupied in cutting down. There were as many as fifty or sixty of the creatures around the trunk, of which number six or seven would work at once, leaving off one by one, as each became weary; a fresh one stepping in to the vacated place" (545). It is added that some beavers "may be caught upon shore; especially the males in search of food. When thus caught, they are easily killed with a blow from a stick" (547).[4] The beaver community works in syncopation for a common goal. They are "wood-cutters" (545), miniature loggers who work to make a clearing in the dark forest. Rodman becomes engrossed by the beavers' work in much the same way that he becomes gleeful by the gardenscapes; that which enables him to impose cultural markers onto ecological processes allows him a sense of escape. The beaver's likeness plays out Rodman's desires for civilization (development, industry, and cultural permanence) in the wild.

Rodman thus never sees the wilderness he explores; significant acts of displacement and projection keep him from experiencing ecosublimity. His only brush with environmental awe and horror comes in his clash with the epitome of Burkean terror, bears. In Poe's *Journal,* bears "are indeed formidable creatures, possessing prodigious strength, with untamable ferocity," their bodies impermeable to pistol shot and knife blade. Described as murderous hulks with sharp teeth, the bears ambush the crew on the "summit" of a "topmost terrace." As Rodman and his party sit down to rest, they "were alarmed by a loud growl immediately in our rear, proceeding from the thick underwood. We started to our feet at once in great terror, for we had left our rifles

[4] It's not necessary to belabor the points where the notes by the bogus editor of this section diverge from actual beaver behavior. The described squeezing method, tailtrowel use, and elaborate tree-cutting cooperation hyperbolize beaver behavior or are inventions. A lengthy analysis of the level of textual distance from the referent, "beaver," is also out of the range of this book, but note that the editor rewrites Rodman as Poe rewrites Irving (and where does Irving get his data?), leaving actual observation at least four texts from an actual beaver. The absent animal, like the peculiar and suicidal buffalo in this text, becomes open to Poe's peculiar inscriptions and investments. Once decoded, plants, animals, and elements in literary texts become relocated, separated from the signifies This separation leaves the beaver subject to the editor's—and Rodman's— spurious taxonomy.

on the island, that we might be unencumbered in the scramble up the cliffs, and the only arms we had were pistols and knives. We had scarcely time to say a word to each other before two enormous brown bears (the first we had yet encountered during the voyage) came rushing at us open-mouthed from a clump of rose-bushes" (577). This attack creates a dilemma; the crew must either jump to their peril or face the bears with insufficient weaponry. The clash that ensues titillates and horrifies Rodman, who explains that "when once fairly aroused I experienced a kind of wild and savage pleasure from the conflict" (578). The vertiginous terror of the crew's peril, much like the cavernous abyss passage in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), gives Rodman an abject delight. This spark of perverse bliss occurs where culture and nature glance off one another in conflict. The enemy must provide a substantial struggle, but it must also be defeated for the sake of progress. As metonym for the forest, the bear seeks to diffuse the crew's enlightened destiny in the void. Rodman in turn wants to dominate the dark forest and its emissaries by processing them for the ends of the mission because the bear's fur, claws, and flesh will be employed for clothing, trade, and food.

The June 1840 issue of *Burtons Gentlemans Magazine* abruptly drops *The Journal of Julius Rodman* on the banks of the Missouri. Rodman never makes it to the mountain, the ecosublime precipice of Thoreau's "Ktaadn" in *The Maine Woods* (1864),[5] for the same reason that Emerson's "transparent eye-ball" can ultimately only see itself. Like Emerson's *Nature* (1836), Poe's *Journal* uses the natural environment to create an elaborate anthropocentric metaphor. Rodman doesn't comprehend the potential terrors his methods might cause, nor does he apprehend the biocentric awe of *The Maine Woods.* By beautifying the substrate, debasing it as game, making anthropomorphic projections, and depicting Rodman's perverse death wish, Poe reveals nascent pathologies of the American depletionist.

Bears also clash with pioneers in Isabella L. Bird's *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains,* a travelogue by an Englishwoman who explores the Rocky Mountains in 1873. The Rockies in this text also function as an end to things, a mystery at the edge of an emerging empire. But unlike Rodman, who perpetuates sentimental and sensational cliches of the West in a hoax travelogue, Bird's narrator problematizes frontier legend as she scrupulously observes and represents the mountain terrain in a travelogue with fictional undertones. Bird's approach differs from Poe's in that objects in nature are described as textual renderings of referential objects, relished for their existence as interdependent life, and the stimulus for the ecosublime. Bird uses literary depictions of environmental apprehension and comprehension to litigate for increasingly domesticated spaces, representing the wild in its own defense. After hearing one legend too many about killer bears, Bird exclaims that she dreamed of *Ursus arctos horribilis* so vividly, "I woke with a furry death hug at my throat" (17). But her first description of grizzlies is underwhelming: "The forest was thick, and had an undergrowth of dwarf

[5] Garrard offers a starting point for a study of Thoreau's ecosublime sensibility.

spruce and brambles, but as the horse had become fidgety and 'scary' on the track, I turned off in the idea of taking a short cut, and was sitting carelessly, shortening my stirrup, when a great, dark, hairy beast rose, crashing and snorting, out of the tangle just in front of me. I had only a glimpse of him, and thought that my imagination had magnified a wild boar, but it was a bear. . . . The bear ran in one direction, and the horse in another" (13). The narrator's moment is one of mutual evasion. After a bit of snorting and crashing the bear merely moves away from unusual visual and auditory cues, as bears tend to do. Her second experience with bears is more anticlimactic, and even endearing. She explains, "I saw a cinnamoncolored bear with two cubs cross the track ahead of me. I tried to keep the horse quiet that the mother might acquit me of any designs upon her lolloping children" (18). Bird's narrator notes maternal care in bears; she explains that the "forest is full of them, but they seem never to attack people unless when wounded, or much aggravated by dogs, or a shebear thinks you are going to molest her young" (17).

By demystifying the referential bear, Bird's narrator chides hunters and pelters who construct penny-press visions of warlike clashes with animals. She sardonically recalls "a man heavily armed, a hunter probably, asked me if I were the English tourist who had 'happened upon' a 'Grizzly' yesterday" (18). In this text proto-Bubbas who flaunt guns and ammunition are mocked for their embellishments. Bird's work complicates western archetypes found in texts such as Henry Nash Smith's chapter "The Mountain Man as Western Hero" as she displays the hunter's incomplete relationships with both civilization and frontier. Smith argues that constructions of the heroic mountain man who "had fled from the restraints of civilization . . . had been greatly strengthened during the 1830s by the spectacular development of the Rocky Mountain fur trade" (81). The mountain man-hero stereotype—one that depicts freedom and rusticated John Waynery on the range—shrivels in *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains.* In reference to the region's "black-tails," "bighorns," "mountain lion," "great grizzly," and other animals, she exclaims, "May their number never be less, in spite of the hunter who kills for food and gain, and the sportsman who kills and marauds for pastime!" (104). Her statements reveal that instead of attaining undomesticated liberty, the mountain man finds himself enslaved either by processes of supply and demand or the psychotic tendencies underlying his depletionist culture. As she protests the hunter's death drive toward species decline, Bird's narrator critiques practices accepted by Rodman, his crew, and national emissaries such as Lewis and Clark. In describing one "Nameless Region," Bird quips that it is "so little profaned by man that if one were compelled to live here in solitude one might truly say of the bears, deer, and elk which abound, 'Their tameness is shocking to me' " (53). By representing the wilderness in this way, she counters the outcropping of texts such as Poe's that romanticize animal slaughter.

But the frontier miner fares much worse in Bird's eye; an antipode to Rodman's beavers, Bird's theriomorphic miners function anti-ecologically by randomizing the substrate and working alone. Bird explains that at mining sites "each miner in solitude was grubbing for himself, and confiding to none of his finds or disappointments." The

interdependence that Bird's narrator finds so impressive in the Rockies contrasts with the isolationist and destructive nature of the miners. She observes that the "mines, with their prolonged subterranean workings, their stamping and crushing mills, and the smelting works ... fill the district with noise, hubbub, and smoke by night and day," adding that "Agriculture restores and beautifies, mining destroys and devastates, turning the earth inside out, making it hideous, and blighting every green thing, as it usually blights man's heart and soul. There was mining everywhere along that grand road, with all its destruction and devastation, its digging, burrowing, gulching and sluicing; up all along the seemingly inaccessible heights were holes with their roofs log supported, in which patient and solitary men were selling their lives for treasure." These acts produce ecocidal vistas of horror, as "the ledges are covered with charred stumps, a picture of desolation, where nature had made everything grand and fair" (193). The holes that riddle the mountainsides, the noxious fumes, and the sounds of "stamping," "crushing," and "smelting" coalesce to help readers apprehend a West being torn and discarded.

Recognizing the area's threatened natural environments, Bird's narrator spends most of her time writing about untouched spaces that leave her in a state bordering on the divine. She describes a functioning ecology in the "Nameless Region": "Just now a heavy-headed elk, with much-branched horns fully three feet long, stood and looked at me, and then quietly trotted away. He was so near that I heard the grass, crisp with hoar frost, crackle under his feet. Bears stripped the cherry bushes within a few yards of us last night. Now two lovely blue birds, with crests on their heads, are picking about within a stone's-throw. This is 'The Great Lone Land,' until lately the hunting ground of the Indians, and not yet settled or traversed, or likely to be so" (53). In describing a moment in an ecosystem that precedes nomenclature, Bird provides the elk, blue birds, bear, cherry bushes, and the frozen grass with communicative opportunities. These voices intertwine. The grass crunches in response to being stepped upon, cherry bushes stand exposed as a testament to bears, and blue birds communicate with their crests and tails. Opposed to Rodman's processing of both culture and nature, Bird's narrator describes that which exists outside the logic of "Rod-Man." Its system of signification perplexes her as it adds to the marvel of the Rockies.

Like *The Journal of Julius Rodman,* Bird's journal responds to the aesthetic rhetoric of landscape gardening common in the nineteenth century. As Vera L. Norwood explains, Bird "seems quite cognizant of the changing values attached to landscapes in Europe between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries"; she "makes a point of disparaging scenery that 'imitates' art" (328). In describing Estes Park in the Rockies, Bird explains: "Here and there the lawns are so smooth, the trees so artistically grouped, a lake makes such an artistic foreground, or a waterfall comes tumbling down with such an apparent feeling for the picturesque, that I am almost angry with nature for her close imitation of art. But in another hundred yards Nature, glorious, unapproachable, inimitable, is herself again, raising one's thoughts reverently upwards to her Creator and ours. Grandeur and sublimity, not softness, are the features of Estes Park" (106).

Like Rodman, Bird's narrator feminizes the landscape, referring to the vista and its inhabitants as "her." But unlike Rodman, she equates the female with a power that supersedes the "smoothness," "softness," and picturesque of the frontier symbolic. Instead, Bird's narrator relates the natural her with the ecosublime; its nonmimetic presence enacts a solitary pilgrimage that ends in an ecological "oceanic" while providing the substrate with a means to argue.

Bird's ecosublime places, to risk an anachronism, are best explained in relation to the Freudian oceanic in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). In chapter 1, Freud describes the oceanic as "something limitless, unbounded" and "a sensation of 'eternity'" (64). He explains: "I cannot discover this 'oceanic' feeling in myself" as he censures the social ramifications of such delusions. He does concede, in "no small difficulty," that it "is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings. One can attempt to describe their physiological signs. Where this is not possible—and I am afraid that the oceanic feeling too will defy this kind of characterization—nothing remains but to fall back on the ideational content." Freud recognizes the fact that something defies his methodology, but his work dismisses the oceanic by equating it with the ills of organized religion and, denotatively, the emerging Nazi regime. Interestingly, he focuses on the oceanic feeling itself, not its often- repugnant behavioral repercussions, characterizing it as "a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole," and cures are offered to the "idea of men's receiving an intimation of their connection with the world around them through an immediate feeling." Freud explains that the oceanic "sounds so strange and fits in so badly with the fabric of our psychology that one is justified in attempting to discover a psycho-analytic—that is, a genetic—explanation of such a feeling" (65). He requires no justification to try to discover reasons for the oceanic feeling, nor does he need to justify his own failure at this attempt.

Freud does succeed in perpetuating the feeling that this seemingly infantile, primitive, or spiritual sensation that makes humans experience themselves as part of a larger whole must be repressed for the good of civilization. For human happiness, he argues, there "is no golden rule which applies to everyone: every man must find out for himself in what particular fashion he can be saved. All kinds of different factors will operate to direct his choice. It is a question of how much real satisfaction he can expect to get from the external world, how far he is led to make himself independent from it, and, finally, how much strength he feels he has for altering the world to suit his wishes" (83). With this axiom, Freud embodies the anti- ecological posture of the post-Enlightenment West, one that saturates Poe's *Journal* and causes Bird to seek recourse in the wild. The idea that satisfaction must be gained solely from getting, altering, and making oneself independent from the world to suit one's wishes displays a condition that goes far beyond the trappings of Poe. Bird's observations provide a means to transgress the myth of progress and represent instead the existence of a hallowed frontier.

In response to depletionist cultural postures of which Freud and Rodman are mere echoes, Bird describes her own ecosublime experiences in the Rocky Mountains. One

account, she explains, could not be written, "as no sort of description within my powers could enable another to realize the glorious sublimity, the majestic solitude, and the unspeakable awfulness and fascination of the scenes" (83). In her most zealous attempt to explain the ecosublime experience, she embellishes the notorious Mountain Jim as he falls sway to the dawn: "Suddenly, as a dazzling streak at first, but enlarging rapidly into a dazzling sphere, the sun wheeled above the grey line, a light and glory as when it was first created. 'Jim' involuntarily and reverently uncovered his head, and exclaimed, 'I believe there is a God!'... Surely 'the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands!' For a full hour those Plains simulated the ocean, down to whose limitless expanse of purple, cliff, rocks, and promontories swept down" (91-92). Mountain Jim, the archetypal hero of the Virgin Land, collapses within the limitless oceanic

terrain. His orgiastic articulation of the word "God" in relation to the land is the most exalted form of representation available, his experience represented as one that cannot be adequately captured with words. The ecosublime moment occurs in Bird's journal when literary figures are overwhelmed with a supersensible feeling caused by the fluidity and tentativeness of natural space, feeling themselves becoming part of an ecological whole. The Rockies thus provide more than psychological satisfaction or happiness; their multidimensional fusion of animal and plant species, sky, water, and ground provides Bird's narrator with the opportunity to be human in her most essential and sacred sense of the word.

2. "I Kin Turn You Ter a Tree"

Hybrid Identities in *The Conjure Woman* and "Life in the Iron-Mills"

Contemporary American desires to become one with nature are often based on privilege and constructed by capital. Sadly, natural environments aes- theticized for human use are typically reserved for SUV drivers, L.L. Bean shoppers, and white-water kayak renters. Literary discrepancies between the bourgeois view and ecological visions of dirt-poor Americans have historically provided readers with the humor, pathos, and horror of conflict between high culture and low nature. Twain was a master of this conflict, depicting rich city slickers duped by rusticated folk in uncultivated spaces that, presumably, the slicker would sooner or later own and cultivate. Literary figures responsible for such actions—depletionists depicted as cunning yet myopic to a fault—provide the nineteenth-century reader with a rascal against whom to direct confusion and anger in the face of real environmental change. From this literary tradition also emerges a new breed of eco-activist, pre-environmentalists who educate and shock mainstream audiences through hyperbolic art; Charles W. Chesnutt's Uncle Julius and Rebecca Harding Davis's Hugh Wolfe counter the anti-ecological mind-set of the South with stories and sculptures that conjure the ecosublime.

In the American literary landscape between 1860 and 1900, depictions of slave and mill life cast a tragic haze over the romantic wild. The idea of a natural immersion so touted by British romantics and American tran- scendentalists became an implement of terror when depicted from the point of view of the slave or mill hand. The late-nineteenth-century descriptions of biocentric assimilation[1] found in this chapter reveal constructions of human identity as material hybrid, as crossbreed between human and environment. This hybridization allows us to read nineteenth-century natural environments bound and enslaved by developing agribusiness and manufacturing processes. In Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861) and Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* (1899), human transformations expose the ecosublimity of identity confusion and the horror of *being* a subaltern ecology. This occurs because their interactions create the apprehension of becoming a part of misused natural environment and the horror of comprehending the ecological self dying. Chesnutt's Uncle Julius tales in *The Conjure Woman* hyperbolize the transformation of human to natural resource in a way that delves beyond racial hybridity into the constructed permeability of *species.*[2] These literary visions of destruction depict overwhelming and inconceivable

[1] By "biocentric assimilation" I mean the cognitive and spiritual blending of individual selves into biological cycles and the recognition of self as niche.

[2] See Fleischmann for an extended discussion of hybrid identity in Chesnutt's work.

fear, causing readers to rethink their environmental values and perhaps even spurring them to action.[3]

In both "The Goophered Grapevine" and "Po' Sandy," slaves find themselves transformed into crossbreeds, and they are subsequently processed as consumable goods.[4] In the former, set in Reconstruction North Carolina, northern land speculator John explains that in the South "the climate was perfect for health, and, in conjunction with the soil, ideal for grape culture; labor was cheap, and land could be bought for a mere song" (1). Both tales indicate much about the ecological context of the period between 1860 and 1900 when poverty-stricken North Carolinians drained swamplands on a massive scale to access fertile soil and cut remaining virgin timber. As agricultural historian J. Paul Lilly explains, "the period between the end of the War and the early 1900s saw the rise of large scale mechanized timber harvest. There were still substantial acreages of virgin timber in eastern North Carolina in 1860 but essentially none by 1900." Under conditions before planned reforestation and the advent of commercial fertilizers, "the soils in North Carolina [were] too low in plant nutrients to sustain crop production." Subsequently, much of the North Carolina substrate in the time when and about which "Po' Sandy" was written—particularly in the central area near Fayetteville or "Patesville"—was a scabbed and eroded patchwork of loblolly pine, subsistence farms, and properties abandoned due to depleted topsoil. We're therefore not surprised that Chesnutt's Uncle Julius tales explore relationships between exploited African Americans and natural environments plagued with misuse in the developing South. Jeffrey Myers explains that Chesnutt's tales teach much about southeastern anti-ecological practices through descriptions of white landowners John, Mars Dugal', and Mars Marrabo. Both "the bodies of slaves and the pine forests of the American Southeast had to be exploited in order to make the fortunes—and the culture—that cotton and tobacco plantations made possible" (6). Without fostering cultural stereotypes of African descendants being somehow closer to the soil, Myers explains, Chesnutt conceives of a sustainable South by offering "an ecocentric way of viewing the self in the landscape that does not require mastery over nature or other people" (7). This ecocentric way can be read both in Chesnutt's descriptions of the landscape and in Uncle Julius, the advocate who weaves human and ecological liberation together in his tales.

As plantation-shopping John and his wife happen upon an elderly African- American man eating scuppernongs, they are provided with a tale about the vineyard when it was part of a slave plantation. Uncle Julius McAdoo details the story of a slave who makes the mistake of eating grapes goophered (bewitched) by Aunt Peggy, a conjure woman who is paid by the vineyard's previous master to protect it from hungry slaves. To further prevent his servants from eating the grapes, "Mars Dugal' sot spring guns en

[3] I would like to thank John A. Tallmadge for helping me to articulate this last point.

[4] Fienberg provides a useful overview of both tales, explaining that the "determinism of environment has shaped the masters of Uncle Julius's slave memory into crude embodiments of a profit motive the tales are calculated to expose and efface" (165).

steel traps, en he en de oberseah sot up nights once't er twice't" (Chesnutt 6). Henry, a new slave, unwittingly eats the grapes and must go to Aunt Peggy to be de- goophered. Aunt Peggy "instructs him that each spring he must anoint his head with the sap of the scuppernong" (Wonham 14) to keep him from dying. Uncle Julius explains to John and his wife that Henry must "go en take 'n scrape of de sap whar it ooze out'n de cut een's er de vimes, en 'n'int his ball head wid it" (Chesnutt 8). After doing so, Henry physiologically develops, his body melding with the morphology of the grapevine: "But de beatenes' thing you eber see happen ter Henry . .. des ez soon ez de young leaves begun ter come out on de grapevimes de ha'r begun ter grow out on Henry's head, en by de middle er de summer he had de bigges' head er ha'r on de plantation. Befo' dat, Henry had tol'able good ha'r 'roun de aidges, but soon ez de young grapes begun ter come Henry's ha'r begun ter quirl all up in little balls, des like dis yer reg'lar grapy ha'r, en by de time de grapes got ripe his head look des like a bunch er grapes" (9). His physical attributes are transformed by the seasons and the cycle of plant growth just as they are changed by the agrarian processes of Mars Dugal'. The slave owner's goopher has transformed Henry, not unlike the later breeding of grapes, into "a vivid image of horticultural—not to say cultural—blending and hybridization" (Wonham 16). The slave is thus "cultivated," his survival based upon his commercial (and now genetic) link to Mars Dugal'.

The represented interchangeability of slave and plant species in "The Goophered Grapevine" confuses the gap between *Homo sapiens* and marketable flora, calling into question established conceptions of identity and interrogating the notion of human as resource. In doing so, the story covertly defends an African-American culture confronted with agrarian and mercantile processes that defined the slave as a hybrid genotype. Henry's ecosublime moment comes in finding that he has truly become part of the field in which he toils. In a stark reversal of Whitmanesque catharsis and transcendence, Henry embodies an American ecology fettered and pruned. Totality in nature thus collapses under the weight of gross commerce. Shrewdly narrated by Uncle Julius to conjure the ecosublime, this boundary experience becomes a tool for reform.

Mars Dugal' cashes in on Henry when he notices his potential for exchange value as a disposable product. In the spring when the Henry-vine appears most vital, "Mars Dugal' up 'n tuk Henry ter town, en sole 'im fer fifteen hunder' dollars" (Chesnutt 10); at the end of spring when Henry seems to deteriorate, a seemingly repentant Mars Dugal' suggests, "I'll be willin' ter gib yer five hund'ed dollars fer 'im, en take my chances on his livin'" (9-10). Uncle Julius explains that "he kep' dat sellin' business up fer five year er mo'. . . . En Mars Dugal' made 'nuff money off'n Henry ter buy anudder plantation ober on Beaver Crick" (11). Henry, sold every spring for fifteen hundred dollars and then bought back for five hundred, becomes for Mars Dugal' a renewable resource. Because Mars Dugal's economic arrangement manipulates the perceived hybridity of the slave, Henry functions in a representative middle ground between *Homo sapiens* and cash crop. Henry and the grapevine die together, intertwined as the remains of poor cultivation techniques. Mars Dugal's hired Yankee who comes down "ter l'arn de

w'ite folks how to raise grapes and make wine" (11) had "dug too close under de roots, en prune de branches too close ter the vime, en all dat lime en ashes done burn' de life out'n de vimes" (12). Uncle Julius derides the slave trader who sells and re-sells Henry for profit as well as the Northern opportunist "runnin' 'roun' de vimya'd en diggin' under de grapevimes" (12) until they wither and die.[5] Both culprits in Uncle Julius's prognostic tale envision the Henry-vine in terms of immediate productivity, opting to overengineer the soil and Henry to death.

For the ecocritic, Henry and the vine cannot be separated because depleted nature *is* depleted culture. Environmental quality is the primary indicator of human quality of life, so it is essential to note that Mars Dugal's farm is designed for environmental, thus ethnic, erosion. The complicated relations among master, slave, and place serve a one-way trajectory of resources and wealth. Paradoxically, the subsequent two-way transformation from/to slave to/from plant imbues Henry with ecological vitality. Because Henry *is* the grapevine, we can analyze Mars Dugal's unsustainable farming methods with the same critical paradigm that we use to evaluate the failings of modern colonialism. By presenting the grapevine in human form, Uncle Julius covertly addresses the human-on-human brutality of plantation culture as it provides the depleted and misused soil with both face and means to bear witness. Uncle Julius might then be seen, not as a slick old "coon" who tricks ownership out of its material possessions, but as rather a nineteenth-century activist who uses prognostic tales as tools of subversion.

Transformation also plays a morbid role in "Po' Sandy," an Uncle Julius tale that involves haunted lumber and the horrors of the southern sawmill. Uncle Julius takes John and wife Annie to the sawmill "on the Lumberton plank-road" (14) to order boards for Annie's new kitchen, and John plans on using lumber from an abandoned school to supplement what he must cut. At the mill Uncle Julius seemingly becomes unsettled by the sound of the saw blade: "We had not waited long before a huge pine log was placed in position, the machinery of the mill was set in motion, and the circular saw began to eat its way through the log, with a loud whirr which resounded throughout the vicinity of the mill" (15). The sound prompts Uncle Julius to spin another tale, and he explains that "dat saw, a-cuttin' en grindin' thoo dat stick er timber, en moanin', en groanin', en sweekin', kyars my 'memb'ance back ter ole times, en 'min's me er po' Sandy" (15). Uncle Julius recalls that Sandy, a most industrious slave, finds himself perpetually lent out to neighbors and relatives of slave owner Mars Marrabo McSwayne. Upon returning home, Sandy finds that "a spekilater come erlong wid a lot er niggers, en Mars Marrabo swap' Sandy's wife off fer a noo 'oman"; to make up for his offense, "Mars Marrabo gin 'im a dollar" (16). Sandy is given a "new wife" but is still perpetually

[5] Goldner argues that while Mars Dugal' is "clever enough to sell Henry dearly every spring and buy him back cheaply every fall, profiting on him for five years in a row, he is no match for the sweeping forces of Northern capitalism which come from a distance and pass through his plantation in the guise of the Yankee confidence man. The Yankee leads the master to speculate often and to 'update' his production methods, thereby ruining him" (54-55).

moved from farm to farm. Upon finding that he must be displaced yet again, Sandy exclaims, "it 'pears ter me I ain' got no home, ner no marster, ner no mistiss, ner no nuffin'. I can't eben keep a wife," exclaiming, "I wisht I wuz a tree, er a stump, er a rock, er sump'n w'at could stay on de plantation fer a w'ile'" (17). Sandy's wish comes true as his wife Tenie transforms him into a pine tree. Sandy's metamorphosis, provoked by his constant relocation from one place to the next, allows him to finally take root.

Sandy's transformation, like that of Henry in "The Goophered Grapevine," leaves him "vulnerable to new forms of exploitation" (Wonham 20) as a natural resource. After sending Tenie to nurse the wife of "Mars Dunkin," Mars Marrabo has the Sandy-tree cut for lumber to build a new kitchen. Uncle Julius explains that as Mars Marrabo's men cut down the tree, "dey axes would glansh off, en didn' 'pear ter make no progress thoo de wood; en of all de creakin', en shakin', en wobblin' you eber see, dat tree done it w'en it commence' ter fall." Uncle Julius describes the suffering pine dragged with a chain, explaining that "de log broke loose, en roll down de hill en in mongs' de trees, en hit tuk nigh 'bout half a day mo' ter git it haul' up ter de saw-mill." Tenie returns to find "de stump standin' there, wid de sap runnin' out of it, en de limbs layin' scattered roun'" Tenie, "out'n her mind," runs to the mill to prevent the mutilation of Sandy, but the mill hands catch her and tie "her arms wid a rope, en fasten' her to one er de posts in de sawmill" and "cut de log up inter bo'ds en scantlin's right befo' her eyes" (20). Bound and screaming, Tenie bears witness to the dismemberment of both husband and forest in a metonymic whirr of ecosublime shock and terror.

Karah Stokes argues that the pine tree is a "vehicle for an elaborate metaphorical rendering of human torture," asserting that "Chesnutt makes us see the grotesque consequences of treating human beings as inanimate objects by transforming Sandy into a literal thing, a tree" (205). The mutilation of the Sandy-tree does appear to be a shrewd way to demonstrate the brutality of plantation culture in this historical context, but these passages seem less a "vehicle for an elaborate metaphorical rendering" than a metonymical rendering of torture that supersedes Stokes's segregation of human and "thing." The Sandy-tree is anything but inanimate as it is cut, dragged to the mill, and sawed into lumber. Chesnutt's sawmill horrors reveal the dissolution of both slave and habitation, providing depictions of Sandy as human and also as ecological niche. Sandy's change allows the reader to comprehend the tale from the tree's point of view, illustrating in stark detail ecological lives uprooted and slashed in the South. Witnessing the Sandy- tree being removed from the forest and ripped limb from limb at the sawmill adds ecocritical support to postcolonial studies as it helps readers to empathize with old-growth forests through our apprehension of transplanted cultures. The essential link is made between tree and slave when Uncle Julius gives one voice to defend the other. As tree, the slave rattles the master's view of both human and nature to vividly describe ecosublime moments of agony.

In both texts, the ecosublime comes when the boundary between self and the post-natural world becomes permeated in a shock of transformation. This experience reveals

an America not in the throes of Emersonian transcendence but at the outer edge of postnatural terror. The human form opens, identity unhinged, and is trapped by the forces of exchange. Henry and Sandy become ensnared, the imaginative "I" shunted to provide grist and growth for what Myers calls "ecological hegemony." The moment of ecological awakening, of biocentric assimilation, is jolted by the terror and confusion of a world quickly hybridized and slowly sapped. Frozen between cognition and cultivation, the subject's border experience extends the self psychologically and spiritually. If the transcendentalists of the previous generation attested that the sublime might be found in nature's forms and that divinity lingered in each individual consciousness, how do readers in the late nineteenth century negotiate the emergence of ecologcal freaks such as the Henry-vine and the mutilation of the Sandy-tree?

The unsustainable mind-set of the Mars Dugal's and Mars Marrabos of *The Conjure Woman* speak to developments that incur long-term economic and environmental loss as they ensure human suffering. The mind-set that perpetuates this loss, an approach personified by landowner John, cannot be dismissed as mere greed. We must look further to devise a counterlogic to depletionist traditions based on four ideological components:

1. reliance upon the economic signified
2. objectification .
3. faith in technology as societal end
4. estrangement from the civic

Ecosublimity erupts when literary figures in these tales experience the transformation of human/nature by these processes, realizing that once transformed they *are* the abstraction between work and profit, nature and identity. Mars Dugal', Mars Marrabo, and John envision the world though the economic lens, and all existence for these literary figures is penetrated by transcendent finance. The slave develops into the vine and becomes fifteen hundred dollars; the tree is transformed into a vision of lumber. Nature, the depletionist assures us, will magically become a source of infinite renewal and reliable productivity. From this strained American optimism stems a blurring of means and ends; the civic thus functions to advance technology while projected benefits vanish. The objectification of both Henry and the grapevine is fostered by the unquestioned belief that Mars Dugal's present malevolence will be erased in the future by the munificence of progress. Mars Dugal' and Mars Marrabo also represent an emerging class of American premoderns lacking any substantial mediation between self and an intangible, abstract republic. This abstraction of the self's relationships on a local level allows for these literary figures to estrange themselves from the referential world and its responsibilities.

When in "Po' Sandy" John's wife attests in indignation, "What a system it was . .. under which such things were possible" (23), the ecocritical reader hears the sawmill yet grinding in the background. Although Uncle Julius is now coachman rather than slave, the system that made "such things" as human transplantation and transformation possible still thrives in the practices of her entrepreneur husband who still "misses the lesson about the harmful effects of exploiting the land" (Fienberg 168). Chesnutt's Uncle Julius tales explore strange relations between human identity and natural environment, recalling the terrors that arise when human and resource become conflated for net gain. Like *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains,* Chesnutt's tales depict characters experiencing the ecosublime, an awakening of the human mind in an increasingly uncertain garden. In both cases American ecologies are hybridized to disrupt Myers's ecological hegemony with visceral shock. Here the "one with nature" metaphor hyperbolically displays slave bodies and minds transformed to the supersensible brink.

Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron-Mills" is another prognostic story that exposes the South's diminutive underbelly between 1860 and 1900. Published thirty-eight years before Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman,* Davis's work describes southern industries that have grown like kudzu since the early 1800s. Like "The Goophered Grapevine" and "Po' Sandy," this story details the identity confusion of human subjects employed as resources, but the ecosublime moment in Davis's text comes when ashen figures are transformed by a human beast. Davis's fauna, not unlike Chesnutt's flora, becomes an agent for human change in a story that describes shady iron-mill practices and subsequent ecological and spiritual crises. Based on Davis's own observations in Wheeling, West Virginia, "Life in the Iron-Mills" bemoans the environmental quality of the habitations surrounding the plant, explaining, "the idiosyncrasy of this town is smoke. It rolls sullenly in slow folds from the great chimneys of the iron-foundries, and settles down in black, slimy pools on the muddy streets" (11). The narrator then describes the "broken figure" of an angel whose wings are "covered with smoke, clotted and black. Smoke everywhere! A dirty canary chirps desolately in a cage beside me. Its dream of green fields and sunshine is a very old dream,— almost worn out, I think" (12).

Romantic notions of a previous literary era have given birth to a dirty canary caged by the determinism of mill-town squalor. The figure of the broken statuette introduces a most important element to the transformation motif, the interplay of human body and industrial residue. Davis thus describes "[m]asses of men, with dull, besotted faces bent to the ground, sharpened here and there by pain or cunning; skin and muscle and flesh begrimed with smoke and ashes; stooping all night over boiling caldrons of metal, laired by day in dens of drunkenness and infamy; breathing from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot, vileness for soul and body" (12). The narrator combines descriptions of human contamination and poverty with "slight angular bodies and sharply-cut facial lines" (15). Human bodies are immersed in residual toxins and unbearable heat: the "unsleeping engines groan and shriek, the fiery pools of metal boil and surge . . . the engines sob and shriek like gods in pain'" (19). Figures emerge from

the hellish mill coated with metal and ash, their bodies degenerated by the noxious effluent and residue of "massed, vile, slimy lives" (13).

The story's central character, Hugh Wolfe, plays a literary role analogous to that of Uncle Julius. Both figures employ hyperbolic art to portray laborers caught between cognition and capital. Much like the other mill hands, Wolfe is described as a human transformed, a "dumb, hopeless animal" (30) with "red-rabbit eyes" (16), emasculated by the heat and hours of the mill. Instead of spinning yarns, Wolfe forms statuesque figures from iron residue: "In the neighboring furnace-buildings lay great heaps of the refuse from the ore after the pig-metal is run. *Kori* we call it here: a light, porous substance, of a delicate, waxen, flesh-colored tinge. Out of the blocks of this korl, Wolfe, in his off-hours from the furnace, had a habit of chipping and moulding figures,—hideous, fantastic enough, but sometimes strangely beautiful: even the mill-men saw that, while they jeered at him. It was a curious fancy in the man, almost a passion" (24). The narrator adds that Wolfe "was no favorite in the mill; he had the taint of school-learning on him" (24). Like Uncle Julius, whose tales appear harmless to the existing order, Wolfe and his korl art seem to offer only a hint of challenge to the status quo.

As Wolfe toils over one of the cauldron-like furnaces, a group of gentleman visitors strolls into earshot: owner Clark Kirby, Doctor May, and dilettante Mitchell. As they idly converse about the mill and its "Invincible Roughs" (28), Mitchell stumbles upon one of the sculptures. Upon seeing it he "started back, half-frightened, as, suddenly turning a corner, the white figure of a woman faced him in the darkness,—a woman, white, of giant proportions, crouching on the ground, her arms flung out in some wild gesture of warning" (31). Mitchell observes "not one line of beauty or grace in it: a nude woman's form, muscular, grown coarse with labor"; in the sculpture Mitchell finds "[o]ne idea: there it was in the tense, rigid muscles, the clutching hands, the wild, eager face, like that of a starving wolf's." Mitchell is "touched . . . strangely" by the white apparition, its warning gesture and wolfish face startling him into a new awareness of the iron mill and its laborers (32).[6] This sculpture provokes the ecosublime by striking the viscera without warning, and the literary body becomes instantly aware of the ghastly metamorphosis of a South literally melting.

Like Chesnutt's hybrids, Wolfe's sculptures open the consciousness to the boundary that separates highly articulate ownership and unspeaking resource. In trying to form some cognitive link between himself and Mitchell, Wolfe feels that "between them there was a great gulf never to be passed" (30). Without some link to his human captors, Wolfe and his fellow workers can only vacillate between human and ore, skin and korl. But the ecosublime experience created by terrifying art tests that boundary, depicting Wolfe and his fellow workers as more than hybrid human steel. Sharon M. Harris argues that "Hugh's decline, environmentally induced, is particularly poignant because he is an artist. Typically, scholars have insisted that Hugh is Davis's representation of

[6] Shurr argues convincingly that Mitchell is the story's narrator.

her own thwarted artistic endeavors. Nothing could be further from Davis's intention. Instead, she attributes the destruction of the true artistic spirit to Hugh's *acceptance* of the capitalists' vision of Beauty" (9). Intentional fallacies notwithstanding, Harris's argument differs from my own because she approaches Hugh, the failed artist, and I analyze Wolfe, the jailed activist. *Wolfe* does not intend to create beauty in his artwork, but rather his sculptures bring Mitchell and Dr. May to higher levels of awareness through monstrous figures that awaken the ecosublime.[7] Kant describes the beautiful in four Moments:

1. *Taste* is the faculty of estimating an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest.* The object of such a delight is called *beautiful.* (50)

2. The *beautiful* is that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally. (60)

3. *Beauty* is the form of *finality* in an object, as far as perceived in it *apart from the representation of an end.* (80)

4. The beautiful is that which, apart from a concept, is cognized as object of a *necessary* delight. (85)

Kantian and Burkean beauty delight in relation to form, not representation or interest.[8] The "capitalists' vision of Beauty" (Harris 9) does not allow the taint of purpose or "message"—that which seeks to instruct—to detract from aesthetic standards of symmetry, refinement, and taste.

As noted, the narrator observes "not one line of beauty or grace" (Davis 32) in the korl woman's features; it also doesn't appear to provoke pleasure and delight for the gentlemen. On the contrary, the piece succeeds in startling and frightening all but Kirby into a heightened awareness of Wolfe's ecosublime message of hunger, inhumanity, and horror. Like Uncle Julius, Wolfe is an archetypal demonstrator who uses propagandistic art to incite ecological and social justice; his iron figures transformed into pained humans thus transcend disinterested beauty and provide instead a breathtaking critique of the practices of Kirby and his depletionist kind. Burke explains that pain, or the apprehension of suffering, "is a foundation capable of the sublime." He continues, "I say a man in great pain has his teeth set, his eye-brows are violently

[7] Harris explores the "capitalists' vision of Beauty" (9), Hawthorne's vision of Beauty in "The Artist of the Beautiful," and the terms *Beauty* and *beautiful* in Davis's text. Hawthorne's rendering of the Beautiful, which "has no relation to size, and may be perfectly developed in a space too minute for any but microscopic investigation, as within the ample verge that is measured by the arc of the rainbow" (361), might be compared to the mathematical sublime. Also, the artist's "bright conceptions, which gleamed through his intellectual world, as the butterflies gleamed through the outward atmosphere" (368), yield themselves well to Kantian notions of the sublime. Otherwise, the distinction between beauty and sublimity in the text should be made.

[8] See part III, section XVIII of Burke's *Enquiry.*

contracted, his forehead is wrinkled, his eyes are dragged inwards, and rolled with great vehemence," adding, "the whole fabric totters. Fear or terror, which is an apprehension of pain or death, exhibits exactly the same effects, approaching in violence ... to the nearness of the cause" (119). The observers' comprehension of human suffering depicted in Wolfe's terrible mill art has the potential to bring about catharsis.

Clark Kirby, son of one of the mill owners, embodies the depletionist mind-set of Mars Dugal' and Mars Marrabo of the Chesnutt tales.[9] In his discussion with Mitchell and Dr. May, Kirby demonstrates a marked estrangement from civic responsibility. "Ce *nest pas mon affaire"* (34), he chides, explaining, "I do not think. I wash my hands of all social problems,— slavery, caste, white or black. My duty to my operatives has a narrow limit,—the pay-hour on Saturday night" (35). His reliance upon the economic signified becomes all too apparent when he exclaims, "Money has spoken!" (35) to describe what Wolfe requires to be saved. But of course this passage reveals the ideological trap in which Kirby himself is ensnared, his narrow vision leaving him subject to depletionist processes that he can no longer control. Davis's tale likewise contains a "little Yankee" (27-28) scuttling around the iron mill, an archetypal toady like "dat Yankee" (Chesnutt 11) in "The Goo- phered Grapevine" who represents for these texts economic pressures that accelerate the South's postnatural turn.

Kirby does not appear to feel Mitchell's shock or May's dismay upon seeing the art object, for to him Wolfe and the mill hands are already objects lacking in "[t]aste, culture, refinement" (Davis 38). He explains, "If I had the making of men, these men who do the lowest part of the world's work should be machines,—nothing more,—hands. It would be kindness. God help them! What are taste, reason, to creatures who must live such lives as that?" (34). To benefit creatures such as Wolfe, Kirby recommends the wholesale removal of mental acumen. His mill *hands* would benefit themselves and the world better as mere tools. This attitude shows Kirby's vision of technology not as means but as end, his transformation of the worker into "hands" a contorted offspring of humanist discourse that proposes increased quality of life and human perfectibility through technological and scientific advance.

Wolfe is a tragic character, but not because of his failure as artist or capitalist. His character achieves tragic proportions because he realizes the ecological referent but can never again touch free soil. Like the transformed characters in Chesnutt's tales, Wolfe ultimately becomes extinct; his tragedy, then, is that of the postnatural confusion of impending modernity. After Wolfe dies, the story's narrator keeps his artwork hidden behind a curtain. In his chamber the veiled sculpture is "accidentally drawn back" and the narrator sees a "bare arm stretched out imploringly in the darkness, and an eager, wolfish face." The beast has "a wan, woful face, through which the spirit of the dead korl-cutter looks out, with its thwarted life, its mighty hunger, its unfinished work. Its

[9] Henwood provides an analysis of Davis's use of pro-slavery literature to describe mill life. Although entering the "white slave" debate is outside the range of this book, one must note that an ecocritical approach demonstrates more similarities than differences in Henwood's slave and industrial states in environmental impact and ecological outcome.

pale, vague lips seem to tremble with a terrible question. 'Is this the End?'—they say,—'nothing beyond?—no more?' " (64). If "Life in the Iron-Mills" is an elegiac meditation on loss and incompletion, what does the text mourn? An anthropocentric approach to the losses and anxieties of the "thwarted artist" has appealed to a number of critics,[10] but such an approach falls short in the last sentences of the story. The narrator looks at the sculpture as the morning light "suddenly touches its head like a blessing hand, and its groping arm points through the broken cloud to the far East, where, in the flickering, nebulous crimson, God has set the promise of the Dawn" (65). At this, apprehension and comprehension merge in terrifying yet expectant awe. Given that this story begins with an extended description of "A cloudy day" and ends with breaking clouds and the promise of dawn, one cannot overlook the significance of clean air as an extended metaphor for what the sculpture, Wolfe, and the mill workers grope for in the polluted darkness. Thus, a reading that recognizes the story's elegy of place depicts Wolfe and his sculptures grasping for connections to more than a nostalgic pastoral.

Harris attests, "Hugh has no real power; he is drifting in a dream-world based upon the myths of the capitalists who had held out to him the great American *dream"* (10). But *Wolfe's* power, I argue, comes from his ability to shock Mitchell and even Dr. May into a comprehension, albeit brief, of the depletionist confinement that contains them all. Wolfe's dream, a hope that leads to his demise, seems less to emulate the mercantile practices of Kirby than to use Mitchell's refinement to escape "out of the wet, the pain, the ashes, somewhere, anywhere,—only for one moment of free air on a hillside, to lie down and let his sick soul throb itself out in the sunshine" (Davis 41). This passage suggests that Wolfe falls sway, not to the American delusion of industrialist Kirby, but to his hopes of finding a more essential connection to the regenerative hillside, air, and sun.

William H. Shurr writes that the "sources of Davis's religious solution are many in her environment," adding that "nature would have to be a part of the formula Davis was constructing" (254). Shurr uses romantic writers and painters such as Ruskin to situate Davis's text in an eclectic version of "liberal Christianity of the mid-nineteenth century" (256). He appears to rebuke Harris, who states, "the attention to colors, the Edenic visions, recalls the already debunked romantic vision from the opening narrative frame. It is as false in the underworld as above, and much more cruel" (10). Synthesizing these seemingly oppositional approaches teaches much about the ecological context of "Life in the Iron-Mills"; while the rhetoric of American romanticism and human transcendence has become overshadowed by the pollution and detritus of the late-nineteenth-century mill, Wolfe and his fellow hands still yearn for what remains of an ecological identity that debunked romantics use exalted art and lofty language to replicate.

But instead of a religious transformation that ultimately provides the worker with divine rewards on a projected world, the artistry of Wolfe and Uncle Julius calls for an ecosublime awareness of place and the hope that spiritual connections to the out-

[10] Harris, Morrison, and Scheiber all touch upon this approach.

side are still possible. The metamorphosed figures of Davis and Chesnutt prefigure Kafka's Gregor Samsa, a body transformed into by-product. Unlike Samsa, who loses his ability to speak, the by-products of "Life in the Iron-Mills" and *The Conjure Woman* become shock art that returns viewers and readers to a recognition of the ecological referent. Uncle Julius and Hugh Wolfe reveal an apprehension of the ecological self and an ecosublime comprehension of potential outcomes of a world hybridized. As mediated experiences, these ecosublime transformations reverberate from the Sandy-tree to Julius, from fictional ownership to literary readership. Comprehending these incalculable terrors through reading, one hopes, enables the audience to realize that such human and environmental injustices imposed upon the poor are no fiction.

Also, one detects in *The Conjure Woman* and "Life in the Iron-Mills" a broader literary and cultural disappointment in economic progress for failing to yield greater advances for those "resources" abused in emerging agribusiness corporations and manufacturing plants. The figure of the evil businessman—prevalent until recently in American fiction and film—finds a face in the nineteenth-century literary South, providing a theoretical framework for what was to follow in depression-era film, literature, and painting. The activist who seeks to challenge plantation and mill ownership also makes a debut, highlighting the undue transformations that occur in an increasingly postnatural United States. Importantly, these texts also link human liberation with sustainability, offering alternatives for both culture and nature. In the bewitched and mutable southern landscapes of Chesnutt and Davis, ecosublimity arises when hybridities of a new nature transform the meaning of biocentric assimilation.

3. Ecocritical City

Modernist Reactions to Urban Environments in Eliot, *Miss Lonelyhearts,* and *Paterson*

In the 1990s the "global growth of literature and criticism devoted to environmental and ecological topics was phenomenal" (Slaymaker 129), and one can only expect a growing concentration on phenomenal topics such as global warming, human overpopulation, resource security, and environmental racism. Ecocriticism unearths literary and cultural models of interdependence, diversity, and sustainability while it undercuts our prevailing sense that meaning is "made" through process and exchange. Against the scholarly inclination toward unreserved symbolic and cultural play, green literary theory has been depicted as somewhat of a semantic killjoy because it secretly yearns for what is taboo in contemporary criticism, a transcendental signified. This predicament leaves ecocritics with few traditional choices. As literary and cultural scholars, we are just beginning to find ways to successfully work and play in the face of daily assaults upon our global ecology. In modernist descriptions of place, particularly those written in the wake of "The Waste Land," it is possible to find green-friendly play that erupts from the biocentric *jouissance* and shock of the ecosublime. Reiterating Christopher Hitt's suggestion that "an ecological sublime would offer a new kind of transcendence which would resist the traditional reinscription of humankind's supremacy over nature" (609), an awe-inspiring and terrifying postnature as represented in modernist literature might well serve the "flickering green."

Eliot, West, and Williams send the foreboding message that technological and urban developments erode nature and community in an unending push for unregulated growth. Their works critique, bemoan, and analyze urban environmental problems as they speculate as to how one—or many— might adapt to growing material uncertainties. They react to water pollution, sprawl, depletion, and erosion. Neither "The Waste Land" (1922) nor *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933) represents city spaces in ways that allow for ecosublimity. Both fail to find interconnectedness in urban areas, revealing modernist approaches to natural environment that interpret cities as replicable and disposable parts. Their works are key for millennial ecocriticism because they outline an unsustainable ethos that neutralizes the urbanite as it disconnects him or her. When we read in "The Waste Land" that the polluted Thames washes away "empty bottles, sandwich papers / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends" (36) and that it "sweats/ Oil and tar" (39), we better understand why "The river's tent is broken" (36) and the "nymphs are departed" (36). The tent—interpreted as either supporting framework or

dilating absorbent—fails to provide the city with an ecological and spiritual climax community.

Both "The Waste Land" and *Miss Lonelyhearts* edge toward the ecosublime but fall short because they fail to generate apprehension, the awe of integration with the outside. Eliot's sorrowful and laborious search for unity over the course of his career makes "The Waste Land" much more troubling than West's often tongue-in-cheek novella. Eliot argues in "Notes toward the Definition of Culture" that his envisioned society requires "variety in unity: not the unity of organization, but the unity of nature" *(Selected Prose* 302) in a way that prefigures Cheryll Glotfelty's description of "interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts" (xx). Modernist and ecocritic alike react to centrifugal impulses of the modern condition by providing hopes of interconnectivity, and both suspend disbelief for the actualization of anticipated social outcomes. Both desire for their worldview to become naturalized by the cultural body and incorporated into the functioning of life-practice. In an ecocritical context, this means prompting urbanites to live as if acts of reparation such as urban gardens and city bike routes will save the dying rock. Disintegration in both contexts results from the loss of a unifying organicism; this loss, modernist works such as "The Waste Land" suggest, coincides with the depletion of social and natural spaces. Arguably, Eliot offers "The Waste Land" as a means to reparation and coherence, and, arguably, he fails. Without offering ecological apprehension, "The Waste Land" fails to stimulate an ecosublime embrace.

Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts,* a novel that both parodies and mimics "The Waste Land," leaves little possibility for escape from Eliot's abject urbanity. West's wasted New Yorker disappointedly moves from node to urban node in search of the tactile, finding only stoniness and aridity. His modern substrate being one without touch, Miss Lonelyhearts orbits and returns to the novel's central node, the park, for rejuvenation. But as "far as he could discover, there were no signs of spring. The decay that covered the surface of the mottled ground was not the kind in which life generates" (4). He remembers, "May had failed to quicken these soiled fields. It had taken all the brutality of July to torture a few green spikes through the exhausted dirt" (4-5). His New York responds to Eliot's London in the passage in "The Waste Land" that asks:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man.
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water. (29-30)

Eliot and West equate these urban spaces with lack, leaving inhabitants without the necessary essence for reproductive viability and spiritual renewal. The park itself is a failed myth, its death a dead-end search for the genuine in a world of molded stone and disposable image. The dead park functions as a decrepit end to the signifying chain, and as Miss Lonelyhearts returns he finds the ecological placenta non-intact.

Miss Lonelyhearts's New York park fails to provide the aesthetic pleasure and sense of peace intended by early American landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux. As Irving D. Fisher explains in *Frederick Law Olmstead and the City Planning Movement in the United States* (1986), the "problem Olmstead undertook to resolve . . . was to provide city dwellers with an antidote to relieve them from the debilitating conditions generated by the business economy" (93). These debilitating conditions, Adam W. Sweeting explains, included poor street sanitation, the loss of open space, and problems with potable water. Sweeting adds that it "was not uncommon for a spring or pool to serve simultaneously as sewer, storm drainage, and drinking supply" and that "[c] arcasses and blood flowing from the more than two hundred slaughter houses created an everpresent problem of waste disposal, as did the tons of ash produced by the city's heavy reliance on coal" (96).

In response to conditions such as these, the Greensward Plan sought to provide clean air, water storage, and drainage as well as curative space for New Yorkers. But does Olmstead's work move New York City toward an urban ecology, or does it merely provide urban dwellers a pastoral cinema, a theater of nature? Olmstead "intended the park as a work of art to act as an agency to reconcile art and nature; the rural and the urban; the expertise that comes with specialization with the harmony of the integrated psyche; the calculating, rational mind with the irrational processes of perceiving and feeling; the atomized impersonality of mass society in the city streets with the warm communality of family and neighborly gathering in the park" (Fisher 94). The aim of Central Park was to reconcile a constructed present with a constructed past while reintroducing the corrective bucolic to the bustling market. The Greensward project would add pastoral and picturesque scenes to the New York skyline that would "integrate the park with the city into a new organic, urban configuration" (94). Olmstead employed existing flora, fauna, and substrate to construct a park complete with meadows, woods, ponds, and ball fields.

So why, in *Miss Lonelyhearts,* does Olmstead's configuration fail? Miss Lonelyhearts's melodramatic and often fraudulent broodings in the park are laughable, but his visions are those of his place, both as observation and metonym. Miss Lonelyhearts—the human embodiment of the desolate park—has become androgynous, an organ without a body, just as the urban space that menaces him functions as excess genitalia on the global mass. In the park "the gray sky looked as if it had been rubbed with a soiled eraser. It held no angels, flaming crosses, olive-bearing doves, wheels within wheels. Only a newspaper struggled in the air like a kite with a broken spine" (5). The floating text might be approached as referential litter just as Miss Lonelyhearts himself is littered with words. The detritus of drifting language and image keeps Miss Lonelyhearts from experiencing a cathartic re-referentiality, what Leonard M. Scigaj more eloquently deems *referance).*[1] The floating sig- nifier, struggling and broken, is filled with the hollow columns of Miss Lonelyhearts himself. The kite-referent floats

[1] Scigaj develops this term in *Sustainable Poetry* 38-42.

haphazardly, a reminder that the signifier does not connect him to either place or community. The newspaper (consumer language) and the park (consumer refuge) fail to convey meaning as they leave Miss Lonelyhearts blinded. Olmstead's debility also concerns the eye; his ardent attempts to reassemble the "natural" in New York mistakenly correlate the textual landscape with the ecological signified. If it can be said that a central aspect of modernity is the loss of the tactile, then its surrogate is the eye.[2] Olmstead's synthetic urban nature can only parody a functioning ecosystem just as Miss Lonelyhearts parodies his awaited redeemer. Olmstead and Miss Lonelyhearts ocularize nature only to envision its caricature.

Miss Lonelyhearts's park is therefore a caricature. It replicates photo images of "meadow" and "forest" but can only parody that which is missing. The infinite horizons and generous vistas envisioned by Olmstead are replaced in *Miss Lonelyhearts* by a stark square bordered by monoliths of stone; though Miss Lonelyhearts notices distortions in the picture, he does not know what lies beyond the frame. In the park, Miss Lonelyhearts examines "the sky and saw that it was canvas-colored and ill-stretched. He examined it like a stupid detective who is searching for a clue to his own exhaustion. When he found nothing, he turned his trained eye on the skyscrapers that menaced the little park from all sides. In their tons of forced rock and tortured steel, he discovered what he thought was a clue" (5). The horizon, "canvas colored and ill-stretched," appears a plastic imitation of the sky, its surreality a reminder that something ill mediates his connections to the outside. At this moment Miss Lonelyhearts understands that "Americans have dissipated their racial energy in an orgy of stone breaking," realizing that "they have done their work hysterically, desperately, almost as if they knew that the stones would some day break them" (27). The hysterics that leads Americans to seek guidance in gossip columns, quick-fix radio gurus, and religious incantations such as the "goat and adding machine" ritual is the desperation that leads to ecocide.

Clues from rocks, stones, and minerals in *Miss Lonelyhearts* also help one apprehend the modern death of the tactile. The "tons of forced rock and tortured steel" prohibit connectivity because they have become debased. As slaves, the forced, tortured, and broken elements menace because they function as being-in-process, as evidence of the ill-stretched instability of synthetic form. West's piece questions the cultural weight and potential for discord in stone as Eliot does in "The Waste Land," but *Miss Lonelyhearts* discards the possibility for renewal found in Eliot's "The Rock," which sings:

In the vacant places
We will build with new bricks
There are hands and machines
And clay for new brick
And lime for new mortar
Where the bricks are fallen
We will build with new stone

[2] Legler identifies connections between nature writing, transcendental consciousness, and the eye.

Where the beams are rotten
We will build with new timbers. (The Waste Land 84)

More building, which means to Miss Lonelyhearts only more breaking, will not create a new church to fill the vacancies left by the cultures of modernity. Regardless of end product, the hysterical breaking of stone further deforms the skyline and reflects the misshapen practices of his desperate readership.

Since Miss Lonelyhearts dissociates himself from his habitat, his approach to wilderness being either that of tertiary consumer or disappointed spectator, he sees only disorder outside. "Stone breaking" signifies the separation of human from place as it hastens the supposed entropic impulse of the natural Other. When the modern breaks stone for use, he or she revises habitat, deconstructing place into indeterminate particles and fashioning a multiplicity of synthetic, urban forms. In the "Dismal Swamp," Miss Lonelyhearts articulates his remoteness when he explains, "Man has a tropism for order. Keys in one pocket, change in another. Mandolins are tuned G D A E. The physical world has a tropism for disorder, entropy. Man against Nature . . . the battle of the centuries. Keys yearn to mix with change. Mandolins strive to get out of tune. Every order has within it the germ of destruction" (30-31). The battle Miss Lonelyhearts envisions is not the battle of "the centuries" but a battle that took shape with the scientific methodologies of the eighteenth century. The concept of habitat, replaced in the eighteenth century by the separate spheres of home and wilderness, facilitates the Enlightenment position that nature is "disordered, and the role and purpose of humankind is to add the order, harmony, and balance that is lacking" (Botkin and Keller 390). A negligent husbander of his urban ecology, Miss Lonelyhearts cannot find solace in "disordered" nature or order in his urban wilderness.

His last confused experience outside takes place in "Miss Lonelyhearts in the Country." Betty's "belief in the curative power of animals" prompts her to take Miss Lonelyhearts to a rural farmhouse; Miss Lonelyhearts notes that as "soon as they reached the outskirts of the city, Betty began to act like an excited child, greeting the trees and grass with delight." Even Miss Lonelyhearts begins to feel less preoccupied in the country: "The road went through a wild-looking stretch of woods and they saw some red squirrels and a partridge. He had to admit, even to himself, that the pale new leaves, shaped and colored like candle flames, were beautiful and that the air smelt clean and alive" (36). But the moment is fleeting. In the farmhouse with Betty, he notes that there "were plenty of stars. A screech owl made a horrible racket somewhere in the woods and when it quit, a loon began down on the pond. The crickets made almost as much noise as the loon" (37). Miss Lonelyhearts's tin ear deforms the soundscape, rendering it discordant and unsettling. By deflowering his surroundings, the narrator undercuts romantic notions of unity in nature as he emphasizes the seeming chaos in the woods. His flattened sky with its "plenty of stars" diminishes any grandeur that the night might offer as it illuminates his own lack of depth perception. The word "plenty" commodifies the heavens, his inattentive quantification that of untouchables perpetually trapped within the narrow film of language and image.

Miss Lonelyhearts finds it "very sad under the trees. Although spring was well advanced, in the deep shade there was nothing but death—rotten leaves, gray and white fungi, and over everything a funereal hush" (38). He echoes Enlightenment works such as Count de Buffon's *Natural History, General and Particular* (1781), which describes deserts "overrun with briars, thorns and trees which are deformed, broken and corrupted" and wetlands " 'occupied with putrid and stagnating water . . . covered with stinking aquatic plants' that 'serve only to nourish venomous insects, and to harbour impure animals'" (qtd. in Botkin and Keller 390). In both texts, undisturbed places horrify because the language of exchange value cannot delve into their crannies and fully encapsulate them for use. Beneath its dual caricature as either utilitarian or picturesque, the wilderness in *Miss Lonelyhearts* is the dark Other—the entropy and chaos that lurk beneath its springtime facade.

Because Miss Lonelyhearts cannot apprehend the vital interactions among leaves, fungi, insects, worms, and microorganisms, he senses only darkness and randomness in the woods. Where can he turn? Eliot's escape into metaphysics here proves incomplete, but Miss Lonelyhearts does get a glimpse at a sublime ecology when he and Betty "went down to look at the pond. They sat close together with their backs against a big oak and watched a heron hunt frogs. Just as they were about to start back, two deer and a fawn came down to the water on the opposite side of the pond. The flies were bothering them and they went into the water and began to feed on the lily pads. Betty accidentally made a noise and the deer floundered back into the woods" (37). The moment of wonder is again arrested, and any possibility of biospheric interconnectivity is lost. His presence in the woods causes discord, leaving Miss Lonelyhearts frozen and detached. Thus he fails to experience the ecosublime. His lack of vision and littered psyche prevent apprehension; his intellectualization of the outside and spiritual fragmentation stymie comprehension.

West's literary response to New York parks and his own Eliot complex enable contemporary ecocritics to differentiate our imitative and replicative critical impulses. In doing so, *Miss Lonelyhearts* allows for "an open endorsement of the value of the experience of landscape to counteract the prevailing attitude favoring only the consumption of landscape as a commodity" (Evernden 102). Replication is the overlay of preexisting synthetic designs onto biomes, and one might think of replicated space as cultural and aesthetic cloning. Experiments in landscape architecture like Olmstead's Central Park replicate spaces as design features for aesthetic affect. Golf courses tend to be replicated spaces, and so do the long blocks of greenways in towns such as Savannah, Georgia. They seek to capture the eye as renderings of a preexisting picturesque and therefore function within the realm of the nonreferential hyperreal.

Imitation is a bit different, though the distinction at first seems slight. In these spaces, cities imitate practices learned about nature to foster sustainability. Imitative spaces are therefore referential; they move beyond the ocular into the tactile and material. A line of nonindigenous trees along a suburban street is not imitative, because it does not interrelate the surrounding community and biome in a proliferating,

interdependent body. It is a line of replicants—a clone resultant of biological and psychological monoculture. Vegetable gardens found along highway medians and abandoned lots, on the other hand, are imitative spaces because they provide sustenance as well as aesthetics for the city's inhabitants. As urbanites make interdependence and sustainability part of a daily life-practice, their actions bind them together in an ecocentric convergence.

William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* (1946-58)[3] answers the bleak homily of Eliot by offering Paterson, a bodily society filled with possibilities for connectivity, responsible play, and the ecosublime.[4] Book 2 disdainfully satirizes Eliot's "The Waste Land,"[5] and it also counters the work of Williams's friend and associate Nathanael West. Williams acknowledges the modern loss of the tactile by describing the tentative interactions between city and flower:

A man like a city and a woman like a flower
—who are in love. Two women. Three women.
Innumerable women, each like a flower.
only one man—like a city. (7)

We assume from this text that since American cities—aggregations of shops, manufacturing plants, and government buildings—are essentially replicants, the man-city is thus an agent of technology. Women, then, are represented here as agents of biospheric diversity and germination. "City" desires unification with "flower," but there are disjunctures, gaps, and barriers that invariably lead to divorce.

a bud forever green,
tight-curled, upon the pavement, perfect
in juice and substance but divorced, divorced
from its fellows, fallen low—
Divorce is
the sign of knowledge in our time,
divorce! divorce! (17)

Although Williams's divorce hints at Eliot's sterile ruins and West's desiccated park, book 2 of *Paterson* seeks to unite city and flower, rock and water, urbanity and ecology in a fresh configuration. The possibilities of interconnectivity come alive in Williams's urban garden, and the pleasures of functioning in an organic body becomes, instead of an exercise in subjugation, an expression of what Alfred North Whitehead calls "bodily society" (26).

One thus expects to find a rationale for a mechanical organicism, an urban ecology. But this is not to be the case; Williams's ironic position yields no hope that nature will neatly conform to city patterns and sequences. Nor do we see Paterson or any other

[3] Book 1 was first published in 1946, and the following books were published consecutively in 1948, 1949, 1951, and 1958. The collection was first published in 1963.

[4] Whitehead (23) integrates the human body and the surroundings in a proto- ecological configuration that serves Williams's assimilative purposes in *Paterson.*

[5] See Matthews.

real city capable of decentralization or biocentric assimilation on a truly ecological level. The terms *urban* and *ecology,* when placed together, seem a most dangerous oxymoron. And Williams himself was far too plucky to make that leap. Paterson might rather be envisioned as a place where green thinking might be co-opted in order to make urban spaces more sustainable and diverse. Closer to the spirit of the poem might be the concept of the urban garden, an imitative space that has the potential to provide sustenance and pleasure for city dwellers. Urban space, we gather from *Paterson,* must find a way to germinate and bloom as its inhabitants recognize their own relationships to the organic system that flickers in its interstitial nodes.

Central to *Paterson* is the idea that body, place, and city interrelate directly—the molecular, the natural, and the urban. We need not look far in Williams's work to see the influence of Whitehead, who explains in "Nature and Life" that "there is no definite boundary to determine where the body begins and external nature ends. Again, the body can lose whole limbs, and yet we claim identity with the same body. Also, the vital functions of the cells in the amputated limb ebb slowly. Indeed, the limb survives in separation from the body for an immense time compared to the internal vibratory periods of its molecules . . . Thus, there is a unity of the body with the environment, as well as a unity of body and soul into one person" (23). This unification of human body, soul, and external environment manifests itself as Paterson, which functions at once as human, city, poem, and modern myth. In weaving this organicism into his work, Williams's narrator finds himself attempting to verbally correlate body, environment, and soul as

.. a mass of detail
to interrelate on a new ground, difficulty;
an assonance, a homologue
triple piled
pulling the disparate to clarify and compress. (19)

The modernist organicism that Williams constructs from the romantics and Whitehead does not demand formal congruity. These disjunctive lines heighten the unlikelihood of an urban ecology, just as Williams finds it difficult in *Paterson* to interrelate the many aspects of modern culture.

In the urban garden of *Paterson,* explains Donald W. Markos, "the injunction to imitate nature no longer means—or no longer merely means— to mirror nature, but rather to imitate nature's power to generate new forms" (115). These new forms imitate nature within preexisting city structures to foster sustainability and quality of life. Thus the park, greenway, and urban garden must function as imitative spaces that diminish replication of biome and spirit. Markos argues that crucial to Williams's work is the "fundamental conception of organicism . . . that the universe is alive throughout" (155). Yet Williams's narrator wonders at unaroused people, the automatons who have lost recognition of place. The hope of renewal is offered between the cracks of Paterson, where the regenerative thrust of the ecosystem germinates in both the poet's words and city spaces. In "Sunday in the Park" the reader confronts the sign "no dogs allowed

at large in this park" (61). One gathers that the park, and thus the city, tolerates nature in medians and nonindigenous greenways only. The park is not a free space; it is a domesticated space where the likenesses of animals can only be found in cages or on leashes. But Williams's park becomes ecosublime when abutments are permeated, allowing connections among flower, concrete, and river to take root in the minds of those searching in the park:

Sunday in the park,
limited by the escarpment, eastward; to
the west abutting on the old road: recreation
with a view! the binoculars chained
to anchored stanchions along the east wall— beyond which, a hawk soars!
—a trumpet sounds fitfully. (55)

One senses a hint of sarcasm in the first line of this passage; the title "Sunday in the Park" seems at first merely to critique antiseptic American recreation areas. Borders created by landscape architecture fragment biomes to project social aggregations not in sync with the river but with the sidewalks, bus routes, and electrical currents anterior to the park. But despite the visual limitations, the auditory hindrances of the road, and the chains locking the binoculars along the wall, observers catch a passing glance of ecological transcendence.

In contrast to the unresolved deer scene in *Miss Lonelyhearts,* the hawk passage in *Paterson* offers the ecosublime by employing Wordsworthian catharsis to permeate modern space. The hawk's brief presence opens the way for the apprehension of nonhuman trajectories, a flower penetrating the city and opening possibilities for the continuance of organic growth. The trumpet blast implies the coming of the king, a rejuvenating spirit that will bring vitality to the land. The park now offers a permutation of Eliot's and West's nontact ile and unreal theater of entropic nature, providing instead a hope for referance. In his attentiveness to the possibilities of a bodily society, Williams's speaker guides readers to witness both hawk and city through a different lens. Although incongruent, Paterson the city/poem unleashes nature to move from the eye to the body, from aestheticism to sustenance. Nature is represented in ways that challenge how readers experience borders, highways, rivers, and animals. Pushing beyond Miss Lonelyhearts's view that only sees replication and disjunction, *Paterson* conceives organic urban forms. Williams represents in *Paterson* the fears of reintegration and joys of interdependence, and these moments summon the ecosublime.

Although "the organic universe is in a state of becoming and is therefore imperfect, there are moments recorded by romantic poets in which the universe does appear so beautiful as to be wholly satisfying" (Markos 176).

This satisfaction begins in *Paterson* with simple recognition of the existence of place. Fitfully, "Sunday in the Park" opens with the lines

Outside
outside myself
there is a world. (43)

Williams's narrator counteracts the Cartesian escarpment separating human cognition and the outside by emphasizing "things," the "world" outside his cerebral functions. This world, we gather from Williams, provides the template from which Coleridge's esemplastic capabilities are derived.[6] In one telling passage, Williams's narrator sardonically blasts the idiocy of those who claim mastery over the "flower":

How strange you are, you idiot!
So you think because the rose
is red that you shall have the mastery?
The rose is green and will bloom, overtopping you, green, livid green when you shall no more speak, or taste, or even be. (29)

Naming the rose red, employing language to categorize flora and fauna, does not arm humankind with the moral authority to master nonverbal life. Interestingly, this passage highlights the oral passageway that in *Paterson* will fail in the ecosublimity of a "livid green." The facilitation of language appears somehow at odds with the flower's bloom as Williams's ecosublime moment tests the limits of language.

Words are drowned out by the central generating force in this poem: the river. Its "thunderous voice" erupts from the chasm where artistic, mythical, and erotic impulses spring.

—beyond the gap where the river plunges into the narrow gorge, unseen
—and the imagination soars, as a voice beckons, a thundrous voice, endless
—as sleep: the voice
that has ineluctably called them—
that unmoving roar! (55)

Williams's river responds to the spatial and spiritual dearth of Eliot and West by providing an incessant surge of water through the rocks upon which the park rests. Williams's "thundrous voice" provides a second report to "What the Thunder Said":

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water. *(The Waste Land* 42)

Kathleen D. Matthews argues that Williams "creates a local anthropomorphic deity of rock and water and also uses the sound of water over rock as the major metaphor for a living language" (243). Although the metaphor of water passing over rock functions centrally in Williams's critique of Eliot, its implications supersede Williams's search for linguistic identity.

Rather, the river functions as a vital and life-giving organicism that imitates the ecological and gives rise to the artistry of place: rooftop gardens, alley art, and mountain lookouts as well as poetry. When Williams's speaker envisions "a park, devoted to pleasure: devoted to . grasshoppers!" (50), we sense that this devotion is one for the

[6] This Coleridgean term (from *Biographica Literaria)* means to mold into one, to unify. It also implies a seminal discharge that correlates with the imaginative impulse.

green that lingers in an otherwise developed Paterson. Since, as Matthews explains, "the grasshoppers appear to represent love for a living environment and an attempt to express that environment" (253), it seems doubly interesting from an ecocritical standpoint that "the grasshoppers and their music ... go unnoticed by the Sunday crowd." "The grasshoppers," Matthews notices, "can only be heard in dreams" (253). Williams leaves the hope of his bodily society to the imagination, his poetic city revealing the restraints of his vision through challenges of line and meter. He tries to explain how the city and nature might marry in the modern world, though he has trouble bringing them together in his poem.

But the connective binds of ecosublimity may well have the power to wake the city's unaroused people from their dream states, their virtual lives. Book 1 explains that

the myth
that holds up the rock,
that holds up the water thrives there—
in that cavern, that profound cleft, a flickering green inspiring terror, watching. .
And standing, shrouded there, in that din, Earth, the chatterer, father of all speech (39)

Exodus 17:6 details the emergence of myth in water as Moses smites the rock of Horeb, the flow of water a sublime eruption that wakes his followers in awe. In this passage Williams also seeks to strike the stones, presumably left by Eliot, to provide a means to unite. This assimilation with nature and religious bliss derived from the "flickering green" inspires both terror and speech—the ecosublime and the grasshopper's song. Christopher Hitt explains that in "an age of exploitation, commodification, and domination we need awe, envelopment, and transcendence" (620). But where does our transcendence lead us? It is our pleasure to transcend the restrictions of sig- nifier and image in Eliot's prophetic city, but we must realize that after the ecosublime moment we are grounded. With this grounding comes recognition that we aren't isolatoes after all.

4. Biocentric Assimilation

Salem Cigarettes, *Field Notes,* and *A Timbered Choir*

From sustainable to postnatural, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century depictions of the ecosublime thrust literary figures into a stark awareness that place matters. Representations of global warming, human overpopulation, species extinction, and resource depletion in the second half of the twentieth century gave rise to intense and eerie literary imaginings in the United States, and with this ecocidal imagination came new questions about the future. The following chapters depict ecosublime moments after events such as the National Environmental Teach-In, the National Environmental Policy Act, and Three Mile Island.[1] The post-World War II literature and culture that are studied also bring into focus an important aim of ecocriticism: the employment of literature, activism, and media to interrogate the archaic nature-culture dichotomy in greener ways. Barry Lopez and Wendell Berry are important to this aim because they take literature to the representative edge, depicting figures pulled beyond linguistic thresholds and exploring the obscure places where language ends and the world begins. In doing so, their works respond to a larger collective yearning for wholeness in the industrialized West.

In search of such "wholeness," this chapter will analyze literature alongside unlikely objects of inquiry. The remaining chapters approach a range of thinkers, products, writers, and advertisements to outline a cultural trajectory for the concept of the ecosublime; literature, theory, and culture converge here to probe the peculiar human desire to be subsumed by something greater than oneself. Kant explains that "a part of a tree ... generates itself in such a way that the preservation of one part is reciprocally dependent on the preservation of the other parts" (19), and Neil Evernden develops part/whole consciousness in terms of the human relationship to the nonhuman. Evernden explains that the "preservation of the non-human is a very personal crusade, a rejection of the homogenization of the world that threatens to diminish all, including the self. There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context" (103). Kant and Evernden emphasize interdependency and diversification as central to preservation because each individual unit must function within its particular network to flourish and diversify. The physical body of the extant being functions as an adaptable component of a larger configuration, one which requires that the partic-

[1] Held on April 22,1970, the National Environmental Teach-In was to be the largest street demonstration nationwide since the end of World War II. Senators Edward Kennedy and Barry Goldwater, Margaret Mead, and many others spoke on pollution, nuclear disarmament, and other ecological concerns. April 22 is now celebrated as Earth Day.

ular component perform specific functions necessary to sustain life. Thus each species defines itself through its relationships to others within its organic structure. In the work of Wendell Berry this way of defining oneself means harmonizing with place, community, and spirit, while Barry Lopez's work displays methodologies to redefine oneself through attentiveness to natural forms. It is therefore not surprising to see in these meticulous writers the interdependency of well-placed words to represent mutually dependent literary environments. Evernden explains that "once we engage in the extension of the boundary of the self into the 'environment,' then of course we imbue it with life and can quite properly regard it as animate—it is animate because we are a part of it" (101). As in *Paterson,* it is precisely this moment of extension and blending that provokes ecosublimity for Lopez's protagonists and Berry's speaker. The ecosublime threshold at the limits of language is breached when the all-encompassing vastness of an ecological organicism elevates the mind to the Kantian supersensible. When this event occurs, the subject feels fixed upon, integrated with, and submerged into the global ecology as infinitude and incalculability draw part into whole.

Consumer culture also experiences oneness with nature in captivating ways. Disposable nature in contemporary culture proliferates with organic and health foods, rugged attire and pseudo-adventure automobiles for suburban use, safari theme parks featuring robotic animals, live animal zoos, and elaborate water worlds that flow with ink-blue fluids. By providing synthetic, reproducible scenarios and products that parcel out very specific needbased biochemical stimuli, capital provides brief moments of gratification for green-leaning target "audiences." Of course, gratification in commodity must require that the product replicate the pain of need. R. J. Reynolds, for example, maintains its physiological audience by giving relief from nicotine need while offering the customer unity with nature.

In an aggressive move by R. J. Reynolds, its recent Salem pack now sports two-tone forest and lime green colors in the form of the yin-yang symbol. The green-on-white striped package for Salem cigarettes has recently been replaced by a newer, groovier pack. The front and back covers display the soft S-curve of the religious icon, and the front cover includes a smaller yin- yang symbol in the bottom left-hand corner. To the right of this smaller yin-yang symbol is the statement "Menthol From Nature." Superimposed onto the forest green side of the back cover, a crayon green plant subtly grows from bottom to top. The "Menthol From Nature" on the back cover includes the declaration, "Made only from the imported oil of the *Mentha arvensis* plant." Finally, the back cover adds the assertion, "Know What's Real." We gather from these changes that R. J. Reynolds hopes to gain from a projected cultural shift, assuming that through various types of spending the American populace wants to feel greener. The color scheme, yin-yang symbol, and growing tendrils on the package not only insinuate that this product is somehow safer, but also that it is aligned with progressive or green values, a knowledge of Eastern philosophy, and a flair for the great outdoors. By using the genus and species name *Mentha arvensis,* this package allows consumers to brush up on their plant taxonomy, and scientific terminology also reassure that

the consumer's lungs are in the hands of professionals. After all, these carcinogens are *all natural.* The most interesting aspect of the new Salem pack is the statement "Know What's Real." R. J. Reynolds attempts with this statement to simultaneously differentiate synthetic from "natural" or "herbal" tobaccos while it attempts to draw Salem from the hyperreality of advertising.

Reynolds's "What's Real" seeks to replace the odious sign with the down- to-earth, the ecological. The purchasing subject, Jean Baudrillard argues, has difficulty distinguishing the economic and ecological laws that compete for signification on objects like our Salem package. In "Consumer Society" he describes this difficulty in terms of the object:

While objects are neither flora nor fauna, they give the impression of being a proliferating vegetation; a jungle where the new savage of modern times has trouble finding the reflexes of civilization. These fauna and flora, which people have produced, have come to encircle and invest them, like a bad science fiction novel. We must describe them as we see and experience them, while not forgetting, even in periods of scarcity or profusion, that they are in actuality the *products of human activity,* and are controlled, not by natural ecological laws, but by the law of exchange value. *(Selected Writings* 39-40)

Baudrillard describes the resulting "multiplication of objects, services, and material goods" that replaces ecological law for exchange law as "a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species" (29). This mutation leaves both human and nature in a process of simulation that, as noted, gives "the impression of being a proliferating vegetation" (29). The Salem package impresses with its wily attempts to co-opt "pop nature"; it aims to encircle the purchasing subject with commodity need while giving the impression that consumers are part of a more natural scene.

Like this advertising campaign, the literature studied in this chapter plays on the cultural premise that unspoiled nature is sacred and therefore a potential locus for pleasurable biological experience. All link green and real, meaning that which is "from nature" functions as a referent point from which competing artifacts or linguistic systems are inauthentic or synthetic. What's important here is the way modern culture, in advertising as well as literature, tries to provide a representative platform for more manifest connections to "What's Real." In *Field Notes: The Grace Note of the Canyon Wren* (1994), Barry Lopez depicts the incorporation of human protagonists into natural environments by having them go through ritualized processes of field examination. Through observation and field study, characters in "Homecoming," "The Open Lot," "Sonora," and "Pearyland" reestablish links with place, and a visceral merging with biome follows in stories such as "The Entreaty of Wiideema" and "The Runner." Like the crucial moments of human contact in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio,* Lopez's characters have sublime flashes of interaction with the natural environment, leaving them immersed and culturally uncentered.

In "Homecoming," a successful West Coast taxonomist specializing in Peruvian plants of the genus *Ellox* loses touch with family and environs. Wick Colter's disloca-

tion is evident when, while walking with his daughter, he "passed a cluster of skullcap, purple flowers that reminded him of lupine, but he could recall neither the popular nor the scientific name." Returning home, he realizes that "he'd forgotten the names of half a dozen or more flowers that grew around his home" (108). In his embarrassment he picks flowers in the forest, a heedless act for which his daughter scolds him. His loss of knowledge and attentiveness renders him suspect, perhaps non- indigenous, in the wilderness surrounding his home. An argument with his estranged wife leads him to sit up late at night rereading Haskin's *Wild Flowers of the Pacific Coast,* and he is compelled to return to the woods alone. Walking by moonlight, he comes to a clearing: "He lay on the ground to bring his face close to the soil and inhaled the cold, damp perfume flowing there. He felt the pricksters of trailing blackberry against his wrist. His

delicate fingers found the pendulous flowers of wild bleeding heart. He recalled the first time he saw spotted coralroot, the first time he smelled deerhead orchid" (113). His union with soil and flora cause him to reestablish the lost bond with his surroundings, and the scents and tactile sensations of blackberry thorns and flowers prompt a flood of remembrance. The renewed ability to recall and name the life around him ties him back to place; his niche in ecosystem and family has been reclaimed. "You smell like the woods" (114), his wife says upon his return. Her olfactory response to stimulus and his own feral odor denote Colter's return to animal network and home.

Lopez depicts the ecosublime moment of homecoming by describing *Eburophyton austinae,* the phantom orchid. Colter explains that the orchid "is truly a phantom, for which you may seek for years, and then, when least expected it suddenly stands before you in some dim forest aisle, a vision of soft, white loveliness, that once seen can never be forgotten" (114). The orchid arises as a vision, and the moment of observation is one of ecosublime recognition and cognitive change. Like a divine apparition, the orchid will not be rebuked; the gift of its presence is one of obligation. Its ecosublimity lies not only in the phantasmagoric nature of its advent in "some dim forest aisle" but also in its significance as oracle and ecological warning. This moment is ecosublime because Colter's boundary experience provokes both apprehension and comprehension. Colter has now reintegrated himself into his biome, and the phantom orchid has revealed to him the tentative bloom of nature and home.

Phantoms also abound in "The Open Lot" and "Pearyland," two of Lopez's stories that involve the ghosts of dead wildlife. Often represented as reminders of previous ill will, ghosts haunt sites of previous injustice. Like species that function as ecological niches, ghosts are inseparably linked to place. Lopez's spectral bears, foxes, and birds in *Field Notes* provide an ecosublime link to the inestimable region that lies beyond; they also remind us of the dead world that has been replaced. The rare sightings of these animals, like those of the phantom orchid, come only to those who have made offerings of field examination, observation, and attempts to merge with the outside. But empirical methods fall short, leading Lopez's protagonists to the border zone between

self and the natural Other. The subsequent falling away of cognitive paradigms opens connections to an ever-present miasma that is both supersensible and ecological.

In "The Open Lot," Jane Weddell studies fossilized marine organisms at the Museum of Natural History. She removes "clay and sand and silt" (39) from the fossils to exhume the remains of a lost dynasty: "More than anything she wanted to coax these ghosts from their tombs, to array them adamantine and gleaming like diamonds below her windows, in shafts of sunlight falling over the city and piercing the thick walls of granite that surrounded her" (49). Weddell draws form from mud, finding pattern in the calcified structures of the dead. Her evocation calls for ghosts to speak in piercing light, for city walls to degenerate in a flash of recognition. Her extraction of dead organisms from detritus is simultaneously the exhumation of a functioning nonhuman, nonlinguistic world and an omen at this pivotal moment in geologic time. This omen, the penetration of a light radiation from "ghosts," signifies an ecosublime recognition of the static substrate that calls her to gather wisdom from those departed. In her walks to work, Weddell starts to notice motility and adaptation in a vacant lot. She begins field observations; "to perceive the lot clearly, she believed, she must gain a sense of the whole pattern of which it was a part, taking in even passing, the smell of garbage cans, the shriek of schoolchildren" (43). Patterns arise from seemingly random observations; an urban organicism emerges. Just as scientist Edward Bowman of "Pearyland" finds the "land of dead animals" (64) in the frozen biosphere surrounding Bronland Fjord, Weddell situates herself at the edge of a preternatural chasm between two worlds.

As the cityscape becomes for her a series of networks within an elaborate urban design, Weddell begins to see "phantoms" (41) in the vacant lot. After writing hundreds of pages on the lot, "she became aware in her notes of a pattern of replacement, of restored relationships. The incremental change was stunningly confirmed when she saw a black bear standing in the lot" (46). As her rigorous field study projects her into the biocentric space of the lot, she sees "foxes bounding. Flocks of chickadees. Sometimes she imagined she could hear a distant river. Other times she saw birds migrating overhead, through the buildings" (47). Her attentiveness to place grants her an almost preternatural link to a seemingly absent ecology. In *Field Notes,* the desire to float dislocated from the ecological whole is disrupted by visionaries—the biologists, geologists, and rare perceptive individuals who see ghosts in the substrata of culture. The intermittent presence of Lopez's spiritual entities only amplifies their absence as extant beings, calling into question the sustainability of postnatural space. Weddell's moment of recognition is ecosublime because she apprehends the interconnected urbanity that others miss, her vision allowing readers to comprehend the at- risk environment she studies.

This moment of ecological clarity in Lopez's work is a feeling that Scott Slovic calls the "idea of comprehensive awareness as a prerequisite for enlightened behavior" (141). Slovic explains that in "Wendell Berry's work, and similarly in Barry Lopez's writings... there is a sense of timeliness, of urgency—a sense that awareness is not a mental game, but a condition which helps us to act responsibly and respectfully"

(138). Berry's *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems, 1979-1997* calls for readers to venerate the woods, revising our perceptions "to comprehend the biocentric holiness of creation" (Scigaj, "Panentheistic Epistemology" 132). Through observation, silence, and meditation during Sunday walks around his native Port Royal, Berry's speaker is granted glimpses into an ecological and religious equilibrium that transcends the sign. Berry deems this ecosublime space "Creation," and his relationship to it fosters reconnections to place, community, and world. We gather from Berry—tracing his own religious and philosophical position—that Creation exists as glimpses of Eden and as divine instruction for human behavior. The Bible's Adam is expected to emulate his father, to employ his typically hands-off method of global maintenance.[2] He is tasked to be a maintenance man, to "tend and care" for the Garden and its inhabitants by leaving it to flourish. Like his father, Adam is to intervene in cases of imbalance or disruption, but Adam and Eve themselves disrupt Eden when they lose sight of their own ecological niches and take more than they need. In order to return the Earth to a more Edenic state, we ascertain from Berry, humankind must reestablish something akin to its original relationship to the Earth and learn the values of tending and caring.[3] Berry thus criticizes depletionist practices of clear-cutting, strip mining, bulldozing, and blasting for the sake of "the objective" in the apocalyptic poem "Even while I dreamed I prayed that what I saw was only fear" (208). The depletion of "the last known landscape" in this poem parallels the invention of "the crowd / the individuated, the autonomous, the self-actuated, *I* the homeless" (209), who have become detached from lifegiving land, seasons, and family. Removed from the divine ecology of home, this moment is one of horror. The poem's dreamer prophesies a postnatural dystopia where agrarian organicisms are replaced by elaborate machine states. The speaker foretells that "I visited the loud factories *I* where the machines were made that would drive ever *I* forward *I* toward the objective" (208). In this mechanized space he exclaims that

> I saw the forest reduced to stumps and
> gullies; I saw
> the poisoned river, the mountain cast into the valley;
> I came to the city that nobody recognized because it looked like every other city. (208)

In Berry's nightmare, organic models are supplanted by replicable urban and suburban spaces devoid of landscape or biospheric diversity. Human individuation becomes synonymous with the loss of natural interdependence. Landscape deformity gives rise to the creation of mechanical figures, geometrically replicating shapes and contours on the horizon. One notices *A Timbered Choir* changing over the course of years from a meditation on farming to an elegiac testimony to rural life. This book serves to

[2] In Genesis 2:15 the "Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden as its gardener, to tend and care for it" *(Living Bible)*.

[3] See Allen for an important essay offering connections between religion and ecology.

chronicle rapid decline of the family farm from the 1970s to the 1990s, and with these changes come increasing representations of a postnatural techno-barbarism.

In response, *A Timbered Choir* implores the reader to return to Berry's catalyst for biocentric assimilation: the forest. In "How long does it take to make the woods?" (77), Berry guides readers to the edge of a sacred wood that transgresses mechanical acquisitions and returns mind to body, body to place. The edge of the wood is an ecosublime threshold, and one gets there through pilgrimage, labor, and attentiveness to natural rhythms, by "climbing up through the six days' field, *I* kept in all the body's years, the body's *I* sorrow, weariness and joy" (77). One enters

By passing through
the narrow gate on the far side of that field
where the pasture grass of the body's life gives way to the high, original standing of the trees.
by coming into shadow, the shadow
of the grace of the straight way's ending.
the shadow of the mercy of light. (77)

The human form "gives way," immersed in the light and shadow of the baptismal forest where "you must leave behind / the six days' world, all of its plans and hopes. *I* You must come without weapon or tool" (77). This shedding allows for ecosublime intercourse between body and spirit. Berry explains in "I climb up through the thicket" that "a man / is small before those who have stood so long. *I* He stands under them, looks up, sees, knows, *I* and knows he does not know" (89). The awe-inspiring presence of "the old trees" exists "beyond the complex *I* lineages of cause and effect" (89); as a glimpse of Creation, the magnitude of trees frustrates human understanding. In "Coming to the woods' edge," the speaker becomes encapsulated by an overwhelming stimulus:

Coming to the woods' edge
on my Sunday morning walk,
I stand resting a moment beside
a ragged half-dead wild plum
in bloom, its perfume
a moment enclosing me, and standing side by side with the old broken blooming tree, I almost understand. (87)

As the speaker is taken in by the bloom's scent, he opens to receive the woods' offering. Scigaj explains that we "cannot see into the flesh of trees or see what exists behind trees, for instance, for the trees preexist our contemplation" ("Panentheistic Epistemology" 125). In this aesthetic moment, the speaker realizes that though he stands "side by side" with the tree, he can never fully apprehend its mysterious divinity.

Kant explains the struggle to fathom sacred openings such as this in terms of the sublime. He suggests that incomplete comprehension "may also sufficiently account for the bewilderment, or sort of perplexity, which, as is said, seizes the visitor on first entering St. Peter's in Rome. For here a feeling comes to him of the inadequacy of his

imagination for presenting the idea of a whole within which that imagination attains its maximum, and, in its fruitless efforts to extend this limit, recoils upon itself, but in doing so succumbs to an emotional delight" (100). Like Kant's cathedral, Berry's forest prompts for the visitor a cognitive and emotive process that leaves one permanently touched, because "the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility, and employ itself upon ideas involving higher finality" (92). Having become momentarily detached from sensory representation and language, the speaker returns having experienced the spiritual essence of biocentric assimilation. This moment is one of simultaneous ecological awareness and acceptance of "God's animating energy" (Scigaj, "Panentheistic Epistemology" 120), two events for Berry that are fundamentally linked.

In "Another Sunday morning comes," Berry's speaker delves into a forest "Exceeding thought, because it is *I* Immeasurable" (6-7). The speaker's inability to quantify the sacred as manifested within the immeasurability of the wood leads to a moment of ecosublimity:

Resurrection
Is in the way each maple leaf Commemorates its kind, by connection
Outreaching understanding. What rises
Rises into comprehension
And beyond. (6)

Berry apprehends the maple leaf in its relation to other leaves from the same species, but his apprehension prompts an inability to fully comprehend the leaf's morphological and divine implications. Kant explains that to "take in a quantum intuitively in the imagination so as to be able to use it as a measure, or unit for estimating magnitude by numbers, involves two operations of this faculty: *apprehension* ... and *comprehension"* (99). When Berry's speaker walks through the grooves and ruts of the forest, he apprehends the magnitude of Creation in fall leaves. The leaves signify for him not only the leaves of the years, decades, and centuries past but also the way that he might cognitively trace his leaf through evolution to its source, to his creator.

Kant argues that the sublime, "in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form" (92), meaning that the subject's imagination accommodates the form from which the sublime is produced, not the noumenon.[4] But Berry grapples with form and formlessness in "Thrush song, stream song, holy love," concluding significantly by forming man from earth:

Design
Now falls from thought, I go amazed
Into the maze of design
That mind can follow but not know,
Apparent, plain, and yet unknown,

[4] In the Kantian sense, noumenon is the object unmediated by the observations and judgments of the human subject, whereas phenomenon is the internal assessment of the observation by the human subject. Kant insists that the noumenon can never truly be apprehended.

The outline lost in earth and sky. (43)

The speaker struggles to apprehend ecological, divine form or design when a Sabbath walk takes him or her "higher *I* In the hill's fold" (43). In the "fold" of the hill, be that fold ridge or congregation, the speaker moves into a spiritual maze with outlines that perplex. Because the mind cannot know its labyrinthine secrets or see the "outline lost in earth and sky," Berry's understanding shifts from phenomenon to noumenon, deviating from the Kantian model when the speaker apprehends form. The speaker asks:

What form wakens and rumples this?
Be still. A man who seems to be
A gardener rises out of the ground,
Stands by a tree, shakes off the dark,
The bluebells opening at his feet,
The light a figured cloth of song. (43)

Unlike Frost's horrific "Design," Berry's poem ends at the beginning with bluebells, light, and song. Because Berry chooses to end this poem with a revision of gardener Adam, his ecosublime moment marks a return to the referential landscape. This shift from the Kantian model alters the catharsis from which the subject returns. Instead of an aesthetic delight in which the subject feels himself or herself somehow elevated from the sublime stimulus, Berry's speaker returns to Earth with a newly acquired comprehension of the "higher finality" that is the ecological itself. The sign, man-from-ground, signifies a referential link to the soil. For Berry the referentiality of soil signifies the transcendence of place and the ecological maze that he seeks to negotiate with Christian doctrine. Yet for Berry, explains John R. Knott, this process "leads not to the mystic's sense of transcendence of this world and spiritual union with God but to a greatly heightened awareness of natural phenomena and a sense of harmony with the world to which they belong" (142).

Like Isabella Bird's ecological immersion at the "Nameless Region," biocentric assimilation for Berry and Lopez functions as a redemptive act as it haunts and thrills modern spaces. The gap between sign and species appears narrow in the works of Lopez and Berry, signifying a desire to pioneer new paths to ecological space at an uncertain time. In these contexts, the awe of biocentric assimilation comes first from the fear of what might be lost when the human subject allows him- or herself to be recognized as a functioning niche within an interdependent, infinitely proliferating organicism. But *Field Notes* and *A Timbered Choir* affirm that the challenge of complexity is nature's lure. Its phantoms and holy timbers ultimately offer a glimmer of redemptive capacity. After the fear subsides, biocentric assimilation promotes an aesthetic pleasure that can offer ecosublime elation for literary figures and readers alike. But the ecosublime is purposive; having experienced its overwhelming power, the subject is thrust back into a newly realized space that requires tending and care.

5. The Ozone Hole the Imagination Seeks to Fill

Theory, Exhibition, and *White Noise*

Challenges arise when literary critics attempt to weave ecocriticism into the larger academic fabric. Scholars who avoid intellectual nature trails are equipping themselves with science rather than trying to critique, revise, and deconstruct *Nature.* Since *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), a number of important theoretical texts have emerged, including Lawrence Buell's *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) and Steven Rosendale's edited volume *The Greening of Literary Scholarship* (2003). These works advance the literary discussion beyond nature writing, recognizing a need for environmental incursions in theory. Buell seeks to revise the "claim that we inhabit a prosthetic environment, our perception of which is more simulacra-mediated than context-responsive" (5), and Rosendale's book opens possibilities for seeing through social construction, nature-culture, and simulacrum. From these two works it becomes increasingly clear that green theory must move ecocriticism beyond its codependent, fetishistic relationship to the sign. It must explore.

In *The Ecocriticism Reader,* Michael J. McDowell's "The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight" takes a precarious turn by suggesting that Bakhtin's "theories might be seen as the literary equivalent of ecology, the science of relationships." McDowell argues that the "ideal form to represent reality, according to Bakhtin, is a dialogical form, one in which multiple voices or points of view interact. Monological forms, in contrast, encourage the singular speaking subject to suppress whatever doesn't fit his or her ideology. . . . The effect is a kind of dialogue among differing points of view, which gives value to a variety of socio-ideological positions" (372). Validating human and natural voices, McDowell ends his article with the supposition that within "every text... is a dialogue open for further comments from other points of view. There is no conclusion" (387). Nature provides a multivoiced discourse that prompts heteroglossia without end. Like labor in Baudril- lard's symbolic exchange, the ecosystem itself is "no longer a force. It has become a sign among signs, produced and consumed like the rest. It is interchangeable" *(Selected Writings* 130) with the accumulation of voices that constitute Bakhtinian heteroglossia. Because the veracity of natural environment becomes contingent on the convergence of voices and sign systems in aggregate, nature seems "incorporated into the simulative dimension of hyperrealism." Because "we already live out the 'aesthetic' hallucination of reality" (146), ecocritics are left with endless proliferations.

From this increasingly tricky logic, simulation is the "map that precedes the territory ... that engenders the territory," and it is the territory "whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map" *(Selected Writings* 167). DeLillo's *White Noise* portrays this referential sleight of hand as protagonist Jack Gladney drives his son Heinrich to school:

"It's going to rain tonight."

"It's raining now," I said.

"The radio said tonight."

As the dialogue between father and son spirals into empty debate over what's really real, one detects not a loss of "rain," as critics have suggested, but rather an oddly *arriere garde* desire to test the limits of bourgeois speech, the white noise coming out of Heinrich's mouth. McDowell's heterogloss of natural environment complements Baudrillardian approaches to territory or natural landscape; in both cases there seems to be no it, no rain, no tree in the forest of dialogism and hyperreal image. Baudrillard claims in "The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra" that the world

is caught up in a mad pursuit of images, in an ever greater fascination which is only accentuated by video and digital images. We have thus come to the paradox that these images describe the equal impossibility of the real and the imaginary. . . . For us the medium, the image medium has imposed itself between the real and the imaginary, upsetting the balance between the two, with a kind of fatality which has its own logic. I call this a fatal process in the sense that there is a definite immanence of the image, without any possible transcendent meaning, without any possible dialectic of history. (194-95)

Signs of natural environment mesh and compete with other images in a fatal erasure of context. In his concern over heavy-handed critical dogmatism, McDowell attempts to give nature voices with which to engage. But in doing so he diffuses dialogical possibilities to the point of ineffectuality. By propagating dialogical postures ad infinitum, a scientifically learned or proactive stance can get lost. Paradoxically, natural environment is deprived of the means to argue, to complain.

The potential result of not framing the referent to the complaints of ecologically learned science is disaster. Reopening "dialogue" on federal roadless areas has opened the Tongass National Forest to the socio-ideological positions of paper companies, lobbyists, George W. Bush, and off-road enthusiasts. Ecocritics must instead "reinject realness and referentiality everywhere" (Baudrillard, "Evil Demon" 198) to convince the populace of ecological reality and the finality of ecocide. In "Virtually Hunting Reality in the Forests of Simulacra," Paul Shepard asserts that "A million species constantly make 'assumptions' in their body language, indicating a common ground and the validity of their responses. A thousand million pairs of eyes, antennas, and other sense organs fixed upon something beyond themselves that sustains their being, in a relationship that works. To argue that because we interpose talk or pictures between us and this shared immanence, and that it therefore is meaningless, contradicts the testimony of life itself" (27). Shepard pulls species of life from McDowell's "catastrophic spiral" by displaying a functioning ecosystem outside the dialogic imagination and the

purported immanence of signs. Instead of accelerating the play of simulation, Shepard's vision allows for alternate modes of communication that lead not to Bakhtin but to the experts: the ecologists, biologists, and natural historians who have the greatest understanding of the human impact upon our global ecology. On the road to ecological insight, critics like Bakhtin and notions such as the ecosublime are mere turns that lead to the science of ecology.[1]

Perhaps the next wave of green theorists will gain from *The Truth of Ecology* (2003) by Dana Phillips. Although her book takes blind swipes at ecology per se, Phillips does connect with decisive jabs at ecocritical approaches to both science and literature. Before focusing on the diminutive ecocritic on Phillips's opening page, ask what her preface reveals about gaps in environmental rhetoric in the humanities: "As interpreted by those who claim to have had it—and to judge from the evidence presented so far—the ecocritic's epiphany can be summed up by the propositions (1) that nature, which is refreshingly simple, is good; and (2) that culture, which is tire- somely convoluted, is bad; or (3) at least not so good as nature" (3). Despite the cantankerous style, Phillips challenges green-leaning literary scholars to become more theoretically savvy. The book also requires that ecocritics dig deeper into natural science to provide less utopian, romantic, or perhaps deluded critical traditions (like the moldiest of moldy figs—the sublime). But *The Truth of Ecology* seems to ignore the range of ecocritical approaches that have emerged since (and quite a few before) Buell's landmark *The Environmental Imagination* (1995). It also fails to recognize that her twodimensional "academic Jeremiahs and John Muirs" (4) have sparked nothing less than an explosion of academic and cultural recognition of place in the humanities, legitimizing an array of environmental paths not only to the presses but also to the classroom. Phillips's own suggestion for critics— roguish and picaresque game playing—failed to have the same level of currency in the 1980s. Ecocritic-as-Picaro seems quaint enough for an academic audience saturated with such conditioning (signifying monkey, trickster figure, etc.), but Phillips's book helps us realize that without advocacy, mere skepticism dislocates one from the potential import of literary ecocriticism. Perhaps it isn't ecocritics' naivete or squeamishness that leads them to represent the ecosystem with the reverence that Phillips and Joyce Carol Oates have outgrown, but rather their loss of faith in the populace to truly seek beyond Hallmark card depictions of the outside. Thus there seems little reason to "disenchant ecocriticism" when the urgent hope is to re-enchant the populace with myths required to slow "overpopulation, hourly abuse of the natural world, and mass extinctions ... in an age of global environmental crisis" (40).

These works reveal a reusable trajectory in millennial ecocriticism, one that makes it possible to turn away from social construction and referent games. What remains unfinished is envisioning the human self in this new place. This re-vision might begin with an analysis of the ecosublime in cultural representations of at-risk ecologies. For

[1] A great place to start might be Gotelli's *A Primer of Ecology,* which outlines the basic tenets of ecology and population growth.

example, digital aquarium representations of human overpopulation have the potential to spark awareness in the mind of the American audience, and it's a striking thing to see in person. At the Monterey Bay Aquarium, an outline of the United States changes according to date and human population. Each yellow light corresponds to ten thousand human inhabitants. Dots pop up little by little at the years 1000, 1200, 1300, 1400, 1500, 1600. At around 1850 the dots become larger—the computerized exhibit begins to pulse faster and faster— and yellow cataracts cover the map . . . 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910 .. . until the computer shuts down at 2020, the entire map a pulsing yellow mass. The lights go out, but the pounding tones continue at a higher octave and speed until the sonic pulsations blend to emulate the ominous sound of an EKG attached to a dead body. In a similar exhibit at the New Orleans Aquarium of the Americas, two electronic counting devices flash side by side like car odometers, one blindingly hurtling forward (6,001,854,164! 65! 66! 67! 68!), the other simultaneously spiraling downward. One represents geometric human population growth, with each digit signifying the blur of human birth; the other signifies millisecond by millisecond the destruction of tropical rainforests, acre by acre.

The combination of light and sound produced by these exhibits, from a post-Kantian view, does not excite the ecosublime feeling because the objects themselves do not terrify. Instead, the production of the infinite in relation to the grim possibilities of human population growth catapults the mind into a frenzy of thwarted comprehension. Because, as Lyotard explains, "The Infinite is not 'Comprehensible' as a Whole," the imagination collapses in sublime fear: "When the concept of the large number is transformed into the Idea of an absolute or actual infinite, the mathematical synthesis by composition is powerless to give a presentation of it. Before this Idea, the dizziness of the thought that presents is transformed into mortal anguish. The imagination sinks to a zero of presentation, which is the correlate of the absolute infinite. Nature founders with it, for nothing of it is presentable as an object of this Idea" *(Lessons* 114). The infinitude of human overpopulation triggers ecosublimity; the subject seeks to transcend sensibility when left to reason the possibilities of an outer crust of human flesh on the Earth's surface. Paul Ehrlich speculates in *The Population Bomb* (1971) that if human population growth "continued at the rate it is going at this point for about 900 years, there would be some 60,000,000,000,000,000 people on the face of the [E] arth. Sixty million billion people," which is "about 100 persons per square yard of the Earth's surface, land and sea. A British physicist, J. H. Fremlin, guessed that such a multitude might be housed in a continuous 2,000-story building covering our entire planet" (4).[2] Imagination and comprehension break down in an attempt to grasp the infinitude of rampant human population growth. Reason is then left to fathom the

[2] More recent works on human population growth range from O'Neill, MacKellar, and Lutz's *Population and Climate Change* to the reprint of Lader's *Breeding Ourselves to Death.* "We live amid the greatest extinction of plant and animal life since the dinosaurs appeared some 65 million years ago" (41), explain Brown, Gardner, and Halwell in *Beyond Malthus.*

ramifications of the destructive capability of Ehrlich's suggestion manifested, weirdly, in pulsing aquarium audiovisuals.

For the American ecocidal imagination, terrific fear also looms overhead. Digital representations of ozone-layer depletion provide another example of ecosublimity for the late-twentieth-century audience, prompting the reduction of hazardous CFC levels in the atmosphere.[3] The Total Ozone Mapping Spectrometer (TOMS) reproduces atmospheric ozone levels and superimposes those levels by color onto a virtual globe. After the 1985 images of ozone depletion over Antarctica and the establishment of a causal link between ozone depletion and synthetic chemicals, DuPont and other industries responded "by pointing out that no ozone depletion had ever been detected and that the depletion figures were merely computer projections based on a series of uncertain assumptions" (Litfin 68). By rejecting the ref- erentiality of the computer images and separating signifier from signified, DuPont sought to drive ozone-layer depletion into the hyperreal. But this effort failed after TOMS images on television and computer screens had a startling effect on the viewing populace. The possibilities of UVB radiation, non-melanoma skin cancer, retarded crop growth, destruction of food webs, and increased urban smog as represented by colored spheres on a computer screen prompted citizens worldwide to lobby for relief from the threat of a mystical chasm in the stratosphere.

The ecosublime was experienced by millions of television viewers upon watching images of the ozone hole through the aid of TOMS technology. These images seem the epitome of the hyperreal: a simulated representation of a simulation. Technological models such as this should fit neatly because they do in fact represent nonexistent referents to the viewing subject. Unlike an object as artificial as a plastic tree, TOMS provides images of an object that isn't there. The subject can look into the sky and never see the terrific chasm that threatens to render all land-based animal and plant life extinct. Through the artificial eye of hyperreality, the subject communes with this atmospheric node as digital simulation shocks and terrifies the viewing subject to an instantaneous awareness of a real problem. Subsequently, the subject finds him- or herself incapacitated by the terror of a deadly referent that does not exist. This inability to conceptualize the expanse of the ozone hole generates ecosublimity that Kant would render mathematical. Kant explains that it is the aesthetic estimation of magnitude "in which we get at once a feeling of the effort towards a comprehension that exceeds the faculty of imagination for mentally grasping the progressive apprehension in a whole of intuition, and, with it, a perception of the inadequacy of this faculty, which has no bounds to its progress, for taking in and using for the estimation of a fundamental measure that understanding could turn to account without the least trouble." The faculty of imagination cannot grasp the (w)hole in its entirety because its size "is such that the imagination spends its whole faculty of comprehension upon

[3] An accessible explanation of ozone hole depletion is Horel and Geisler's *Global Environmental Change.*

it in vain." Instead, our faculty of comprehension "must carry our concept of nature to a supersensible substrate (underlying both nature and our faculty of thought) which is great beyond every standard of sense" (104). The subject is propelled beyond the gulf that separates the sensible and the supersensible; he or she reasons, experiences the terror of its limitations, and then "a feeling here comes to him of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the idea of a whole within which that imagination attains its maximum" (100). Like Kant's "threatening rocks" and "thunderclouds piled up at the vault of heaven," TOMS representations ultimately "raise the forces of the soul above the height of the commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage" (111). This courage ultimately manifests itself as a discharge of energy that provides a sense of empowerment and resistance.

This discharge brings us to the challenge of *White Noise,* the book that Cornel Bonca explains in 1996 had begun to "replace *The Crying Lot of 49* as the one book professors use to introduce students to a postmodern sensibility" (25) and has since been described as the most important American novel since World War II. We can't get around DeLillo; ecocritics must see through the noxious discourse that hovers over *White Noise* and recognize "DeLillo's tendency to seek out transcendent moments in our postmodern lives that hint at possibilities for cultural regeneration" (Maltby 501). In *Writing for an Endangered World,* Lawrence Buell disregards the book in two paragraphs, citing the metaphorization of environmental collapse and "parodic evasion of toxic discourse" (52) as reasons for dismissal. He writes:

But the prospect of ecocatastrophe seems to be invoked mainly to be reduced to the status of catalyst to the unfolding of the culturally symptomatic vacuousness of this professor of "Hitler Studies," as the denouement turns to focus on his and his wife's chronic, narcissistic, long-standing death obsessions, which seem no more than tenuously linked to the precipitating event. Unless one reads the event itself and the characters' subsequent discomfiture as, for example, a deliberate nonevent precipitating a scene of bad risk management whose significance lies in precisely nothing more than "the totality of its simulations," it is hard not to conclude that a very different sort of "event" might have served equally well. (51)

Buell chooses not to link the characters' death obsessions and the series of ecological mishaps that pervade *White Noise;* thus he fails to challenge scholarship amassed by critics such as Leonard Wilcox, john N. Duvall, and Frank Lentricchia that leaves *White Noise* suspended in a suburb of simulacrum.[4] Derived in part from Buell's scant reading, Ursula K. Heise's "Toxins, Drugs, and Global Systems" advances the ecocritical debate by his- toricizing risk analysis in the contemporary novel, offering an intriguing first step to a comprehensive ecocritique of *White Noise.* In *From Apocalypse to Way of Life,* Frederick Buell includes *White Noise* within a tradition of "ecodystopian fictions from

[4] I would have to add Dana Phillips's "Don DeLillo's Postmodern Pastoral" to this list. Stating that postmodernism "is a frontier thesis for the next millennium," she notes that it is "more dependent on what has been called 'the idea of wilderness'" (245) than exponents such as Lyotard and Baudrillard have realized.

the 1960s to the present" that have proven "to be anything but mere escapist fantasy" (247-248). Rather, *White Noise* has "not just reflected but influentially intervened in heated contemporary environmental-political disputes from its inception to the present day" (248).

And even the most ardent promoters of DeLillo's simulated vision can't help peeping around the book's postmodern trompe 1'oeil. Wilcox argues that the "natural world—the ultimate ground of the 'real'—succumbs to a hyperreal condition of multiple regress without origin" (351), but he allows that DeLillo's writing "reveals a belief that fictional narrative can provide critical distance from and a critical perspective on the processes it depicts" (363). In "Lust Removed from Nature," Michael Valdez Moses argues that it is "precisely by way of technology reducing nature to a postmodern *simulacrum* (a copy with no original), 'cable nature,' that man assumes sovereignty over a reality that was once understood to transcend man himself" (65), but later he adds that "the immediate threat of death, brought on in some cases by the apparent failures of technology, may paradoxically serve a potentially redeeming function" (71). More significantly, N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge argue: "The vocabulary of the pre-packaged lifestyle seems to provide the only available means of expression for the struggle for contact with 'authentic' being, in a world from which the 'natural' has in so many ways been almost completely excluded" (315). But like Wilcox and Moses they reveal that "moments of pain, fear, shock, or exertion are like toxic events, moments when the world reasserts itself against the dominance of concept" (317). In each case, critics leave an opening in *White Noise* for what Lou F. Caton describes as a "transcendent sense of who we are, the romantic desire to experience ourselves as part of a greater whole, [that] strives for identity within the dynamics of capitalism" (42). These articles don't venture much of a guess at what lies beyond the "redeeming function" of *White Noise,* where "the world asserts itself" in a transcendent moment where literary figures experience themselves "as part of a greater whole." But in "The Romantic Metaphysics of Don DeLillo," Paul Maltby offers the romantic sublime as "a mode of experience that lies beyond the stereotyping and banalizing powers of the media, a mode of experience not subject to simulation" (507). Maltby explains that DeLillo's "response to the adverse cultural effects of late capitalism reproduces a Romantic politics of vision" that questions the "need for radical change at the level of material infrastructure" (512). Like aquarium exhibits and TOMS images, DeLillo's fiction creates moments of ecosublimity that provide vision through spiritual suburbanization to larger questions about the human relationship with the material infrastructure that sustains us.

In the wake of Love Canal and the Bhopal catastrophe, *White Noise* depicts the responses of an American family to a variety of environmental risks, from waves and radiation to grade school evacuations and airborne toxic events.[5] As a result of hearing

[5] On December 3, 1984, the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India, accidentally released methyl isocyanate gas (MIC). Within a week nearly three thousand people in the area were dead, with seven thousand more severely injured. See Shrivastava, *Bhopal;* and Kurzman, *A Killing Wind.*

about the potential evacuation of his suburb due to a looming chemical leak, protagonist Jack Gladney reasons, "I'm not just a college professor. I'm the head of the department. I don't see myself fleeing an airborne toxic event. That's for people who live in mobile homes out in the scrubby parts of the county" (117). Upon coming in contact with the event as a physical entity, his class-based denial is transformed into religious catharsis:

The enormous black mass moved like some death ship in a Norse legend, escorted across the night by armored creatures with spiral wings. We weren't sure how to react. It was a terrible thing to see, so close, so low, packed with chlorides, benzines, phenols, hydrocarbons, or whatever the precise toxic content. But it was also spectacular, part of the grandness of a sweeping event. .. . Our fear was accompanied by a sense of awe that bordered on the religious. It is surely possible to be awed by the thing that threatens your life, to see it as a cosmic force, so much larger than yourself, more powerful, created by elemental and willful rhythms. (127)

This change in Gladney, one that includes deadly exposure to the mysterious toxin Nyodene D, ushers him beyond his simulated cultural threshold. Social standing and economic stability, Gladney finds, cannot protect him from the material forces that encroach, and he is shocked into an overwhelming aesthetic awareness. He will die. Gladney's image bubble is burst, and a newly inspired sense of ecological contingency arises. At the moment of comprehension, an ecosublime catalyst jolts the people of *White Noise* into a momentary link with their own potential liquidation. Richard Kerridge explains that DeLillo's novels "hold out, continually, the tantalizing threat of convergence, of an impending moment of truth when things will cohere and be seen whole," when "the self is fixed to the materiality of the body, and the body is penetrated by the outside world" (190). The threat of the airborne toxic event's deadly powers of penetration makes it a tantalizing representative of the ecosublime.

Another key example in *White Noise* is the new and strange post-seepage sunset that transfigures the entire town. After the "event" the evening sun takes on an abnormal, alien glare. Gladney observes the "postmodern sunset, rich in romantic imagery" and asks, "Why try to describe it? It's enough to say that everything in our field of vision seems to exist in order to gather the light of this event." This event functions beyond description, and it exists outside of human understanding. "What can you think about in the face of this kind of beauty?" (227) asks eccentric scientist Winnie Richards, her apprehension of the sunset beyond her own imaginative abilities. Heise explains that many "hyperboles and the simulations that have typically been interpreted as examples of postmodern inauthenticity become . . . manifestations of daily encounters with risks whose reality cannot be assessed with certainty" (757). When human disturbances in ecological cycles cause abnormalities that stymie the imagination beyond assessment, the moment in *White Noise* provokes ecocidal awe and terror. The result is a "vision of contemporary America that bypasses cultural critique in favor of recording awe at what our civilization has wrought" (Bonca 33). I would take Bonca's point a step further and suggest that *White Noise* records the ecosublime, for "certainly there is

awe, it is all awe, it transcends previous categories of awe, but we don't know whether we are watching in wonder or dread" (DeLillo 324).

DeLillo is far too shrewd to let the simulated landscape of Blacksmith saturate this novel without undercurrents of irony and tension. Jack Gladney provides an antipode to the skepticism of Heinrich as well as visiting professor Murray Siskind's idolatrous relationship to "what our civilization has wrought," but Gladney must remain subject to the culture industry to give the novel's supermarket ending some element of tragedy. Although *White Noise* satirizes human foibles in the face of environmental disaster, it explores in earnest the cultural need to transcend the hyperreal in Jack Gladney and his son Wilder. Ecosublime risks arise for Gladney at every turn, from the toxic cloud and its residual sunset to images of Nyodene D exposure on a SIMUVAC computer screen. In line at the Boy Scout camp, Gladney watches the SIMUVAC attendant as he spends "a fair amount of time tapping on the keys and then studying coded responses on the data screen" (139). He stands perfectly still "to counteract the passage of computerized data that registered [his] life and death" (140). Gladney finds that his combined data is "generating big numbers" (140), as the information "comes back pulsing stars" (141). The SIMUVAC personage explains to Jack that the image "just means you are the sum total of your data" (141).

But after experiencing his own digital death, Jack does seek to transcend the sum total of his data, to see himself as part of something greater; like TOMS images of the ozone, the "toxic event had released a spirit of imagination" (153). In the supermarket Jack "was suddenly aware of the dense environmental texture. The automatic doors opened and closed, breathing abruptly. Colors and odors seemed sharper" (168). He explains, "I threw away correspondence, old paperbacks, magazines I'd been saving to read, pencils that needed sharpening" (222). More than a typical response to dying, Jack's actions seem like an attempt to distance himself from the doodads and commodities that rendered him unaware of his own connections to body and place. He finally comprehends his relationship to the corporate detritus that has ensnared him when he exclaims, "I bore a personal grudge against these things. Somehow they'd put me in this fix" (294). One thus sees beyond Wilcox's argument that media and technology "transform death into a sign spectacle, and its reality is experienced as the body doubled in technified forms: death by 'print-out'" (353) and Moses's point that "modern medical technology distances the dying individual from the intensely personal character of his mortality" (74). Rather, digital representations of Gladney's Nyodene D exposure might be likened to Winnie Richards' "grizzer," as Jack senses a "fresh awareness of the self—the self in terms of a unique and horrifying situation" and experiences his relationship to place "in a new and intense way" (DeLillo 229). As Joseph Tabbi points out, "DeLillo never loses sight of the embodied reality beneath the information grid" (207).

And though I would like to report that Jack Gladney uses his ecosublime recognition of place to become an advocate, perhaps shifting like other characters in DeLillo's novels into bizarre subgroups or utopian cults, this is not the case. Gladney's hyper-

awareness of his own toxic world leaves him lost in the supermarket, dying, spiritually reborn but materially suspended:

What remains ambiguous, and what the novel is unable to affirm or deny, is whether this suspension could be a state of potential; whether the leaks and spills that rush in and out of the unguarded moments will turn out to be destructive or vitalizing; whether there is the possibility of a political awakening to the realities of pollution, for instance, which these sunsets might actually be indicating but which are hopelessly obscured by the play of interpretive fascination; or whether this pause is merely the gestation-period of a fresh antidotal package which will eventually contain this irruption, but which has yet to put round it. (Reeve and Kerridge 323)

I believe this question can be broached in an analysis of Wilder, arguably the only individual left in a mass of postmodern subjects. Wilder's seven hours of lamentation cause Jack to "think he had disappeared inside this wailing noise," wondering if he could "join him in his lost and suspended place we might together perform some reckless wonder of intelligibility" (DeLillo 78). His family watches as he returns "from a period of wandering in some remote and holy place" and "regard [him] with the mingled reverence and wonder we hold in reserve for feats of the most sublime and difficult dimensions" (79). Wilder seems to be the key to seeing through this novel's pastiche, particularly in the final chapter in the book. In chapter 40 Wilder pulls and pedals his tricycle to "the grassy slope that bordered the expressway" and "in the serial whoosh of dashing hatchbacks and vans, began to pedal across the highway, mystically charged" (322). Observers scream as Wilder makes it to the median, through interstate lanes, and into the "intermittent creek that accompanies the highway" (323). It is the moment when a passing motorist holds the submerged boy aloft that readers get a glimpse of the potential for awakening. DeLillo's Wordsworthian child safely making the crossing is the novel's vitalizing moment.

6. Decentralized Visions

The Green Reader, Bearheart,* and *Parable of the Sower

Space-age literature and art have produced a fantastic array of explorations to address American fears of global eco-crises, yet some wish upon a star to render those problems inconsequential. NASA's Apollo missions and Mars rovers appear as part of this cultural enterprise; constructions of science fiction myth spawned by rocket science perpetuate cultural delusions of technologies designed to outlive planet Earth. A twisted branch of American optimism fuels popular predictions that humans will one day be beamed to new worlds, colonies will offer new prosperity to humans victimized by a depleted planet, and the technological fix will be nothing less than intergalactic. There's something of a religious quality here. Space-age redemption will come from the heavens, leaving our current habitations a mere testing ground. If Earth is only a launchpad, then any limited terrestrial vision should be dwarfed by a more progress-oriented, cosmic sensibility.[1] Earthseed, the post-space-age scripture and belief system of Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), decrees that the "Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars" (68). Lauren Oya Olimina writes in her diary, "people who traveled to extrasolar worlds would be on their own—far from politicians and business people, failing economies and tortured ecologies— and far from help. Well out of the shadow of their parent world" (74). To evolve and grow, the people of Earth must leave an abused and abusive Mother Earth to scatter like seeds across the utopian cosmos. Doesn't this rhetoric of extrasolar expansion echo the ethos of Manifest Destiny so popular in nineteenth-century America?

Despite Lauren's adolescent desires to escape this old parent world, she and the other figures in *Parable of the Sower* remain on Earth's troubled ground. Set between 2024 and 2027, this novel develops not into a parable of escape but rather into a "near-future domestic upheaval narrative detailing the breakdown of the United States infrastructure" (Doerksen 22).[2] Lauren and her converts travel from impoverished California toward Oregon in a pilgrimage that echoes the trek of Proude Cedarfair and his circus troupe in Chippewa writer Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart* (1990). In both novels, future travelers experience a chaotic and violent post-America broken into bioregions devoid of national allegiance. Both novels question what might remain in the American rubble after legal, capital, and national codes falter. And these novels also offer spec-

[1] Sandner links science fiction and ecocriticism to the romantic sublime.

[2] In *Parable of the Talents,* sequel to *Parable of the Sower,* the cosmic goals of Earthseed are frustrated by the new American president's fundamentalist cult. Lauren is separated from her daughter and subjected to abuses by the religious faction Christian America.

ulative staging grounds for decentralization to fulfill the ecocidal imagination's most complex desire, one that looks beyond Marx's economic base into a tentative material ground. Perhaps the idea of decentralization is the most exquisite of ecosublime topics this book addresses; the breakdowns depicted in Butler's *Parable of the Sower,* Vizenor's *Bearheart,* and *The Green Reader* (1991) scrutinize a collapse of ideology and a true breach of the nature-culture dichotomy. With decentralization comes the need for a new American subjectivity, one that alters the very concept of the abstract for our fast-food nation. In these novels a gecko isn't a cute cartoon animal that sells car insurance; it's meat on a stick. Decentralization in these novels opens possibilities for a *reconstruction* of place and community, but the ecosublime moment comes in *Bearheart* and *Parable of the Sower* when literary figures affected by human overpopulation and resource scarcity undergo human violence. Trauma and social collapse trigger spiritual awakenings that recast human relationships to the post-apocalyptic environments of the future.

But before approaching this issue as a Hollywood eco-apocalypse a la Kevin Costner,[3] decentralization might occur first on the household level, branching out to community networks. Green thinkers agree that small movements toward decentralization now can curb future dramatic shifts. The contemporary American can now decentralize economically. One can surf the web in a solar-powered home and carpool to the thrift store. The design of more sustainable, self-sufficient homes and communities before environmental catastrophe I consider pre-ecocidal decentralization,[4] while post-ecocidal decentralization would be the result of resource depletion and rapid species decline. For pre-ecocidal communities such as those conceived in Andrew Dobson's *The Green Reader,* products and services would be built and performed on the local level, while community decisions would be left to community members themselves. The materials used to build town edifices would come from the surrounding area to conserve the energy needed to transfer non-indigenous supplies. Even the processing of garbage and sewage would be the responsibility of each neighborhood; transferring wastes to less affluent communities would be nonviable as well as unethical. Products and technologies for the community would be built and created primarily by its citizenry. Subsequently, *The Green Reader* maintains, the pleasures of labor might return to local craftsmen and builders as macro- industrially produced products and foods will be harder to come by—as well as unsuitable for the individual's needs.

In pre-ecocidal decentralized spaces, cultural and economic shifts would attentively follow material measures. When, for example, it becomes unfeasible to import exotic fish to local restaurants, owners must begin to rely on the local economy for trout, bass, or the ubiquitous local favorite, catfish. Green theorists such as Edward Goldsmith and Kirkpatrick Sale press for pre-ecocidal decentralization in the hope that

[3] Recent post-apocalyptic movies that draw upon fears of decentralization such as *Waterworld* (1995) and *The Postman* (1997) tend to star Costner.

[4] "Sustainable development" and "smart growth" are terms likened to what I refer to as pre-ecocidal decentralization.

offsetting a deleterious consumer culture might foster sustainable practices far into the future. In *The Green Reader,* Goldsmith argues that a decentralized state fosters democratic decision making, diversity, community thinking, and reduction of adverse impact. He attests: "[I]n communities small enough for the general will to be worked out and expressed by individuals confident of themselves and their fellows as individuals, 'us and them' situations are less likely to occur—people having learned the limits of a stable society would be free to order their own lives within them as they wished, and would therefore accept the restraints of the stable society as necessary and desirable and not as some arbitrary restriction imposed by a remote and unsympathetic government" (74).[5] He emphasizes that his "goal should be to create *community feeling* and *global awareness,* rather than that dangerous and sterile compromise which is nationalism" (76). Goldsmith's argument, one interrogated in *Bearheart* and *Parable of the Sower,* hinges on the presupposition that dematerialism and environmental concern will naturally coincide with the diffusion of centralized industry and government.

In an article in *The Green Reader* titled "Bioregionalism," Kirkpatrick Sale suggests that biome dictates decentralized boundaries.[6] The limitations of bioregion must dictate the parameters of population growth and consumption for each Earth-based cultural entity. Sale's rendering of bio- regional community is inherently utopian, where one lives "a life primarily of contemplation and leisure, where work takes up only a few hours a day... where conversation and making love and play become the common rituals of the afternoon" (82). However, he explains, "truly autonomous bioregions will likely go their own separate ways and end up with quite disparate political systems." For Sale, bioregional diversity "not merely tolerates but thrives upon the diversities of human behaviour" (81). Because these varying social arrangements do not grow beyond their bioregional limitations, diversification fosters a healthy social interdependence, just as biodiversity fosters a healthy ecological network. Sale and Goldsmith depict idealized communities that realize the necessity and value of getting small before uncomely changes in lifestyle become necessary. Attempting to build upon the aura of a nostalgic past, they characterize culture in ways that green-gloss issues of class, ethnicity, and education. The resulting vision leaves readers with delightful cultural visions but little in the way of practical use.

Gerald Vizenor's novel *Bearheart* also explores decentralized spaces, offering what might appear a stark antipode to the ecotopias proposed by Goldsmith and Sale. In *Bearheart* future possibilities for sustainable bioregionalism are left in the hands of Native American Proude Cedarfair and members of the cedar nation. Vizenor prophesies the collapse of America after a wide range of ecological catastrophes, what I have referred to as post- ecocidal decentralization. Affluent consumer societies that revolve around nonreferential relationships to resources, space, and the needs of others are

[5] Originally published in Edward Goldsmith et al., *The Ecologist: A Blueprint for Survival* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

[6] Originally published in Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Schumacher Lectures,* vol. 2 (London: Abacus, 1974).

rapidly replaced by smaller, non-affluent *conserver* societies that cognitively connect food to soil, energy to use, and macropolitical "need" to personal need. This change comes in *Bearheart* when post-American refugees must scrounge for sustenance and eliminate human predators to survive. Vizenor depicts this process by illustrating the migration of Proude Cedarfair and his fellow pilgrims, Native Americans whose keen criticisms of post-ecocidal America inform its terrifying landscape. *Bearheart* reminds us that the destruction of "terminal creeds" arouses as it terrifies. Rapid market decline, fluctuations in organized religion, resource war, and the narcissistic death drive of a superpower coalesce in the post-American mind as marvel and terror. Such vastness liberates as it encapsulates; social and intellectual freedoms frighten and invigorate as material restrictions recast the socius in an ecosublime comprehension of breakdown. Vizenor's post-American "whitepeople" and "whitecripples" function as erratic monsters, subsumed by the distressing vastness left by the fall. Randomized, many aggregate in urban centers to perpetuate rituals of depravity. But Proude Cedarfair's troupe senses regeneration between the broken social nodes found in chapters such as "Last Attraction" and "Witch Hunt Restaurant." Possibilities for sustainable bioregionalism can be found in the tribal ethos of Proude Cedarfair himself.

Set in an America where resource depletion has left the U.S. federal government a neutered system of signs, Vizenor's text depicts the ugly result of mass clear-cutting and the mismanagement of oil. Vizenor shocks, terrifies, and exhilarates the reader by associating ecocide with physical dismemberment and the logic of snuff film. He explains in one passage, "the dark eyes of tribal victims were popped with spoons and heel tendons were severed" while "the whites stabbed the victims with sharp forks" (54). Readers become aware not only that literal murder and cannibalism of tribal victims takes place but that the usurpation and ingestion of tribal lands is also enacted in a metonymic ritual. In this passage, the American capital complex is likened to spoons and forks that dig into Native American forests for the last few natural resources available for development.

Vizenor's text also seeks to spark the ecosublime with prophetic images of human overpopulation. During one troubling pastiche of Americana, the main street parade, Cedarfair's troupe gets worried as "more whitepeople climbed into and onto the silver convertible. The car moved at a slow idle while more and more whitepeople from the courthouse joined the parade" (54). Like Bigfoot's automobile, Vizenor's post-America can only carry a finite number. The car becomes so "loaded with bodies" that the rear tires explode, but instead of realizing their destructive weight, "more and more whitepeople tried to pile into the convertible. The rear tires flapped against the asphalt. The rear bumper was dragging and the plush seats were torn and broken." Chaos ensues when Bigfoot notices "whitepeople" fumbling with the gas line: "three whitepeople had torn up the trunk floor and severed the spiral gasoline line. When the three started a siphon flowing the sparks from the churning rear wheels ignited the spilled gasoline. The whitepeople turned to run but the tank exploded in a giant red ball of swirling flames. Flaming whitebodies were hurled against the curbs and poles and trees beside

the school hill road" (56). Not only are the masses too heavy, but the inane riders also cannot grasp cooperation or moderation. The terror associated with this ball of flames, its significance as human population explosion, and the zombie-like actions of the people in the midst of mayhem spark an awesome check to the senses.

Vizenor's *Bearheart* takes depletion processes to hideous ends, predicting the famine, aimless mobility, violence, and confusion of a futuristic depression state. When the pilgrims find themselves gambling for their lives with Sir Cecil Staples, "The Monarch of Unleaded Gasoline," the underlying gloom momentarily subsides: "The pilgrims stood near the trailer wall in a festive mood, chatting about past friends and families, telling stories, unaware for the moment that the federal government had failed, that there was no fuel for public use, that children and old people were abandoned and starving, that groups of urban people were affiliating and organizing around their bizarre and violent needs" (114). Vizenor's postnatural spaces offer a sad rebuke to the vitality and hope found in *The Green Reader;* here, most social aggregations revolve around twisted petite narratives that perpetuate depletionist principles. Sir Cecil Staples plays games of chance for the lives of the needy, his monarchy a result and end of the postmodern rejection of presence. The pilgrims find that there is in fact no oil, that the stakes of the game are based on an absent resource. But the degeneration of the evil gambler signifies a transition from postmodern chance to ecological design; physiological and national dissections in *Bearheart* function, oddly, as catalysts for bioregional regeneration. When Little Big Mouse is dismembered, raped, and cannibalized by the crippled masses—another passage where abject ecological rape clearly resounds—one notes the correlation between dissected body and regenerative biosphere: "She moved her miniature feet through the grass like her fingers over stars. .. . When she leaped high in the air spreading her constellation quilt like a fine umbrella, the cripples saw a shadow of blond hair between her white clean legs as she descended to earth. .. . Then the savage whitecripples pulled her flesh apart. Her hair was gone from her crotch and head and armpits. Her fingers were broken and removed. Her face was pulled into pieces, her breasts were twisted, her feet and legs were pulled from her body." Pulling pubic hair from the body, like ripping flowers and trees from the ground, acts as both synecdoche and sacrifice. The narrator adds, "the cripples gnawed and pulled at her until nothing remained" (151). But when her death takes place, the narrator importantly notes that the constellation quilt is left behind. The constellation quilt's significance as persistent spiritual and social form is resilient even in death. Vizenor notes that at the Word Hospital they "find tongues in trees, books in brooks, phrases from the mouth of fish, oral literatures on the wings of insects, sermons in stone" (165). That which American culture leaves behind, then, thrusts the post-ecocidal subject beyond the reliance on the signifier into a reevaluation of place as referent and meaning maker. Vizenor employs cut-up methodologies reminiscent of William S. Burroughs to distort hegemonic codes or terminal creeds by "cutting up" texts, splicing them together, and reproducing the texts in new arrangements. The resulting work allows for momentary nonverbal

freedom, and the transcendence of synthetic linguistic barriers fosters clarity, agency, and activism.

The science fiction novel *Parable of the Sower* offers an African-American teenager's response to living in a decentralized California of the future, and Lauren's diary taps into the American ecocidal imagination so searingly that one forgives the protagonist's insistence that space exploration will somehow redeem people of Earth. I agree with Frederick Buell that Butler's novel "lays bare the increasingly determining, systemic interplay between social marginalization, poverty, social breakdown, and environmental crisis" (314), and that in doing so *Parable of the Sower* advances "a nightmar- ishly critical portrait of where contemporary capitalist deregulation and privatization are now heading" (315). In the "2020s of the novel, careless environmental laws have led to a six-year drought in southern California, and an accompanying spate of starvation and fires" (Doerksen 23). Water costs more than gasoline, and readers are reminded that the sea level "keeps rising with the warming climate and there is the occasional earthquake" (Butler 105). Lauren bemoans her parents, who "never miss a chance to relive the good old days or to tell kids how great it's going to be when the country gets back on its feet and good times come back" (7). But rather than wait for the good times to return, Lauren starts collecting. She acquires book on "survival in the wilderness, three on guns and shooting, two each on handling medical emergencies . . . plants and their uses, and basic living: logcabin-building, livestock raising, plant cultivation, soap making" (50). She hides emergency packs with supplies and money, waiting for her city's inevitable downfall.

Three representative communities are described in Butler's tragic postAmerica: Robledo, Olivar, and Acorn. At the beginning of the novel Lauren's family lives in Robledo, a walled enclave outside Los Angeles. Outside the wall a mass of zombie-like poor lie in wait; the people of Robledo must leave the wall in packs, armed. As Robledo suffers increasing attacks, Lauren realizes that her gated community "cannot be sustained because its relative financial and social stability is structurally interconnected to the extreme instability of the poor and the pyromaniacs who throng outside the walls" (Dubey 112). For the inhabitants inside the wall, the combination of scarcity and increased human numbers has created the necessity to perceive the Other—the thing outside the wall—as predator. By placing the protagonist inside the gated community, Butler forewarns walled-in Americans that gates and walls serve as little more than psychological barriers from poverty. Rather than offering a more palatable representation of a virtuous needy and poor, *Parable of the Sower* takes an unorthodox and shocking view of how scarcity makes us dangerous. When the deranged mob finally overtakes the wall, Lauren sees people "running, screaming, shooting. The gate had been destroyed" (Butler 137); as her house burns, Lauren runs outside, where "a woman and three kids might look like a gift basket of food, money, and sex" (138). It is here that *The Parable of the Sower* depicts an ecosublime comprehension of collapse, when Lauren experiences the terrors of post-ecocidal decentralization and begins her trek as messianic leader for Earthseed. In her Earthseed notebook, she writes, "A tree

I Cannot grow *I* In its parents' shadows" (73), meaning that future cultures must distance themselves from archaic practices that promote self-consumption. In contrast to the shadowy policies of the past, Earthseed will promote discovery "rather than invention, exploration rather than creation" (69).

The second community Butler addresses is Olivar, a coastal city purchased by the multinational company Kagimoto, Stamm, Frampton (KSF). Entirely privatized, Olivar recruits educated families with technical skills who "accept smaller salaries than their socio-economic group is used to in exchange for security" and "a guaranteed food supply" (106). KSF manipulates the way that "the country's cloistered twenty-first century elite configures the master narrative of 'progress' as a panacea for the future," and in doing so it reincorporates "entire American cities and towns" (Gant-Britton 284). Unlike the Garfields, who are whisked away in an armored KSF truck, Lauren understands that Olivar is pulling the "old company-town trick" (Butler 107) by drawing a frightened populace into debt slavery using their fear of lower economic groups as a weapon. Butler's descriptions of Olivar suggest the dire limits to which Americans will seek refuge in the dangerous food, sterile architecture, and lack of artistic character of the corporate state. Lauren blames this loss on the deregulation policies and weak labor laws of the U.S. president, Christopher Donner, whose "continued relationship to, and reliance on, the narrative of 'progress' and 'development' on which this country was originally founded, demands nothing less than a willing suspension of disbelief, a voluntary amnesia" (Gant-Britton 288). Donner, whose name has special relevance to early American history, represents the decrepit end to the Reagan legacy of environmental exploitation, deregulation, and heedless consumption. "I wish you could have known this country when it was still salvageable," says Bankole when Lauren and her fellowship make it to his abandoned rural lands; "I don't think you can understand what we've lost" (294). But during her pilgrimage Lauren learns that federal, state, and local "governments still exist—in name at least" (294) and finds "state parks filled with huge redwood trees and hoards of squatters" (281). As in *Bearheart,* public lands and reservations have become a last refuge for Americans feckless enough to privatize their world to death.

Lauren's fledgling Earthseed community, Acorn, offers a green alternative to gated community Robledo and corporate enclave Olivar. Lauren describes an isolated farmland with "huge, half ruined garden plus citrus trees full of unripe fruit. . . nut trees plus wild pines, redwoods, and Douglas firs" (286). She explains that everything "will have to be done by hand— composting, watering, weeding, picking worms or slugs or whatever off the crops" (288). Disregarding Bankole's antiquated notion of salvaging the dying empire, Lauren echoes Voltaire's Candide and reclaims what's left of her garden. Here I must differ with Madhu Dubey, who argues that "Earthseed is definitely not an organic community unified by collective memory, ethnicity, shared cultural heritage, or attachment to place" (113). Although it's true that *Parable of the Sower* reaches "for more complex ways of representing communities" (Dubey 113), I see Acorn as coextensive with both place and cultural tradition. Butler challenges readers to redefine in

the wake of catastrophe the foundations of twentieth-century identity: ethnicity, class, and environment.

A central message of *Parable of the Sower* is that material loss can potentially enable post-Americans to reconceive arbitrary cultural constructions that perpetuate the American movement toward ecocide. Earthseed is itself a cultural tradition, one born out of the dying hegemonic systems of the past. Rather than seeing the Earthseed community as "symptomatic of the difficulty that limits the contemporary literary imagination seeking utopian urban alternatives" (Dubey 115), one must first take into consideration the material limits of urban space to sustain human life. I do not share Dubey's disappointment with Earthseed's seemingly limited scope and his point that "we end up thinking small because the abstraction of this order makes it difficult to grasp and imagine large-scale change" (115). Butler's novel seems to present large-scale changes like the industrial revolution or NAFTA as ultimate causes for Robledo's downfall. With Acorn, *Parable of the Sower* advances possibilities for small-scale communities, the notion having much larger implications when approached ecocritically.

The aesthetic potential created by the ecosublime experience of decentralization offers reintegration into the biome, then recognition of its dangers. In both novels this moment is one of spirit. Proude Cedarfair and his troupe end their journey beyond Chaco Canyon into Fajada Butte, "the ancient place of vision bears" (Vizenor 241). The vision bear tells "the two pilgrims to enter the fourth world as bears"; their "bodies changed shapes and began to float through the corner window toward the rising winter solstice sun" (242). Proude Cedarfair and pilgrim Inawa Biwide fly "on the perfect light into the fourth world" (243). The spiritual significance of this world where ecological beings move "over time in four directions" (244) is enhanced when we recall that the term "fourth world" also repre - sents "small nations of under twelve million inhabitants, groups working for their autonomy and independence at all levels from the neighborhood to the nation . . . who are struggling against the giantism of the institutions of today's mass societies and for a human scale and a non-centralized, multi-cellular, power-dispersed world order" (qtd. in Griggs). The journey of Proude Cedarfair into an ecosublime spirit world represents hope for the fourth world that endures. Cedarfair's shamanistic passage promises that sustainable life still germinates in fading western lands.

Similarly, Lauren Olamina's *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* provides an ecosublime path through a dying technopolis offering rebirth here on Earth, as well as in the stars. Under the mantra "God is change" (Butler 3), *Earthseed* decrees:

In order to rise
From its own ashes
A phoenix
First
Must
Burn. (137)

Earthseed depicts the burning of walled communities as a stage of cultural evolution, as Lauren's Acorn emerges from industrialism's ashes. Important for this study is the moment when Cedarfair, Lauren, and other literary figures overcome the terrific helplessness of ecocide and obtain the "power of resistance" (Kant 111) that the ecosublime affords. This moment offers not only hope for a more heedful approach to place but also tools for prevention. In *American Sublime* (1991), Rob Wilson describes postmodern sublimity in its leap "toward self-absorption into a totality of nature of knowledge, situating the self as 'nodal' center circulating the flow of cosmic energy and information which is—largely considered—'language'" (207). The ecosublime totality of nature found in *Bearheart* and *Parable of the Sower* offers instead decentered spiritualities of place, cosmic energies flowing through the self into something greater. These literary awakenings enable readers to experience the vicarious joys and terrors of starting over.

7. Sabotage and Eco-Terror

Edward Abbey, the Unabomber Manifesto, and Earth First!

Americans have a greater emotional response to the places in between. Smoldering clear-cuts, newly flattened knolls, and draining creek beds tend to provoke greater reactions than, for example, an abandoned Wal-Mart parking lot next to a new Wal-Mart parking lot. Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) responds to the irritation, rage, and terror felt when the gaps between technological rhizome and ecological biome become exposed. In defense of contingent or "in between" places, Abbey's monkey- wrenchers assault "a runaway technology, an all-devouring entity that feeds on humans, on all animals, on all living things, and even finally on minerals, metals, rock, soil, on the earth itself" (114). Because they destroy equipment and machinery, Abbey's fictional saboteurs have been depicted as literary predecessors to moderate activist groups like Greenpeace as well as the condo-torching collective Earth Liberation Front (ELF). The Gang has also been compared to the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, who purportedly used bombs to scare Americans into a new awareness of technological ills. In rethinking these comparisons and the ethical gulf between writing about sabotage and committing murder, the question emerges whether literary or real ecotage can promote greener approaches to place. Can ecoterror spark the ecosublime?

To make sense of current jargon surrounding radical activism, it becomes necessary to first define terms such as "ecotage," "monkeywrenching," and "eco-terror." The latter of these does not mean terrorist acts perpetrated by ecologists; it must instead be understood as the terror associated with the destruction of functioning ecosystems. Attempts to add the prefix "eco" to terrorism politically undermines the legitimate aims of the so- called tree huggers and eco-Nazis often satirized and admonished in media culture. Let's remove the political or religious monikers; it would seem unsuitable to label abortion clinic bombers Republican terrorists or the 9/11 perpetrators Islam-terrorists. Radical activists have themselves used terms such as "eco-sabotage" or "ecotage" to describe equipment destruction, but this conflation only makes matters worse. Edward Abbey's *Hayduke Lives!* (1990) clarifies at least one aspect of radical tactic and terminology; monkeywrenching is explicitly defined as nonviolent direct action employed under specific circumstances to slow or halt development.[1]

[1] "Monkey wrenching includes such acts as pulling up survey stakes, putting sand in the crankcases of bulldozers, rendering dirt roads in wild areas impassable to vehicles, cutting down billboards, and removing and destroying trap lines ... [M]onkeywrenching is nonviolent and is aimed only at inanimate objects, never toward physically hurting people. It is defensive in that it is used to prevent destructive

Abbey's Monkey Wrench Gang undercuts the presumption that "the preserved forest is a cage, a shackles on the accomplishment of *objets d'* art(ifacts), while the developed forest is the result of a rite they, at least, see as inner and outer liberation" (Hochman 82). Like Wildean art, which purports to not only complete but also improve upon the natural world, the logger's pieces are a morally induced reaffirmation of man's enlightened mission and an opening for future works: roadways, bridges, and parking lots. From this rationale, areas "denuded of trees are referred to as clearcuts, 'clearings,' and open areas, which gives an impression (initial anyway) of land liberated of imposing, dominating trees that make it impossible for anything else to grow, and whose clearing makes it possible for animals— deer for example—to eat what grows back" (82). The clear-cut might be seen as freed from the restrictions of base nature as it corrects the deficiencies therein, and the form that emerges from the artist/logger should enlighten the terrain as it does the sensibilities. The mind-field is thus "opened" by bulldozers and logging cranes. Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* counters this outlook with the ecosublime: "In silence they looked around at a scene of devastation. Within an area of half a square mile the forest had been stripped of every tree, big or small, healthy or diseased, seedling or ancient snag. Everything gone but the stumps. Where trees had been were now huge heaps of slash waiting to be burned when the winter snows arrived. A network of truck, skidder, and bulldozer tracks wound among the total amputees" (227-28). In horror, the Gang drives "up and down the skid trails, through mud and muck, around stacked logs and slash heaps, through the acreage of mutilated stumps. Massacre of the pines—not a standing tree within an area of two hundred acres" (230). Like the sawmill atrocities of "Po' Sandy," this moment of slack-faced shock and rage opens the field of representation to ecosublimity as it calls for a historicization of environmental catastrophe.

But if this "massacre" were reproduced on CNN, argues Jonathan Bordo, it would more often than not appear "ordinary and acceptable" (173) to American audiences enmeshed within the technological postmodern. "The sublime arises, not from what reason has excluded and suppressed, but from the products of reason itself," Bordo contends. "Our experience of ecological peril, then, is not aesthetic in the classical sense. It is an ordinary, everyday happening proclaimed in the media ... as images which are as numbing as they are uninterpretable and banal" (175). From this perspective, media technology functions to flatten affect through juxtaposition and overkill, its message one of inevitability and hopelessness. Bordo equates the postmodern sublime with the increase in indeterminacy of ecological peril, concluding that the "powers of modern technology have released the sublime." Therefore, every effort "to manage the sublime by technological means seems merely to increase the indeterminacy, rendering our experience even more inchoate and defenseless in the face of it" (177). Kant's conception of sublimity becomes muffled by a narcotic proliferation, one evil and or-

development in wild places and in seminatural areas next to cities. It is not major industrial sabotage; it is not revolutionary" (Foreman 118).

chestrated: "[Doc] watched the news. Same as yesterday's. The General Crisis coming along nicely. Nothing new except the commercials full of sly art and eco-porn. Scenes of the Louisiana bayous, strange birds in slow- motion flight, cypress trees bearded with Spanish moss. Above the primeval scene the voice of Power spoke, reeking with sincerity, in praise of itself, the Exxon Oil Company—its tidiness, its fastidious care for all things wild, its concern for human needs" *(Gang* 236). The thirty-second clip of polished wildlife, slowed in response to louder and faster potato chip and deodorant commercials, offers viewers the briefest repose. This gap in airtime, purchased for the viewer by Exxon, seeks to associate the oil company with the momentary silence that the wild must appear to provide.

In response to Exxon's simulated eco-porn—the commercial designed to eroticize and beautify ecological destruction—the Gang molests a Smokey the Bear sign, a "life-size simulacrum of the notorious ursine bore, complete with ranger hat, blue jeans and shovel" (226). Bonnie exposes Smokey when she unbuttons his fly, "pictorially speaking," and paints "onto his crotch a limp pet-cock with hairy but shriveled balls" (227). Her graffiti art pornographically "opens" the synthetic bear and his evils to view as the group moves from the material level to the semiotic, and this is where the Gang finds its raison d'etre. The group functions as both material agency (I can "touch" this issue through sabotage) and semiotic activist cell (I will "explode" numbing media images through mayhem and counter-activity). Bordo's argument that contemporary "technological pragmatism has as its primary task the organizing of an effective screen of denial to channel threats to standing" (176) does not keep the monkeywrenchers from at-

tempting to penetrate and desecrate this synthetic screen. The Gang responds to Bordo's helplessness with "[f]orget all that. Our duty is to destroy billboards" *(Gang* 44). Agency for the Gang appears possible, the dismemberment of technological ideology through sabotage a repudiation of denial. Thus, much of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is dedicated to detailed descriptions of the strategy and implementation of the Gang's operations, many of which end with balls of flame. The fantasy of halting widespread development through sabotage manifests itself in the same way that antinuclear pathos has evoked the sublimity of revolutionary mass movements. Bordo's indeterminacy and helplessness are replaced with explosions and fires, the postmodern tested in a jarring reacquaintance with material forces. Through destruction, Abbey's monkeywrenchers seek to provide stark reminders of the potential might of radical activism.

Conservationists have hailed Abbey's "uncompromising views on wilderness preservation" (Payne 157),[2] but most have distanced themselves from support of tactics such as monkeywrenching and tree spiking. Moderate environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, and Greenpeace have been grouped with tree spikers by timber lobbyists and anti-conservation groups such as the Ayn Rand Insti-

[2] Abbey's slippery take on direct action and sabotage is studied in chapter 9 of Payne's *Voices in the Wilderness.*

tute, but these associations ring hollow. Those who do claim responsibility for ecotage and terrorism find themselves in a semiotic flux that invariably conflates terrorist act with guiding principle. For example, television audiences captivated by the plight of the Unabomber ignored the content of his manifesto in the media frenzy that chronicled his murderous deeds. In an interview from an Administrative Maximum Facility Prison in Florence, Colorado, Theodore Kaczynski recalled: "I read Edward Abbey in [the] mid-eighties and that was one of the things that gave me the idea that, 'yeah, there are other people out there that have the same attitudes that I do.' I read *The Monkey Wrench Gang,* I think it was. But what first motivated me wasn't anything I read. I just got mad seeing the machines ripping up the woods and so forth" ("Interview," par. 8). A chronicle of Kaczynski's monkeywrenching tactics can be found in Chris Waits and Dave Shors's *Unabomber: The Secret Life of Ted Kaczynski* (1999). Waits, himself a logger, explains that he had befriended Kaczynski in the woods of Montana only to have his equipment destroyed, his dogs poisoned and rubbed thoroughly with human feces, and his supplies employed in the making of bombs.

Waits unwittingly depicts himself as an incarnation of a depletionist archetype from *The Monkey Wrench Gang*—the Bishop Love model. "I started to spend all my spare time cutting lumber at my sawmill so I could expand our home," he explains. "I was building an atrium where I could install a large spa, raise exotic birds, and grow tropical plants" (93). He recalls: "It was 1985 and I had successfully bid on the very large Forest Service contract to log 4 million board feet of timber and build more than six miles of specified roads into a virtually roadless area near Stemple Pass just a few miles from my home" (78). The author takes time to boast of his three logging units, which contain "about 200,000 board feet of lumber, enough raw material to build a small subdivision," and he ponders on the building of "the last road required by the agreement, a three-mile jaunt into a roadless area virtually next to the Continental Divide Trail" (80). Abbey couldn't have fictionalized a more perfect mountebank to oppose the "mad genius," Waits's list of clear-cut conquests and non-indigenous atriums, spas, "tropical plants," and "exotic birds" a malicious slight to the Douglas firs, hawks, fishes, rabbits, and other wildlife near the Continental Divide.

Waits explains that during one clear-cutting operation Kaczynski "had arrived about 10 a.m. and sat quietly in the trees as the 475-horsepower diesel came to life with a deep-throated roar and a cloud of black smoke," adding with intended verve that at full throttle the diesel "generated enough power to move a small house off its foundation and then crush it under its twenty-inch-wide steel tracks" (77). Shortly after "a call came in that smoke was sighted near the timber sale area, a fire crew was immediately dispatched. A short time later they pulled their fire trucks into the area and found the log loader had been set on fire, and that flames then spread to one of the rubber-tired skidders, leaving charred smoking hulks of steel. Flames also had spread to nearby trees and several acres were burned. Fire fighters were able to extinguish the blaze quickly before it built into a dangerous forest fire" (91). Other reports verify that logging "equipment was hit; skidding cables were cut and dirt was put into their machines' oil

and diesel fuel" (97) by an unknown assailant. Waits also bemoans the death of his "Cat," recalling that the "engine had been nearly destroyed; the rods, crankshaft, and most other moving parts were ruined," adding, "and if that wasn't enough, the down time cost me even more" (81). Finally, on one mining operation Waits decides "to haul the dragline home," admitting that the "culprit had succeeded in shutting down our operation" (103). *Una- bomber* ends with jumbled quotations from Kaczynski's journals, drawing the most trivial of conclusions. Waits, the person "closest" to Kaczynski, never appears to make the connection between the terrorist's post-ecocidal trauma, seeing his environs opened around him, and Waits's own acts of deforestation. The proposed sublimity of place does not reach Waits, for no catharsis, revaluation, or true cessation occurs. Kaczynski's acts of sabotage confirm Waits's anti-ecological values, suggesting to the logger, his crew, and Waits's readership that an overriding irrationality pervades those dedicated to deep ecology and conservation.

Kaczynski argues in the opening paragraph of "Industrial Society and Its Future" that "the Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race" and that the "continued development of technology will worsen the situation."[3] Using human overpopulation and its ills as rationale, he explains how he, or "FC,"[4] sought to transgress the technological machine through terror and assassination. Discussing the distribution of his manifesto, he argues: "If they had been accepted and published, they probably would not have attracted many readers, because it's more fun to watch the entertainment put out by the media than to read a sober essay. Even if these writings had had many readers, most of these readers would soon have forgotten what they had read as their minds were flooded by the mass of material to which the media expose them. In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression, we've had to kill people" (par. 96). Kaczynski implies that in order to get noticed by the public he must jazz up his text to pacify the American fascination with explosions, fire, and human mutilation. His actions betray the assumption that his particular event will, if only momentarily, jar his audience from their sedation and allow them to experience the vicarious terrors of a post-ecocidal "death-world."

Not unlike Abbey's Monkey Wrench Gang, Kaczynski attempts to provide negative feedback to the runaway processes of technology on both material and semiotic levels. But one must remember the ethical gap between Abbey's literary sabotage and

[3] The September 19, 1995, *Washington Post* article "Industrial Society and Its Future" was printed with this editorial note: "This text was sent last June to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* by the person who calls himself 'FC,' identified by the FBI as the Unabomber, whom authorities have implicated in three murders and 16 bombings. The author threatened to send a bomb to an unspecified destination 'with intent to kill' unless one of the newspapers published this manuscript. The Attorney General and the Director of the FBI recommended publication. An article about the decision to publish the document appears on the front page of today's paper."

[4] Kaczynski's pseudonym for some letters and terrorism was "FC," which stands for "Freedom Club." His use of "we" in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* was an attempt to make his efforts appear to be those of a cadre of highly skilled and dedicated saboteurs.

Kaczynski's actual murders, the links between the two as valid as connections made between the *White Album* and Charles Manson. The lasting impression invoked by the Unabomber comes from the catalyzing power of flash and detonation, making the use of transit system and U.S. mail all the more deconstructive. To replicate the sublime fascination of Alamogordo, Kaczynski arguably sought to puncture the "mass" through irrational and seemingly arbitrary explosions that, like atomic weaponry, challenge "the possibility of self-preservation" and transform "the conditions of consciousness" (Nye 228). Interestingly, Nye's observations on the atomic bomb provide keys to understanding the bizarre logic of explosions and terror as negative feedbacks in media culture. Nye suggests, in response to Husserl's concept of a "life-world," that instead of "thinking that individual machines amplified an individual's life-world, this technological system had created the possibility of a 'death-world.' " The opening of this condition of consciousness to the populace, Nye explains, comes when a culture perceives individual machines in aggregate, as a "technological system." As this possibility develops, "[n]ature and human existence [cease] to be 'pre-given' " and become "contingent" (228). Thus, to create the possibility of an ecological death-world, the Unabomber arguably employed detonation devices to make contingency a precondition of the technological postmodern.

The explosion, on a material level, patterns conditions of an envisioned post-ecocidal anarchy. On a semiotic level, the bomber seeks to function as a sublime force, a decentering hesitation in the mechanisms of technology. *This* gap between potato chip and deodorant commercials will presumably connect viewers to the issue attached to the bomb. Through violence, the Unabomber sought to present the postnatural unpresentable, to mediate between the transcendence of ecological collapse and the tangibility of forms. At the limits of imaginable catastrophe, the bomb "short-circuits thinking with itself" *{Lessons* 54). Lyotard explains that to promote "the sublime, the imagination must be subjected to violence, because it is by way of its suffering, the mediation of its violation, that the joy of seeing—or almost seeing—the law can be obtained" ("Interest" 124). The violence of a subdued and absent nature manifests itself through the actions of "bad contacts," fanatic emissaries who etch pseudo-ecological law with blueprints of fire. The technological machine explodes and is replaced by a death-world of contingency; thus, Kaczynski's fantasized obliteration of technology through technology displays violence to cognitively and spiritually revive ecological law. The Unabomber, then, sought to bring American media audiences to the ecosublime with terrorism.

But, to point out the obvious logical flaw of media-centered terrorist acts, any human-made explosion or grotesquerie that enters the simulative becomes digested into the system it seeks to attack, forming a *positive* feedback loop of heteroglossia and synthesis. This means that explosive plots make any future capture of media space contingent on even larger explosions, stronger rhetoric, and more fanatical displays. Unlike global warming or El Nino, Theodore can be controlled with a pair of handcuffs. Kaczynski's essay did make it to the *New York Times* and the *Washington*

Post, but it was written off as paranoid rant. Because of the Unabomber's noxious deeds, environmentalism in its more benign manifestations suffered an unjust disgrace. This paradox leaves unanswered the question, How should the ecocritic approach the Unabomber and his work? Does "Industrial Society and Its Future" warrant critical attention, or should it be dismissed in reaction to the author's crimes? If we are capable of separating the environmental atrocities that preceded Kaczynski's acts from his own acts of terrorism, we can learn much from the Unabomber's manifesto. September 11 teaches us that we must never depict terrorism as arbitrary maneuvers outside historical, economic, and environmental pressures. We should interrogate this text in part as a testimony of environmental and human loss.

But rather than provide a resolutely green vision, the ecotopia Kaczynski characterizes in "Industrial Society and Its Future" offers instead a strange mix of machismo, comic book culture, and patriotic pathos. He writes: "The positive ideal that we propose is Nature. That is, WILD nature; those aspects of the functioning of the Earth and its living things that are independent of human management and free of human interference and control ... those aspects of the functioning of the human individual that are not subject to regulation by organized society but are products of chance, or free will, or God (depending on your religious or philosophical opinions)" (par. 183). Kaczynski adds to this surprisingly PC ending, "Nature makes a perfect counter-ideal to technology for several reasons. Nature (that which is outside the power of the system) is the opposite of technology (which seeks to expand indefinitely the power of the system)" (par. 184). The Unabomber calls for both autonomy and freedom from "the system," placing "WILD nature" within the good pole of his worn either/or. Echoing also the steadfast rhetoric of comic book Avengers or their corresponding villains, the Unabomber adds that until "the industrial system has been thoroughly wrecked, the destruction of that system must be the revolutionaries' ONLY goal" (par. 200).

Kaczynski's hopes for the future mirror those of Abbey's Hayduke, an often-comic character whose fantasies of decentralization hinge on the creed of "freedom":

When the cities are gone, he thought, and all the ruckus has died away, when sunflowers push up through the concrete and asphalt of the forgotten interstate freeways, when the Kremlin and the Pentagon are turned into nursing homes for generals, presidents and other such shitheads, when the glass-aluminum skyscraper tombs of Phoenix Arizona barely show above the sand dunes, why then, why then, why then by God maybe free men and wild women on horses, free women and wild men, can roam the sagebrush canyonlands in freedom—goddammit!—herding the feral cattle into box canyons, and gorge on bloody meat and bleeding fucking internal organs, and dance all night to the music of fiddles! banjos! steel guitars! by the light of a reborn moon! by God, yes! *(Monkey Wrench Gang* 107)

Both the Monkey Wrench Gang and "Freedom Club" perceive wild nature as an escape from the constrictions of systems so that people might be free. Kaczynski argues in the manifesto that "in our society people do not satisfy their biological needs AUTONOMOUSLY but by functioning as parts of an immense social machine" (par.

41), just as Bonnie of the Monkey Wrench Gang attests that the "fabric ... of our social structure is being unraveled by too many desperately interdependent people" (42). In both texts, decentralized space appears as a release from interdependency, where humans detached from technology and government can follow their WILD instincts. Ironically, the fantasies of Kaczynski and Hayduke echo standard Manifest Destiny and western expansion rhetoric of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; in both contexts the frontier functions as repository and playground for the desires of an oppressed populace. Biocentric approaches thus become obscured by neocolonial dogma, testing assertions by Daniel J. Philippon that hail Abbey's roots in deep ecology and "advocacy of the destruction of anthropocentric ideas, institutions, and technologies" (251). In *The Closing Circle* (1971), Barry Commoner explains that an "ecosystem consists of multiple interconnected parts, which act on one another" (33). And we learn in *Deep Ecology* (1985) that "complexity and symbiosis are conditions for maximizing diversity" (Devall and Sessions 71), meaning that the greatest level of diversity (freedom) for the greatest number of people can only be brought about under the ethos of ecological interconnectedness. The anthropocentric tantrums of Hayduke don't offer much hope that ecological interconnectedness will be valued when the technological system falters. As the "closest thing to the gang's spokesman" (Philippon 243), Hayduke's "utopian quest" comes up short in its attempt to "change things back to what they were" (242). Hayduke makes it necessary to revisit the argument that Abbey links radical activism "with the philosophy of biocentrism" (221).

In *Hayduke Lives!*—Abbey's sequel to *The Monkey Wrench Gang*—the problems of WILD life appear in a literary endorsement of the movement Earth First![5] In their attempt to slay GOLIATH the "Giant Earth Mover . .. the world's largest mobile land machine" (7), the Monkey Wrench Gang now downplays the shock value of theatrical activism. The 1990s ecotage of Earth First!, the novel *Hayduke Lives!,* and nonfiction texts such as Dave Foreman's *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (1991) diverge from the logic of Kaczynski in that desire for shock and awe is replaced by a code of integrity for public lands. The notoriety and success of both *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and mainstream environmental movements prompted Abbey and Foreman in the early 1990s to harness this surprising public attention toward more effective and palatable ends. In *Hayduke Lives!* Doc explains that the "ecology warrior hurts no living thing, absolutely never," adding that the "point of his work is to increase *their* costs, nudge them toward net loss, bankruptcy, forcing them to withdraw and retreat" (110-11). Abbey also "makes a distinction between living things and property, a distinction that—when its full implications are examined—reveals Abbey's belief in the value of biodiversity over the value of private property" (Philippon 257). Foreman feels that his criminal precursors in American history include activists involved in the Boston Tea Party and the Underground Railroad, two illegal operations performed to circumvent unjust

[5] In chapter 5 of *Conserving Words,* Philippon historicizes the link between Edward Abbey and Earth First!

policies. His references to the civil disobedience of Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. attempt to place Earth First! within the tradition of radical visionaries whose moral imperative had priority over society's symbolic order.

But demolition fails to bring Abbey's readers, the Unabomber's victims, and radical activism's followers to the ecosublime because it draws attention away from ends and toward means. Their actions generate the terror in realizing tentativeness and incalculable uncertainty (comprehension), but they fail to trigger the awe of ecological integration (apprehension). Ecotage, both literary and literal, obscures at-risk ecologies and creates a green carnival that more often than not alienates potential allies. We learn from Abbey's makeover of the Monkey Wrench Gang in *Hayduke Lives!* that a range of direct-action tactics (such as "cracking" the Glen Canyon Dam) can better promote an ecological ethos than vandalism alone. Remember that in *Hayduke Lives!* Abbey brings the reader to an ecosublime and poignant moment by ending the book with the reemergence of the buried tortoise, calling attention to why the activist persists. The last decade's growth of environmental organizations, ranging from the Sierra Club to Earth First!, tells us much about American mainstream desires to see untouched spaces preserved. One would hope they suggest that we have agency in such causes. If green politics is to grow, it will have to grow up.[6] Proponents of an ecological worldview must infiltrate rather than annihilate. We must confound the tags and markers that keep the activist from the aim.

[6] For a comprehensive view of green politics in America, I suggest four recently published books that deal with contemporary environmental thought: Mick Smith, *An Ethics of Place;* Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought;* Frome, *Green Speak;* and Toke, *Green Politics and Neo-Liberalism.*

Epilogue

From the Sublime to the (Eco)Absurd: The Millennial Activist in Pop Nature

Because most environmental education comes to Americans in CNN sound bites, cinema lip service, and eco-posturing from the occasional top-forty band, one wonders about the extent to which pop nature might lead consumers to a greater understanding of the natural environment. Can simulated ecologies in popular culture provide an ecosublime realization of ecological principles, or do they simply offer absurd rhetoric that fosters consumerism with a green conscience? In *Enviropop* (2002), environmental rhetoricians Mark Meister and Phyllis M. Japp provide a framework for a study of the natural environment in the contemporary media imagination, explaining that the "nature symbol is a powerful and popular visual as well as verbal construct that is consistently modified, manipulated, and redefined in popular culture" (2). They study the relative success of natural environment as "a mass-produced commodity designed for cultural consumption" (2) in artifacts such as greeting cards, the television program *The Simpsons,* and the Home and Garden Television Network. This framework embodies a prevalent critical mode that struggles to shake off its own anthropocentrism. Another entity that has been "consistently modified, manipulated, and redefined" (2) from the 1970s to the present is the literary and cultural archetype of the environmental activist. Like the eco-saboteur, the mainstream eco-activist has been represented in novels, films, feature articles, commercials, and video games in a way that reflects post-World War II culture's fluctuating comprehension and anxiety over rapidly changing American spaces. The general shift in the environmentalist archetype has been to manufacture idealistic and pretentious champion models such as Dr. Vern of the film *Prophecy: The Monster Movie* (1979), the repressed heavy such as the 1980s EPA agent in *Ghostbusters* (1984), the tree-hugger model rampant in Clinton-era investigative reports, and in the late 1990s the singleminded investigator archetype such as Erin Brockovich. Media depictions after the 2000 presidential election appear less and less sympathetic, with tie-dyed television losers portrayed as comic relief, clandestine villains, or dead.

What real and represented activists do, what they wear, and their modes of protest dictate how the popular audience perceives not only activists but also the environments for which they stand. As the Green Party receives its lashing in popular culture for changing the course of the 2000 election, the natural environment gets its slashing in the form of proposed wilderness reviews and "Healthy Forest" initiatives. From the 1970s to the present, media renderings of both environment and activist reveal an American

culture struggling with its own strained adolescence while averting the traumas of its ecocidal imagination. Moments of (eco)absurdity emerge when literature and culture represent nature and its champions in ways that trivialize the severity of our situation. Politically, the (eco)absurd justifies anti- ecological practices such as hyperconsumption and reckless development. An analysis of pop nature and its proponents in *Prophecy: The Monster Movie,* the television program *Twin Peaks,* and the video game *Oddworld* crosses the not-so-fine line between sublimity and absurdity in media representations of imperiled ecologies. Through depictions of the environmental activist, *Prophecy* typifies corporate attempts to represent the ecosublime only to create a theater of the (eco)absurd, while *Twin Peaks* fails to maintain its ironic relationship to nature, propelling viewers to a sublime understanding of the inner life of forests. Finally, the digital logic of home video games in *Oddworld* reveals both horror and hope for the future of environmentalism.

Edging by the marquee outside a now-defunct theater in Foley, Alabama, I cringed at the embryonic monster extending its claws, in wait for what promised to be a horrid nativity.

SHE LIVES.

DON'T MOVE. DON'T BREATHE.

THERE'S NOWHERE TO RUN.

SHE WILL FIND YOU.

Television previews that displayed campers in sleeping bags flung into trees and the low chortle of an inhuman beast propelled squeamish kids and their parents into this dark 1979 matinee. Within minutes the death toll had escalated to four and a dog had jettisoned himself from a high crag, but before the monster could salivate all over the white male doctor-hero I had leapt from my seat, fled through faces blue with reflected horror, and escaped to the lobby, where I waited out the film. Cousin Eugene tried to coax a ten-year-old me back to my seat, but I shook my head, my shivering hands knotted around a small bag of soggy popcorn.

It was the scariest thing I had ever seen.

Highlighted in the first and second issues of *Fangoria* magazine, *Prophecy* got rave reviews from American x-generation third graders reared on John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), the Tall Man of *Phantasm* (1979), and *Friday the 13th* (1980). This film may have been a major disappointment for critics as well as the director,[1] but many reviewers agree (after mercilessly attacking the movie) that despite the campy "grizzly" Ktaadn and a score reminiscent of the television program *Bonanza, Prophecy* does contain moments of sphincter-tingling terror.[2] With its 2003 release on DVD, John

[1] Chadwick H. "Chadzilla" Saxelid claims in his review that Frankenheimer's "complete and utter failure with the movie lead [sic] to his suffering a paralyzing bout of clinical depression that kept him from working for several years."

[2] Reviewer Stephen Cooke recalls that the camper scene "freaked the bejeebers out of me when I saw it on the ABC Sunday Night Movie as a kid," and Mark A. Rivera attests that the "main monster at times appears stiff, but is frighteningly ugly enough to scare the heck out of anyone, especially kids."

Franken- heimer's *Prophecy: The Monster Movie* received a second barrage of hostile reviews that reveals much about contemporary American moviegoers' expectations when they see a film, as well as growing uncertainties about the outside. Frankenheimer's movie attempts to use the big-budget vehicle to touch on issues of human overpopulation, pollution, clear-cutting, species extinction, and Native American land rights. After the traumatic dog/crag scene, the action shifts to Washington, D.C., where public health examiner Dr. Robert Vern examines congested ghetto slums and rat-gnawed minority children. Recruited to settle a land dispute between a lumber company and a Native American tribe, Dr. Vern and his wife, Maggie, go to upstate Maine to write an EPA report that will presumably relinquish the land to either Pitney Lumber or the "Original People." After observing deformed fish and tadpoles, Dr. Verne tours the paper mill and finds that the company had been using mercury to soak logs for years. Mercury, a mutagen, has transformed a family of bears into gigantic eco-freaks with physical characteristics from each stage of the evolutionary ladder. After Maggie purloins baby Ktaadn as evidence, mama Ktaadn chases down and kills one by one the ragtag group of Native Americans, law enforcement officials, and the evil lumber boss Mr. Isley. In an anticlimactic fight to the finish, Dr. Verne kills mama Ktaadn with the arrow of Native American John Hawks, played by Armand Assante.

The cinematic horrors of *Prophecy* seem a bit juvenile when compared to the actual environmental catastrophe to which the film alludes.[3] The Minamata Bay tragedy of the early 1950s killed more than fourteen hundred Japanese citizens and caused unspeakable physical damage to thousands more. Mercury-tainted fish eaten in what is now referred to as Mercury Bay caused miscarriages, brain damage, vision problems, seizures, headaches, hearing loss, and birth defects for area citizens. After realizing that the Chisso Corporation had been dumping mercury in the Minamata Bay since the 1930s, the Japanese government conceded to compensation and cleanup efforts. Mercury poisoning affected the area's animals; "it started when the village cats turned into demons. One year, they were sleepy pets; the next they were hyperactive monsters—screeching, scratching and jumping around as if possessed" (Watts). Similar behavioral oddities were reported in the human populace. These observations are important because they further divide the unified subject beyond the Freudian id into terrific visions of a toxic second self. The realization that industrial contaminants could alter physical and behavioral characteristics of human and beast alike forces the ecocidal imagination to ponder new monstrosities of human identity, giving birth to films ranging from David Cronenberg's masterwork *Scanners* (1981) to cult classic *The Toxic Avenger* (1986). Like *Prophecy,* these films envision human physiological and behavioral adaptations to corporate miscarriages and—regardless of their stylistic flaws—ultimately

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Even "Chadzilla" Saxelid admits that though the film "manages to bungle every convention of a 50s mutant monster movie" that "it did scare me half to death as a child."

[3] The film does hyperbolize the death toll, though. Over one thousand (not one hundred thousand) people died as a result of methylmercury poisoning in Minamata, Japan.

increase suspicion for the flare vent towers and industrial runoff of industries such as Boise Cascade, Georgia-Pacific, and International Paper.

After a brief introduction at the beginning of *Prophecy,* we see three weary campers—a father, son, and daughter—hiking down a gorge overlooking a forest lake in the distance. The camera focuses on the daughter's tired face as her transistor radio plays disco. The high angle of the camera and the close proximity of protruding firs in the background provide a sense of vulnerability and ensnarement. The father makes the daughter turn off the radio, his right-turned face frozen, and then the camera moves right to left across the tree line. The camera then rests on the children, both looking right.

"What is it?" asks the boy.

"Nothing," says the father, and they continue their trek, the disco again blaring, but we then get a slow close-up of a patch of forest and the sound of deep, monstrous panting. From left to right the patch of trees shifts from green to ominous shadow. At this point the audience doesn't know what's stalking the campers through the forest, the canopy of darkening trees providing domicile and cover for something. Here Frankenheimer edges around what only *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) has been able to penetrate in film: the psychopathology of the middle-class camper in postmodern culture. The real moment of horror for the aforementioned scene comes when the camper is made to turn off her radio; any loss of connection to media or telecommunications reveals to an American audience that *something is wrong.* The moment of silence, of quietly observing trees, becomes one of uncertainty and fear. In this context, the human moves beyond the concept of habitat, beyond the separate spheres of inside/outside, into the abject space beyond intercalated links to capital. One by one the campers lose those links and therefore hike closer to death. Ktaadn and the environment that conceals her, then, embody the threat that comes with the contravention of the culture industry.

When I recently watched this film with a group of college freshmen, the sleeping bag death scene got a most pronounced reaction ... high-pitched cackles of delight. However, there was a strange stillness in the classroom (followed by a jolt of shock) just seconds before as the camera focuses on the dwindling campfire and closes on sleeping father, son, and daughter. Leaves rustle, waking the son, who slowly zips up his mummy-style sleeping bag; as the camera hovers over the daughter, one sees the movement of shadow, the eyes of the screaming girl, and the father's opened mouth. Hopping away from Ktaadn in his yellow sleeping bag, the son is slapped end over end into a tree as the bag explodes in a flurry of white feathers. What stands out in this scene is the fearful son's attempt to protect himself from the wild with his new sleeping bag. As he zips the bag to the neck, we catch a glimpse of the boy's relief. The boy feels safe because he has immersed himself in the fortifications of consumerism; the radio, gear, and accoutrements that separate him from the dark wood provide him with a virtual sense of protection. When Ktaadn smashes the boy into the tree, his

face reveals the film's closest encounter with cinematic terror and ecosublimity; the products have failed him as Ktaadn shatters body and mind.

After the film's release in 1979, reviewers attacked it on aesthetic and formal grounds, with Steven H. Scheuer giving it only two stars, pronouncing that the "monster suggests an overgrown grizzly with a bad case of acne; the *mise-en-scene* suggests an inept home movie" (536). The second wave of reviews—internet postings that coincide with DVD re-releases—forgive (or even revel in) the movie's "cheesy" special effects and stilted dialogue; these critics instead attack the film for its imposition of "message." Steven Cooke argues that *"Prophecy* has such an air of self-importance about itself, and its environmental message, that it winds up looking ridiculous rather than enjoyable," and Kurt Dahlke complains that "this self-proclaimed 'monster movie' strains with its earnest, pedantic plot to educate viewers about the evils of pollutants, while including a giant monster." He suggests that instead of "pulling viewers in two directions, a better monster movie would strive less to teach, and more to make the audience screech." James Kendrick argues that if "it hadn't been so insistent that it's 'about something,' it probably could have gotten away with its less-than-stellar make-up effects, cardboard characters, and grand feats of illogic" as he bemoans the film's "urge to unmask the environmentally destructive doings of evil big business." Finally, Ken Begg's twelve-page condemnation attests that "you can, if you really try, mess up even a Horror Movie. One popular method is to smother your Horror Flick with a 'message.' "

This second wave of critics understands all too well how this movie draws from 1950s gigantism features that link ecological ruin to atomic radiation, and most also see how it plays on the Frankenstein paradigm that scorns science run amok for tampering with Mother Nature. The film fails for this DVD literati because it does what mainstream movies can no longer seem to do with a straight face: move beyond the purposeless into the purposive. Their indignation correlates less to Kantian taste than it betrays a uniform desire to retain the ideology and ethos of pure capital, which by design leaves the human mind suspended in a semi-aesthetic yet uncritical condition. One might ask, Can the millennial moviegoer tolerate a film that might entertain and be "about something," terrify as well as teach? Can popular music and film still provide interest and have a real-world stratagem? For the child there is no ideological boundary between ecological terror (purpose) and the creatures in the cinematic wood (purposelessness). The political investments that hinder the adult reviewer do not irritate the child, who feels almost unrestricted terror, horror, and "gross" when Ktaadn tears pulpwood bosses in half. The adult has more trouble synthesizing real-world ecological terror—message—and the pleasurable horrors that arise from viewing the vicarious dismemberment of random subjects. But on a most primal level, the ecosublime occurs for movie viewers when ideological and political barriers are disturbed by the fright associated with *real* ecological monstrosities: clear-cutting, pollution, and extinction. The disinterested, pleasurable sensation of the 1931 version of *Frankenstein* exists because the message has been either dated by time or muted by ideology. The

creaking and plastic monster, then, must *protect* the reviewing subject from the horrors of an unspeakably abject real.

Prophecy's reviewers also expose a critical distinction between the climate of the 1970s and millennial movie culture. What most of the recent reviewers deride as bleeding-heart conceit in the film apparently wasn't perceived as particularly repugnant when *Prophecy* was made. Films of the 1970s duplicitously yet overtly criticized the exploitative actions of "big business" in ways that most Hollywood filmmakers wouldn't dare today,[4] and the aforementioned contemporary reviewers are quick to assail that which strays from the self-gratifying consumption circuit of techno-culture. These reviewing subjects must begrudge the fact that something as clearly embedded in pure capital—the horror flick—has the audacity to rip American audiences from our pubescent approach to natural space. Ken Begg complains that people "don't want to be educated" with boring details about mercury poisoning or genocide when they go into an American theater .. . they want to be *scared.*

Because 1970s features such as *Prophecy* or the eco-apocalyptic *Soylent Green* must provide characterization from a flow of shocking newspaper reports and magazine articles, filmmakers become caught in a representative dilemma between the purposeless and the purposive. How can one use popular culture to thrust the facts of our environmental crisis to an American audience? Can mass media—television, movies, music video, games, and film—represent place without slipping into absurdity or, worse yet, sincerity? From a millennial perspective, *Prophecy* trivializes environmental issues because of its spurious inclusion of special effects such as the "gooshy" (Begg), "gloppy" (Dahlke) plastic bear suit. In its desire to spotlight the horrors of pollution, clear-cutting, and the physiological results of mercury poisoning, special effects are employed that pull the film's images from the potentially tedious referent. Ironically, this practice in *Prophecy* shifts contemporary audience response from the sublime to the absurd. The discrepancy between the ecological signified and the Hollywood signifier takes what is truly awful to produce as its stand in an absurd ritual of simulated activism. Thus, Hollywood radiation poisoning, as seen in the television version of *The Hulk,* does not rot the flesh and cause unspeakable damage but instead has the ability to transform muscle men into heroes with bad wigs and dye jobs. Ecosublimity cannot occur when the human mind fails to see beyond the cinematic trompe 1'oeil.

Prophecy collapses on its own dogma not because it provides a hazy critique of depletionist industries but because it reveals through a variety of swish pans and close-ups a mounting conception of the natural world as alien menace. In his critique of the film *Deliverance,* Jhan Hochman explains that the forest "is endangered partly *because* it is perceived as a dangerous place, a locale to be avoided" (71), adding that "the forest gets implicated" (84) in the odious actions of characters. Likewise, *Prophecy* implicates the natural environment in the villainy of both Ktaadn and Isley by depicting the

[4] There are a few big-budget films that seem to overtly critique anti-ecological practices, such as *A Civil Action* (1998) and *Erin Brockovich* (2000).

forests of northern Maine as ominous and panoptic predators to American campers. In so doing, it fosters the endangerment of the undeveloped forest in the same way that the movie *Jaws* renewed interest in shark hunting. Much of this film's frightful green-gloss comes in its depiction of Dr. Vern, the environmental advocate. Why did movies of this era insist that indigenous people needed the white male doctor-hero to identify the crisis, educate the indigenous, and kill the creature? With no disrespect intended to Armand Assante and cast members of varying ethnicities, wouldn't the film have proven more accurate if it had highlighted *actual* Native Americans attempting to negotiate big lumber's ecocidal impulses? As Dr. Vern marches from the contaminated Garden of Eden to the noxious Pitney Lumber Mill, one detects a level of arrogance and certitude that audiences and reviewers have historically found off-putting in the zealous reformer. The pious Dr. Vern helps to calcify representations of the environmental activist in contemporary popular culture as white, male, overeducated, pretentious, and groovy to a repulsive degree. The natural environment, by extension, becomes analyzed not only as alien but also as a constituent of a vast liberal conspiracy. As a manifestation of the socialistic and potentially anarchic impulse of the Left, the forest finds itself represented as suspect, indolent, and in need of a haircut. Despite its overt "message" and "earnest, pedantic plot" (Dahlke), *Prophecy goes* out of its way to depict the wild in vast, wide-angle shots or aggressive pans into shadow and expansive outward movements. The forest is portrayed as a dark and confusing place that might well gain from the enlightening forces of chainsaw and pulpwood crane.

So this film falls short as both effective propaganda and mindless fun, and perhaps it is true that Dr. Vern "is so intense with self-righteousness that one expects any object he glances at to burst into flames" (Begg). As a cultural artifact, however, *Prophecy* does succeed as a contextual indicator of the period after Richard Nixon advanced crucial environmental legislation in the 1970s and before the atrocities of the Reagan administration.[5] As a mirror of late-1970s culture, this film recounts increased suspicion of industrial toxins, particularly as they pertain to environmental crimes such as Love Canal and the Minamata Bay incident; a contemporary revision of the outdoors as alien menace; and the development of the environmental activist as literary and cultural archetype. From these observations, one notes in American media consciousness the eminence of an ecocidal imagination.

Representations of nature and its promoters also waver from absurdity to sublimity and back again in *Twin Peaks,* a television program produced by Mark Frost and David Lynch. Set in a northwestern town surrounded by Douglas firs, this program preoccupies itself with environmental issues on a most trivial level while offering one of the most eclectic and affecting ecological visions found on television. The opening credits of the pilot offer a slow, droning score by Angelo Badalamenti that simultane-

[5] Richard Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act into law on January 1, 1970, providing what many consider the foundation for the contemporary environmental movement. See Flippen, *Nixon and the Environment.* An informative book on Ronald Reagan's environmental policy is Lash, Gillman, and Sheridan, *A Season of Spoils.*

ously lulls and forebodes. The credits include seven scenes: a Bewick's wren, a lumber mill, machines sharpening saw blades, a gigantic fallen log, a "Welcome to Twin Peaks" sign, a waterfall, and a left-to-right pan of a stream. Each of these scenes provides clues to the ecological vision that *Twin Peaks* embraces even as it mocks. The wren is important first as an allusion to Lynch's *Blue Velvet,* to the robin in the film's final scenes that represents the all-encompassing love that drives "the darkness away" by functioning as predator to metaphorical beetles. It is also important because this bird, resting on a tree limb, is juxtaposed with the smokestacks of the mill, the mechanical motions of the sharpening saw blades, and the huge log displayed like a trophy.

The smokestacks (and even the mechanical blades) are filmed in the glossy, nostalgic mode of nineteenth-century panoramic painting, and with the simple yet magnetic score one is just able to get by without the disconcerting sense that Lynch and Frost are trying to impose some pedantic "message." When one looks again to *Blue Velvet*—the town Lumberton, the radio DJ's reference to falling trees, and the ever-passing log truck—one cannot help but get the sense that both pieces artfully and sardonically pose the message that environmental destruction is occurring all around a numbed populace that will remain in states of chipper self-containment until the last tree falls. The fifth image is telling because it displays the tiny "Welcome to Twin Peaks" sign directly in front of a gigantic and overwhelming mountain that looks dissimilar to its facsimile. The sign offers simulated twin mountains in the shape of human breasts—snowcapped aureoles pressed skyward—while the mountain itself appears a sharp yet asymmetrical collection of sublime crags and rises. This scene, which centers upon a power line nestled between two trees, hints that the artificial teats of signification can scarcely conceal odious apertures behind its facade of aesthetic beauty. The discrepancy between the Twin Peaks "sign" and the actual mountain reveals to the attentive viewer that a jolt of revelation will follow. The sixth image, a waterfall, also seems to soothe—the flow of water played in slow motion—until viewers are made to remain fixed on the cataract of white that seems to break in all directions when it strikes the rocks beneath. The final and most disconcerting moment is the slow pan that appears to move with the stream. As the camera moves with the scarlet water of late evening, one is troubled by the black shadows of reflected trees that loom overhead from the opposite bank at the top of the screen. Once a wren threatened by saw blades, pop nature now appears a chaotic and predatory force.

This series revolves around the strange murder of high school sweetheart Laura Palmer and the FBI special agent who aids the Twin Peaks police department and community in its search for the killer. Laura Palmer, her death, and the search for her murderer slowly unveil both social and ecological trauma in the town and surrounding woods. Special Agent Dale Cooper, a clairvoyant who gets clues from Tibetan techniques and dreams, permeates inductive logic to communicate with Laura in the "Black Lodge," an oblique way station "between two worlds." Interwoven into this distorted soap opera is a subplot involving a dangerous liaison between the proprietors of the Packard Lumber Mill and a proposed "Ghostwood Estates" project that would

develop a surrounding forest into lots and golf courses and thus render extinct the endangered "pine weasel." Also of note are a number of Lynchian caricatures, including the "rooted" Harold Smith, who grows orchids and narratives in his territorial bower; Josie Packard, whose departing soul becomes imprisoned within a bedside table made presumably with the wood of her own mill; and the Log Lady, who receives transmissions from the piece of timber she has carried since her husband's untimely death. Recurring motifs include a close-up of fir branches moving in high wind and the repetition of the bizarre declaration, "the owls are not what they seem" (episode 8). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, when Cooper goes to the Black Lodge he must pass the threshold of an ethereal ring of sycamore trees. These connections between human and natural environment provide the pervading sense that a study of *Twin Peaks* must go further than the human subconscious to offer answers to Laura's many secrets. Although the standard critical disposition toward Lynch is to situate his work within psychoanalytical, postmodern, and/or Lacanian frames,[6] one still finds it odd that an ecocritical study of *Twin Peaks* and its central metaphor, Laura Palmer, has been virtually overlooked.[7] While a comprehensive ecocritical study of *Twin Peaks* supersedes my modest intentions, I do intend to use the series to reveal a second face of the environmental activist in popular culture and to analyze dual depictions of the natural environment as alien menace and ecological redeemer in a way that wavers between the (eco)absurd and the ecosublime.

Throughout both seasons are clues to the show's preoccupation with eerie boundaries between cultural and natural space that link Laura not merely to the feminine otherworldliness of the male id but also to the self that exists in the organic gap separating living things, the elements, and the mysterious power of the woods. Environmental clues often seem dropped in *Twin Peaks* as comic relief, but as with the Log Lady who gives trees voice, our expected responses as viewers are stretched to an extremity that reveals something far more complex. One example occurs in the pilot, when Special Agent Cooper and Sheriff Harry S. Truman open Laura's safety deposit box; the scene opens with what appears to be a dead deer's head on a conference table. Cooper and Truman enter the office, stare at the deer, and find that it is stuffed and has recently fallen from the wall. The camera moves back to Cooper as he opens Laura's safety deposit box while the deer's head remains in the bottom left of the screen, its disturbing glazed eyes staring helplessly at the camera. What appears at first a wacky television non sequitur later becomes part of a larger phenomenon that emanates from the woods. Like the flickering lights of the morgue, the deer's head resounds the cacophony of voices from the Black Lodge giving stuffed nature the chance to communicate, to be. Material, postnatural objects like the deer's head, Josie's bedside table, and Margaret's log become ontological nodes in the Twin Peaks biome. As "being" they are extant connections between the human world and

[6] Examples of this approach are Herzogenrath, Mulvey, and Marzec.

[7] Phelps takes up this topic briefly.

presences in the woods that are at once environmental and ethereal. Of course, the program's preoccupation with stuffed animals has a more immediate environmental message: the "ghosts" or remnants of animal slaughter are constant reminders of the region's economic reliance on other species.

Invaded ecological spaces in *Twin Peaks* also perpetuate the forest's depiction as alien presence. Martha P. Nochimson touches on Lynch's ecological vision in her Bakhtinian and psychoanalytic readings of *Twin Peaks:* "The recurring images of the fir boughs undulating in the wind and of the cascading waterfall foaming on impact with its basin bring us to the mysteries of the air... . The natural images—the fir branches—provide the experience of the free energy beyond human control and its narratives" (80). Nochimson's approach centralizes the human libido as the program's symbolic cosmology, and natural environments in *Twin Peaks* function as free-floating repositories that take form as manifestations of human desire. For example, the frothing waterfall and burning logs in the fireplace of the Great Northern might reflect the unrevealed eroticisms of depletionist turned environmental advocate Ben Horne. However, this approach leaves a problematic critical gap among the characters, the natural environment, and the Black Lodge. I find it interesting that Nochimson mentions that this natural energy exists "beyond human control and its narratives" and acknowledges the non-narrative, nonhuman world of *Twin Peaks* as relevant to its understanding but doesn't track the program's biocentric inclinations. Perhaps an ecocritical analysis of *Twin Peaks* doesn't appear to fit with the Lynch/Frost profile, and scenes relating to the natural environment have typically been overlooked because of their campy veneer.

From an ecocritical perspective, the fir branches in the wind have little to do with the human experience of free energy; instead, they embody interconnected human and nonhuman energies that control the outcomes of characters and places in Twin Peaks. In giving the natural world preternatural vitality, *Twin Peaks* presents the woods as a repository for nonhuman malevolence. Importantly, the forest also proves the staging ground for Agent Cooper to make his ecosublime transcendence and assume a divine status alongside other messianic inhabitants of the Lynch/Frost cosmology. When Agent Cooper dreams of MIKE, a shamanistic inhabiter of the wood's spirits, this one-armed revelation recites the central poem that hints at the role of the natural environment in the program:

In the darkness of future past
The magician longs to see
One chants [chance] out between two worlds:
Fire walk with me. (episode 2)

This message from "another world" beckons Agent Cooper into the woods, calling for him to make his walk of fire over the coals that separate him from "Laura Palmer." In making his fire walk, Agent Cooper might earn his singular chance to transcend this world and experience another. Solving the case of Laura Palmer and unraveling the tapestry of chaotic clues is for Agent Cooper the permeation of ecological confusion and a spiritual hyperawareness of the patterns and forms of bioregion. As the show

progresses Agent Cooper gets other dispatches from this other "world," including transmissions from Air Force Major Briggs.[8] Cooper finds that the cryptic messages have come not from outer space but from the surrounding forest itself. Cooper's transcendence, then, renders him an omniscient part of the forest and the invisible biological matrix that *Twin Peaks* inhabits.

Like *Prophecy,* this program reveals an anxiety of the outdoors in contemporary culture, playing upon the paranoiac sense that incomprehensible designs in nature conspire like Greek deities for and against particular members of humankind. "The woods holds many spirits," explains Deputy Hawk, supporting Sheriff Truman's statement that there's "a sort of evil out there . .. something very, very strange in these old woods. Call it what you want—a darkness, a presence. It takes many forms" (episode 4). Episode 5 offers a stark example of the program's eco-paranoia in its depiction of birds. When clues lead Cooper, Truman, Doc Hayward, and Native American Deputy Hawk into the forest to find the cabin of criminal Jacques Renault, the group is shadowed by an ominous American crow. The camera focuses on the black crow landing frightfully on dead limbs and provides close-ups of the bird's yellow eye; as a stalker from the woods the bird sees the team's progress and will presumably relay this information to forces beyond the sycamore trees. Before reaching Renault's cabin the team happens upon the Log Lady, whose log provides crucial information to the case; from the log she relays the message, "Dark. Laughing. The owls were flying. Many things were blocked. Laughing. Two men. Two girls. Flashlights pass by in the woods over the ridge. The owls were near. The dark was pressing in on her" (episode 5). Darkness and owl conspire against human victims Laura and Ronette (Ronnette) Pulaski, the show raising suspicions for the audience that the woods itself is the killer. When the team reaches the cabin, it finds not only an important clue in a cuckoo clock but also the myna bird Waldo, which had ripped holes in Laura's body on the night she was murdered. The birds in episode 5 call one to ask questions answered in the final episode: Why would animals of different species conspire against Cooper and his team? Why do animals watch us?

Later in the program, when Cooper receives the transmission "the owls are not what they seem" and audiences see the owl's body superimposed onto the face of BOB,[9] one cannot help but place this show in its historical context and recall one of America's most high-profile environmental quandaries since the National Environmental Policy Act was made law. The frenzied debate over the northern spotted owl in the Pacific Northwest had been brewing in the late 1980s until the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the northern spotted owl *(Strix occidentalis caurind)* as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Logging companies argued that the National Forest Management Act had already curtailed the timber business and that "the owl" would cost Americans thousands of jobs in areas just west of where the fictional Twin Peaks is set.

[8] The eccentric Briggs previously worked on Project Blue Book, the U.S. cold war study of UFOs.
[9] BOB, the program's primary embodiment of evil, inhabits human and animal hosts.

Groups protested that if cutting continued "at its current rate of 125,000 acres a year, the old-growth forests will be gone within thirty years and the mills [will be] forced to close anyhow" (Andre and Velasquez 1). The issue gained national attention, fueling outrage and debate, with much of the American populace unsure why one species of owl would cause such a stir. Conservative pundits used feeble logic to portray environmentalists as zealous and petty for defending this indicator species, and activists aided by television-driven ecotheatricists drew media attention to an important issue that many didn't appear to comprehend. Under the June 1990 provision, "timber companies are required to leave at least 40% of the old-growth forests intact within a 1.3 mile radius of any spotted owl nest or activity site" (Andre and Velasquez 1), leaving a ring of untouched trees around the estimated two thousand pairs that survived.

In June 1990, when the fate of the northern spotted owl was in hot dispute, *Twin Peaks* was at its apex of popularity. The 1991 season would revolve around heinous owls in tree branches and the mysterious Owl Cave that contains the Native American petraglyph providing Agent Cooper with the possibility for ecological transcendence. The glyph in Owl Cave leads Agent Cooper to a ring of twelve sycamores in Ghostwood Forest that form a curtained gateway to a celestial waiting room. Agent Cooper transgresses the ecological trompe 1'oeil, allowing audiences to finally see what exists behind the curtained veil of trees. Having passed the threshold, Cooper experiences a song of religious enchantment:

And I'll see you, and you'll see me
And I'll see you in the branches that blow
In the breeze
I'll see you in the trees
I'll see you in the trees
Under the sycamore trees, (episode 29)

The song equates transcendent sight and enlightenment that Cooper seeks with the owl that sits in the tree's branches. The aged and suited singer of this ecosublime mantra *is* the owl; the bird that once appeared a source of horror now ushers "the good Dale" to his seat as deity.[10] The detective's apprehension of "Laura Palmer" thus becomes his ecosublime comprehension of the trees, owls, and breezes of Ghostwood Forest.

This program penetrates the (eco)absurd and moves from purposelessness to purposiveness in frames. If the camera were, for example, to focus for an instant on stuffed animals such as the deer's head only to shift directly to human characters, we could pass the moment off as a non sequitur or camp, but since the camera lingers on the deer's head to an uncomfortable degree—as it does in the Doc Hayward/Waldo scenes of episode 6— audiences must confront and synthesize what has become more than mere directorial fetish. Such is the case with the "Ghostwood Estates'VPackard Sawmill

[10] Unfortunately for the program's following, Agent Cooper never completes his fire walk to the White Lodge. *Twin Peaks* was canceled after the second season.

subplot that percolates in the first season and becomes central to the program in the second season. When corrupt businessman Ben Horne and deposed lumber baroness Catherine Martell devise a plan to burn the Packard Mill to develop Ghostwood Estates country club and resort, Horne gets ensnared in his own murderous double cross and loses the land. Catherine acquires Ghostwood Estates, and Horne loses his mind to emerge many episodes later as a vehement environmentalist and animal rights activist. Horne trades his flashy suit for jogging attire, crunches celery rather than puffing his cigar, and shocks his constituents with his ecological conversion. He reveals, "According to an environmental impact report, what few pine weasels remain will be all but wiped out with the proposed plans for Ghostwood development," adding with uncharacteristic pathos, "I want Twin Peaks to remain unspoiled in an era of vast environmental change."

At his "Stop Ghostwood: Save the Pine Weasel" gala event and fundraiser, Horne gives a speech that gives such outlandish lip service to environmental concerns that one witnesses the program's ironic posture burst into a diatribe against the supposed hypocrisy of mainstream environmentalism and its talking heads. One also detects momentary incursions of sincerity and remorse in Horne, who has emerged from the brink of insanity with a newly found desire to give himself a "first scrubbing on one of the dirtiest consciences in the entire northwest." In episode 24 Horne gives his plea at the Stop Ghostwood rally:

It is gratifying to see so many people who are sincere about their environment. The Stop Ghostwood campaign is a determined effort to keep the rabid development interests from trying to turn our beautiful northwestern forests into a monstrous amusement park, destroying animal preserves which have been undisturbed for centuries, the little worlds that serve as sanctums for several endangered species, not the least of which is the little pine weasel. Before moving along, I would just like to remind all of us that ecology is not a luxury science. It is not about pleasant appearances. It is about survival, about whether we are all going to make it. Period. But not to understate the value of visual pleasure, we come to the fashion show.

Horne's ecological redemption is thwarted when he parades the program's most comedic characters in uncouth attire. Afterward, the pine weasel bites the master of ceremony's nose and causes pandemonium for the group of concerned citizens and wealthy benefactors. Viewer expectations of the archetypal green are shaken to such a degree that one must concede more than mere mimicry of the environmentalist stereotype.

Scenes of the tiny "weasel" running amok undercut Horne's uplifting reversal, and the episode collapses into ludicrousness when Horne toady Mr. Pinkie screeches, "Don't panic! He's completely harmless! He's already endangered!" (episode 24). Mainstream environmental activism is thus depicted in *Twin Peaks* as not much more than an opportunity to sell Horne's activewear. As a spokesman for the anti-development platform, Horne retains the personality flaws of Dr. Verne of *Prophecy* but adds T-shirt-hawking mercantilism. The television folly of *Twin Peaks* hyperbolizes the cultural perception

of absurdity and hypocrisy in the mainstream environmental activist to the breaking point. While it aptly calls for a reappraisal of media-enhanced environmentalism and the censure of depletionists like Ben Horne, the commercially driven *Twin Peaks* ultimately fosters corporate attitudes that undermine the legitimate aims for which advocates in groups such as Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and the Nature Conservancy toil.

Perhaps a better mouthpiece for the producers' ecological message and a more apropos *Twin Peaks* eco-advocate comes from Annie Blackburn, Cooper's love interest in the second season. Giving her speech as a contestant for the Miss Twin Peaks Beauty Contest, Annie echoes Chief Seattle, stating, "When the last red man has vanished from this earth, these forests and shores will still hold their spirits, for the Indians love the Earth as a newborn loves his mother's heartbeat." She continues: "Why have we all lost touch with this beauty? Maybe saving a forest starts with preserving some of the feelings that die inside us every day, those parts of ourselves that we deny. For if we cannot respect that interior land, neither can we respect the land we walk. So let us in walking gently upon the Earth leave behind a simple legacy, that we're new warriors, mystic warriors who love the Earth and try to save it" (episode 29). Instead of using the natural environment as a mere projection of the human psyche, this "new warrior" uses the interior as a metaphor for the outside. Annie's call to action also suggests that the curse of Twin Peaks relates to its previous injustices and subsequent spiritual and ecological loss. The darkness in the woods, then, is the emergent past; the eyes of birds follow us as reminders.

Perhaps the most promising representation of the "green" activist in this book comes from *Oddworld,* a video game that offers virtual experiences of negotiating extreme terrains and challenging the depletionist industrial complex "RuptureFarms." Having played the game in darkened graduate school apartments in the early days of PlayStation, before X-Box and PlayStation 2,1 recently decided to buy an *Oddworld* for myself. The attendant at the electronics department explained that aside from the PlayStation I needed an AV adapter or perhaps an AV cable, the S-video cable or even the costly RFU adapter. If anyone else wanted to play, I also needed to buy another analog controller and likely a multitap or a mouse. After I dragged my plastic bag full of consoles, wires, adapters, and controllers to my television and began to tear through the cellophane that protected each piece of the device, I realized that I had to order the CD for PlayStation because the PC version that grad school buddy Mike gave me wasn't compatible. After finding the least expensive CD on the internet (plus shipping and handling), I waited for the next three to seven days for my game to arrive. Finally it came and I played *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* into the morning hours. Worn from hours of simulated activism, I attempted to save my game at the marker where "Abe" had last fallen from a tree-lined ledge, only to find that I hadn't bought a memory card. Unable to save my game and unwilling to lose it, I left the game running until I could get back to the superstore to buy one. As I handed a different attendant at the electronics department my twenty dollars, I assured myself that my study of this

game was serious, my objective being to find emotive and intellectual links between game space and ecological space and to discover ecosublime presences in this collusion of technology and the natural environment.

This 1997 game revolves around the plight of Abe, an "ignorant, happy floor-waxer" (8) who has the misfortune of witnessing a murderous proposal at meatpacking conglomerate RuptureFarms. *Oddworld* begins with a cartoon explaining its premise: on the dark horizon the player sees smokestacks extending from a menacing plant with metal pipes, bulging boilers, and circular blades slicing through what looks to be rib cages on a conveyer belt. One then sees the RuptureFarms logo branded on barrels filled with bloody meat. The scene shifts to Abe dressed only in a loincloth and bound in an iron cell. As Abe narrates his story, the player observes him buffing the floor while passing gigantic billboards advertising delicacies such as Meech Munchies, Paramite Pies, and Scrab Cakes. The final billboard reads, "Coming Soon: New and Tasty!" Abe peeps into the boardroom to see a semicircle of suit-wearing armless monsters that glower over an economic indicator with arrow pointing downward. With Meeches extinct and the Paramites and Scrabs "turning up thin," the evil Mollock unveils "New and Tasty!"; Abe yelps in horror, "This new kind of meat... it was us!" Now a fugitive from industrial rule, Abe must restore ecological harmony to Oddworld and save his endangered fellows.

The intense prelude draws from the intricate cinematography of *Blade Runner* and thematic of *Soylent Green* to simulate a corporate dystopia filled with hours of pitfalls for the simulated activist. As "the millennial hero" (15) Abe, players must remain attentive to the terrain, avoid predators, and save as many enslaved animals as possible. Without weaponry of his own, this indigenous creature must adapt to five "environments" and save his fellow workers to reclaim the "proud and ancient legacy" (18) of his native Mudokons. These treacherous environments include desert wasteland Scrabania and fir-lined Paramonia, part of "Oddworld's vanishing wilderness" (24). Helping Abe on his trail are lightning bugs that form linguistic cues, story stones that provide ancient lore, and bird portholes that open for Mudokons to jump through to safety. Along the way other earth-tone cartoons depict the ecological harmony of Oddworld before Mollock colonialism and Abe's destiny to "shut down RuptureFarms and restore the lost land."

Playing the game hour after hour, I found myself disturbed with death after tragic death of Abe, who must jump, crouch, and sneak over menacing alien terrains to rescue his green friends. As a player I would suffer when my Abe-self would lead a fellow Mudokon into a deadly encounter with predatory Scrab or meat grinder. And as Abe made a dangerous leap, my viscera would follow—just as it had as a child when I maneuvered the little reptile in *Frogger* across the busy intersection to find sanctuary from heavy traffic. As I stared hour after hour into the television screen and pushed buttons, my questions remained: Can video games like *Oddworld* in any useful way permeate simulation and provide the player with a genuine sense of agency?

Can manipulating virtual place bring one any closer to environmental action for the millennial planet? Can *Oddworld* provide ecosublime connections to our world?

Like the other cultural artifacts I have highlighted, *Oddworld* does increase suspicion of industrial ills while it develops the environmental activist archetype. Abe embodies for the video-game audience a new nobility for the millennial activist. He teaches us that we aren't distinct from the other living things on our planet; as an indigenous creature, he heeds the patterns and behaviors of his surroundings and fellow inhabitants. We also learn from his plight that all are responsible, that class and race cannot be seen as justification for anti-ecological practices. Unlike Dr. Vern and Ben Horne, who see media attention as their most essential tool, Abe circumvents the mediating screen and instead uses direct action to save his planet. If he gets to the end of the game without rescuing a majority of his fellow Mudokons, he must return to RuptureFarms and continue the fight. Thus Abe needs fellow endangered life-forms just as they are dependent upon him. Without weapons of his own, he must infiltrate and revolutionize a corporate machine state with overwhelming military might.

But as the game provides simulated successes against insurmountable odds, the flickering diffusion of colorful images ultimately offers filmy beauties of heterogeneity that scatter consciousness in the purposelessness of customer satisfaction. Unlike media renderings of the ozone hole that provide ecosublime links to the natural world, this product creates a pleasurable aesthetic distance between player and referent, providing not much more than a parodic struggle for contested joystick space. Players follow Abe through all of the emotional stages of direct action: the shock of awareness, accepting environmental responsibility, struggling through political and physical threat, and taking on the organization. These vicarious experiences prove purgative and finally protect playing subjects from the traumas of real environmental actions of the period, such as anti-globalization protests and anti-corporate adbusting campaigns. Why suffer the terrors of millennial environmental defeat when I can save the planet ad nauseum from my own couch?

Like *Prophecy* and *Twin Peaks,* this game employs a scattered, imprecise mixture of Native American lore, urban myth, and psychic detritus dredged from decades of film and television. As the Abe-self endures his long hike, players are inculcated with glorious arabesques and cave figures that provide a beautiful pastiche of aboriginal spaces, while honoring none. Players thus experience the vague heaviness of history and experience reenactments of cultural struggle, but the cloying disquiet of information never surfaces to make Abe's fatality the grounds for reprieve. This is the awe and terror of simulacrum, the absurd waste of the media age; the simulated life suppresses human desire for ecological contact and offers glittering images that divert as they bore. Activists who spend hours inside, designing green games and websites (not to mention writing scholarly books), often fail to differentiate the language and image that seek to provide environmental education and the outdoor teaching-in-action that supersedes discourse.

But the ecological dilemmas drawn from these media activists—and our American desires to consume them all—provide much more than indeterminacy and defeat. Like the owls, the activists are not what they seem. Their media likenesses express genuine human desires, however timid, to grapple with our human role in global processes that change in ways that are by nature supersensible. Perhaps a fresh approach to our millennial timidity and an appropriate ending to this book might be found in the words of Henry David Thoreau, who in the "Ktaadn" section of *The Maine Woods* writes: "I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one— *that* my body might—but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature—daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense! Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *Where* are we?" (376-77). Thoreau's words beckon the fearful American into the awe and terror of the real, to imbue our simulated lives with connections that leave us forever changed. These permeations of the cultural self offer transcendent contacts with an ecosublime world and the recognition of message in rocks, trees, and wind. Like the other literary and cultural artifacts studied in this book, popular culture responds to the radical and terrifying changes made to the environmental face of America in the last two centuries. The continent we now inhabit, from an ecological point of view, is a great departure from the vistas and waters so revered by Thoreau. We must react to the might and speed of our postnatural condition in an increasingly vertiginous cultural context where the chance for mass acceptance of environmental responsibility seems an unlikelihood. But as many of the writers, strategists, and philosophers in this book have established, an environmental awakening of ecosublime proportions can prove to be a catalyst for social and environmental reform. Through what I have referred to as an ecosublime in literature and culture, we have been stirred to mature attitudes toward ecological contingencies worldwide. An awesome and terrifying jolt to the heart and soul has historically overwhelmed even the most rigid and dazed Western mind to awareness and action. Literary works and cultural artifacts that do evoke the ecosublime presence serve simultaneously as a negation of the postmodern and a guide for what must now happen.[11]

[11] A recent book that offers practical new strategies for dealing with global environmental threats is Speth's *Red Sky at Morning.* Speth offers eight steps for international success in dealing with problems such as deforestation, global warming, and species extinction. Chapter 10, "The Most Fundamental Transition of All," includes the Earth Charter Preamble, which states, "As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise... We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations" (194).

Picture this. Small, inward-seeking towns surrounded by local greenways and biospheric zones fulfill the material, civic, and democratic needs for each bioregion. The concept of trade changes as the cost to transfer goods becomes more expensive than the price of the good. As sprawl ceases, the populace looks to postnatural zones for room and to nature for instruction as to how the reproductive life of the human race must continue. Under codes of interdependency and symbiosis, the human race responds humanely to the biological necessity to decrease human population.

The realities of finitude are addressed as human need and quality of life become ideologically linked to the concept of sustainability. The decentralized biome flourishes as a place of civic and democratic activity, and it is refreshing to actively and frequently engage in the goings-on of a tangible political and ecological body. All we have lost is our plastic wrappings, our toys, our disposable lifestyles, and our increasing addiction to perpetual audiovisual stimulation. The ecosublime has washed away these flickering needs and replaced them with a new blueprint for our survival.

Isn't it pretty to think so.

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