SPEAKING FOR NATURE: 
THE POLITICS AND PRACTICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IN 
AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE 

DISSERTATION 

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines contemporary American literary and cultural texts that share the stance of environmental advocacy, "speaking for" the rights or interests of nonhuman nature by challenging dominant Western ideologies which construct humanity as separate from and superior to nature. While such advocacy is essential in contemporary American culture, we cannot uncritically accept that texts which speak for nature are selflessly motivated or politically effective. Consequently, I adapt feminist theories about the problems of speaking for others to explore how texts of environmental advocacy are often undermined and infiltrated by traces of the ideologies they seek to transform. In this exploration, I focus on three issues: constructions of human subjectivity, conceptions of human relationships with nature and the role of language(s) in mediating those relationships, and representations of nature itself.

I examine the construction of human subjectivity in texts that highlight the connections between nature and traditionally oppressed groups of people such as women and Native Americans; these texts include works by ecofeminists and non-native writers who hold out Native American cultures as models of ecological responsibility, autobiographical nonfiction by Dian Fossey, Alice Walker and Terry Tempest Williams, and fiction by Ursula Le Guin. To explore concepts of the relationship between humans and nature, I turn to the work of wilderness advocates Dave Foreman and Edward Abbey, the nonfiction of Gary Snyder, and the scientific theories of James Lovelock and
Wes Jackson. To examine representations of the nonhuman, I discuss the visual texts of print advertisements and television documentaries. While some of these texts alienate humans from the natural world and each other by constructing falsely unified, static pictures that erase differences within the human subject, between humans and nature, and within the natural world, others resist such constructions. Instead, they work towards a view of the world as complex and shifting, in which humans and nature shape each other through innumerable relationships that produce differences as well as commonalities. Ultimately, I argue that critical reflection on the practice of environmental advocacy can positively transform the ways we represent and enact our relationships with the rest of nature.
To my parents, who taught me to respect
and care for other living things.
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INTRODUCTION

WHEN EXPERIENCE AND IDEOLOGY CONFLICT:
THE ORIGINS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

When I was seven years old, my family moved from a neighborhood within the city limits to a nearby but more rural area. I remember at first being terrified of the toads that the boy next door used to bring over to test my reaction. Soon, though, I too became comfortable picking up the creatures that had originally so frightened me, and then I progressed to searching for crawdads in the creek in the woods behind our house. Led even further afield by my adventurous beagle, I gradually acquired an intimate knowledge of the woods and meadows in the area. Each spring, I looked forward to the familiar progression of wildflowers; in complete ignorance of the scientific or even common names of most species, I carefully named them myself and knew when and where to expect them. I also recognized particular animals which belonged in the places near our house, such as the three-legged toad or the turtle which made the hissing noise. If anything changed in these places, for good or ill, it was immediately obvious to me. I'll never forget how angry and violated I felt when someone hacked down a small tree in a clearing by the creek.

Many of these woodlands and fields fell victim to developers as I grew older (although the woods behind my parents' house miraculously lives
on). The other neighborhood children and I felt outrage and personal loss at these inroads into our well-loved landscapes. We used to ride our bikes past the men on bulldozers and wish all sorts of evil on their enterprise. When one subdivision was delayed for a few years because of problems with its sewer system, we felt slightly vindicated. But we never felt that there was anything we could do to stop what was happening. In fact, I'm sure any protests I made to adults were dismissed as childish fantasies. In the real world, I learned, progress and development take precedence over children's attachments to woods and fields. While we merely played in those places, grown-ups had much more important, economic interests in them.

In this way, I encountered an unsettling disjunction between the dominant beliefs of my culture and the values that grew out of my own experiences. Over the years, I learned in many ways how profound that disjunction really was and how pervasive were the ideologies of my culture that devalued nature — and often people — in order to sanction their abuse and destruction for the purposes of dominant institutions and practices. Although these ideologies worked to teach me that my grief at the loss of natural places was something I would grow out of, I retained my belief that the bonds I had formed with those places and living things were important. Eventually, in the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, for the first time I found that I was not alone in my beliefs, that other thinking adults questioned the mentality of progress and development that saw natural places and people's love for them as inconsequential.

As a teacher, I have also found that many students have shared my childhood experience of loving a natural place, losing it to development, and confronting a social attitude that grief over such things is childish and
must be outgrown. In a number of my courses, I have asked students to
describe a natural place which has held personal value for them. A
significant number wrote of fields or woods, usually stranded in the midst of
suburban development, which they sought out as refuges from the adult
world of civilization. Almost all of these narratives end with the
destruction of the natural place, usually for housing developments. These
essays, many of which are the most eloquent and touching pieces of writing I
see from these students, have suggested to me that a significant personal
relationship with a natural place is something many children — at least
those lucky enough to have the opportunity — experience. Even as college
students, they haven’t been completely convinced that their love for these
places was meaningless and immature. Even more significantly, some have
harbored regrets that they didn’t do more to try to save the places that they
loved; but they, like me, often felt helpless against a cultural value system
that seemingly left no functional place for love of nature. Of course, it is
important for these students, and for me, to understand that our own
houses and yards were created at the cost of other wild places and, if we look
back far enough, at the cost of removing, damaging, and even destroying
other cultures that depended on those places. However, such a realization
can inform rather than invalidate the value we place on nature wherever
we find it: wilderness areas, suburban yards, city parks.

Many writers and thinkers have formulated theories to explain why
Western culture so privileges the view of nature as a resource for humans
to use however they wish and how such a view can damage those who hold
it as well as the natural world. In *Reflections on Gender and Science*, Evelyn
Fox Keller explores the cultural processes by which the male subject in
particular adopts the scientific, objective ideals of autonomy, separation and distance from others (including nature), and she explains how a rigid dualism between self and other can inhibit experiences such as creativity and love. Theodore Roszak *(The Voice of the Earth)* and Paul Shepard *(Nature and Madness)* have discussed the aspects of Western culture that physically and psychically cut us off from the natural world, and propose that this alienation can cause deep psychic harm because of the basic, evolutionary role that nonhuman nature has played in the creation of the human subject. These writers and many others, as I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter 1, emphasize the dominance within Western culture of ideologies that separate humans from nature in order to justify human domination of the natural world.

For most members of Western culture who question such ideologies in childhood, the impetus to love and protect a natural place lives on into adulthood as a treasured memory, but the sense of their powerlessness against a cultural mandate that houses, roads, and malls take precedence over woods and fields leaves little room for them to build on this memory in their everyday lives. But for others, the need to speak out for nature against the onslaughts of culture grows until it is irrepressible. As Patrick Murphy suggests in "Prolegomenon for an Ecofeminist Dialogics," when the disjunction between experience and dominant ideologies results in "the individual undergoing, reflecting on, and articulating the differences between experiences in social reality and the natural world that do not square with the official ideology" (48), it can produce genuine resistance. How exciting it was for me to discover writers like Edward Abbey and Terry Tempest Williams, who enact such resistance in their texts not only by
proclaiming a fierce love for natural places that exceeds the bounds of "official ideology," but also by advocating the protection of such landscapes through words and actions. If only I had known Abbey had already been pulling up surveyor's stakes in Arches National Monument when my own childhood landscape was threatened, it might have widened my sense of possible responses to include some kind of protest, although no doubt a less extreme form.

As I will discuss in Chapter 1, the stance of explicit advocacy for the natural world that Abbey and Williams adopt can be found in American writers at least as far back as Thoreau, who began his essay "Walking" by proclaiming,

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, — to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than as a member of Society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister, and the school-committee, and every one of you will take care of that. (49)

While Thoreau's sense that American society values civilization above nature still holds true today, the number of writers who have felt compelled to take stances similar to his has steadily grown along with a cultural sense of urgency about the degradation of our natural environment.1 Like Thoreau, contemporary writers who present themselves as advocates of nature are concerned with dominant ideologies which they see as separating

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1 The increasing prevalence and cultural impact of advocates for the value and rights of nonhuman nature has been documented in Paul Brooks' Speaking for Nature: How Literary Naturalists from Henry Thoreau to Rachel Carson Have Shaped America and in Roderick Nash's The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics.
humans from nature and privileging them over it in a damaging way; these writers take on the goal of subverting such ideologies by "speaking" in defense of nonhuman nature and its inherent value and rights.\(^2\) The dominant ideologies that these writers work to challenge have often been identified with two key concepts: dualism and hierarchy. Dualism refers to the sense of humans as radically separate from nature, while hierarchy refers to the sense that humans are privileged over nature. As Val Plumwood explains in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, "Dualism is the process by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive" (31).

Plumwood goes on to explain why dualism is almost inevitably linked with hierarchy within Western culture:

> In dualism, the more highly valued side (males, humans) is construed as alien to and of a different nature or order of being from the 'lower', inferiorized side (women, nature) and each is treated as lacking in qualities which make possible overlap, kinship, or continuity. The nature of each is constructed in polarised ways by the exclusion of qualities shared with the other; the dominant side is taken as primary, the subordinated side is defined in relation to it . . . . the effect of dualism is, in

\(^2\)While a number of the writers whom I will characterize as taking this polemical stance of "speaking for nature" have also been described as "nature writers," I see an important difference between the broad category of nature writing and the more specific, though sometimes overlapping, category of the discourse of environmental advocacy. Nature writing has been broadly defined as a category of literary nonfiction that reflects some combination of the traditions of science, natural history, and personal narrative and interpretation (see Fritzell, Lyon, and Murray). In their focus on relationships between humans and the rest of nature, contemporary writers who adopt the stance of speaking for nature often draw on these same traditions, but they are further distinguished by their emphasis on the ethical implications of the relationships they see between humans and the rest of nature. In other words, they take overtly political stances that humans are interconnected with the rest of nature, that they are no more inherently valuable to the whole than any other part of nature, and that Western culture should adapt its values and practices to reflect such beliefs.
Rosemary Radford Ruether’s words, to "naturalize domination" (32).

As Plumwood suggests, for writers and thinkers concerned with human relationships to the nonhuman environment, ideologies of dualism and hierarchy are inextricably tied up with domination; she further suggests that these ideologies ground not just the human domination of nature, but also intra-human dominations such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual preference.

It is my sense of the extent to which such ideologies structure Western culture and subjectivity that motivates the pages that follow. In this dissertation, I will look at a number of recent texts of American literature or media that adopt the position of environmental advocacy. My concern is that, especially among environmentally concerned readers and viewers such as myself, written or visual texts that overtly speak for nature will be too readily accepted as admirable and effective. My intention is not to dissuade anyone from participating in the discourse of environmental advocacy; the natural world is surely in need of people who will represent its interests in the arenas of human culture. However, the dominant ideologies that lead humans to devalue and degrade nature, as well as other human beings, are such pervasive forces within our culture that even texts constructed with the most subversive motives cannot help but reflect their influence. Assuming that texts with subversive agendas are immune from the forces they seek to oppose only makes it more likely that they will be recontained by those very forces. As a consequence, I believe it is particularly important for the authors and readers/viewers of texts of environmental advocacy to question carefully the ideological import and
political effect of the ways those texts construct the human subject, the natural world, and the relationship(s) between them.

As many writers who take on the stance of advocacy for the natural world realize, employing the term "nature" at all is a tricky business, leaving even more room for interpretation than the use of most words. In her philosophical work, *What is Nature?*, Kate Soper points out that "nature" takes on several major meanings within Western culture. The first meaning she identifies is the metaphysical concept of nature as the nonhuman, as the "other"; as she puts it, this is "the concept through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity" (155). The second is the realist concept of nature as the greater whole which contains, engenders, and limits all things, including humans: "the structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world, that provide the objects of study of the natural sciences, and condition the possible forms of human intervention in biology or interaction in the environment" (Soper 155-56). It is important to realize that the metaphysical concept of nature can be — and often has been — employed in ways that place human interests above those of nature and sanction human abuse of the nonhuman; it is this dominant cultural use of the concept that most environmental advocates seek to discredit. These advocates instead stress the realist concept of nature in order to oppose or at least counterbalance dominant ideologies which elevate humans over nature and thus ignore human dependence on the structures, processes and powers Soper describes. However, as I will argue, it is also important to be aware of nature in a metaphysical sense that does not necessarily sanction human domination of nature, but rather merely suggests the ways in which humans are different
from other parts of nature. As Soper points out, the act of environmental advocacy implicitly depends on this idea of difference: "For insofar as the appeal is to humanity to alter its ways, it presupposed our possession of capacities by which we are singled out from other living creatures and inorganic matter" (40).

However, in practice, it is not always easy to distinguish humans from the rest of nature: the extent to which human beings and human culture have been affected by the nonhuman, and the growing extent to which the nonhuman has been affected by human activity, often render such distinctions almost meaningless. As a consequence, we often employ what Soper calls a lay or surface concept of nature based on "ordinarily observable features of the world" (156); while we cannot reasonably insist that human-created landscapes like the rural countryside represent pure nature in a metaphysical sense, and the realist concept of nature instructs us that everything is part of the greater whole, we can and do distinguish the countryside from urban landscapes that are even more the products of human culture. As Soper explains, the lay concept is frequently employed in environmental discourse: "This is the nature of immediate experience and aesthetic appreciation; the nature we have destroyed and polluted and are asked to conserve and preserve" (156).

It is inevitable that writers who speak for nature will employ all these concepts, and each can serve a useful purpose in illuminating different perspectives on the human relationship with the natural world. However, it is crucial for such writers — and their readers — to ask not only which of these definitions is being employed, but how and to what effect. As I have
discussed, a single concept such as the metaphysical notion of nature can be deployed in very different ways.

In my first chapter, I contextualize the contemporary practice of environmental advocacy by describing some of the more predominant theories about how nature has been defined and constructed at different points in the history of Western culture. These theories hold that the ideologies of dualism and hierarchy have dominated the Western worldview, although they have mediated the human-nature relationship in different ways at different times and places. However, scholars concerned with environmental history and philosophy also find other traditions within Western culture that have, to greater and lesser degrees, challenged those dominant ideologies. And, while the texts I discuss in the rest of the dissertation explicitly oppose the dominant tradition, they are in the tradition of these alternative ways of thinking.

In my second chapter, I draw on and adapt feminist discussions of the ethics and politics of women speaking for other women (especially others of a different ethnicity, race, class, or sexual orientation) as a basis for my exploration of works of environmental advocacy, in which humans speak for the "other" of all human culture: nature. Like feminists who seek to act as advocates for less privileged women, humans who position themselves as advocates for the natural world often subtly reinforce the ideologies of dominance that they seek to transform.

In my third chapter, I take up authors who focus so completely on the connections between certain traditionally oppressed groups of humans and nature that they deny the differences that do exist. I explore such an erasure of difference between women and nature in the works of ecofeminist writers.
including Susan Griffin and Yrestra King and between Native Americans and nature in the works of non-native writers who point to native cultures as models of ecological responsibility. Such texts tend to elevate the group of people linked with nature over other people, who are represented as estranged from nature. In this way, these texts maintain the ideologies of dualism and hierarchy they otherwise work to challenge, ultimately erasing any complicity women or Native Americans might have in environmental degradation. In addition, such a failure to recognize the important differences between any human and nonhuman nature can result in a misrepresentation of the needs of the natural environment. However, building on the work of poststructuralist feminists Teresa de Lauretis and Donna Haraway, I also discuss other texts which more successfully challenge dominant ideologies: Alice Walker and Dian Fossey offer representations of humans consciously identifying with animals while also taking responsibility for the suffering and destruction that human cultures inflict on animals and their habitats; Ursula Le Guin and Terry Tempest Williams foreground the constructed and constantly shifting nature of human self and nonhuman nature, acknowledging the connections between the two without ignoring the differences.

My fourth chapter focuses on other authors who speak for nature and see humans as part of the natural world, but who nevertheless are quite aware of the differences between humans and the rest of nature and of the responsibilities implied by such differences. However, they so take for granted their privilege in being able discursively to construct themselves and nature that they neglect to adequately question the dualistic and hierarchical assumptions underlying that privilege. I explore such a stance
in the work of wilderness advocate Dave Foreman, who presents himself as an "ecowarrior": the speaking, active, human defender of a silent, passive natural world. By not acknowledging the way this stance maintains a rigid human/nature dualism, he perpetuates and even strengthens the split. I also discuss Edward Abbey, a wilderness advocate whose works have deeply influenced Foreman; while Abbey is keenly aware of the need to try to listen to and learn from nature, his recurring sense of the impossibility of doing so can foster a counterproductive sense of humans as inevitably cut off from the natural world. Building on theoretical work by Donna Haraway and Patrick Murphy, I turn to texts by Gary Snyder, Wes Jackson, and James Lovelock that suggest that we need not see nonhuman nature as silent, passive, or inaccessible; rather, we can reconstruct our conceptions of how humans and nature interact in ways that allow us to listen to or read the sign systems of the natural world, and thus learn from it in order to forge a more sustainable relationship with the rest of nature.

In my fifth chapter, I examine works that represent the natural world visually as well as verbally and, in doing so, tend to deny the partial and constructed nature of those representations. They frequently erase differences within the natural world, leading to generalizations and misrepresentations of nonhuman nature and its interests, and often leave no place for humans within the perceptions of nature that they create. For example, the print advertisements of the nuclear power industry totalize the "needs" of the natural world by focusing on one aspect (the atmosphere, which is not polluted by nuclear energy) while ignoring others (the soil and groundwater, which are polluted by nuclear waste). In addition, television documentaries such as Wild America and Nature often create the
perception that they provide an unmediated, unconstructed view of the natural world. This sense that we can see the natural other without constructing it denies our biological and perceptual interconnectedness with the natural world. When media instead foreground a sense that the view of nature they present is constructed, partial, and temporary, they allow us to imagine a multiplicity of ways humans can relate to nonhuman nature beyond domination or alienation.

Thus, I not only identify ways in which texts of environmental advocacy reinforce dominant ideologies but also point to aspects of such texts which hold more potential for transforming representations of humans and nature that sanction destructive attitudes and behavior. My goal in doing so is to formulate a suggestive, rather than prescriptive, way of reading and writing which will not only enrich literary and cultural studies but which will also make a positive and practical contribution to the ongoing struggle to alter the human relationship with the rest of nature by reconceiving it in our discourse.
CHAPTER ONE

THE CULTURAL TRADITION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

In the brief history that he provides at the beginning of *This Incomperable Land: A Book of American Nature Writing*, Thomas Lyon explains that:

> The great traditions of Western civilization that stand behind our history . . . are traditions of a powerfully dualistic cast, both philosophically and psychologically, tending to enforce the separation of mind from matter, self from surroundings, and man from nature. (17)

He goes on to explain that this atomistic sense of individual identity and of humanity itself has led our culture to view nature primarily in terms of natural resources, fostering the assumption that it exists solely for our use. Almost all cultural and literary critics who have contemplated the current environmental crisis have expressed some version of this critique, tracing our current state of affairs to greater or lesser degrees to the dominant ideologies within Western culture that see humans as radically separate from and superior to nonhuman nature. It is in opposition to precisely these ideologies that the contemporary discourse of environmental advocacy positions itself, and in this chapter, I will briefly map some of the most prominent theories about the various concepts, metaphors, and
practices that have contributed to this destructive mindset at different points in Western history.

However, it is also important to see that attitudes toward nature in our culture have neither remained statically destructive nor devolved steadily from an Edenic state of harmony to our current state of crisis. Just as there are strands within the discourse of environmental advocacy that may work against its primary purpose, as I will argue in the chapters to come, there has also been a significant alternative tradition working within and against the attitudes of separation and domination that have reigned in Western culture. In addition, other concepts have served to enforce dominant ideologies at certain times and places but have been interpreted in ways that tempered those ideologies at others. In this chapter, I will also discuss some of the most prominent instances of this alternative tradition in order to show that contemporary American writers who "speak for nature" are not only working against dominant cultural ideologies but also simultaneously taking their place in a cultural tradition of doing so.

Many writers have attempted to label and characterize the strands of thought about human relations to nature that weave through the history of Western culture. In The Machine in the Garden, Leo Marx proposes that American history reveals an ongoing tension between a cultural desire for a simple life close to nature and an attraction to technology and the ways it can be used to transform and master nature. This basic opposition — domination of nature versus unity or harmony with nature — holds true in most treatments of the history of human relationships with the natural environment. However, unlike Marx, who emphasizes the use of machines to dominate nature, other writers link the dominant ideology with the
conception of nature as a machine or mechanism that can and should be controlled by human efforts (specifically, by science and technology); Donald Worster, in *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, labels this latter concept the imperial tradition. For Worster, this line of thought has historically been opposed to the arcadian tradition, which places humans in a more modest position within an interdependent and harmonious nature. Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature* sees the idea of nature as mechanism as not only opposing but historically supplanting the more harmonious view, which she characterizes as one of nature as organism. She is not alone in noting the ways in which nature has been increasingly denied a sense of life and spirit in our culture; this is the primary concern of Morris Berman, who uses the term "enchanted" in *The Reenchantment of the World* to evoke the sense in which humans once saw themselves as fully participating in an "enchanted," living natural world. As both Berman and Merchant point out, by rendering nature as "dead" or "disenchanted," humans have separated themselves from it and from ethical relations to it.

For writers who see human relations with nature as progressively worsening over time, there is invariably a period which is viewed as a golden age of harmony with the natural world. Max Oelschlaeger and Paul Shepard place this period back as far as the Paleolithic era when humans lived in hunter-gatherer cultures. As Oelschlaeger has pointed out in *The Idea of Wilderness*, for such people, the idea of wilderness or nature must have been non-existent, for their lives were so intimately bound up with nonhuman nature that the idea of its separateness would have been inconceivable. For writers like Oelschlaeger, Shepard, and Wes Jackson who see hunter-gatherer cultures as possessing an ideal relationship with nature,
the "fall" from this Edenic oneness occurred with the Neolithic agricultural revolution; by learning to manipulate nature, humans inevitably began to see themselves as, to some degree, separate from it.

Because Greek and Roman societies of classical times have so profoundly influenced Western culture, it is important to ask what sort of attitudes they held toward nature and how those attitudes may have helped to shape subsequent thought and practice in Europe and, later, the United States. As Clarence Glacken points out in *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, classical attitudes toward nature varied greatly through history and few studies have explored them in depth. For Berman, though, the period between Homer and Plato is notable for the disappearance of a sense of unity with the natural world. He points out that the *Iliad* includes no words that refer to internal states of mind; instead, the individual is represented as being immersed in a world that he learns about through emotional identification. Socrates and Plato, on the other hand, were opposed to instinct in favor of rational knowledge, and Berman attributes to Plato "the canonization of the subject/object distinction in the West."

Berman, along with John Passmore, actually sees the roots of the rationalism and empiricism of Descartes and Bacon in classical thought, pointing to Plato's focus on unaided reason as the route to knowledge and Aristotle's reliance on gathering information from the outside world; both forms of knowledge suppose a separation between subject and object and assume that the knowledge will be used to gain control of nature. Glacken points out that the Greeks did use their knowledge and "science" to transform nature and refers to Wolfgang Helbig's argument that the alienation of humans from nature occurred with the rise of the great
Hellenistic cities. The pastoral mode, commonly traced to Virgil, can be interpreted as an expression of this alienation: it clearly distinguishes between the rural countryside and the city, and holds up the pastoral life, close to nature, as a welcome respite from and critique of city life.

However, environmental historians have noted that not all aspects of classical thought necessarily reflected or produced an alienated relationship with nature. Glacken himself sees two more positive attitudes as predominating. The first, which he associates with Plato and Aristotle, revolves around a sense that the world has been designed for human benefit, that there is a meaning and plan to human life and to the earth. This view found expression in arguments regarding the unity and harmony of the cosmos and in the artisan analogy developed in Plato’s Timaeus, which held that the earth as a work of creation is like the art of an artisan. While Aristotle did not attribute creation to an artisan, he similarly stressed the fitness of earth as an environment for humans and other forms of life in his contention that nature does nothing in vain. Although this view did sanction the use and transformation of nature by humans, it also conceived of the world as a unified, ordered whole in which humans occupied a limited, interdependent place. The second view that Glacken explores gave more precedence to the power of the natural environment, stressing the ways that it could influence humans and human culture; according to Glacken, there is some evidence that the Greeks ascribed certain characteristics of their civilization to climate and temperature. A more significant theory of environmental influence is the concept found in Hippocrates (and lasting into the eighteenth century) that human health is
governed by humors, which in turn could be affected by environmental conditions.

While classical cultures have been implicated in the deterioration of the human-nature relationship by a few writers, far more have condemned Christianity and the entire Judeo-Christian tradition for setting humans apart from the rest of the earth in a very damaging way. Perhaps the most well-known of these critiques is Lynn White, Jr.'s article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," in which he flatly states that "We shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christians axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man" (1207). This axiom is commonly traced to Genesis, in which God gives Adam dominion over the rest of the earth. The Biblical story of the Fall also holds implications for human relationships with nature: the human difficulties in eking an existence from the earth as a result of the fall could be interpreted as establishing nature as a force hostile to humanity that must be subdued for humans to survive. As Berman points out, the Old Testament as a whole can also be read as a record of the triumph of the Judeo-Christian God over the "pagan" gods often associated with nature; in other words, it is the story of the loss of a cultural sense that divinity is immanent in nature.

However, Judeo-Christian beliefs need not be interpreted as exclusively hostile to nature. In his 1864 work Man and Nature, George Perkins Marsh argues that God's charge to humanity in Genesis was not to exploit the earth wastefully and carelessly, but rather to use it and care for it as stewards of God. In fact, there are passages throughout the Bible (especially in the book of Job) that instruct humans to treat the earth with respect and to learn from it. Writers like Nash and Devall and Sessions also
point to Francis of Assisi as a well-known Christian figure who adopted an attitude of humility and brotherhood toward the natural world.

Another Christian concept that could be interpreted in several ways is the Great Chain of Being — growing out of Aristotle's concept of a ladder of nature stretching from the material to the spiritual — as well as the related "argument from design."¹ As Kate Soper, Carolyn Merchant, and others have noted, the idea of the Chain placed humans midway between nature and the divine in a hierarchical order. While this sense of hierarchy no doubt encouraged human domination of nature, it also positioned humans as part of a greater whole that included the natural world. In doing so, it created a sense that humans were not opposed to or separable from nature, but rather different from it in degree rather than kind. As J.J. Clarke points out, conceiving of nature, humanity, and the divine as a continuum in this manner contributed to a sense that nature's design or signs could be read to reveal the nature and purposes of God. This theory, similar to classical notions of the ideally designed universe, is evident in the argument of theologians ranging from Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries to Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth that the existence of God can be ascertained through the order of the natural world, which is too perfect to have come about by mere chance. Like the Great Chain, the argument from design placed nature at the bottom of a hierarchy, valuable merely as a route to understanding the divine rather than for itself. However, it also placed the natural in an intimate, significant relationship with the human and the divine, a relationship that did not inherently deny life or spirit to the natural world.

¹See Lovejoy for an extensive discussion of the Great Chain of Being.
According to Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature*, this view of the world as strictly ordered was primarily interpreted in a way that was positive for human-nature relationships throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. As she explains, "the root metaphor binding together the self, society, and the cosmos was that of organism. As a projection of the way people experienced daily life, organismic theory emphasized interdependence among the parts of the human body, subordination of the individual to communal purposes in family, community, and state, and vital life permeating the cosmos to the lowliest stone" (1). Berman and Soper also stress the ideas of "plenitude, diversity and organic interconnection" (Soper 25) that placed humans in a reciprocal relationship with an animate natural world at this time. For Merchant, this worldview expressed itself in the image of the earth as a nurturing mother, an image that functioned to restrain destructive human behavior toward nature.

These views persisted into the Renaissance, although sometimes with different foundations; as J.J. Clarke points out, the ideas of Aristotle fell out of favor, but the Great Chain of Being remained an influential concept and was supported instead by Platonic and neoPlatonic thought. The idea that nature consisted of signs that held relationships to a spiritual plane persisted, too, and one of its manifestations was in Renaissance occult philosophy and alchemy. As Berman explains, this school of thought was based on the idea of resemblance: the idea that the world of humans, plants, and animals mirrored the heavens. Magic and alchemy took advantage of these resemblances in a way that could be interpreted, as it has been by William Leiss, as undiluted mastery and dominance over nature for human purposes. But, as Berman points out, "Magic was at once spiritual and
Each of the occult sciences, including alchemy, astrology, and the cabala, aimed at both the acquisition of practical, mundane objectives, and union with the Divinity. There was always a tension between these two goals" (96).

Most chroniclers of Western attitudes toward nature agree that a significant shift in thinking began in the Renaissance and then flowered during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the periods associated with the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the rise of a money-based economic system.² This shift can generally be described as a movement from an animistic image of the world as organism to a mechanistic view. As Kate Soper explains:

This cosmological shift, in which a concept of nature as 'ensouled' organism is supplanted by a conception of it as inorganic, fundamentally mathematical and hence objectively quantifiable, has its correlate in the philosophical dualism of Descartes, which opposed God (the Architect and Prime Mover of the 'machine') to Nature (the 'clockwork' set in motion), and mind or soul (as the essence of humanity) to the body or inanimate matter of the rest of existence. (43)

Morris Berman emphasizes the way in which such a shift took a sense of purpose away from nonhuman nature, leaving it as passive matter acted upon from the outside; all that was left as part of nature itself was behavior and data that could be described in a quantitative way. What Glacken sees as significant in this shift is the way a holistic worldview was replaced by an atomistic one:

In the mechanical, the actions of the individual parts of a whole are explained by known laws, the whole being the sum of the parts and their interaction. In the organic, the whole

²See Berman, Evernden (Social Creation), Glacken, Leiss, Merchant, Soper and Worster.
exists first, perhaps in the mind of an artisan, before the parts; the design of the whole explains the actions and reactions of the parts. (378)

While a sense of a deity was retained as the creator of the mechanism of nature and the originator of its motion, in the Enlightenment the focus moved away from God and toward the human; ultimately, human power and purposes — the mastery of nature through science, the manipulation and commodification of nature for commerce — took precedence.

Along with Christianity, Descartes's seventeenth-century philosophy of dualism and rationalism is one of the two most cited sources of the current state of relations between Western culture and nonhuman nature. He is most infamous for his proposition of a radical dualism between mind and matter, thus denying mind, spirit or soul to nonhuman nature, effectively turning animals into automata, and instituting a profound sense of distance between subject and object. By denying mind or spirit to anything except for humans, Descartes gave philosophical support to the kind of scientific experimentation that would grow out of the ideas of Francis Bacon, another influential figure of the seventeenth century. Bacon proclaimed that humans had immeasurable potential for understanding and controlling nature, and he characterized the relationship between science and nature as one in which nature would be forced to give up her secrets through experimentation. Significantly, the philosophy of Descartes made it ethically unproblematic to do so.

Ironically, Descartes' views can be seen as opposed in many ways to those of Bacon, whose empiricism stressed the observation of the material world as much as Descartes' rationalism privileged the intellect. However, as Berman points out,
The fundamental discovery of the Scientific Revolution... was that there was no real clash between rationalism and empiricism. The former says that the laws of thought conform to the laws of things; the latter says, always check your thought against the data so that you know what thoughts to think. (28)

As he puts it, "Bacon's goal, of course, was realized by Descartes' means" (29). He goes on to explain that the scientific work of Galileo and Newton demonstrated a synthesis of reason and empiricism; while Newton actually attacked many of Descartes' specific propositions about the natural world in his Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy (1686), "the central Cartesian outlook — that the world is a vast machine of matter and motion obeying mathematical laws — was thoroughly validated by Newton's work" (42). As Merchant points out, the change in worldview that accompanied the Scientific Revolution also manifested itself through images of nature; rather than emphasizing the harmonious aspects of nature with images like the nurturing mother, people were more likely to see it as wild, threatening, and in need of human control.

In religious circles, interpretations of Christian doctrine also came more and more to reflect the idea of nature as resource to be managed and exploited by humans. As Keith Thomas explains in Man and the Natural World, the concept of the Great Chain of Being in particular came to be used to support human separation from and dominance over the natural world. A prominent exception to this trend, however, was John Ray's 1691 The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation. In this version of the argument from design, Ray explicitly conveyed the notions that the things of the world were not created solely for the use of humankind and
that the study of nature should widen humans' sense of ethical responsibility.

Linnaeus, the eighteenth century Swedish botanist best known for his influential system of plant classification, is an interesting figure in the history of Enlightenment views of nature. Some critics of the human relationship with nature see him as a positive figure who helped his culture to better understand the relationships within nature; Passmore, for instance, links him with Ray in opposition to the views of Descartes and Bacon. However, for Donald Worster, Linnaeus was one of the prime architects of what he calls the "imperial tradition"; he viewed Linnaeus' work as a perfect example of the exercise of reason in order to establish human dominion over nature. For Worster, the view epitomized by Linnaeus is in opposition to the arcadian stance of peaceful coexistence with nature represented by Gilbert White, an English parson who wrote the 1789 work *A Natural History of Selborne*.

As I have discussed, the dominant shift in European thinking about nature from a holistic and animistic worldview to a mechanistic one is most often associated with the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment philosophy of the time; however, it was also, as I have mentioned, concomitant with the rise of a money-based economy, a transition Berman has called the "commercial revolution." An important aspect of this revolution was the imperial conquest by European powers of other lands. The "discovery" and colonization of North America beginning during the Renaissance held particular significance for British and, later, American thinking about nature. As Kate Soper argues, the experience of encountering new, "wild" landscapes and "uncivilized" native peoples
resulted in a sharpening of the distinction of the distance between civilized cultures on the one hand and uncivilized humanity and nature on the other. Clarence Glacken makes the similar point that it was in their impacts on these relatively untouched landscapes that Europeans could finally see and understand the extent of their power to transform nature.

More specifically, the dominant view of Europeans coming to America reflected the emphasis on acquiring and trading material goods that initially spurred Columbus' voyage to North America and most of the European incursions that followed. In The Rediscovery of North America, Barry Lopez has traced current attitudes that see nature only in terms of material wealth back to this view, emphasizing the ways in which the Europeans' relationship with the native people and the landscape of North America was dominated by greed; their view of wealth, he explains, was very limited, encompassing gold and slaves but not the wisdom of native cultures or the beauty and diversity of the natural environments they encountered. While most, if not all, scholars of the history of human-nature relationships would agree with Lopez, even Lopez himself acknowledges that there were exceptions — exceptions that can inspire us to begin again and behave differently. Gary Snyder describes one such exception in The Practice of the Wild: Alvar Núñez, who immersed himself in the native cultures and wild landscapes of the New World, gaining "a compassionate heart, a taste for self-sufficiency and simplicity, and a knack for healing" (13). And even Columbus, who appears so unfavorably in The Rediscovery of North America, had moments when he did notice the beauty and non-material sorts of wealth the "new world" had to offer; as Thomas Lyon notes, Columbus' journal for October 15, 1492 reads
"These islands are very green and fertile and the breezes are very soft, and it is possible that there are in them many things, of which I do not know, because I did not wish to delay in finding gold, by discovering and going about many islands." Of course, as the entry suggests, the desire for wealth won in the end for Columbus, as it did for most of the Europeans who followed him.

As Leo Marx, Roderick Nash and Annette Kolodny discuss, British colonists in particular had very high expectations for the New World. The pastoral tradition still ran deep in their culture, and reports of the bounties of nature available in America led them to believe that this was a place where the pastoral myth could literally come true. While in *The Lay of the Land*, Kolodny shows the tenacious hold such a belief had on many colonists, even in the face of severe cold and hunger, as a whole they were bitterly disappointed. The landscape of the New World did boast an incredible bounty of natural resources; however, the colonists could not obtain them without a struggle, both against nature itself and the native people who lived there. For Marx, this paradox generated the tension between Americans' attractions to the "garden" and the "machine" that persists to this day. For Kolodny, a psychic rift grew out of the fact that the (male) colonists' experiences confronted them with two incompatible yet inseparable feminized images of nature: the nurturing mother who promised safety and satisfaction and the virgin land that they must tame and possess. Ironically, in order to realize the pastoral dream of bounty, they had to conquer and—in some of their eyes—defile the feminized landscape. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Nash finds the root of colonists' divided attitudes toward the natural world in the Old Testament opposition
between paradise and wilderness, which was viewed as chaotic and evil. Expecting paradise, they experienced instead difficult lives in a wilderness landscape unlike any they had ever encountered, and their predominant reaction was hostility and a religious and utilitarian mission to transform the wild into the civilized and ordered. Exceptions did occur; for example, Jonathon Edwards, participating in a Puritan resurgence in the early eighteenth century, sometimes saw wilderness as a place for renewal and salvation rather than as the abode of Satan.

However, the dominant antipathy to wilderness in the United States persisted into the nineteenth century despite the dying away of strong Puritan beliefs; the mandate for transforming wilderness became progress and profit rather than the destruction of evil. As William Cronon points out in *Changes in the Land*, his study of the ways that colonization changed the New England landscape, one of the primary ways that the colonists' attitude toward nature differed from that of the native inhabitants of the region was in their view of the land solely as a commodity. And this new attitude produced profound changes in the natural environment itself; the wilderness and the species that depended on it were so radically transformed that by 1718 a three-year moratorium on deer hunting had to be instituted in Massachusetts to allow the species to adequately reproduce itself.

As Marx in particular points out, the Edenic or pastoral ideal was viewed as more readily achievable in the southern areas of what is now the United States. He refers to the eighteenth-century agrarianism of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* as an example of the belief that humans could coexist with nature in harmony, manipulating but not destroying the bounty and beauty of the natural world. Jefferson, along with Crevecoeur
(Letters from an American Farmer) did express an optimism that human use of nature could be balanced with respect for the land and for the salutary effect it could have on the character of the American who worked it. The possibility that the efforts of earlier colonists who transformed the wilderness could have paved the way for later inhabitants to envision nature in a more favorable light is acknowledged in particular by Carolyn Merchant in Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England; she sees a softening of the need to dominate nature and a desire to see the land as a living, growing organism in eighteenth century New England and attributes it directly to the success that seventeenth-century residents had had in subjugating the land. However, this change in attitude, along with Jeffersonian agrarianism, were to quickly fade away in the face of the incredible industrialization and "development" that took place on the North American continent in the nineteenth century.

At the same time that scientific, philosophical and religious thought were sanctioning the domination of nature in Europe and America, aesthetic theory was turning to nature with a renewed interest. In fact, the distance created by technology and commerce helped to make it possible to aestheticize the landscape. These aesthetic theories are commonly traced to Edmund Burke's 1757 Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful and Immanuel Kant's 1763 Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime. As Malcolm Andrews explains in The Search for the Picturesque, Burke theorized that the two strongest human instincts are self-preservation and the social impulse. The two

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3See Monk for a thorough treatment of the sublime. It is also discussed in Andrews, Novak, and Soper.
aesthetic modes he discusses — the sublime and the beautiful — stem from these instincts; experiences which produce terror (because they seem to pose a threat to self-preservation) are the source of the sublime, and they are more intense than experiences of the beautiful, which evoke the social impulse. These concepts are a significant break from Enlightenment thought because they are based not on intellectual judgements but rather on irrational, emotional reactions. The idea of the sublime in particular also breaks away from ideals of nature as an ordered, mechanistic system by emphasizing the wild aspects of the natural world and suggesting that vast, chaotic scenery could please — through intense emotions of awe and terror — as well as, if not better than, ordered landscapes. As Barbara Novak and William Cronon ("The Trouble with Wilderness") point out, theories of the sublime also link the observer's reaction of terror and awe to the intimations of infinity (and the divine) produced by landscapes such as towering mountains or gaping chasms.

While the aesthetic of the sublime values what is more "natural" and wild over what is more ordered and civilized, the focus on the human reaction to sublimity suggests that this concept was, in some ways, as utilitarian as the ideas of the seventeenth-century scientists. Even more significantly, as Kate Soper points out,

it is only, we may say, a culture that has commenced, in some sense, to experience its alienation from nature as the negative consequence of its industrial achievement that will be inclined to 'return' to the wilderness or to aestheticize its terrors as a form of foreboding against further encroachment on its territory. (227)

The concept of the picturesque — applied to landscapes, landscape paintings, and tourism — arose in the late eighteenth century, most
famously in the writings of William Gilpin and Sir Uvedale Price. Initially, it was quite intertwined with the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful; Gilpin refers to picturesque sublimity and picturesque beauty. The added element was human design: Gilpin once simply defined the picturesque as "that kind of beauty that would look well in a picture." For Gilpin, the smoothness and neatness that made real objects beautiful did not produce the same effect in a painting; instead, roughness, irregularity, and intricacy were pleasing. Picturesque paintings and landscapes came to be strongly associated with ruins, in which roughness and variety had replaced regularity. Price was dissatisfied with some aspects of Gilpin's theories and, in particular, wanted to distinguish the picturesque from the sublime and the beautiful and also wanted to ensure that it was not conceptually limited to the art of painting. His taste in subjects moved from ruins to more humble, rural figures, such as hovels, ragged flocks of sheep, gypsies, and beggars, anticipating the primitivism of the Romantics. The value the picturesque placed upon natural landscapes, the processes of nature that produce ruins, and less "civilized" settings and segments of society could be interpreted as a positive epoch in the history of human attitudes toward nature. However, as Malcolm Andrews explains in *The Search for the Picturesque*, the standards of the picturesque aesthetic were so exacting that, ironically, landscapes often had to be "improved" in paintings or in reality to meet them. Of course, the pastoral or arcadian ideal had always promoted a positive, harmonious human interaction with nature, so the idea of humans changing or using the landscape was not necessarily a damaging one. However, aestheticizing the landscape to the extent that an observer could criticize a waterfall for falling incorrectly, as Andrews reports Gilpin
did, suggests that picturesque theory and tourism may have done as much to alienate people from nature as to bring them into a closer understanding and appreciation of it.

Romanticism in Britain grew up in tandem with these aesthetic theories in the late eighteenth century and has been widely interpreted as a reaction to the utilitarian Enlightenment view of a mechanistic, lifeless nature functioning solely as a resource for human culture. As Kate Soper has explained, Enlightenment philosophy sees "culture as offering an essential corrective to 'nature', or providing the milieu in which alone it acquires any definitively human form," while Romanticism promoted the opposing attitude of "nature as releasing us from the repressions or deformations of culture and as itself a source of wisdom and moral guidance" (28-29). For Romantics such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, not only did the Enlightenment view of nature fail to account for the life and spirit they saw in the natural world, but also, with its narrow focus on rationality, it ignored the powers of the human imagination. Like theories of sublime and beautiful, Romanticism valued emotion over rationality; like the picturesque, Romanticism focused on the wild and primitive rather than the ordered and civilized. However, the Romantic attitude also tended to see humans and nature in a holistic, interconnected relationship and to find a pantheistic life force and even divinity in nature, and these concepts hearkened back to pre-Enlightenment views.

As critics such as Jonathon Bate and Karl Kroeber have discussed, the Romantic movement in Britain can be seen as promoting very positive relationships between humans and the natural world. For Neil Evernden in *The Social Construction of Nature*, the Romantic emphasis on personal
emotional and imaginative experiences with nature that lead to an understanding of the interconnected processes and rhythms that bind the natural world (including humans, to some degree) together offered (and still offers) a way of thinking that could break what he calls the Cartesian roadblock in the human-nature relationship. It is important to note, though, as James Applewhite stresses in *Seas and Inland Journeys*, that the Romantic experience of oneness with nature often served the ultimate purpose of a greater insight into the self rather than a greater appreciation or understanding of nonhuman nature. Nevertheless, what Lawrence Buell has called simply "European Romanticism's canonization of nature" exerted a wide influence on future thinkers and writers, if not on British culture at large, and offered a strong alternative tradition to Enlightenment thought on nature.

One of the cultures to exhibit the influence of British aesthetics and Romantic philosophy was, of course, the United States. However, the physical and political characteristics of the country transformed these ideas to some degree. One of the most influential factors was the American wilderness, along with a nationalistic desire in the late eighteenth century to celebrate the wilderness as one feature that distinguished America from its British antecedents. The wilderness landscape lent itself especially well to the aesthetic of the sublime, which can be recognized in a variety of American art forms, from William Bartram's 1791 *Travels*, an natural history/travel account of what is now the American South, to the paintings of Hudson River School artists such as Thomas Cole and John Durand. As William Cronon has pointed out in "The Trouble with Wilderness," the antipathy that the early Puritan settlers felt toward the wilderness as the
abode of Satan persisted into the eighteenth century in the sense that wilderness continued to be associated with the supernatural. However, the influence of the doctrine of the sublime helped transform the sense of the supernatural beneath the surface of nature from negative to positive: the mountains, waterfalls, and chasms of the American wilderness came to be viewed as routes to experiencing the awesome power of the divine, whether interpreted as the Christian God or as a more Romantic, pantheistic divinity.

As Cronon emphasizes, though, "even as it came to embody the awesome power of the sublime, wilderness was also being tamed—not just by those who were building settlements in its midst but also by those who most celebrated its inhuman beauty" (75). By the early nineteenth century, it was possible for the first time to travel widely (at least in certain areas) without coming into contact with a wilderness area. The first half of the century saw steam navigation established on the Great Lakes, significant expansion of railroad networks, and other technological and commercial growth that would, by the end of the century, transform what had been in 1776 a mostly agrarian seaboard nation to an industrial power that stretched across the continent.

It was during this century that the American myth of the frontier flourished. Cronon sees this myth as building not only on the sublime's sacralization of wilderness, but also as adapting the Romantic attraction to primitivism: "the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living" (76). In frontier mythology, people from the settled east and European countries made such a return on the frontier: when they came into contact with untamed nature, or wilderness, they were able to free themselves of
the ills of civilization and tap into the essential, primitive part of themselves, thus reinfusing "themselves with a vigor, an independence, and a creativity that were the source of American democracy and national character" (Cronon 76). As Cronon suggests, this meant that wilderness became not just a place to encounter the divine, but also the source of national identity.

This sense of the cultural meaning of the frontier was addressed in detail for the first time by Frederick Jackson Turner in an essay entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," written, ironically, to assert the closing of the frontier in 1893. The paradox of the frontier was that, in order to fulfill the cultural function Turner and others ascribed to it, wilderness had to be conquered and thus the frontier had to move ever westward — leading to its disappearance, at least by Turner's reckoning, by the end of the nineteenth century. The writings of nineteenth-century America are filled with examples of conflicted feelings about the frontier and the fact that the wilderness that brought out such admirable qualities in the settlers must be gradually destroyed in order to do so. In his Leatherstocking Tales, the early-to-mid nineteenth century writer James Fenimore Cooper imaginatively recreated the frontier wilderness of the eighteenth century, emphasizing a sense of the aesthetic and ethical value of wilderness and the nobility of the Native Americans who inhabited it while simultaneously intimating that civilization's destruction of the wilderness and those who live in it was, though tragic, inevitable.

Another nineteenth century American figure who mourned the passing of the wilderness was Thoreau, who felt that the wilderness he found in the quickly vanishing wilderness areas of New England was an essential
complement to civilization: as he put it in "Walking," "in Wildness is the preservation of the world" (61). While many critics have made the argument that Thoreau is a pivotal figure in the history of Western relationships with nature, Lawrence Buell has most firmly established this idea in The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture. Outside of environmental criticism, Thoreau is widely associated with the Transcendentalist, Romantic view of nature; best represented by Emerson, this view conceives of the individual's experiences alone in nature as a route to transcend the material in search of higher spiritual enlightenment and experience. As Donald Worster has pointed out in Nature's Economy, viewing nature as a resource for the human imagination in this way may be less damaging than viewing it as purely a material resource, but it still maintains a sense that nature is separate from and subordinate to humankind.

As Buell has painstakingly detailed, however, Thoreau's career and writings reveal that he had a much richer and more varied relationship with the natural world than the label "transcendentalist" suggests. In fact, Buell and many other critics interested in the environmental implications of literary works see in Thoreau the first major articulation of a biocentric philosophy which counters the traditional Western human-centered, or anthropocentric, view of nature with a holistic, egalitarian sense that humans are part of nature and are no more important than any other part of it.\(^4\) Buell makes sense of the potentially conflicting aspects of Thoreau's attitudes toward the natural world by tracing a pattern in which Thoreau

\(^4\)See, for example, Brooks, Nash (Rights of Nature and Wilderness), Oelschlaeger, and Worster (Nature's Economy).
moved from viewing wild nature as site for recreation to experiencing it as
the place where he felt most at home, and then to making use of it, both as
an amateur botanist and as a writer in the Emersonian tradition of finding
in nature a spiritually coherent system of signs that can lead to
transcendence. While Buell acknowledges that aspects of Thoreau's works
simply reinforced dominant nineteenth-century norms that idealized wild
nature while simultaneously sanctioning its destruction, he argues that
Thoreau's writings and life were also genuinely radical in that they
proposed a "return to nature" as a lived experience, both through his self-
conscious attempt to do so chronicled in Walden and through the sense of
intimacy with his natural environment that is evident in almost all his
works. Even more radical was his holistic view of nature as a vast network
of relationships and his sense of the equality among all living things —
including humans — implied by such relationships.

Significantly, Thoreau's attitude toward nature evolved into a proto-
environmentalist politics in the face of the disappearance of the wild places
he loved. As Buell explains, his search for "secluded pockets of wildness
that he could savor as unappreciated, unfrequented jewels of the Concord
region" led him "to a self-conscious politics of environmentalism: a defense
of nature against the human invader" (Buell 135). This political aspect of
Thoreau's relationship to nature is most evident in his later writings, such
as the essay "Walking" in which he announces that "I wish to speak a word
for nature" (49).\(^5\) It is due to statements like these that Paul Brooks begins
Speaking for Nature, his survey of the cultural and political impacts of

\(^5\) Thoreau delivered "Walking" as a public lecture in 1851 and on several subsequent
occasions, so its origins are contemporaneous with the 1854 Walden; however, as Oelschlaeger
explains in The Idea of Wilderness, he also revised it in the years before he died in 1862.
"literary naturalists" who have positioned themselves as environmental advocates, with Thoreau.

In many ways, Thoreau's holistic, biocentric view of humanity's relationship to nature was confirmed by Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859. Darwin's theory of evolution left no room for any ideas that humans had been specially created or were separate from the rest of nature. They were subject to the same natural forces as other living things. However, the more popular interpretations of Darwin seized upon the idea of the survival of the fittest as a justification for the human domination of the natural environment. This justification of domination was even applied to the subjugation of certain groups of people within Western culture by the movement known as Social Darwinism. In addition to ignoring the aspects of Darwin's ideas that emphasized the unity and continuity of all life, most people also remained unaware of the even more radical ideas expressed in his 1871 *Descent of Man*. As Roderick Nash explains in *The Rights of Nature*, in this work Darwin proposes that moral sensibilities, or ethics, have also undergone a process of evolution through time, and he predicts that eventually moral consideration will be extended to all sentient beings.

Despite the widespread use of Darwin to uphold dominant attitudes toward nature in both England and the United States, Thoreau's alternative vision lived on in figures like John Muir. Muir, who moved as a boy from Scotland to the United States in 1849, became one of the country's foremost explorers of and advocates for wilderness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He belonged to the transcendentalist tradition in that his writings expressed a strong sense of the divinity in nature; however, he
moved even further beyond this tradition than Thoreau in his commitment to advocacy and activism. The natural place he knew and loved best was the Sierra Mountains of California, and his efforts were crucial to the establishment of Yosemite National Park in that area in 1890. In 1892, he was also instrumental in founding the Sierra Club to further protect the area.

Muir shared a love for the outdoors with Gifford Pinchot, who was eventually appointed as the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service by President Theodore Roosevelt. While the two were friends for a time, the deep differences between Muir's and Pinchot's positions on natural and wild areas surfaced during an 1896 Forestry Commission survey of western woodlands. Pinchot's position grew out of the attitude articulated by George Perkins Marsh in the 1864 work *Man and Nature*, an attitude that did not challenge dominant, anthropocentric notions that nature existed to be used by human beings, but instead argued that humans had a duty to make use of nature wisely and conserve it for future generations. Muir's vision grew out of thinkers like Thoreau and supported the view that wild and natural areas should be preserved intact and protected from any sort of human interference. These two viewpoints, often labeled "conservation" and "preservation," surfaced again and again in the twentieth century as conflicts arose over the way the country would manage its public lands. Despite preservationist successes such as the setting aside of National Parks, the dominant cultural and political viewpoint was that of conservation; Roosevelt's establishment in 1905 of vast stretches of land as National Forests where multiple uses such as mining, logging, and grazing would be permitted and even encouraged testified to that.
John Muir died in 1914 after an all-out battle to prevent the damming of Hetch Hetchy, a spectacularly beautiful valley adjacent to Yosemite that was turned into a reservoir for the city of San Francisco rather than included as part of the National Park as Muir advocated. Many environmentalists link Muir’s death to this loss, and it is tempting to interpret the entire story as the victory of conservation over preservation; however, while the United States of the early twentieth century was heavily indoctrinated with the conservationist, "wise use" ideology that Muir opposed, the career and writings of Aldo Leopold reveal that it was possible for such attitudes to change. Leopold, a graduate of Yale’s School of Forestry, came out of the conservation tradition and became a manager of National Forests in Arizona and New Mexico in 1909. However, as he describes in his essay "Thinking Like a Mountain," his viewpoint changed at this time from a narrow focus on resource conservation to a more holistic, ecological vision that saw the complexity and interconnectedness of what he would elsewhere call "the land organism": animals, plants, water, air, soil, and the pathways of food and energy that held them together. In "Thinking Like a Mountain," Leopold looks back on his career and explained that he initially killed all predators he encountered without hesitation, assuming that fewer wolves meant more deer, and that more deer were better for hunters. However, after seeing the "green fire" die in the eyes of a wolf he had just killed, Leopold experienced a change of heart and mind that led him to understand the crucial role that every part of an ecosystem — even predators — played.

\[\text{Written in 1944, "Thinking Like a Mountain" was published in A Sand County Almanac in 1949.}\]
In his essay "The Land Ethic" (which grew out of a paper titled "The Conservation Ethic" which Leopold presented in 1933), Leopold named and described the land organism and the complex, interconnected pathways of energy and food that linked all its parts. However, his principle point was even more radical than this sense of interconnectedness; he argued that human beings should understand that they, too, are part of this "organism" and that they should acknowledge this by extending ethical consideration from human beings to "the land." As he put it, a land ethic "changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (240). While Leopold's views were clearly radical for his time, they could be interpreted as striking a balance between the biocentric idea that human culture should accord nature inherent rights and ethical consideration and the more anthropocentric, instrumental view that, due to the interconnected nature of the land organism, humans would eventually harm themselves if they did not do so. However, this apparent compromise stems from the non-dualistic nature of Leopold's understanding of the relationship between human beings and nature: because he saw so clearly that humans are intertangled in the chains of energy and food that flow through the land organism, Leopold understood that their welfare and the welfare of the rest of nature could not really be separated, and he proposed the land ethic as a moral recognition of this fact. During his life, Leopold had an effect on wildlife and forestry management through his professional work and writings; for example, he successfully lobbied to have over half a million acres in New Mexico's Gila National Forest set aside as wilderness habitat in 1924. However, his primary philosophical statement, A Sand County Almanac, was not published until
after his death in 1948, and this work has had a profound impact on
generations of nature writers and environmentalists who have come after
him.

Perhaps more than any other twentieth-century writer, Rachel Carson
followed in the tradition of Aldo Leopold in terms of challenging dominant
anthropocentric and utilitarian attitudes toward nature. Having earned an
M.A. in zoology from Johns Hopkins University, she worked for the Bureau
of Fisheries (which later became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) during
the 1940s but also began her career as a writer of natural history books about
the sea during that time. These books, *Under the Sea Wind* (1941), the very
popular *The Sea Around Us* (1951), and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955) displayed
the unusual combination of science and poetry found in the works of
Thoreau and Leopold. As Vera Norwood has argued, they also participated
in a women’s tradition of cooperation and empathy with the natural world.
However, aspects of this cooperation and empathy — in particular, a sense
of the complex interrelationships in nature and a non-dominating focus on
careful observation rather than confrontation with the nonhuman — also
reflected the holism and biocentric egalitarianism of Thoreau and Leopold.

Again like Thoreau and Leopold, Carson moved from a holistic,
biocentric view of nature to a stance as nature’s advocate due to her sense of
urgency about human impacts on natural systems. In Carson’s case, the
transformation was quite dramatic, from her culturally non-threatening
books about the sea to her controversial 1962 call-to-arms, *Silent Spring*. In
this book, Carson’s focus was the damage to natural systems and to human
health produced by the indiscriminate use of human-designed chemical
pesticides. Explicitly, she dwelt on the ways that humans were
interconnected with other natural entities in order to educate the public as to the ways that the pesticides designed to kill insects could eventually enter and damage human bodies. However, she also more subtly challenged the dominant cultural attitude that nature existed only to be subjugated and used by humans, suggesting that a more humble attitude of cooperation and respect would be better for all concerned. Like Leopold, she possessed an understanding of the many ways human welfare was tied up with the welfare of nature that prevented her from radically separating the two entities in her argument; her apocalyptic image of a silent spring, when no birds would sing because they had all been killed by pesticides that had accumulated in their food sources, suggested that humans depended on nature spiritually and aesthetically as well as biologically and physically.

As the theorists, critics and historians I have discussed assert, Western attitudes toward nature have been dominated by ideologies of separation and hierarchy that have served to sanction humanity's domination and indiscriminate use of other living things and the nonliving environment. However, these dominant ideologies have not remained static over time, nor have they prevented the influence of alternative traditions of thought. Before the nineteenth century, these alternative traditions usually took the form of stewardship ethics or arcadian visions that sanctioned and even idealized limited, careful uses of nature. In addition, a sense that humans and nature were connected manifested itself in concepts such as the Great Chain of Being and the work of John Ray. But a new phase in these alternative traditions can be traced to Thoreau and the intimations of the interconnectedness and equality of all living things found in his later works. His consciousness of speaking as an advocate, of promoting ideas that
directly challenged his culture's prevailing views of nature and of proper human relations to nature, positions him at the beginning of a movement that has grown through the years, encompassing writers like Muir, Leopold, and Carson.

Unfortunately, the magnitude of the environmental destruction that these writers protest has dramatically increased since the time of Thoreau as well, and it is at the conjunction of the current flowering of this tradition of advocacy and the current sense of environmental crisis that I would like to begin my study. In the pages that follow, I will explore the contemporary heirs of Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, and Carson in order to explore why their efforts at advocacy, as successful as they might be in affecting certain individuals or isolated situations, seem unable to slow the overall progress of environmental degradation and to suggest some strategies both authors and readers can employ to increase their chances of success.
CHAPTER 2

THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SPEAKING FOR NATURE

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the practice of speaking for nature has its roots in traditions that have subtly yet persistently challenged dominant attitudes and institutions throughout the history of Western culture. Although environmental advocacy has become more widely practiced in the twentieth century than ever before, dominant cultural attitudes towards nonhuman nature and environmental issues in the U.S. have still made it difficult for voices engaged in this practice to be heard throughout this century. Aldo Leopold struggled for years to find a publisher for his *A Sand County Almanac* and its eloquent argument that the boundaries of ethical consideration be extended to include the nonhuman. Finally published in 1949, *A Sand County Almanac* sold only a few thousand copies before the 1960s, when it quickly gained popularity as "the intellectual touchstone for the most far-reaching environmental movement in American history" (Nash, *Rights* 63).¹ The 1962 publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* was much more visibly controversial, dramatically highlighting the clash between dominant cultural attitudes and

¹ For accounts of the content and reception of *A Sand County Almanac* and other works by Leopold, see Brooks (Chapter XII, "The Wilderness Ideal"), Nash (*Rights* 63-74), Meine, and Ribbens.
her view that humanity is interconnected with nature and has an ethical
duty to cooperate with rather than dominate it. Although Silent Spring sold
well immediately, it generated a storm of controversy and, by and large, the
scientific community at that time rejected Carson's claims as the emotional,
unfounded suspicions of a woman and an amateur.  

Although the challenge that books like A Sand County Almanac and
Silent Spring presented to dominant cultural views about the relationship
between humans and nonhuman nature problematized their reception, in
the end such books contributed to a growing public awareness that trends
such as loss of wilderness and widespread use of toxic chemicals affect not
only nonhuman nature, but the human population as well. Widespread
participation in the first Earth Day in April, 1970, indicated that the U.S. had
achieved at least a superficial national awareness of the need for humans to
consider the impact of human culture on nonhuman nature, whether for
the sake of nature or for the sake of humanity’s reliance on the natural
world. Since this first Earth Day, generally perceived as the birth of the
popular environmental movement in the U.S., writers who speak for
nature have found ever more receptive audiences. In 1988, Time Magazine
went so far as to revise its Man of the Year award, traditionally given to the
person considered most influential in world events, in order to name the

\[\text{footnote}
2\text{Although Carson was a scientist who held a master’s degree in biology from Johns}
Hopkins University and worked for what later became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
Silent Spring was written for a lay audience. Carson’s attempt to communicate “inside”
scientific information to lay people in order to empower them to take political action
concerning their health and environment, combined with the scientific community’s resistance
to accepting women among its ranks, both seemed to inflame other scientists with rage. In
addition, she was attacked by a variety of people and institutions associated with the
chemical pesticide business. See Brooks (Chapter XIII), Nash (Rights 78-82 ), and Norwood
(Chapter 5) for detailed descriptions of the book and its reception.
\]
"Endangered Earth" the Planet of the Year. Following a year of record heat waves and droughts, the magazine's choice clearly was motivated more by concern for the human population than for the biosphere as a whole; nevertheless, this choice signaled an unprecedented public concern about the impact of human activity on the rest of nature. By 1992, the degree of popular acceptance for the proposition that humans must reevaluate their attitudes and practices toward their environment was so great that it did not seem out of place for a public figure like Senator Al Gore, later elected Vice-President of the United States, to author a book, Earth in the Balance, arguing for the need for both the government and individuals to consider the impact of human activity on the environment.

Although the most popular and effective pleas for humans to reevaluate their attitudes and behavior toward the natural environment have appealed to self-interest, contemporary U.S. culture also seems to be manifesting a growing interest in understanding the nonhuman and in establishing more egalitarian, less instrumental relationships with nature. Predictably, this tendency most often reveals itself in the popular fascination with the issues surrounding animal consciousness: Does it exist? Can humans gain access to it? Periodic media coverage of researchers' attempts to teach human forms of communication to apes and efforts to decipher the

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3 This tendency by conservationists to show "that we can't do as we wish without paying a price" (Everden, "Beyond Ecology" 16) concerns many environmental philosophers and ethicists. Everden points out that appeals to alter or limit human impact on nonhuman nature because humans rely on certain species or ecosystems tacitly reinforce the premise that the value of any particular non-human entity lies purely in its usefulness to humans. Of course, the danger in this approach reveals itself when a species or area without demonstrable usefulness to humanity is threatened. In addition, such an attitude does nothing to challenge the dominant ideology of humanity's complete separation from nature and right to exercise power over nature.
"languages" of animals such as whales and dolphins attests to this desire better to understand the nonhuman, as does the recent popularity of books like *The Secret Life of Dogs*, in which Elizabeth Thomas attempts to interpret the inner motivations of her dogs' behavior, or *When Elephants Weep*, in which the authors combine anecdotal accounts with scientific studies to make the case that animals lead complex emotional lives. Although such examples could be seen simply as humans' desire to impose anthropocentric values and interpretations onto the nonhuman, and thus as just another example of the human tendency to dominate and objectify nature, the particular impulse to understand what animals are thinking suggests that humans are becoming more open to recognizing animals as subjects with their own needs and problems rather than as mere objects for human use.

The decades since the first Earth Day have also seen the growth of radical environmental groups, such as Earth First!, the Sea Shepherd Society, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which deny that humanity possesses an inherent right to dominate nature and instead place an ethical imperative on the inherent value of all nonhuman species and habitats, regardless of their usefulness to humanity.\(^4\) While such groups

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\(^4\)In fact, these groups usually place a priority on defending species and areas (wilderness, in the case of EFl, and the world’s oceans, in the case of the Sea Shepherds) untouched by and with the least discernible connections to human society. My sense is that this approach grows out of the fact that such areas are the most in need of defense (because their "use" value to humans seems low), rather than out of a philosophy which elevates the nonhuman over the human. Of course, individual instances of misanthropy do occur: mainstream publications tend to cite with shock Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman’s statement that deaths due to the Ethiopian famine should be viewed as a desirable reduction in the human population (Fromm 29). As Harold Fromm points out, Foreman claims this and other remarks were distorted and quoted out of context, and Foreman seems to back away from such an extreme — and potentially xenophobic — position in his 1992 *Confessions of an*
have not gained widespread public support, their persistence and growth testifies to an increased willingness to accord inherent rights or value to natural entities.\footnote{While the growing movement to accord inherent rights to nonhuman entities represents a significant challenge to dominant human attitudes and relations toward the natural world, it is not uniformly considered to be unproblematic; in particular, ecofeminist theorists have criticized the reliance of the rights movement on an atomistic notion of self, which they feel precludes a feminist, relational notion of identity. While a discussion of the many controversies regarding the issue of rights in the disciplines of environmental ethics and ecofeminism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, see Jim Cheney’s "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology" and Karen Warren’s "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections" for an introduction to the debate.}

As environmental responsibility is increasingly becoming a socially accepted cause, we find more and more writers acting on their urges to speak for nature, and both popular and academic works of this kind are finding an increasingly receptive readership. However, despite the growing number of texts taking such a position and an expanding cultural sense of the need to deal with environmental problems, human overuse of natural resources and abuse of other species seems to continue almost unabated. Biologist E.O. Wilson predicts that increasing extinction rates may result in the loss of 20 percent of presently existing species by the year 2022, and rise as high as 50

\begin{quote}
Ecowarrior: "This basic recognition of the overpopulation problem does not mean that we should ignore the economic and social causes of overpopulation, and shouldn't criticize the accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands, the maldistribution of 'resources,' and the venality of multinational corporations and Third World juntas alike" (28). Radical environmentalists like Foreman will inevitably sometimes appear to elevate the welfare of nonhuman nature over that of humanity because they tend to operate out of a biocentric belief that all components of nature (including humans) are of equal value. As Foreman explained in an interview with The Mother Earth News, "So when we say Earth First!," we're saying what we feel — that the well-being of the Earth and all its life forms comes first, and that humans should realize that they're only a part of it, rather than apart from it" (18). Animal rights groups, which focus more on the rights of individual animals rather than a long-term vision of what's good for the whole of nature, seem to produce more instances of genuine misanthropy. See Rik Scarce's Ecowarriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement for a discussion of these and other radical environmental groups.
\end{quote}
percent thereafter (*Diversity* 278). Any significant legislation designed to reduce human activities leading to environmental degradation, such as the reauthorized Clean Air Act passed in the United States in 1990, seems unable to gain Congressional or public support unless its provisions are undercut and weakened in response to demands by various special interest groups (primarily the electric power and coal industries in the case of the Clean Air Act). Finally, a human population growing at such a rate that it is expected to double by the year 2025 continually threatens to cancel out any decrease in pollution or overconsumption of natural resources by the existing population. Such observations seem to run counter to Wilson's proposition that humans have a natural love of life in all its forms, or biophilia, and that this love enhances our own lives: "The more we know of other forms of life, the more we enjoy and respect ourselves. . . . Humanity is exalted not because we are so far above other living creatures, but because knowing them well elevates the very concept of life" (*Biophilia* 22). However, as Scott McVay notes in response to Wilson's idea in the prelude to *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, we still need to ask to what extent humans' attraction to and knowledge of other life forms actually influence our everyday actions. And, I would add, it is equally important to ask what other forces might be working against the kind of love and respect for life that Wilson describes.

Despite the evidence that a growing discourse of environmental advocacy has failed to inspire Western human culture to substantially decrease environmentally destructive activities, I am not immediately persuaded to dismiss the power of textual representations to alter the way humans conceive of their relationship with nonhuman nature. Instead, I
believe we must reconsider the pervasive force of our culture's prevailing ideologies of dualism and hierarchy which construct human culture as completely separate from and superior to nature. Within Western conceptions, the natural world remains marginalized, the underprivileged "other" of human culture. And working in opposition to the goals of environmental advocacy are explicitly anti-environmental forces such as the "Wise Use" movement which argues that environmental problems are exaggerated and that environmental regulations restrict citizens' rights to make profits and to manage their property as they like. By constructing a scenario in which the health of the environment is pitted against human need such as jobs, this movement reinforces ideologies which view humans and nature as irrevocably separate.⁶

Nature writers, environmental ethicists, and scientists alike who have studied the phenomenon of increasing environmental awareness accompanied by increasing environmental degradation arrive at similar conclusions: basically, they agree that because of the deeply ideological nature of the way human culture perceives and relates to nonhuman nature, it follows that any attempts to change those perceptions and relationships must be rooted in an effort to alter our culture's most pervasive beliefs and values. As social scientist Stephen Kellert asserts,

Our modern environmental crisis—the widespread toxification of various food chains, the multi-faceted degradation of the atmosphere, the far-ranging depletion of diverse natural resources, and, above all, the massive loss of biological diversity and the scale of global species extinctions—is viewed

⁶See David Helvarg's The War Against the Greens.
as symptomatic of a fundamental rupture of human emotional and spiritual relationship with the natural world.

The mitigation of this environmental crisis may necessitate nothing less than a fundamental shift in human consciousness. (*Biophilia Hypothesis* 26)

Other authors specifically address the potential for discourse to effect such a shift in human consciousness. As Thomas Berry explains in *The Dream of the Earth*, every culture has certain "mythic visions" which evoke "the energies needed to sustain the human effort involved" (30) in any enterprise. According to Berry, the industrial vision of contemporary Western society must be replaced by a new, ecological vision or a new mythology. While Berry acknowledges the powerful role new scientific discoveries must play in this ecological vision, he also emphasizes the need for "a mystique of the land such as is supplied by the nature poets, essayists, and artists" (33).

The authors whom I will examine in the following chapters overtly set out to use discourse to challenge the prevailing cultural ideologies that...

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7 There are a variety of works that describe scientific and scientifically-related theories that can be interpreted as implying a view of reality that undercuts the subject/object dualism of traditional Western science. Berry gives his interpretation of what physicists call the anthropic principle: "In this perception the human is seen as a mode of being in the universe as well as a distinctive being in the universe. Stated somewhat differently, the human is that being in whom the universe comes to itself in a special mode of conscious reflection" (16). Other revolutionary scientific insights which validate a similar sense of the interconnectedness and life of the earth can be found in *Gaia, A Way of Knowing: Political Implications of the New Biology*, edited by William Irwin Thompson. In addition, Devall and Sessions (*Deep Ecology*) relate some potentially subversive recent findings in physics: "With the 'new physics' this whole picture of reality [the Cartesian mechanistic, dualistic worldview] has been shattered, although the message has been slow to work its way out to the social (human) sciences. The idea of discrete material, subatomic particles, is being abandoned for the view of Nature as a constant flux or flow of energy transformations. In a similar vein, the idea that the scientist can totally separate himself (sic) from the experiment or observation conducted is also being abandoned as an illusion" (88-89). Devall and Sessions seem to base their sense of the "new physics" on two works by Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* and *The Turning Point*.
promote a dualistic, hierarchical relationship between nonhuman nature and human culture; they implicitly or explicitly adopt the stance that humans are, indeed, a part of nature, claiming that humans are interconnected with other living things and their nonliving environment and, often, that they are of no greater inherent importance or worth than other natural entities. And yet, because of the ideologically constructed nature of discourse, these texts often simultaneously work against this subversive message in a variety of ways; they are vulnerable to being undermined and infiltrated by the ideologies of separation and hierarchy they argue against because they often fail carefully to problematize and question their constructions of the identity of both humans and nonhuman nature as well as the implications of those constructions.

The fact that the discourse of environmental advocacy is vulnerable to producing consequences that go against the impulses of its authors is poignantly illustrated in Dian Fossey's *Gorillas in the Mist*. Fossey describes her observations and interactions with the mountain gorillas of the Rwandan rain forests in careful and loving detail. Because of the tremendous responsibility Fossey felt toward the gorillas she studied, she viewed every decision and action involving them as charged with ethical import. A particularly important decision involved Digit, a young male gorilla for whom Fossey developed a special fondness and admiration; the friendliness and trust he displayed toward Fossey made such an impact on her that, describing one of his playful overtures, she was forced to confess that "At such times, I fear, my scientific detachment dissolved" (182). Because of this bond, she was especially devastated upon learning that he had been killed while defending his family group from poachers. Although
Fossey's description of Digit's mutilated corpse is fairly dispassionate, the overwhelming grief she felt reveals itself starkly in her admission that "There are times when one cannot accept facts for fear of shattering one's being . . . From that moment on, I came to live within an insulated part of myself" (206).

As a consequence, she keenly felt the importance of the decision which she then needed to make: either "bury Digit and retain the news of his slaughter or publicize his death to gain additional support for active conservation in the Parc des Volcans through regular and frequent patrols to rid the park of encroachers" (206). Among the factors which Fossey considered in her decision were the political realities of the Park administration's priorities.\textsuperscript{8} She worried that Digit was "going to be the first sacrificial victim from the study groups if monetary rewards were to follow the news of his slaughter" (207). In the end, she decided to publicize the killing, unwilling to let Digit's death be in vain. When other gorillas were killed approximately six months later, she was haunted by doubts: "Since Digit's killing had proved so profitable to the Rwandese park officials, could there possibly be a connection between the first tragedy and the latest timely slaughters?" (216).

Thus, the discourse through which Fossey hoped to publicize Digit's death and thus improve the safety of the other gorillas may have backfired, instead contributing to the deaths of the very animals she wished to protect.

\textsuperscript{8} Apparently, Fossey's suspicion of the Park administration was not groundless; during her residence in the Park, the Park's Conservator actually hired poachers to acquire two infant gorillas to sell to the Cologne Zoo. Tragically, adult gorillas will fight to the death to defend the young members of their family groups: a total of eighteen other gorillas were killed in the process of capturing the infants.
This situation dramatically highlights the issue any person hoping to effect social change faces: how to accurately predict the consequences of our discourse and/or actions. As Heinz Pagels explains in *The Dreams of Reason*,

> We hold certain values because we want to effect some desired goal, one that is at least good for us. But if we could model the complex consequence of these simple values, we might find out, as often as not, that there are counterintuitive consequences of our moral actions. There are things we leave out in our thinking. The direct good that we want to realize is not realized, or there are disastrous side effects of our pursuit of a specific moral action. (331)

Unfortunately, there exists no reliable way to model the effects of discourse which seeks to transform the human relationship to nonhuman nature. However, the first step is to be aware that dominant ideologies are pervasive and that even the most oppositional discourse will inevitably reflect them in a variety of ways. By cultivating such an awareness, both writers and readers of discourse that participates in the practice of speaking for the natural other can work to lessen the possibility that such discourse will be recontained by the very ideologies it sets out to subvert; we can do so by becoming more conscious and critical of the ideological implications of the ways these texts construct human identity, the human relationship to nature, and the natural world itself. In this chapter, I will suggest some of the particular issues that may arise as part of such a critique by first exploring the problems and tentative solutions involved in the practice of speaking for others as articulated within current feminist theory and by then adapting those concerns to the discourse of environmental advocacy.
The Problems of Speaking for Others in Feminist Theory

In order to problematize the practice of speaking for the natural other, it is useful to turn to a discipline which is currently examining the complex issues of identity and otherness involved in any practice of speaking for others: contemporary feminist theory. The current dialogue concerning identity and advocacy in feminist theory grows out of a concern as to whose interests are actually being represented by hegemonic feminist discourse. Specifically, the Western, white, upper/middle class feminists, many of them academics, who dominate contemporary feminist theory and practice are being asked to problematize their attempts to represent, or speak for, women as a group. Despite their desire to alter social values and practices in order to end the oppression of women and other marginalized groups, these women find themselves almost inextricably embedded in dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy, ideologies which separate and privilege men over women, whites over other races, Western culture over other cultures, heterosexuality over homosexuality and bisexuality, and so on. While the goals of these feminists involve challenging such ideologies with their discourse, the position of being able to write or speak within the arenas of human culture is itself one of privilege. Often, women who speak as representatives for all women within these arenas hold this position of power/privilege because of their differences in race, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation from the less privileged women whom they wish to represent. Consequently, their very act of speaking is implicated in the web of "power relations of domination, exploitation, and subordination" (Alcoff, "Problem" 15) which they wish to challenge through their discourse.
Although the position of white, Western feminists who speak for other women is clearly different in many ways than that of humans who speak for nonhuman nature, the two types of advocates share a dilemma: the effectiveness of their subversive stance is threatened by the pervasive ideologies of Western culture. In addition, there is a significant parallel between their positions: both types of advocates are part of a larger group — either all women, or all of nature — that includes themselves and the others whom they represent; however, the advocates occupy a position of privilege within the dominant culture and thus are different in this way from the rest of the group.

It is inevitable that any critique of oppressive ideologies will also strengthen and serve those ideologies in certain ways because of their pervasive nature. However, feminists who engage in the practice of speaking for others are struggling to become more aware of the differences among women and how differences in identity and privilege can affect their resulting discourse. Through such an awareness, they hope to adapt their advocacy in ways that make it less vulnerable to reinforcing dominant ideologies and more successful in challenging them. What such feminist theorists can teach those who wish to speak for nonhuman nature — and those who listen to or view messages of environmental advocacy — is that it is essential to explore the constructions of self and other that organize any discourse of advocacy. Therefore, it is instructive to look more carefully at the feminist debate over speaking for others in order to lay the groundwork for a similar discussion of the discourse of speaking for nature.
Feminist Attention to Difference: Too Little or Too Much?

In "A Response to 'The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory,'" Gayatri Spivak proposes a theory of discourse that can help to explain why it has been so tempting for feminists to suppress the differences among women when they speak for them as a group. She points out that whenever you construct any kind of a discourse, if you look at it you will see that at the beginning of the discourse, in order to be able to speak, at the beginning of the discourse, there was something like a two-step. The two-step was necessary in order to say that a divided is whole. You start from an assumption which you must think is whole in order to be able to speak. (211)

The historical struggle by Western feminists to gain a speaking voice in male-dominated culture has been predicated on just such an illusory assumption about the "wholeness" of women's identity: their construction of women's subjectivity is based on the repression of differences among women, on the assumption that the Western "constitution and interpellation of the subject, not only as individual, but as 'individualist'" (Spivak, "Political Economy" 219) adequately represents the subjectivity of all women. Of course, as the Western "female individualist articulated herself . . . it was the 'native female' as such (within discourse, as a signifier) who was excluded from any share in this emerging norm" (Spivak, "Political Economy" 220).

Although the current trend in Western academic feminism is no longer to ignore non-Western women, the practice of speaking for these "others" often uncritically continues the problematic assumption of a shared identity among women. By assuming that all women have access to a common experience or identity by virtue of their shared biological sex, such
feminists participate in an essentialist notion of woman's subjectivity. According to Diana Fuss, essentialism can be defined generally "as a belief in true essence — that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing" (2). For feminists, conceptions of identity most often take the form of "appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order" (Fuss 2). The cultural feminist movement in particular has displayed the idea of an essential female identity to argue for women's innate superiority to men, valorizing concepts traditionally associated with women, such as cooperation and nurturance, and denigrating characteristics traditionally associated with men, such as aggression and competition. However, other feminists are concerned that such an approach merely reverses the values of the male-dominated culture, thus reinforcing rather than challenging the ideologies of dualism and hierarchy underlying those values. Thus, such a use of essential notions of identity "does not criticize the fundamental mechanism of oppressive power used to perpetuate sexism and in fact reinvokes that mechanism in its supposed solution" (Alcoff, "Identity — Crisis" 305).

Another major criticism of essentialism is that it ignores that now widely accepted insight of poststructuralism: the historically and socially constituted nature of the subject. By conceiving of the individual subject as unitary and unchanging, essentialist conceptions of women's identity place the subject "outside the sphere of cultural influence and historical change" (Fuss 3). Thus, such conceptions deny the subject the capacity for transformation, a fundamental problem for a movement committed to
social change. In addition, by ignoring the socially constructed nature of the subject, feminists who appeal to an essentialized notion of a shared women's identity also overlook the differences in ethnicity, race, class, and sexual orientation between themselves and the "other" women whom they claim to represent, and thus they ignore rather than eradicate the imbalance in power/privilege which springs from these differences. By overlooking such differences and imbalances, these feminists risk leaving the ideology responsible for them unchallenged.

However, when they assume that some common bond among women gives them unproblematized access to the experience of the less privileged women they speak for, privileged feminists leave what Spivak would call a "trace," a subtle sign which can be read as the mark of an "absent presence": in this case, the presence of repressed differences among women which are covered over when speaking feminists represent women as a "whole" group ("A Response" 211). This trace can manifest itself in the subtle ways that discourses of advocacy which ignore difference actually reinforce the dominant ideologies and interests. Such reinforcement can have consequences beyond the theoretical: as Linda Alcoff explains in "The Problem of Speaking for Others," "the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for" (7). In other words, women who belong to marginalized groups are being oppressed both within and by the very movement which defines itself as working for their liberation.

In tracing the complex connections between the discursive act of erasing or ignoring difference and privilege and the practical consequence of
reinforcing or increasing oppression, current feminist thought has identified several ways in which speaking for others can, essentially, defeat its purpose. Some of these self-defeating dynamics arise when speakers overlook difference to such an extent that they assume they are the same as the others for whom they speak. Other dynamics arise when speakers acknowledge differences but fail to examine these differences and question how they might affect their relationships with the women for whom they speak. Still others occur when speakers ignore the power that the speaking position grants them to contribute discursively to the construction of their own and the other's subject positions; they effectively ignore the mediated character of all representations and the limited nature of their own representations of other women.

The first type of problem occurs when feminists focus so exclusively on the commonalities among all women that they actually leave any differences unacknowledged. Of course, when speaking feminists assume that all women are the same, with the same situations and needs, they risk misrepresenting the situations and needs of other women. In addition, in some situations the speaking feminists suppress the differences between themselves and other women by appropriating the qualities and experiences of their less privileged others, and thus the more privileged women can ignore their own complicity in the oppression of those others; if all women are seen as essentially the same, suffering in the same ways, how can the speaking women recognize the way they act as the oppressors of other women? As Špivak points out in "The Political Economy of Women," academic feminists must learn to acknowledge that our "pleasures over the liberating effects of computers and of our everyday wardrobe" are made
possible by the oppression of hundreds of thousands of non-Western women who labor in the electronics and textile industries in developing countries (225). While acknowledging our complicity in the international division of labor and other ideologically rooted forces which contribute to the oppression of women less privileged than we are is not enough to eliminate such oppression, taking responsibility for the ways we contribute to the ideology and practice of oppression is an important step towards undermining it.

In addition, when speaking feminists erase difference by constructing women's identity based largely on the social positioning of the less privileged, they can use it as currency with which to gain power in the current social/academic structure. As Spivak puts it in "The Political Economy of Women," "the invocation of the pervasive oppression of Woman in every class and race stratum, indeed in the lowest sub-caste, cannot help but justify the institutional interests of the (female) academic." (220). By reifying the experience of the oppressed other, and stressing her unity with that experience by virtue of a shared identity as women, the academic feminist reinforces and profits from the very ideology of hierarchy that she sets out to undermine.

Of course, many women engaged in the feminist practice of speaking for others more readily acknowledge their differences from those for whom they speak, but a second type of problem occurs when such women nevertheless authorize their discourse based on their commonalities with these women. By failing to recognize, problematize, and question the historical and social privileging of their differences from these women, a privileging which grants them the further privilege of being able to speak
and be heard within dominant culture, such feminists risk reinforcing the ideology which their discourse overtly challenges. In *In Other Worlds*, Gayatri Spivak explains that

> When we speak for ourselves, we urge with conviction: the personal is also the political. For the rest of the world's women, the sense of whose personal micrology is difficult (though not impossible) for us to acquire, we fall back on a colonialist theory of most efficient information retrieval. (179)

Ironically, in their attempts to represent the position of less privileged women within dominant culture, privileged feminists end up constructing them not as subjects, but as the objects of "information retrieval" and analysis. While this objectification may be partially attributed to the difficulty of acquiring a sense of the "personal micrology" of those different from oneself, it also grows out of an unexamined assumption of the dominant ideology of dualism and hierarchy: that the speaking feminists' greater power within dominant culture bestows upon them an ability to know and understand which is superior to that of less privileged women, even in regard to the lives and cultural positioning of those very women. Such an assumption can lock the speaking feminist into a vacuum of ignorance because it prevents her from seriously considering the possibility that she might learn from the other. As Spivak says of women she has observed washing clothing in a river in India: "The academic feminist must learn to learn from them, to speak to them, to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be *corrected* by our superior theory and enlightened compassion" (*In Other Worlds* 135).⁹

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⁹ As Linda Alcoff points out in "The Problem of Speaking for Others," it is very important to note that such women are ideologically/culturally positioned and constructed
A third type of problem arises when privileged feminists who leave differences unexamined enable themselves to ignore the power that the speaking position grants them to contribute discursively to the construction of their own and the other's subject positions. By failing to explore the implications of this discursive privilege, they not only risk reinforcing the ideology which has granted it to them, but they also risk misrepresenting the other. What Alcoff characterizes as "the mediated character of all representations" ("Problem" 9) contributes to the risk of misrepresentation because it entails that "the speaker loses some portion of his or her control over the meaning and truth of his or her utterance" ("Problem" 15). While this loss of control can never be completely eliminated, a careful acknowledgment of the constructed nature of representations and of the power implied in the ability to contribute to those constructions through discourse can help those who speak for less privileged women to recognize the different historical/cultural positions and needs which those women may possess.

As Jane Roland Martin explains in "Methodological Essentialism, False Difference, and Other Dangerous Traps," such criticisms have produced a dramatic shift in recent years towards honoring women's diversity within feminist discourse. Perhaps the most common attempt to acknowledge differences among women has been, as Martin notes, the tendency to "talk about specific kinds of women: black women, white women, Asian women, Hispanic women; lesbians, heterosexual women; just as the academic feminist is. However, she finds it equally important to realize that the ideological construction of these less privileged women does not eliminate "the possibility that the oppressed will produce a 'countersentence' that can then suggest a new historical narrative" (23).
bisexual women; and so forth" (636). However, using such categories does not solve the problems of masking difference; as Martin points out, such an approach highlights some differences, but "in each case the problem of masking diversity recurs at the more specific level of discourse" (637). And these more specific categories still do not escape the charges of essentialism leveled at women who sought to characterize all women as a group; any division of women into static groups risks the assumption that there is an essential bond connecting the members of each group.\(^{10}\)

Even more problematic is the way that such categories are often deployed in hostile games of identity politics, in which members of more privileged groups are censured for presuming to understand or comment on the experiences of members of less privileged groups. Such criticisms seem simply to invert traditional hierarchies, exchanging the positions of privileged and less privileged without challenging the overarching ideology which supports hierarchy and privilege to begin with. Postcolonial critic Edward Said objects to "totalizing theories" such as identity politics, remarking that

If one believes with Gramsci that an intellectual vocation is socially possible as well as desirable, then it is an inadmissible contradiction at the same time to build analyses of historical experience around exclusions, exclusions that stipulate, for instance, that only women can understand feminine

\(^{10}\)It is important to note that such identity categories need not depend on essentialist concepts; the idea of lesbian identity, for instance, could be justified by pointing to the unique combination of social forces and discourses that lesbians experience. However, as Diana Fuss discusses in *Essentially Speaking*, there is a tendency in current theory to conflate essence with identity; she also notes a correlation between the extent to which a political or social group has been oppressed and the extent to which it adheres to an essentialist notion of its own identity as a group (98).
experience, only Jews can understand Jewish suffering, only formerly colonial subjects can understand colonial experience. (31)

Said argues that if we acknowledge the massive, complex histories of special but overlapping and interconnected experiences, there is no reason to grant each an essentially separate status. In the end, he points out, all humans can share each others' shaping forces and experiences through the interpretive opportunities provided by the indeterminate nature of discourse.

Despite objections such as Said's, many feminists have reacted to the need to honor difference — and the identity politics that have emerged alongside it — with what Linda Alcoff calls the retreat response: "simply to retreat from all practices of speaking for and assert that one can only know one's narrow individual experience and one's 'own truth' and can never make claims beyond this" ("Problem" 17). As the categories meant to account for difference become ever smaller and more specific, the seemingly unbridgeable boundaries between different kinds of women multiply, and in the end, each woman is left feeling comfortable speaking only for herself. Martin explains that the "a priori affirmation of difference by contemporary feminist theorists" does women a deep disservice by encouraging us to construct "other women as utterly Other" (646). When we see other women in this way, it is difficult not to dismiss wholesale the possibility of finding any way to make connections with them. As Donna Haraway puts it in "A Cyborg Manifesto,"

in the consciousness of our failures, we risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. 'Epistemology' is about knowing the difference. (160-161)
Giving up on the attempt to connect with and speak for other women is politically devastating because it leaves completely unrepresented the positions of those without the privilege of being able to speak and be heard within dominant culture — in other words, those most victimized by the world historical systems of domination of which Haraway writes.

The "retreat response" also presents theoretical problems in its inherent conflict with most feminist ideologies. As Linda Alcoff points out, this response can be seen as reinforcing the traditional Western conception of the autonomous self — a conception that contradicts the generally accepted feminist principle that each individual is inextricably connected to everyone else. Even when an individual woman takes care to speak only for herself and to characterize only her own position, her discourse inevitably holds implications about the way others should or can be or act. Thus, "we cannot neatly separate off our mediating praxis that interprets and constructs our experiences from the praxis of others" (Alcoff, "Problem" 21).

_The Poststructuralist Response and the Problem of Agency_

The dilemma feminist critics are left with is how to identify with other women in a way that enables them to represent the interests of those women and, at the same time, properly acknowledge and account for their differences from them. Some feminists have taken the position that in order to conceptualize identity in a way that acknowledges both connections with and differences from others, women must first acknowledge the differences within themselves. In an attempt to do so, they have turned to the poststructuralist view which holds that subjectivities are constructed by ideological forces through discourse. As Teresa de Lauretis explains in
"Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness,"
poststructuralist feminist theory has reconceptualized the subject as
"shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference" (116),
axes which include but are not confined to gender, race, class, ethnicity, and
sexual orientation. Like many other feminist poststructuralists, de Lauretis
accepts

the interrelatedness of discourse and social practices, and of the
multiplicity of positionalities concurrently available in the
social field seen as a field of forces; not a single system of power
dominating the powerless but a tangle of distinct and variable
relations of power and points of resistance. ("Eccentric Subjects"
131)

In other words, each axis of difference implies one or more discursive fields
or forces acting on the individual subject; the discourses associated with each
axis of identification are often contesting. For example, my "identity" as a
woman may at times come into conflict with my identity as a Western
academic, or I may be subject to such conflicting discursive representations
of what it means to be a woman as those created by feminist theory and
those created by television beer commercials.

While such a conception of the subject as shifting and contradictory
certainly avoids the problems of essentialism or unchanging identity
categories, it can also make it difficult to discuss "women" as a concept at all;
the poststructuralist approach is very sensitive to the unique combination of
forces shaping each subject and thus can make it difficult to find any basis for
commonality. However, feminists working within poststructuralist
frameworks are aware that an inability to discuss "women" at all is just as
politically paralyzing as the retreat response: for many of them, the key to
retaining the category of "women" is a sense of "the interweaving of
oppresions rather than their hierarchical privileging" (Donaldson 8), a sense that can allow us to acknowledge the differences arising from the unique nature of each person's socially constructed subjectivity without cutting us off from one another. By viewing the individual subjectivity as organized across multiple axes of difference, we can acknowledge the way that we foreground different aspects of our identity at different times; I respond to some situations primarily as an academic, to others as a U.S. citizen, to others as a woman, to others as an animal lover. Each of these axes of identity carries with it a construction of reality encoded by social, ideological (often discursive) forces. In different situations, different axes of identity and thus different constructions of the reality are called forward. When I foreground a certain axis of identity and construction of reality, I can temporarily forge a connection with others who are foregrounding a similar axis of identity based on similar shaping forces in their own histories. I can establish connection without committing myself to a monolithic, static conception of identity—my own or others'. In this way, the feminist poststructuralist approach constructs the subject as what Haraway calls a "split and contradictory self." Such a self holds potential for subverting dominant ideologies because her divisions and contradictions allow her to connect without oversimplifying her identity in essentialist ways which reinscribe those ideologies in new forms; such a self is the one Haraway describes in "Situated Knowledges" as able to "interrogate positioning and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history" (193).

Such a feminist, poststructuralist conception of identity not only imagines a way for women to make connections with each other outside of
essentialist or rigid identity categories, but it also opens up the possibility that the subject can change in politically positive ways by constructing herself as continually in flux. However, some versions of poststructuralism simultaneously undercut the possibility of this type of change; for the purest social constructionists, individuals have no real control over their own actions or identities, but are instead "written" by history and culture. This extreme view can become what Rita Felski describes as a "mechanistic determinism; individuals remain unconscious of and unable to reflect upon the discursive structures through which they are positioned as subjects" (53). Because such a position denies the possibility of political agency, any attempt to speak for others is rendered pointless; the individual is seen as unable to intervene in the discursive forces determining her own and other's identities. For feminists committed to social change and advocacy, it is crucial to imagine a way the subject can achieve agency without relinquishing the more positive insights of poststructuralism. Fortunately, as Rita Felski proposes in Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, we need not revert to essentialist conceptions of identity in order to reclaim agency; instead, we must conceive of "a dynamic model of social reproduction and human communication which allows for a more dialectical understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and social structures" (55). Of course, to do so, we must imagine a way in which discourse — which most poststructuralists view as the primary structuring force which determines the nature of social institutions and forces as well as constructing meaning and human subjectivity — can be used to subvert the very ideology it works to maintain. As Teresa de Lauretis explains in Alice Doesn't, "That patriarchy exists concretely, in social relations, and that it works precisely
through the very discursive and representational structures that allow us to recognize it, is the problem and struggle of feminist theory" (165).

For most feminist theorists, the key to a theory of identity which allows for the ability of the subject to participate in the construction of her own and others' subjectivities through discourse goes back to the insight that the subject is constantly shifting and changing as it is exposed to changing ideological forces and different discursive structures. As de Lauretis explains in "Eccentric Subjects," individual experience can be understood "as the result of a complex bundle of determinations and struggles, a process of continuing renegotiation of external pressures and internal resistances" (137). In fact, what constitutes de Lauretis' notion of "experience" is the individual subject's "personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world" (Alice Doesn't 159), and it is experience in this sense which constructs subjectivity; thus, construction is an ongoing process in which the individual subject participates.

But how can the ideologically constructed subject work against the outside forces in which she participates? The possibility of such subversive participation, and thus the possibility of agency, lies in the complex and contradictory nature of the shifting subject. As de Lauretis describes it, the subject is

a locus of multiple and variable positions, which are made available in the social field by historical process. . . . [It is] neither unified nor singly divided between positions of masculinity and femininity but organized across positions on several axes of difference and across discourses and practices that may be, and often are, mutually contradictory. (137)
Because of the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of the axes of difference (and associated discourses) constituting individual subjectivity, the feminist may well play the role of oppressor in certain social contexts, while occupying the position of the oppressed in others, and occupying both simultaneously in still others. As Joan Scott explains, "Subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings possible for the concepts they deploy" (34). It is the contradictions and conflicts among discursive systems and among axes of difference, and thus within the individual subject, that allows for the possibility of multiple meanings, or, in other words, for interpretation. And it is through the act of interpreting the discursive and ideological forces acting on her that the individual subject can participate in the construction of those forces in return.

In her article, "Cultural Feminism versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," Linda Alcoff incorporates this idea of interpretation (building on the ideas of Teresa de Lauretis) into her concept of "positionality."\(^{11}\) In this concept, Alcoff posits a way to talk about the

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\(^{11}\) In particular, Alcoff refers to de Lauretis' statement in "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts" that "... consciousness is not the result but the term of a process. Consciousness of self, like class consciousness or race consciousness (e.g. my consciousness of being white), is a particular configuration of subjectivity, or subjective limits, produced at the intersection of meaning with experience. (I have never, before coming to this country, been conscious of being white; and the meaning, the sense of what it means to be white has changed for me greatly over the years.) In other words, these different forms of consciousness are grounded, to be sure, in one's personal history; but that history—one's identity—is interpreted or reconstructed by each of us within the horizon of meanings and knowledges available in the culture at given historical moments, a horizon that also includes modes of political commitment and struggle. Self and identity, in other words, are always grasped and understood within particular discursive configurations. Consciousness, therefore, is never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions.

In this perspective, the very notion of identity undergoes a shift: identity is not the
category "women" without essentializing them because she defines women by their external position; in addition, she acknowledges the constructionist insight that external, ideological and discursive forces play a crucial role in the ongoing formation of subjectivity while at the same time insisting that women contribute to those forces and to their own construction. She asserts

that the very subjectivity (or subjective experience of being a woman) and the very identity of women is constituted by women's position. However, this view should not imply that the concept of "woman" is determined solely by external elements and that the woman herself is merely a passive recipient of an identity created by these forces. Rather, she herself is part of the historicized, fluid moment, and she therefore actively contributes to the context within which her position can be delineated. I would include Laurets' point here, that the identity of a woman is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history, as mediated through the cultural discursive context to which she has access. Therefore, the concept of positionality includes two points: first, as already stated, that the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, and place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply a place where a meaning can be discovered (the meaning of femaleness). (324)

goal but rather the point of departure of the process of self-consciousness, a process by which one begins to know that and how the personal is political, that and how the subject is specifically and materially en-gendered in its social conditions and possibilities of existence. . . . this feminist concept of identity is not at all a statement of an essential nature of Woman, whether defined biologically or philosophically, but rather a political-personal strategy of survival and resistance that is also, at the same time, a critical practice and a mode of knowledge. . . . the search for identity may be, in fact, a "rewriting" of self "in relation to shifting interpersonal and political contexts": in other words, a recasting of the notion that the personal is political which does not simply equate and collapse the two ("the personal is the same as the political," which in practice translates into "the personal instead of the political") but maintains the tension between them precisely through the understanding of identity as multiple and even self-contradictory" (8-9).
Importantly, Alcoff’s theory allows for the political agency of the subject; women can have an effect on the forces which shape them through constantly reinterpreting or reconstructing themselves and their histories.

In her article "Eccentric Subjects," de Lauretis explores how individuals may achieve their potential to interpret and thus participate in the construction of ideological forces and their own subjectivities; they can do so by taking what de Lauretis calls an "excessive critical position," a position "attained through practices of political and personal displacement across boundaries between sociosexual identities and communities, between bodies and discourses, by what I like to call the eccentric subject" (145). This displacement involves a recognition of the necessity for interpreting and criticizing the discourses which have exerted such a strong shaping force on your own subjectivity, of dis-identifying "from those assumptions and conditions taken for granted. . . . [to locate yourself in] a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed" (138). In other words, the individual’s interpretation of the multiple discursive fields imbricated within her subjectivity must exceed traditional limits and meanings. And because the "eccentric subject" has the potential to undermine dominant ideological forces through taking such an excessive critical position, she has agency (which de Lauretis differentiates from the more liberal humanist notion of choice), “and hence social accountability” (137).

In the end, failing to speak for those who would otherwise not be heard excludes their needs from consideration within dominant cultural arenas by default, and so those feminists who wish to effect social change cannot retreat from the task of speaking for others until the voice of each
woman stands an equal chance of being heard. And, while feminist poststructuralist theory has certainly not solved all the problems inherent in speaking for others, it has offered promising concepts that move towards solving some of the issues that have most troubled feminists engaged in the practice of speaking for others: finding a way to construct women as a group without essentializing identity; establishing connections with other women while still respecting and learning from the ways they are different; acknowledging the socially constructed nature of identity in a way that still leaves room for agency.

However, those who speak for others cannot forget that the other has a voice of her own, and that listening to that voice will strengthen the subversive nature of feminist discourse. "Speaking constitutes a subject that challenges and subverts the opposition between the knowing agent and the object of knowledge" (Alcoff, "Problem" 23), and thus, creating conditions where the voice of the other can speak and be heard undermines ideologies of hierarchy and dualism by allowing her to assert her difference from those who would speak for her.

The Problem of Speaking for the Natural Other

Like feminists who have been criticized for employing a concept of women that emphasizes commonalities and erases difference, human advocates who speak for nature tend to stress the ways that humans are connected to and part of nature as a whole. Also like these feminists, environmental advocates stress connection and commonality in an attempt to undermine our culture's prevailing uses of difference to justify domination. While the feminists are concerned with the differences
between men and women, the advocates who speak for nature object to the cultural tendency to erase our participation in nature and natural processes — a biological, even essential, fact of our existences. Many assert the participation of humans in nature and the equality of humans with other natural entities and thus would seem directly to challenge the ideologies of dualism and hierarchy that not only privilege men over women, white over other races, but also privilege the human over other species and nonliving natural entities such as rivers, rock formations, or air. However, the human speaking for natural entities, which are less privileged within dominant (human) culture, risks actually reinforcing those ideologies in ways which are strikingly similar to the three types of problems that I have described as potentially occurring when privileged feminists speak for women less privileged than themselves.

As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 3, some authors who speak for nature effectively erase the idea of difference in their attempt to foreground humans' essential connectedness with nature. Like the speaking feminists who construct a whole, essentialized women's identity by repressing the differences among the experiences of women, these writers construct wholeness by repressing human difference from the natural other. They create a whole out of a certain group of humans — often women or Native Americans — and nature so they can speak for nature. In doing so, these authors can over-identify with the natural world to the extent that they appropriate nature's status as exploited victim of human culture for themselves and the other humans in the group. Such an appropriation or projection of nature's qualities often leads to labeling the author and the group of humans she represents as unproblematically good, the blameless
saviors of the natural world, a move that fails to acknowledge any complicity those humans might have for human destruction of the natural world. In addition, the superficial privileging of environmental issues in the current political climate offers the possibility that those who identify themselves with nature will profit from the act, either economically, professionally, or in gaining a sense of moral mastery. As Linda Alcoff explains, "the practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise" ("Problem" 29).

While the authors I will discuss in Chapter 3 are deeply concerned with nature and their relationships to the natural world, the issues their works raise go back to human subjectivity. As many feminist theorists have discovered, in order to minimize the possibility that your advocacy for others will simply further their oppression, it is crucial to examine yourself and your own cultural construction and positioning. Accordingly, in Chapter 3, I will focus on the complicated issues of human subjectivity tied up in the practice of speaking for nature: how they can construct their own identities in ways that allow them to acknowledge their connections with nature as well as their differences — and the responsibilities implied by those differences — from it; how to conceive of human identity in a way that allows for individual and cultural change; and how to achieve a sense of agency in the face of the discursive forces of dominant, oppressive ideologies.

In Chapter 4 I will look at a group of environmental advocates whose situation parallels that of feminists who acknowledge their differences from
the women for whom they speak, yet neglect to ask how those differences can or should affect their discourse. These authors, although they see humans as part of the natural world, are also quite aware of the differences between humans and other natural entities; in fact, their advocacy often arises out of their keen sense of responsibility towards the natural world. These writers place a special value on wilderness, which they see as particularly threatened by the cultural forces that devalue and damage nature. However, while these advocates' commitment to protecting nature and wilderness functions as an acknowledgment of the cultural privilege they possess in relation to nature, they often neglect to question the dualistic and hierarchical assumptions underlying that privilege; the way Dave Foreman represents the act of advocacy, for instance, actually reinforces the human/nature dichotomy by representing humans as speaking, active defenders of a silent, passive natural world. This type of dualism denies nature agency in a way that cuts these advocates off from the possibility that nature could contribute to its own defense.

While the issues that I explore in relation to all of the writers in this chapter revolve around the relationship between the human advocate and the natural world, other authors, such as Edward Abbey and Gary Snyder, acknowledge the importance of trying to listen to and learn from nature in order to speak for it more effectively. However, this is a very difficult task that often involves problems related to language: whether human language precludes access to the "reality" of nature as well as whether nature has languages or sign systems that humans can learn to understand.

Chapter 5 will examine instances of speaking for nature that are reminiscent of discourses in which feminists fail to explore the implications
of the mediated nature of all representation, thus sometimes lapsing into a sense that their representations of the needs and experiences of other women are "true" in some objective way. The examples of environmental advocacy I discuss — which take the form of print advertisements and television nature documentaries — foreground not the subjectivity of the "author" or the relationship between humans and nature, but the representation of nature itself. These examples often seem to neglect or even evade the responsibilities that accompany the privilege of discursively contributing to representation by falling into easy generalizations about nonhuman nature. In doing so, they risk misrepresenting nature by erasing the differences within the natural world: one way this occurs is when they focus on one aspect of nature while ignoring others; another occurs when their homogenized or monolithic constructions of nature leave no room for conceiving of the human place within the natural world. The perception that the viewer of these ads or documentaries is receiving a complete and unmediated, unconstructed representation of the natural world fosters the notion that we can see the natural other without constructing it in some way; the sense that nature is complete without human beings maintains a sharp dividing line between the humans and the natural. Together, these two tendencies deny our biological and perceptual interconnectedness with the natural world.

Like women who speak for other women, authors who speak for nature often undermine their subversive goals by erasing or failing to account for differences in the ways I have briefly described. The careful attention feminists have begun to give to the constructions of self, other, and the relationships between the two that ground the discourse of advocacy
would seem just as relevant to those humans who speak for nature as for those academic feminists who speak for less privileged women. However, those who wish to speak for nonhuman nature have yet to undergo the scrupulous self-examination that some of these feminists have undertaken. Perhaps this is because the need for such a self-examination among those who speak for nature is less obvious. After all, natural entities, unlike women in developing nations, can't speak for themselves using human language. However, that does not mean that we cannot conceive of nature in ways that allow us to learn from it and see it as subject rather than object. In addition, perhaps because nature is easier to objectify and thus to construct in any way we choose, it seems especially tempting for people unproblematically to over-simplify their conceptions of nature and of their own relationship to it because nature cannot, in most people's eyes, contradict any representations. Nevertheless, some constructions of the human self, human relations to the natural other, and nature itself reinforce dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy, while others can be more subversive of that ideology. In order to contribute to a framework which will aid me in suggesting differentiations of this kind in the chapters to come, I will briefly discuss the human relationship to nature and how issues central to the feminist practice of speaking for nature can be adapted for the practice of environmental advocacy.

*Humans and Nature: Connections and Differences*

As I have discussed, the discourse of environmental advocacy has stressed human commonalities with the rest of nature in order to counter dominant ideologies that reinforce a sense of human difference and superiority in regard to the natural world. Philosophical and ethical claims
for such commonalities are well-supported by environmental science, which demonstrates the many ways that humans are biologically and physically part of nature as a whole. Like other animals, we depend on natural systems and other species for our food, water, and air. Like other animals, we decompose back into our constitutive elements when we die. "Humanity coevolved with the rest of life on this particular planet" and thus we are dependent upon that life (Wilson, *Diversity* 347).

While such a corrective can play an important role in improving nature's standing within human culture, as I have explained, an excessive or unreflecting emphasis on human connections with nature can simultaneously support dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy. Like feminist advocates, environmental advocates need to account for difference: in this case, human differences from the rest of nature. Despite the biological fact of humans' interconnectedness with nonhuman nature — and any ethical conclusions about the inherent equality of natural entities with human beings that may be drawn from that fact — humans are different from any other part of nature as well. First of all, humans belong to a unique species, *Homo sapiens*. In *The Diversity of Life*, biologist E. O. Wilson defines a species as "a population whose members are able to interbreed freely under natural conditions" (38). Thus, belonging to a distinct species implies certain genetic and behavioral differences from all other living species.

One characteristic of the human species which seems distinct, although difficult to quantify, is our practical ability and apparent predilection to transform and seek to control the natural world (including our own bodies), often with unanticipated consequences. Although the
human race is not the only species to significantly alter the earth's environment (consider the photosynthetic organisms which evolved in the period between 2.8 and 1.8 billion years ago, eventually changing the earth's atmosphere from anaerobic to aerobic), such great changes as those we have wrought have never before occurred in such a short period of time. One measure of our effect on the environment is our impact on biodiversity. In his discussion of biodiversity, Wilson acknowledges the difficulties and complexities of assessing the loss of biodiversity due to human impact, yet finds enough evidence to assert that "in the small minority of groups of plants and animals that are well known, extinction is proceeding at a rapid rate, far above prehuman levels. In many cases the level is calamitous: the entire group is threatened" (255). Later, his assertion becomes even more specific:

If past species have lived on an order of a million years in the absence of human interference, a common figure for some groups documented in the fossil record, it follows that the normal 'background' extinction rate is about one species per one million species a year. Human activity has increased extinction between 1,000 and 10,000 times over this level in the rain forest [which he previously reports to be thought to contain more than half the species of organisms on earth despite the fact that they occupy only 6% of the earth's land

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12 Biodiversity is defined in Don Kaufman and Cecilia Franz's environmental science textbook *Biosphere 2000: Protecting Our Global Environment* as "The variety of life forms that inhabit the earth; biodiversity includes genetic diversity among members of a population or species as well as the diversity of species and ecosystems" (G-2).

13 These difficulties and complexities include the vast number of species as yet undiscovered by humans (he estimates that 90% of the species in existence are as yet unnamed, p. 255), the difficulty of figuring out the exact cause of a species' extinction and thus of attributing it to human impact, and the difficulty of knowing the exact moment when a species becomes extinct.
surface] by reduction in area alone. Clearly, we are in the midst of one of the great extinction spasms of geological history. (280)

Another measure of human impact is the extent to which we have influenced nonhuman nature. In *The End of Nature*, Bill McKibben argues that by elevating the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and thus increasing global warming, the human species has brought an end to nature in the sense that no part or aspect of nonhuman nature is unaffected by human activity.

Many people would assert that there exists yet another difference between humans and the rest of nature: consciousness. This is in all probability true in regard to the nonliving aspects of nature, but the difference becomes harder to prove categorically when we look at studies of other animals conducted in the field of cognitive ethology, which analyzes cognitive processes in nonhuman animals. In *Animal Minds*, cognitive ethologist Donald Griffin explains, "Because it is so difficult to prove rigorously whether any given animal is conscious, no matter how ingenious its behavior, scientists have tended to cling to the assumption that all animal behavior is unconscious" (1). However, the ongoing work of Griffin and others in the field renders it more and more difficult to draw such an absolute line between humans and other life forms. Griffin cites detailed descriptions of studies which attest to 1) different species' ability to adapt behavior to cope with novel challenges; 2) physiological signals from animal brains that may be correlated with conscious thinking; and 3) data concerning communicative behavior by which animals appear to be conveying thoughts to other animals. Based on these studies, Griffin concludes that not only do animals experience cognition or thoughts, as
most scientists would agree, but also that there is good reason to believe that at least some animals are conscious of themselves as beings and of their own actions as distinct from the actions of other beings. Given the work of Griffin and others like him, it is likely that there exists a continuum of consciousness among animals, a continuum which reaches an extreme of introspection and self-reflection in the human species.

Although humans cannot simplistically distinguish ourselves from the rest of nature by the criterion of consciousness, we can still distinguish ourselves by the degree to which we can reflect upon the ways our actions will affect others in the present, and ourselves and others in the future. We can reflect upon these implications of our behavior enough, in theory, to change our actions if we deem it necessary. As a consequence, we must acknowledge our privilege and responsibility in being able to alter the way we interact with the rest of nature by consciously reflecting on and mediating the way we conceive of our relationship with nonhuman nature.

Clearly, feminist poststructuralist conceptions of identity that emphasize the complex, shifting nature of the subject hold promise for those engaged in the discourse of environmental advocacy; such views of identity can account for the ways we are connected with other natural entities as well as the important ways that we are different from them. However, most feminist poststructuralists have not addressed the ways that relationships with the natural world might be included in conceptions of human identity; in the next section, I will suggest how this might be accomplished.

*Nature, Culture, and Discourse: Other Axes of Difference*
Despite the reality that human beings are biologically and physically interconnected with the natural world in a variety of interactive relationships, the cultural forces of ideology and discourse significantly affect the ways humans can perceive and interact with nature. The most extreme poststructuralist stance would assert that, as Diana Fuss puts it, "the natural is itself posited as a construction of the social" (3). Many environmentalists react violently to this position, which N. Katherine Hayles calls "radical constructivism": the stance that "everything we think we know, including 'nature,' is a construction emerging from historically specific, discursive, social, and cultural conditions" (47). These environmentalists often interpret such a stance as denying the reality or existence of the natural world and recoil in horror from what they see as the ultimate in human arrogance; for example, in Confessions of an Eco-Warrior, environmental activist Dave Foreman insists that

the world exists independently of us. When a tree falls in the forest and no human is there to hear it, it still falls, the shock waves still echo from bluff to cliff, the bears and the birds yet hear, and life goes on. Only an arrogant fool could think otherwise. (53)

Needless to say, to deny nature any existence outside of cultural constructions would be to maintain a damaging anthropocentric hierarchy that many feminists as well as most environmentalists would wish to avoid. However, poststructuralist thinkers more often take the moderate

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14 As I discuss, environmentalists often see poststructuralism as denying the existence of a "real" natural world that is independent of human constructions; however, it is important to note that most (if not all) poststructuralist theorists would disagree with such an interpretation of their views. Their point is that we can only know and interact with "reality" through our constructions of it, not that such a reality does not exist.
stance that, although the rest of nature (and indeed, our own bodies) exist independently of our perceptions and discursive constructions of them, we can only know them through those social constructions. As Neil Evernden asserts in *The Social Construction of Nature*, "Inevitably, what we know is largely our own symbolic representations, which will behave as they were designed to. But of that which they purport to represent, they tell a partial story at best" (130).

For environmental advocates concerned with promoting an egalitarian relationship between humans and nature, it is important to emphasize the ways that humans and nature mutually affect each other, to balance the sense of how profoundly human culture constructs nature with a sense of the ways nature can shape culture. Of course, natural forces and entities exert a strong physical shaping force on other organisms and nonliving entities (think of the water erosion that has formed — and continues to form — the Grand Canyon); it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that they also exert an influence on human beings and human culture through the ways they affect us both physically and mentally. For example, E. O. Wilson has proposed that human beings as a species have been shaped by the interactions of their brains and bodies with nonhuman nature through evolution. Human identities, in turn, must be shaped at least partially by the physical, chemical composition of human brains and by

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15 In this book, Evernden takes an approach to the concept of nature which is generally compatible with poststructuralist theory. He surveys the differing meanings assigned to the term "nature" at different times and in different circumstances in order to show "the highly cultural content of what is taken to be an objective entity" (xiii) and to propose new ways to think about that term in order to bring about environmental reform. However, his ideas come into conflict with the tenets of social construction when he suggests that we can, with effort, experience nature outside the constraint of the social.
the capabilities of human bodies. As Wilson points out in "Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic,"

human history did not begin eight or ten thousand years ago with the invention of agriculture and villages. It began hundreds of thousands or millions of years ago with the origin of the genus Homo. For more than 99 percent of human history people have lived in hunter-gatherer bands totally and intimately involved with other organisms. During this period of deep history, and still farther back, into paleohominid times, they depended on an exact learned knowledge of crucial aspects of natural history. That much is true even of chimpanzees today, who use primitive tools and have a practical knowledge of plants and animals. As language and culture expanded, humans also used living organisms of diverse kinds as a principal source of metaphor and myth. In short, the brain evolved in a biocentric world, not a machine-regulated world.

Based on this insight, Wilson develops his concept of biophilia: the idea that humans possess an "innate tendency to focus on life and life-like processes" (Biophilia 1) which affords them some competitive advantage as a species and which provides an outlet for achieving personal fulfillment.

Significantly, Wilson claims that this tendency extends beyond a material, physical dependence "to encompass as well the human craving for aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive, and even spiritual meaning and satisfaction" (Kellert, Biophilia Hypothesis 20). Wilson also supports his biophilia hypothesis with a proposed mechanism of gene-culture co-evolution: "a certain genotype makes a behavioral response more likely, the response enhances survival and reproductive fitness, the genotype consequently spreads through the population, and the behavioral response grows more frequent"
(Wilson, "Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic" 33). These behavioral responses, in turn, shape human culture.

Of course, arguments that natural forces have shaped culture can go too far, lapsing into the kind of biological determinism for which Wilson and other figures associated with "sociobiology" have become infamous. As Ruth Bleier points out in *Science and Gender*, the discipline of sociobiology existed long before Wilson and traditionally focused on the social behavior of animals. However, the term has come to be associated with the work of Wilson, Richard Dawkins, and others who seek to explain all social behavior, including that of humans, on the basis of biology. Central to their explanations is the idea of the "selfish gene"; as Kate Soper explains,

> The essential thesis of sociobiology, in short, is that the individual organism is to be viewed as the vehicle for the reproduction of the gene and that all forms of altruistic or cooperative behaviour are explicable in terms of an underlying 'competition' for genetic inheritance" (58).

As both Bleier and Soper discuss, this incarnation of sociobiology has inspired a wide range of criticisms, ranging from those based on its methodology to those that charge it with reading "biology in the light of existing relations of class, gender, and racial exploitation," and thus naturalizing and perpetuating "tribalism, racism, entrepreneurial activity, xenophobia, male domination and social stratification" (Soper 58).17

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16 Wilson outlines the mechanism of gene-culture co-evolution in more detail in *Promethean Fire*, "The Relation Between Biological and Cultural Evolution," and (with Charles Lumsden) *Genes, Mind, and Culture*.

17 The implication that culture is solely the product of nature can be critiqued on other grounds as well; as Aaron Katcher and Gregory Wilkins remark in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, a collection of essays discussing Wilson's hypothesis, "The precarious state of the world's dwindling resources of wilderness provides overwhelming evidence that no matter how deeply the tendency to engage other kinds of life is rooted in our brains, our culture determines
While it is crucial to critique the oppressive implications of theories like Wilson's, it is also important to consider the more positive ramifications of the ways such theories describe specific mechanisms through which nonhuman nature can affect human identity and culture. Human culture, in the West at least, is too quick to hold itself above the influence of nature and needs to be reminded of the fundamental role the nonhuman world has played in shaping the human one. As Neil Evernden explains in *The Natural Alien*: "There is no hope of untangling the biological and the cultural in the amalgam that is human. We are given to culture by virtue of our situation in the organic world, and culture remains our sole apparent means of approximating the meaning which habitually evades us" (121).

The insight that the natural and the cultural are profoundly intertwined with another another informs the work of Theodore Roszak and Paul Shepard, who both propose explanations for Western culture's alienation from nature that hinge on the ways that nature affects human psychology. Roszak, in *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology*, proposes ecopsychology as a way to heal the "alienation between the person and the natural environment," just as other therapies address alienation between individuals and other people or society as a whole (320). He explains that there is a "synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being" which is dependent on humans' ecological unconscious, wherein can be found "the living record of cosmic how our actions impinge on our common natural world" (190). Although their phrasing suggests a problematically radical dualism between nature and culture rather than a dialectic, their insight that neither biology nor culture can be adequately discussed in isolation from one another provides a good context for Wilson's ideas.
evolution, tracing back to distant initial conditions in the history of time" (321). He bases his sense of the human mind and unconscious as intimately connected to the rest of the universe on findings of modern science including complex adaptive systems and on less conventionally accepted ideas like the Anthropic Principle and the Gaia Hypothesis:

Contemporary studies in the ordered complexity of nature tell us that life and mind emerge from this evolutionary tale as culminating natural systems within the unfolding sequence of physical, biological, mental, and cultural systems we know as "the universe." (320)

In order to end our culture's typical repression of the ecological unconscious, he proposes methods which could help to "recover the child's innately animistic quality of experience in functionally 'sane' adults" (320).

In Nature and Madness, Paul Shepard claims that humans once lived in stable harmony with nonhuman nature: when humans lived by hunting and gathering, the species evolved a pattern of psychological development in response to intimate, constant contact with nonhuman nature because it was adaptive and beneficial to human survival. This pattern of development culminates in a "sense of being at home in the world" based on "an acceptance of ambiguity, of the tensions between the lust for omnipotence and the necessity to manipulate, between man as different and man as a kind of animal, and especially between a growing sense of the separateness of the self and kinship to the Other" (13-14). With the onset of agriculture, however, the intimate bond with nonhuman nature which fostered this pattern of development was broken, but the pattern remained. Pointing out that mental unhealth is often accompanied by regression to mental stages typical of infancy or early childhood, Shephard suggests that
the demands of a culture increasingly separated from nonhuman nature began to encourage values and attitudes typical of juvenile stages of human development. Thus, as a species, we remain stalled at a level of development which results in chronic madness as evidenced by our destruction of our own environment.

While these theories suggest ways that nature might affect human culture through genetics and the human psyche, they do not address the poststructuralist understanding that it is specifically discursive, ideological forces that act as the primary forces structuring human culture and identity. In order to evolve a theory which accepts poststructuralist conceptions of social construction yet accords nature a role in the processes of that construction, we must ask how nature can be seen as participating in discursive forces. If we know nature, ourselves, and each other only through our symbolic representations, then how does nature "know" or interact with us? SueEllen Campbell suggests in "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet" that the insight that we are constructed by "all kinds of influences outside ourselves, that we are part of vast networks, texts written by larger and stronger forces" can easily include a role for nonhuman nature: "But surely one of the most important of these forces is the rest of the natural world. How close we are to the land as we are growing up and when we are grown, how we learn to see our relationship with it — these things must matter enormously" (209). Gary Snyder has stressed that even language, that most ideologically determined tool/shaping force of human culture, has been influenced by the nonhuman, natural environment of the species using it: "It would be a mistake to think that humans got 'smarter' at some point and invented first
language and then society. Language and culture emerge from our biological-social natural existence, animals that we were/are. Language is a mind/body system that coevolved with our needs and nerves (Practice 17).

In the end, it is not only unnecessary but impossible to see nonhuman nature and human culture as uninvolved with one another. Gary Snyder gives us a way to look at nature and culture as not irrevocably divided, but profoundly imbricated within one another, whether within or without the individual human identity:

Exquisite complex beings in their energy webs inhabiting the fertile corners of the urban world in accord with the rules of wild systems, the visible hardy stalks and stems of vacant lots and railroads, the persistent raccoon squads, bacteria in the loam and in our yogurt. The term culture, in its meaning of 'a deliberately maintained aesthetic and intellectual life' and in its other meaning of 'the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns,' is never far from a biological root meaning as in 'yogurt culture' — a nourishing habitat. (15)

Our bodies are wild. The involuntary quick turn of the head at a shout, the vertigo at looking off a precipice, the heart-in-the-throat in a moment of danger, the catch of the breath, the quiet moments relaxing, staring, reflecting — all universal responses of this mammal body. . . . The depths of the mind, the unconscious, are our inner wilderness areas, and that is where a bobcat is right now. (16)

Yet another way to conceive of the imbrication of the natural within human identity and culture is to return to the poststructuralist concept that every individual human subject occupies a position at the intersection of multiple and shifting axes of identity (and associated discursive forces). We can expand this theory of the subject to account for human construction by nature through perceiving categories and entities within the natural world as acting as axes of difference or identity, just as human concepts such as gender or ethnicity do. For example, our identities may be shaped by our
bioregions or by natural features of our places such as mountains or woods. We may be affected by our discursive sense of ourselves as mammals, or as living things (as opposed to natural entities such as air or water which are abiotic).

Viewing our axes of identity as occupying a continuum from the most natural to the most cultural accounts for our ability to sometimes acknowledge connections with natural entities and sometimes acknowledge our differences from them (and, ideally, sometimes a combination of both). Such connections, grounded in affinity rather than essentialism, would allow us to focus on whatever axes of identity are most appropriate for our current context while acknowledging that our identities shift and change throughout time due to different experiences and shaping forces. And, most importantly for the purposes of environmental advocacy, it would allow us to acknowledge our connections with nonhuman nature without ignoring our differences from it. As Kate Soper puts it,

To insist on our naturality, it seems, is to pay too little heed to those exceptional powers and capacities through which we have exercised an ecologically destructive dominance over Nature, but without which there can also be no question of overcoming this alienation. To insist, on the other hand, on our 'super-naturality' or essential separation from nature is to sever us too radically from the material context of existence, to conceptualize human nature in idealist terms (by viewing its essence as 'mentalistic' or 'spiritual'), and to open the way to a purely conceptual or subjectivist — and hence ecologically irrelevant — resolution of the problem of alienation. (49)
CHAPTER 3

"REWRITING A GENEALOGY WITH THE EARTH": ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY AND HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

In the Preface to Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her, ecofeminist author Susan Griffin explains that she has written her book primarily in two voices: one is the "paternal" voice of patriarchal Western civilization and science, and the other, which she represents in italics,

began as my voice but was quickly joined by the voices of other women, and voices from nature, with which I felt more and more strongly identified, particularly as I read the opinions of men about us. This is an embodied voice and an impassioned one (xvi).

In this way, Griffin positions herself as speaking not only for other women, but also for nature, using her privileged position as a writer to testify to what she perceives as the oppression both have shared within Western culture. In constructing a politicized bond between women and nature, Griffin is reclaiming a centuries-old culturally perceived connection between the two groups, a connection that men within Western culture have historically used to marginalize women by classifying them as less human than, and thus inferior to, men.¹ In the face of a growing environmental crisis, a number of women

¹Carolyn Merchant’s The Death of Nature examines the history of this connection in detail.
writers have reclaimed this connection with nature in order to strengthen their sense of identity and oppose themselves to the dominant cultural forces they see as responsible for environmental degradation as well as women's oppression.

While ecofeminists like Griffin are deeply concerned with improving the cultural standing of both women and nature, I am particularly concerned with the ways they position themselves as advocates for the natural world based on their sense of sharing its victimization within Western culture. As I have mentioned in Chapter 2, an unreflective over-emphasis on the connections between these two groups can actually reinforce the ideologies responsible for that victimization. By associating women so closely with nature and then opposing those two groups to the rest of human culture, these writers risk representing the human relationship with nature as dualistic — either the complete integration experienced by women or the total alienation experienced by men — and then hierarchically privileging the first over the second. By ignoring women's differences from nature, such a stance can lead ecofeminists to ignore the ways that women have participated in attitudes and practices that are destructive to nature. In addition, when they represent women's identity as monolithic and static, such writers deny human subjects and culture the capacity for change.

Like women, Native American cultures have been widely perceived as closer to nature by dominant Western society and have suffered classification as "subhuman" as a result. However, some writers who wish to argue for the value and rights of nonhuman nature have begun rethinking the implications of this connection as well, speculating that dominant culture could learn from such societies how to transform our relationship with nonhuman nature into
one that is less dominating and more sustainable for both humans and nonhuman nature. The works of non-Native American writers who take such a stance demonstrate some of the same problems found in ecofeminist discourse, problems resulting from over-identifying certain groups of people with nature. Interestingly, texts by Native Americans that address these issues often confront and work towards solving these problems.

In this chapter, I will examine these problems as they occur in the works of ecofeminists, non-Native Americans writing about Native cultures, and Native Americans themselves. I will begin by discussing the works that I see as representing more limited views of human identity and human potential for relationships with the nonhuman; like certain feminist and Marxist approaches that Donna Haraway critiques in "A Cyborg Manifesto," these works "run aground on Western epistemological imperatives to construct a revolutionary subject from the perspective of a hierarchy of oppressions and/or a latent position of moral superiority, innocence, and greater closeness to nature" (176).

In the second section of the chapter, I will examine works that more successfully construct subjectivities that occupy the position of Haraway’s mythical Cyborg: able to forge political alliances with others, yet free "of the need to ground politics in 'our' privileged position of the oppression that incorporates all other dominations, the innocence of the merely violated, the ground of those closer to nature" (176).

Traditionally Oppressed Groups and Nature: Connections that Suppress Difference

Writers who speak for nature based on commonalities between traditionally oppressed groups of humans and the natural world often invoke
essentialist conceptions of human identity and culture; the discourse of both ecofeminists and non-Native American writers who promote what they see as Native worldviews exhibit such conceptions. However, many ecofeminists also recognize the risk that essentialist positions can reinvoke dominant ideologies and distance themselves from those positions; nevertheless, some non-essentialist ecofeminists stress what they see as the culturally constructed connections between women and nature to such an extent that they effectively erase the idea of difference and its implications. In this section, I will discuss both essentialist and non-essentialist discourses that over-emphasize commonalities between traditionally oppressed groups of people and nature.

Essentialism and the Myth of the Golden Past

The most obvious way that writers risk advancing a limited view of identity in the course of reclaiming and rewriting traditional connections between certain groups and nonhuman nature is by suggesting that members of these groups share in some sort of unchanging, essential identity which grants them an access to nonhuman nature that other people do not possess. Ecofeminist writers in particular have come to bear the stigma (especially within academia) of such essentialism. It is true that some ecofeminist writers claim that women are essentially or inherently closer to nature than men because of physical/biological connections such as menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. According to Vera Norwood, ecofeminist adherents of such a viewpoint, "focus on women's 'physical' connection with the earth as a result of their menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and childbirth" (265). For these ecofeminists, she explains, "the problem is . . . the patriarchal culture's alienation from women's physical experience in the push to dominate the earth. The solution to
the violent relationships of patriarchy, they contend, lies in emphasizing values rising from women's connection with nature" (265).

Norwood notes tendencies toward such a focus in the work of Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Andrée Collard, and Ariel Salleh. For example, in The Rape of the Wild, Andrée Collard asserts that

> Nothing links the human animal and nature so profoundly as woman's reproductive system which enables her to share the experience of bringing forth and nourishing life with the rest of the living world. Whether or not she personally experiences biological mothering, it is in this that woman is most truly a child of nature and in this natural integrity lies the wellspring of her strength. (106)

While Collard's work rejects dominant ideologies which might use such an essential, biological connection between women and nature to exclude both from consideration in the real of human culture, her representation of an essential woman-nature connection simply reverses the traditional cultural hierarchy which elevates men over women and humans over nature. As a consequence, her work actually reinforces the ideology of dualism which denies the interconnectedness of men, women, and nonhuman nature. Mary Daly is another ecofeminist writer who holds out women's biological closeness to nonhuman nature as a source for healing the ills of patriarchal culture.² Ynestra King, an ecofeminist whose non-essentialist stance I will discuss at length later in this chapter, is careful to acknowledge the power of Daly's vision but

² While Daly's essentialism raises the problematic issues I discuss in connection with ecofeminist essentialism in general, it is important to note that many ecofeminists cite Daly's Gyn/Ecology (1978) as a work which inspired them to explore the connections between feminism and environmentalism (see King's 'The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology). While this could be interpreted as an indication that essentialism is a well-accepted position within ecofeminism, it can also be interpreted as a testament to the political value of Daly's work. In other words, while I believe it is important to critique biological essentialism, I also feel it is problematic to dismiss a work simply because it takes an essentialist stance.
recognizes the dualism inherent in merely reversing the hierarchical values of dominant culture:

My ecofeminism differs from that of Daly; I believe Gyn/Ecology stands as a powerful phenomenology of the victimization of women, but it is ultimately dualistic. . . . She has turned the old misogynist Thomas Aquinas on his head. Although she is more correct than he, she has reified the female over the male. She does not take us past dualism, which I believe to be the ecofeminist agenda. ("Healing the Wounds" 124)  

While this type of biological essentialism has been roundly critiqued within feminist theory, as I discuss in Chapter 2, the discourse of environmental advocacy exhibits another, less obvious version of essentialism that also warrants some concern. A number of writers attempt to justify women's or Native American cultures' associations with nonhuman nature by asserting the existence of a "golden past" when certain groups of humans lived in harmony with nature and with each other. They tend to make such assertions not only in an attempt to valorize traditionally oppressed groups and nonhuman nature, but also to prove that Western culture can best overcome its alienation from the rest of nature by restoring an Edenic condition of wholeness represented by those harmonious cultures.

A well known group that often participates in this trend is the branch of cultural feminism that focuses on the existence of goddess-worshipping cultures before the rise of patriarchal society. In "The Gaia Tradition and the

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3Note that this essay, as published in Jagger and Bordo's 1989 Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing, is an earlier version of the essay that appears in Diamond and Orenstein's 1990 collection Reshaping the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism. Except where I note otherwise, I have used the earlier version because it is longer and goes into more depth on issues of interest to an academic audience than the second version.
Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto," Riane Eisler presents a typical description of these cultures:

One fascinating discovery about our past is that for millenia — a span of time many times longer than the 5,000 years conventionally counted as history — prehistoric societies worshipped the Goddess of nature and spirituality, our great Mother, the giver of life and creator of all. But even more fascinating is that these ancient societies were structured very much like the more peaceful and just society we are now trying to construct. This is not to say that these were ideal societies or utopias. But, unlike our societies, they were *not* warlike. They were *not* societies where women were subordinate to men. And they did *not* see our Earth as an object for exploitation and domination.

While the factual accuracy of such accounts of peaceful and ecologically responsible pre-patriarchal societies has been questioned by a variety of critics, it is even more important to question the legitimacy of invoking such a vision of the past in order to justify a goal of increased ecological responsibility for the future.

By predicating the possibility that human culture can overcome its dualistic relationship with nonhuman nature on the idea that there once existed non-hierarchical human cultures characterized by equality and harmony among men and women as well as between humans and nature, ecofeminists like Eisler suggest that human culture can only improve its ecological consciousness.

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4 See Janet Biehl's *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*. While I agree with Ariel Salleh's estimation of Biehl's work (in "Second Thoughts on Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics") as generally mean-spirited, dependent upon a falsely universalized sense of ecofeminist belief, and as perpetuating the culture/nature dualism by recommending that "women place themselves along with men over and above 'nature'" (100), I think Biehl's chapter on "The Neolithic Mystique" raises some interesting questions about accounts of these goddess-worshipping cultures. For example, she questions the validity of the archaeological evidence usually used to prove these cultures' existence as well as challenging the premise that goddess worship necessarily guarantees gender equality, non-hierarchy, and peace.
by returning to a previously existing cultural identity of wholeness with nonhuman nature. This presumes a notion of cultural identity that is quite limited in its ability to adapt and change; as Ynestra King recognizes,

The knowledge that women were not always dominated and that society was not always hierarchical is a powerful inspiration for contemporary women, so long as such a society is not represented as a 'natural order' apart from history, to which we will inevitably return by a great reversal. ("History" 44)\(^5\)

A similar tendency to predicate a cultural shift in attitudes toward nonhuman nature upon the existence of cultures which have already achieved perfect harmony among people and with the world around them can be found in non-Native writers who focus on Native American cultures' relationship with their natural environment. As Richard White points out in his bibliographic essay, "Native Americans and the Environment," the growth of the environmental movement in the 1970s was accompanied by a desire on the part of many environmentalists and researchers to look at Native Americans as "conservationists and ecologists" (180). Since that time, writers who wish to speak for nonhuman nature have frequently valorized Native American cultures, both past and present, as examples of human societies which recognized and respected the inherent value and the needs of nonhuman

\(^5\)Eisler herself seems to realize some of the potential problems in suggesting that all "tribal cultures" have positive relationships with nonhuman nature (and thus by implication that all industrialized cultures have negative relationships with nonhuman nature): "But if we carefully examine both our past and present, we see that many peoples past and present living close to nature have all too often been blindly destructive of their environment.... And while there is much we can learn today from tribal cultures, it is important not to indiscriminately idealize all non-Western cultures and/or blame all our troubles on our secular scientific age." (32) However, despite this brief disclaimer, she never explains what a "secular scientific" alternative to returning to pre-patriarchal culture might be, or acknowledges the risk that an over-emphasis on the existence of cultures which were ecologically harmonious might contribute to a limited and essentialist notion of human cultural identities.
nature, and which consequently avoided the human/nature dualism so prevalent in our culture. However, these representations of Native American cultures often participate in a version of the myth of the golden past; even when these writers are referring to contemporary Native American cultures, they often present them as embodying traditions of the past which have somehow survived, pure and unchanged, into modern times.

For example, Chaia Heller, in her ecofeminist essay "For the Love of Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic," critiques the use of the image of "Mother Earth" by deep ecologists and other environmentalists as perpetuating Western cultural conceptions of women and nature as weak, vulnerable and therefore in need of protection by men. Acknowledging the association of the "Mother Earth" image with Native American cultures, Heller explains that the use of such an image has a different effect when used by such cultures than when appropriated by "oppressive" societies:

Certainly there are nonpatriarchal, indigenous cultures, such as many Native American cultures, which use female images of nature in a nonsexist way. However, when those who are not from these indigenous cultures attempt to use a 'Mother Earth' metaphor, something vital is lost in the translation. A metaphor that emerges within the language of a tribal people cannot be accurately translated into the language of an oppressive people (231).

Heller's sense that it is problematic for Western culture to appropriate the traditions and images of native cultures demonstrates an admirable respect for the ways those cultures are different from our own. As Ynestra King points out in "Healing the Wounds,"

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6 In her critique of feminized images of nature, Heller participates in a critical discussion primarily initiated by Patrick D. Murphy's "Sex-Typing the Planet: Gaia Imagery and the Problem of Subverting Patriarchy."
human beings can't simply jump off, or jump out of history. These indigenous, embodied, earth-centered traditions can plant seeds in the imagination of people who are the products of dualistic cultures, but White Westerners cannot use them to avoid the responsibility of their own history. (126)

However, most writers who invoke native cultures or traditions in their attempt to speak for nature do so in the way King recommends, as inspiration for a radical revision of Western culture's worldview, not as something to rob or adopt wholesale. In their book *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, Bill Devall and George Sessions are careful to say that their field, deep ecology, draws on the traditions of native cultures not for "a revival of the Romantic version of primal peoples as 'noble savages,' but a basis for philosophy, religion, cosmology, and conservation practices that can be applied to our own society" (96).

Heller's strict prohibition on any use of Native American traditions or images by other cultures in fact works to maintain a dualism between nature and culture, a dualism that is irrevocably caught up with the dualism between men and women that she condemns so vociferously. By presenting dominant Western culture as so monolithically sexist and alienated from nature that any association of women and nonhuman nature is inherently destructive, while valorizing Native American cultures as living in perfect harmony with nature and each other, she constructs a division between the two groups that seems virtually unbridgeable.

In doing so, Heller participates in what Doug MacCleery calls the myth of the "ecologically invisible" Native American: the sense that Native American cultures had no observable effects on their environments and thus were invisible in terms of ecological impacts. As historical geographer M.J. Bowden
points out, the currently popular idea that, before the arrival of Europeans, Native Americans "lived, so the tradition goes, in harmony with nature, making no irremediable changes in the environment, and handing over to Europeans a virgin land" (20) has its roots in the cultural mythmaking of Puritan settlers during the 1600s. Bowden explains that "The ignoble savage, non-agricultural and barely human, was invented to justify dispossession. . . and to prove that the Indian had no part in transforming America from Wilderness to Garden" (20). However, as scholars in environmental history, historical geography, and cultural ecology have been arguing for some time, "There is no question that enormous areas of the forests and grasslands we inherited (or invaded and stole, if you wish) were very much cultural landscapes, shaped profoundly by human action," (MacCleery 4). As historical geographer W.M. Denevan writes in "The Pristine Myth. The Landscape of the Americas in 1492,"

there is substantial evidence . . . that the Native American landscape of the early sixteenth century was a humanized landscape almost everywhere. Populations were large. Forest composition had been modified, grasslands had been created, wildlife disrupted, and erosion ubiquitous. (369)

As MacCleery discusses, the "humanization" of the landscape by Native American cultures included significant levels of agriculture and the regular setting of fires:

Agriculture originated in North America about 10,000 years ago. . . By 1500, tens of millions of acres were cleared for crops. Native peoples everywhere in North America also set fire to hundreds of millions of acres on a regular basis to improve game habitat, facilitate travel, reduce insect pests, remove cover for potential enemies, enhance conditions for berries, drive game, and for other purposes. (4)
MacCLEERY points out that the European belief that Native Americans did not shape their environment eventually lost some of its negative connotations; writers and painters of nineteenth century America such as Thoreau and the "Hudson River School" landscape artists were among the first to reverse those negative connotations by idealizing what they saw as the Native Americans' harmony with nature. However,

Whether denigrated as ignoble savages or idealized as native Americans living in perfect equilibrium and harmony with the environment, the Indians are given no credit for opening up the Eastern Woodlands, for creating much of America's grassland, and for transforming hardwoods to piney woods with their "woods-burning habit. (Bowden 20)

Many writers who invoke Native American cultures as examples for contemporary Western society are aware of the inaccuracy of the idea that these native cultures had no impact whatsoever on their natural environment. However, even among those who acknowledge that Native American cultures made use of and altered their environment, there is a reluctance to admit that such alterations were ever severe or potentially disruptive. Common to writers who exhibit such a reluctance is the belief that Native American cultures possessed a spiritual and cultural worldview which effectively moderated their interactions with nonhuman nature so as to prevent harm or significant alteration. In *American Indian Ecology*, Donald Hughes writes that

One of the inescapable facts which emerges when we contrast the Indian past with the present is that the American Indians' cultural patterns, based on careful hunting and agricultural carried on according to spiritual perceptions of nature, actually preserved the earth and life on the earth. (139)

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7See Gary Paul Nabhan's discussion of this tendency in "Cultural Parallax in Viewing North American Habitats."
Devall and Sessions agree that native cultures were universally prevented from abusing nonhuman nature by their exemplary sense of place:

Native Americans and other primal peoples can teach us reverence for the land, the place of being. Nature was used—beaver, bison, etc.—for sustenance, but richness of ends was achieved with material technology that was elegant, sophisticated, appropriate, and controlled within the context of a traditional society. (97)

In The Rights of Nature, Roderick Nash also elaborates on the worldview that so many environmentalists feel is the key to Native Americans' ecological responsibility: "central to most Indian religions and ethical systems was the idea that humans and other forms of life constituted a single society" (117).

However, some scholars insist that Native American cultures' interactions with nonhuman nature, while clearly less disruptive and with less permanent effects than those of contemporary Western culture, were not always ecologically benign. Denevan, for instance, states firmly that "the Indian impact was neither benign nor localized and ephemeral, not were resources always used in a sound ecological way" (370). In addition to citing the controversial thesis "that 'overkill' hunting caused the extinction of some large mammals during the late Pleistocene" (375), Denevan describes how "the size of native populations, associated deforestation and prolonged intensive agriculture led to severe land degradation in some regions" (376), including what is now Central Mexico. 8

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8 Interestingly, Denevan cites the devastation of Native American populations resulting from diseases introduced by Europeans as one reason why Native American interactions with nature have long been perceived as non-interventionist: "Most of our eyewitness descriptions of wilderness and empty lands come from a later time [than 1492], particularly 1750-1850 when interior lands began to be explored and occupied by Europeans. By 1650, Indian populations in the hemisphere had been reduced by about 90 percent [since 1492], while by 1750 European numbers were not yet substantial and settlement had only begun to expand. As a result, fields
Interestingly, Gary Nabhan takes issue with both the viewpoint that Native Americans "have had a negligible impact on their homelands" (88) and the equally extreme contention that "Native Americans and other indigenous peoples have rapaciously exterminated wildlife within their reach and that their farming, hunting, and gathering techniques were often ecologically ill-suited for the habitats in which they were practiced" (89). Instead, he argues that Native Americans experienced both types of relationships with nature and acquired ecological wisdom over time: "I would like to suggest that all of pre-Columbian North America was not pristine wilderness for the very reason that many indigenous cultures actively managed habitats and plant populations within their home ranges as a response to earlier episodes of overexploitation" (93). He describes the current environmental practices of the O'odham people, an indigenous culture he is familiar with, as an example of a relationship with nature which avoids the dichotomy between total harmony with the landscape and destructive abuse of it: "the O'odham elders I know best still behave as active participants in the desert without assuming that they are ultimately 'in control' of it" (96).

Despite viewpoints like Nabhan's which work to complicate dualistic thinking about Native American relationships with nature, many writers looking to current Native American cultures for models of ecological responsibility continue to predicate those cultures' special respect for and sense of reciprocity with nonhuman nature on the idea of a "golden past." In his book, In the Absence of the Sacred, Jerry Mander quotes Native American religious leaders to demonstrate how different their attitude toward the

had been abandoned, while settlements vanished, forests recovered, and savannas retreated" (379).
environment is than that of most Americans. Their words create an image of contemporary Native American cultures as engaged in a religious struggle to maintain traditional spiritual connections to the land, traditional connections associated with an ancient way of life that also included harmony among human beings.

Ironically, in their desire to conceive of the possibility of a human culture that is not alienated from nonhuman nature, non-Native writers who invoke visions of a pre-patriarchal or Native American "golden past" predicate that possibility on a notion of human identity as originally, essentially, unalienated from nature. Such a static notion of the true identity of human beings limits the possibility for transforming our current relationship with nonhuman nature: if the cultural aspects of human identity are somehow false or wrong within Western industrialized society, positive change seems attainable only through the rejection of that culture and a return to a state represented as previous to culture as we know it.

Needless to say, such a perception of human identity is inherently dualistic, attempting not to mend or complicate the perceived dualism between nature and culture, but to end it simply by rejecting industrialized Western culture as we know it. As Donna Haraway explains in "A Cyborg Manifesto," the answer to dualism is not to give into the seduction of "origin myths" which promise the return of some original "organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (150). While the promise of the possibility of holism might seem the answer to the hierarchical domination which proceeds from our culture's dualistic ideologies, that sort of unity often requires that some entities be appropriated by or incorporated into others. The valorization of mythic cultures at one with nature implies that
human culture as we know it must take a back seat to nature in order to integrate the two nondualistically. Such an erasure of difference is just another kind of domination, a different hierarchy.9

Interestingly, contemporary Native American writers often demonstrate a sense of the need to use cultural traditions as a basis for growth and change rather than predating change on a return to some original condition of wholeness with nature. Paula Gunn Allen, who is Laguna Pueblo-Sioux, has written widely on Native American women's issues, and she is well known for her views that pre-European Native cultures not only existed "in community with all living things" (Spider Woman 9) but also "based their social systems, however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused world-views" (Sacred Hoop 2).10 However, Allen does not construct these aspects of Native American cultures as inherent and unchanging. In the introduction to Spider Woman's Granddaughters, an edited collection that combines traditional Native tales concerning women with contemporary writing by Native American women, Allen acknowledges that "present-day Native cultures and consciousness include Western cultural elements and structures. . . . [and that

9 Such an emphasis on the connectedness of Native American cultures with nonhuman nature not only serves to perpetuate a static conception of human and cultural identity and to reinforce dualistic ideologies by creating a sharp division between those cultures appropriately connected to nature and those who are not. In addition, as Vera Norwood points out in Made from this Earth, dominant Western society has traditionally linked wild nature with groups like Africans and Native Americans in order to place those groups outside the bounds of culture: "Regardless of its accuracy, the Euro-American notion that North American tribes are more in tune with, or immersed in, nature has also served to place such people outside the ranks of human culture" (177).

10 Allen argues that the woman-focused aspects of Native American cultures have been largely overlooked by white culture: "Western studies of American Indian tribal systems are erroneous at base because they view tribalism from the cultural bias of patriarchy and thus either discount, degrade, or conceal gynocratic features or recontextualize those features so that they will appear patriarchal" (Sacred Hoop 4).
the] Native literary tradition is dynamic; it changes as our life circumstances change" (7). In fact, she presents change as an integral part of Native world views that see humans and nature as caught up in complex, dynamic processes that inextricably tie them together:

As any American Indian knows, all of life is living — that is, dynamic and aware, partaking as it does in the life of the All Spirit and contributing as it does to the continuing life of that same Great Mystery. The tribal systems are static in that all movement is related to all other movement — that is, harmonious and balanced or unified; they are not static in the sense that they do not allow or accept change . . . the tribal persor assumes a place in creation that is dynamic, creative and responsive. (Sacred Hoop 56-57)

These issues are explored even more vividly in Leslie Marmon Silko's novel Ceremony, which avoids essentializing myths of Native American cultures or individuals as inherently in tune with nonhuman nature but retains a sense that the traditions and insights of those cultures hold promise for healing human beings' self-destructive relationships with each other and the natural and spiritual worlds. This novel tells the story of Tayo, a "half-breed" Laguna Pueblo who suffers a psychological and spiritual crisis after serving in World War II. Tayo's connections with the natural world are central to the novel, but they are not harmonious. In fact, part of Tayo's distress stems from his sense that he is responsible for the severe drought that makes it difficult for his family and community to raise crops or cattle. He remembers the stories of his culture that stress the fragility of the intricate, web-like processes of nature and the traditional wisdom passed on by his uncle Josiah: "The old people used to say that droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave" (46); he fears he has torn the strands of the web by cursing the heavy rains that made
it difficult for him to carry his dying cousin Rocky as they were being marched to a Japanese prison camp during the war.

However, Silko soon makes it clear that Tayo's crisis is not an isolated one; instead, his fate is revealed as entwined with that of the natural world, his people, and even the white culture that oppresses them. The wide-ranging connections of this crisis are symbolized by Tayo's seemingly delusional memory of watching his fellow soldiers kill a Japanese soldier with the face of his Uncle Josiah, who in fact died while Tayo was away. Tayo, as a "half-breed," also represents the extent to which Native cultures have become intermingled with others; ironically, he retains more respect for Native traditions and beliefs that value nature and spirituality than many of the "pure-blood" characters who have become caught up in Western lifestyles and values. Nevertheless, Tayo's investment in those traditions and beliefs are conflicted, and he struggles to understand his relationship to them throughout the book. For example, he is puzzled by the inconsistencies between explanations of natural phenomena found in science books and those implied by the stories of his culture, though he feels in his heart that the stories are true. Similarly, he finds he can draw strength and peace from simple interactions with the natural world — "in a world of crickets and wind and cottonwood trees he was almost alive again" (104) — and yet also succumbs to the temptation of forgetting his pain through outlets introduced by the white culture such as excessive drinking.

In this way, Silko makes it clear that there are no "pure" Native identities or traditions left, if they ever existed, and that Native Americans cannot fall back on some essential part of their nature to heal the wounds of modern existence, but instead must struggle to create new identities and rituals that
build on ancient traditions but respond to historical and cultural change. Significantly, Tayo learns this lesson from Betonie, a mixed blood medicine man whom he initially mistrusts because he "didn't talk the way Tayo expected a medicine man to talk" (118). Betonie explains that his unorthodox approach to medicine is based on an acknowledgment of the ways that Native culture and identity have changed:

At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it becomes necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong. (126)

In addition to accepting the need for change in response to the physical and cultural intrusions of whites upon Natives, Betonie also rejects the idea that Native Americans and their culture can or should be separate from other cultures. He attributes Tayo's confusion of the Japanese soldier with Josiah to the underlying connections between different peoples: "It isn't surprising you saw him with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done: you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world" (124). And it is the destructive force that Betonie identifies as "witchery" that works to maintain the dualistic illusion that all of the problems of Native peoples can be traced to whites; as he explains "white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates; and I tell you, we can deal with white people . . . because we invented white people" (132).11

11 It's important to note that Silko does not represent white people entirely as innocent victims of witchery, either; as she makes clear, they are often its tools, and in this role they oppress Native Americans by, for example, recruiting them as soldiers by appealing to their identity as Americans and then treating them as second-class citizens after they return from the war.
As Tayo learns, witchery manifests itself in wars between different peoples as well as through behavior that ravages the earth and its animals; it operates through tools such as the white people who abuse the land the Natives once cherished and the Natives who let it happen. While most people are merely its tools, others are self-conscious agents of its destructive designs. Significantly, the most malevolent agent of witchery in *Ceremony* is Emo, a "pure-blood" Native American who proudly retells stories of the Japanese he killed during the war while he displays their teeth as souvenirs; even before Tayo understands the concept of witchery, he senses the profound evil in Emo's attitude: "Emo fed off each man he killed, and the higher the rank of the dead man, the higher it made Emo" (61).

Despite the insights he gains from Betonie and a summer spent with a mysterious woman who helps him connect with a more spiritual, earth-centered worldview, Tayo struggles with his identity until the very end of the novel, torn between his need to reconnect with the earth and the spiritual plane and his loyalty to his friend Harley, who is under the influence of Emo and the empty "ritual" of driving too fast, drinking, and recounting war stories. This conflict becomes a struggle between Tayo and "the destroyers" represented by Emo about how the story will end: either in a way that will feed the witchery by engaging Tayo in violence against Emo or in a way that will oppose the witchery by resisting the temptation of violence. Ultimately, Tayo acts as an agent of positive change for humanity and nature not out of a static cultural or individual identity; instead, his identity is neither isolated nor static. It is shaped by his culture, his family and community, his experiences in the war, his natural surroundings, and, significantly, his own struggles to understand
and shape in return the "world made of stories, ... always changing and moving" (95) that he sees surrounding him.

The myth of original, essential wholeness that Allen and Silko challenge can also be formulated on the level of the individual subject; ecofeminists, often more fully the products of an individualistic culture than are Native Americans, are more likely to adopt this version of the myth. Many of these ecofeminists strive to avoid the type of biological essentialism that accords women a stronger inherent connection to nature than men, and yet when they emphasize the embodied participation of all humans — men and women — in natural processes, they can construct the vision of a golden past of the individual, an Eden before the Fall of alienation from nonhuman nature. While the realization that all human beings are physically and biologically interconnected with the environment and other living things is an essential precursor to changing our attitude and actions towards nonhuman nature, it is dangerous to cling to the idea that this interconnection guarantees that human identity possesses certain promises or potentials.

For example, in her essay "Split Culture," Susan Griffin at first seems as though she shares the postmodern feminist sense that the image of individual human subject "as discrete static beings" (11) is an illusion. But her point is not that human subjectivity is necessarily fragmented and shifting. Instead, she sees the people of Western culture as suffering from a false internal dualism: "But in separating Nature from culture within himself, the man who believes this delusion has split his own needs and desires from his intelligence and from all meaning" (11). Griffin sees this internal split as false not because it oversimplifies the complex nature of human identity, but because it represses each person’s essential and original wholeness:
But we each have another secret too, a secret knowledge of wholeness. ... We do not think we still know what it was to be a child, untaught by culture to be divided from ourselves. Yet within each of us, our bodies, that memory still exists. (16)

Rather than exploding dualism by demonstrating the multiple axes of difference and associated discourses, including those associated with nature, that organize the human subject, Griffin’s myth of original wholeness erases any idea of difference at all, and culture is rejected for or incorporated into nature.

Finally, these inspiring visions of individual or cultural golden pasts of oneness with nature create an image of the ideal relationship between human and nonhuman that is unrealistically static and, thus, unattainable. The idea of living in harmony with all that is and leaving nature untouched fosters a sense that humans have, and should, have no effect on the rest of nature. Yet everything in nature interacts with other parts of the biosphere, and humans are not, and cannot, be an exception to this rule. In the words of Wendell Berry,

people cannot live in nature without changing it. But this is true of all creatures; they depend upon nature, and they change it. What we call nature is, in a sense, the sum of the changes made by all the various creatures and natural forces in their intricate actions and influences upon each other and upon their places. ... But unlike other creatures, humans must make a choice as to the kind and scale of difference they make. ("Getting Along with Nature" 7)

Thus, acknowledging the need for human beings to interact with the nonhuman, to change it, and to be changed by it, need not mean giving up on improving our relationship with the rest of nature. In fact, recognizing that human identity, both cultural and individual, changes in a dialectical relationship with the nonhuman can liberate us from unrealistic and limiting
notions of what is possible or desirable. It can also free us from the need to find an ideology and practice that is perfect and thus immune from criticism. As Linda Alcoff explains in "The Problem of Speaking for Others,"

The desire to find an absolute means to avoid making errors comes perhaps not from a desire to advance collective goals but a desire for personal mastery, to establish a privileged discursive position wherein one cannot be undermined or challenged and thus is master of the situation. From such a position one's own location and positionality would not require constant interrogation and critical reflection. (22)

The poststructural and ecological realization of the constantly shifting nature of human identity calls for us consistently to perform such critical reflection, and such a sense of the need to accept and embrace incompleteness, imperfection, and change as a permanent condition is not well served by wishing for the return of a golden past of perfect, static wholeness, or even holding one up as inspiration.

*The Possibilities and Limits of Anti-Dualistic Ecofeminism*

As Greta Gaard points out in "Misunderstanding Ecofeminism," many ecofeminist writers are aware of the dangers inherent in an essentialist, dualistic position and distance themselves from it.¹² In "Healing the Wounds," for

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¹² Among ecofeminist theorists, there exists a spectrum of feminist positions on the issue of women's relationship to nature. The essentialism of the radical or cultural feminists lies at one end of the spectrum; as Greta Gaard explains in "Misunderstanding Ecofeminism," embracing the woman/nature connection "has been the path of cultural feminists, who seek to wash themselves clean of the masculine public realm entirely, and exalt, instead, all those attributes of feminine culture — darkness, the wild, nature, animals, spirituality, the body, emotion" (21). At the opposite end of the spectrum is the position that "you can reject it, which has been the strategy of liberal feminists, who seek to abandon anything attributed to the feminine realm and leap headlong into the public male realm of reason, to go 'where the rights are'" (21). However, ecofeminists do sometimes disagree on the labels they give to these positions. In "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/Culture Dualism" (both 1989 and 1990 versions), Ynestra King suggests feminists who embrace the woman-nature connection should be called radical cultural, or simply cultural, feminists to distinguish them from radical feminists who repudiate the woman-nature connection in order to claim women's
example, Ynestra King explicitly states her conviction that ecofeminism should be, above all, an attempt to confront the dualisms of Western culture: "The task of an ecological feminism is the organic forging of a genuinely antidualistic, or dialectical, theory and practice" (130). In addition to questioning the dualism between men/culture and women/nature we see in more essentialist versions of ecofeminism, King is concerned with bridging the gap between rationality and spirituality she sees represented by socialist and cultural feminisms. According to King, socialist feminists tend to share the rationalist bias of Marxists theorists, and thus "have not seriously attended to the domination of nonhuman nature, nor to the domination of inner nature" (128). Cultural feminists, with their focus on personal transformation and empowerment, account for the "inner nature" of human beings, but fail to see women as social historical agents. For King, it is essential for ecofeminism to engage with both of these positions rather than dualistically opposing them to each other: "we are not talking heads, nor are we unself-conscious nature" (128).

In Woman and Nature, the more poetic and less explicitly theoretical work of ecofeminism that I cited in the beginning of this chapter, Susan Griffin also critiques and seeks to avoid the dualism of western culture; in the preface, she notes that "patriarchal thought (or the thought of civilized man) . . . claims to be objective, and separated from emotion, and so it is appropriate that the style of
this book does not make that separation." (xv). By refusing to separate thought and emotion in her writing style, Griffin positions herself in opposition to the dualisms of dominant culture. In addition, King sees Griffin as collapsing "the rigid boundaries of the subject and the object, suggesting a recovery of mysticism as a way of knowing nature immanently" ("Healing the Wounds," 125), thus challenging another pervasive dualism of our culture. In fact, one of Griffin's major goals in Woman and Nature is to represent a non-dualistic women's consciousness distinct from the patriarchal influence of dualistic thought; she spends the fourth "book" of Woman and Nature reseeing "all that we have seen in the first two books from the eye of patriarchy" (xvi). In this fourth book, Griffin represents dualism as one of the patriarchal ways of knowing which women can and should transcend when inspired and empowered by their historic and cultural association with nonhuman nature. The voice of women and nature which she represents by italics realizes that "everything is moving, and we are a part of this motion" (185), "And that one act cannot be separated from another" (186). Inspired by the natural phenomenon of erosion, the voice proclaims further that "We say that we are part of what is

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13 As both Ynestra King and Stacy Alaimo note, Susan Griffin's Woman and Nature is often identified as presenting an essentialist version of women's connection to nonhuman nature, as collapsing "the domination of women and the domination of nature into a single, timeless phenomenon" (King, "Healing the Wounds" 125). However, both Alaimo and King argue that such a reading oversimplifies Griffin's approach. In another essay, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," King insists that "Woman and Nature is an inspirational poetic work with political implications. It explores the terrain of our deepest naturalness, but I do not read it as a delineation of a set of politics. To use Griffin's work in this way is to make it into something it was not intended to be. In personal conversation and in her more politically explicit works such as Pornography and Silence (1981), Griffin is antidualistic, struggling to bridge the false oppositions of nature and culture, passion and reason. Both science and poetry are deeply intuitive processes" (28, n.12). As my analysis of Griffin's work will show, I agree that her view of the connection between women and nature is more complex than an essential, biological one.
shaped and we are part of what is shaping" (195). Such an insistence of the importance of going beyond simplistic views of identity as static and self-contained suggests that Griffin's ecofeminist vision is deeply rooted in a desire to complicate dualism.

In their quest to challenge the pervasive dualisms of their culture, both King and Susan Griffin construct human identity in a more complex way that do more essentialist works of ecofeminism; their theories of identity are careful to account for the culturally as well as naturally constructed aspects of those identities. They belong to a loosely aligned group of ecofeminists who perceive a connection between women and nature based not on women's biology or essential identity, but rather on their shared oppression or domination within patriarchal culture; thus they see any bond which women share with nature in a way men do not as culturally constructed rather than inherent to women's nature. As King explains in "The Ecology of Feminism," more essentialist approaches to ecofeminism fail to acknowledge this:

Other feminists have reinforced the women-nature connection: woman and nature, the spiritual and intuitive, versus man and the culture of patriarchal rationality. This position also does not necessarily question the nature-culture dualism or recognize that women's ecological sensitivity and life orientation is a socialized perspective that could be socialized right out of us depending on our day-to-day lives. (23)

In Woman and Nature, Griffin interweaves scenarios of the oppression of women and of nonhuman nature throughout the history of western civilization, juxtaposing the scenarios in ways which highlight the connections between the cultural position of both women and natural entities. For example, she weaves a narrative of a woman being accused of witchcraft throughout a history of the achievements of Western science. Griffin's clever juxtapositioning of the two
"stories" makes clear that both woman and nature are being cast as victims for
the advancement of scientific progress: "(He says that the earth should be put
on the rack and tortured for her secrets)" (16). Other sections of the book make
clear that such abuse of women and nature continues in modern, Western
society. For example, in the section entitled "Land: Her Changing Face,"
Griffin draws a parallel between male-dominated culture's treatment of the
land and men's treatment of women; at one point she describes the "addiction"
of farmland to artificial chemicals and links it to Western medicine's use of
drugs such as Valium to control women:

What device she can use to continue she does. She says that the
pain is unbearable. Give me something, she says. . . . He says she
cannot continue without him. He says she must have what he
gives her. (54)

Thus, Griffin suggests, men and male culture try to control women and
nature in an effort to reassure themselves that they are needed. In fact, she
emphasizes throughout the book that much of male-dominated culture's
treatment of women stems from male insecurities and fear. In "The Hunt," she
stresses the similarities between a man's pursuit of a woman and his hunting of
a wild animal to illustrate the way men and male culture have projected their
own fears and desires onto women and nature in order to alleviate and satisfy
those feelings: "She makes him pursue her. . . . She has dressed to excite his
desire" (103). Then he uses his projected image to justify his destruction of his
other: "He faces annihilation in her, he says. . . . Now, he must conquer her
wildness, he says, he must tame her before she drives him wild, he says" (104).
By showing that it is men who have associated women with nonhuman nature
and treated both in a similar, oppressive fashion, Griffin suggests that it is male-
dominated culture that has created the bond between women and nature that she seeks to reclaim and use in a liberatory fashion.

Significantly, King's and Griffin's approaches to ecofeminism do not claim to exclude men from a connection with nonhuman nature. If women's special bond with nonhuman nature results from the history and ideologies of Western culture, men are just as capable of achieving a bond as women are of losing or ignoring it. Griffin begins her theoretical essay "Split Culture" by stating that "We who are born into this civilization have inherited a habit of mind. We are divided against ourselves. We no longer feel ourselves to be a part of this earth" (7). The rest of her essay makes clear that, despite the historical/cultural association between women and nature, "none of us are [sic] safe" (12) from this divided habit of mind, women as well as men. In "The Ecology of Feminism," King is careful to point out that "All humans are natural beings. . . [even though] in patriarchal thought, women are believed to be closer to nature than men" (18). She goes on to explain why it is that men in patriarchal cultures have been socialized away from their basic connection to nature:

For men raised in woman-hating cultures, the fact that they are born of women and are dependent upon nonhuman nature for existence is frightening. The process of objectification, of the making of woman and nature into 'others' to be appropriated and dominated, is based on a profound forgetting by men. . . But the denied part of men is never fully obliterated. The memory remains in the knowledge of mortality and the fear of women's power. (22)

Thus, if men feel more alienated from nonhuman nature than women do, it is a result of culture and history rather than an inherent aspect of men's identities. And ecofeminism, aware that both men and women can become alienated from
nonhuman nature, should work towards "a dynamic, developmental theory of
the person — male and female — who emerges out of nonhuman nature, where
difference is neither reified or ignored and the dialectical relationship between
human and nonhuman nature is understood" ("Healing the Wounds" 131).

While ecofeminists like King and Griffin tend to see the same ideological
forces as responsible for the oppression of women and the domination of
nonhuman nature, they do not limit their inquiry to the way these ideological
forces affect women and nonhuman nature; in "Healing the Wounds," King
asserts that "the systematic denigration of working-class people and people of
color, women, and animals are all connected to the basic dualism that lies at the
root of western civilization" (115). This acknowledgment of the multiple ways
oppression works in our culture is compatible with poststructuralist feminists'
knowledge that identity is multiply organized across variable axes of difference. In
addition, these ecofeminists sometimes recognize that nonhuman nature exerts
a significant shaping force on human identity, even to the extent of representing
aspects of identity such as psyche and sexuality as a kind of inner nature (King,
"Healing the Wounds" 132). Such a representation challenges the
human/nature dualism and could potentially support an interpretation of
various aspects of nature as acting as some of the axes of difference which serve
to organize human identity. Overall, by expanding their analysis to include all
forms of human oppression and of the oppression of aspects of the human
subject, these ecofeminists adopt a more complex view of human identity than
that espoused by essentialist ecofeminists. However, ecofeminists like King

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14 As Ynestra King writes in "Healing the Wounds" (1989), she believes that "The
ecological crisis is related to systems of hatred of all that is natural and female by the White,
male Western formulators of philosophy, technology, and death inventions" (115).
and Griffin rarely explore the variety of axes of difference and associated discourses acting on individual women, nor do they tend to explore the ways women's identities are shaped by forces (whether cultural or natural) other than their cultural/historic association with nonhuman nature.

Despite the strong anti-dualistic bent of King's and Griffin's work, both writers are — like all subjects within Western culture — vulnerable to the pervasive and often subtle influences of dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy. Because of their intense focus on the cultural/historic association between women and nature, writers like these ecofeminists sometimes fall prey to those pervasive influences. One way they do so is by presenting different forms of oppression as essentially separate from each other, despite the recognition on the part of ecofeminists like King that "the domination of sex, race, and class, and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing" ("Ecology of Feminism," 20).

This sense of separation appears when ecofeminists assert that certain forms of oppression are prior to or the source of all others. They tend to locate this "original" ground of domination in the oppression of women.₁⁵ Seemingly in contradiction to her acknowledgment of the interrelatedness of all forms of domination and oppression, elsewhere King asserts that "the mind-set of hierarchy" which allows domination to occur has "its material roots in the domination of human by human, particularly women by men." ("Healing the Wounds" 115-16). Janis Birkeland, another ecofeminist, states that "in short, gender identification is more central to human behavior than human

₁⁵While a focus on women's oppression is central to the feminist and ecofeminist agendas, these ecofeminists go beyond such a focus to actually claim that this form of oppression is the source of all others.
identification" in order to argue that male deep ecologists' "focus on anthropocentrism protects the masculine ego from scrutiny" (50). By proposing that sexism is more innate than anthropocentrism, or that women's oppression is the source of all other human oppression (and perhaps the domination of nature as well), these ecofeminists risk reinforcing the mindset of hierarchy they wish to condemn.

In her essay "Split Culture," Susan Griffin alternatively turns to the domination of nature as the original form of dualism and oppression. She begins the essay by expressing her opposition to the dualistic and hierarchical ways our culture has come to perceive both ourselves and our relationship with nonhuman nature:

> We divide ourselves and all that we know along an invisible borderline between what we call Nature and what we believe is superior to Nature. . . . According to this worldview — a view whose assumptions are so widely accepted by this civilization that we do not even think of it as an ideology — there is a hierarchy to existence. . . . Among human beings, a similar order exists. (8)

However, she goes on to see a hierarchy in the way oppression grows out of this worldview. First, in order to sanction the destruction of nonhuman nature, the modern mind convinces itself that Nature is lifeless: "Matter is dead. A forest has no spiritual life" (11). From this denial of life and spirit to Nature comes a denial of humanity to people who traditionally have been associated with nonhuman nature: "In the same way, society transforms those who have become symbols of Nature into objects of degradation" (12). Thus, Griffin roots Western society's enslavement of African people in the cultural association of

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16 In her critique of deep ecology, Janis Birkeland joins a number of ecofeminists; I discuss the ecofeminist critique of deep ecology later on in this chapter.
Africans with nonhuman nature, explaining that the Western fear that humans were subject to the laws of nature was appeased "symbolically by enslaving a people whom this culture conceived of as symbols of Nature" (14). She even explains the story of a slave trader's irrational cruelty to and murder of an African child by this notion of a deep-rooted Western fear of natural power: "this child became, in the insane mind of this civilization, and in the mind of this captain, a symbol of natural power" (15). While Griffin's focus on the ideological interconnections between race oppression and Western culture's desire to dominate nature is well taken, her unproblematized vision of the culturally constructed split between humans and nonhuman nature as the root and cause of all other forms of domination and oppression falls into the dominant mindset of hierarchy and dualism nonetheless.

While it is obvious that the experiences and history of individuals or groups of individuals might foreground certain forms of oppression, the categorical assertion that sexism or the desire to dominate nature is fundamentally prior to or the source of all other forms of domination does little to challenge the ideologies responsible for such domination. Donna Haraway criticizes a similar tendency on the part of socialist feminists to search "for a single ground of domination to secure our revolutionary voice" ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 160-161); in fact, in their quest to explain the profound interrelatedness of different forms of oppression, even consciously antidualistic writers like King and Griffin effectively essentialize certain groups of people or nature as inherently more oppressed than others, thus reinforcing a hierarchical ranking of oppressions rather than working for a theory of human and natural identity that recognizes the interweaving of oppressions both
within the human subject and among the outside, discursive forces acting on that subject.

Another way that such ecofeminist writers can inadvertently reinforce dominant, oppressive ideologies is simply through the extent to which they emphasize the historically and culturally constructed connections between women and nature — an extent that prevents them from acknowledging or exploring the differences among women or between women and the rest of nature. The ecofeminists who best exemplify this trend invoke the historical/cultural connection between women and nature in order to justify their right to speak for nonhuman nature. As Vera Norwood explains, their reasoning seems to be that "the oppressed—more closely identified with nature—speak more eloquently for nature" (283). In "The Ecology of Feminism," King is careful to highlight her sense that women and nature share a culturally constructed position of otherness:

The ecology movement, in theory and practice, attempts to speak for nature — the 'other' that has no voice and is not conceived of subjectively in our civilization. Feminism represents the refusal of the original "other" in patriarchal human society to remain silent or to be 'other' any longer (20).

Thus, she uses women and nature's shared position within Western culture as a justification for her own and other ecofeminist women's acts of speaking for nature and women simulaneously. In the same way, Griffin appeals to Western culture's long tradition of associating women with nature in order to dominate both as a rationale for her adoption of a viewpoint and voice that speaks for women and nature. However, the difference between human women and nonhuman nature implied in the phrase "speaking for" is lost when
ecofeminists appropriate the characteristics and cultural status of nature to such an extent that they speak as the nonhuman.

This "speaking as" is sometimes quite obvious, as when Griffin explicitly takes on the voices of elephants to express how deeply their abuse at the hands of patriarchy has affected them:

Now we will let the blood of our mother sink into this earth. . . . We will cover her. . . . We will not be the same. . . . They [our enemies] will know whom to beware and whom to fear. . . . We will not forget and this memory will protect them [our young]. What they have learned from us, all that we have taught them so that they can survive, how to suck up water with their trunks, how to pull down leaves from trees, how to lift their tusks, and dig holes by the river with their feet, all this they will pass on, and generation after generation will remember the scent of the enemy. . . . Only then, when no trace is left of this memory in us, will we see what we can be without this fear, without this enemy, what we are. (217-18)\(^\text{17}\)

However, the act of women speaking as nature is more often accomplished by ecofeminists who speak for women and nature together, yet in doing so appropriate nature's status within contemporary society as exploited victim of human culture for all women. They emphasize the bond between women and nature to the extent that it completely determines the nature of the relationship between the two: they are represented as virtually one and the same. In addition, this representation of the bond between women and nature as the primary or even sole force shaping women's identities leaves all other aspects of identity unacknowledged, and thus fails to account for the differences among women.

\(^\text{17}\) As I mentioned earlier, Griffin represents the voice of women and nature with italics in order to differentiate it from the voice of patriarchy, which she represents with regular type.
In Woman and Nature, Griffin's highly symbolic representation of woman/nature within Western history and culture emphasizes this constructed association between the two to the extent that it creates an image of women/nature as a monolithic group consistently opposed to men. In the fourth section, in which she re-envisions all that she earlier represented from the viewpoint of patriarchy, Griffin returns to the female lion she portrayed caged in a zoological garden in her first book; this time the lion is being examined by representative Western male scientists. The situation of this lion, for whose roaring the book is named, illustrates the basic opposition Griffin maintains in this book:

She swaggers in . . . She is measuring their moves. And they are measuring her . . . They announce she is alive. They wonder why she roars, and conclude that the roaring must be inside her. They decide to see it. She swings at them when they try to put her asleep. She has no soul, they conclude, she does not know right from wrong. "Be still," they shout at her. "Be humble, trust us," they demand. "We have souls," they proclaim, "we know what is right," they approach her with their medicine, "for you." She does not understand this language. She devours them. (187)

As the name of this section, "The Lion in the Den of the Prophets," reveals, much of Griffin's re-envisioning of patriarchal ideas involves reversing the traditional hierarchies which have valued men and male-dominated practices such as science and language over what is female, natural, and intuitive. Despite aspects and sections of her work which reject hierarchy and dualism altogether, Griffin's consistent practice of opposing women/nature to male-dominated culture undermines and potentially even negates the anti-dualistic aspects of her work.

In her essays, King is more careful than Griffin to explicitly differentiate her version of ecofeminism from those who wish to reinforce the woman-nature
connection in an essential way that perpetuates a dualism between women/nature and men/culture.\textsuperscript{18} Despite her insistence that "the nature-culture dualism is a product of culture" ("Ecology of Feminism 23), though, King also creates a sense that women are, as a group, monolithically situated somewhere between the two extremes of that dualism; thus, women can 

\textit{consciously choose} not to sever the woman-nature connection by joining male culture. Rather, we can use it as a vantage point for a different kind of culture and politics that would integrate intuitive, spiritual, and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science and magic insofar as they enable us to transform the nature-culture distinction and to envision and create a free, ecological society. (23)

We can find many examples of women in contemporary society who, like Rachel Carson,\textsuperscript{19} have demonstrated a greater realization of humanity's interconnectedness with nonhuman nature than that which prevails in the dominant culture. And yet, we cannot ignore the extent to which many women benefit from and participate in the ideological, political, and economic forces which sanction the domination and abuse of nonhuman nature. By representing women's bond with nature as something all women share equally and which significantly shapes every woman's identity, writers like King and Griffin perpetuate a vision of identity which lacks an attention to difference: not only the differences between women and nonhuman nature, but among women as well.

\textsuperscript{18} In "Healing the Wounds," King criticizes the dualism she sees in cultural feminists' essentialist notions of women's identity: "This connecting of women and nature has lent itself to a romanticization of women as good, separate from all the dastardly deeds of men and culture" (125).

\textsuperscript{19} See Vera Norwood's \textit{Made from this Earth: American Women and Nature} for an excellent discussion of a tradition among American women which challenges dominant cultural attitudes toward nonhuman nature.
This lack of attention to difference is significant, for it is the differences between women and the rest of nature which mean that women can participate in cultural attitudes and practices which are environmentally destructive, and it is the differences among women which mean that some participate more fully and consciously in these attitudes and practices than others. As Vera Norwood explains in her discussion of ecofeminism in *Made from this Earth*, "some [ecofeminist writers] have cast women, along with nature, as an oppressed class that did not participate in the masculine agenda of domination" (276-77). In her ecofeminist essay, "For the Love of Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic," Chaia Heller participates in this vision of women in a fairly unproblematized way. In the course of explaining how men use romanticized images of nature to "control and denigrate women and people of color" (224), Heller criticizes deep ecologists Devall and Sessions for blaming humans as a whole for the extinction of certain species:

The romantic ecologist constructs a big, flat category called 'human' and holds this abstract human responsible for the destruction of nature. However, it is unclear just who is subsumed under this category of human. Are the authors referring to women who, rather than participating intentionally and profitably in 'human intervention' in nature, are reduced to 'bodies of natural labor' and plundered along with nature? (225-26)

Of course, in revealing Devall and Sessions' overgeneralization in assuming that all humans are equally responsible for extinction, Heller commits her own overgeneralization in assuming that all women are equally innocent of any such responsibility.

Other ecofeminists are more careful to acknowledge the ways women may participate in ideology or practices which contribute to the domination of
nature. At one point in the 1990 version of her essay, "Healing the Wounds," King describes the feminist health movement as an example of an appropriately mediated, dialectical relationship to nature which reappropriates and demedicalizes childbirth. She also cites body consciousness as another area "in which women may employ ecofeminism to overcome misogynist dualism, accepting bodies as they are" (119) rather than struggling to achieve culturally determined, unrealistic norms of beauty through unhealthy measures such as dieting, tanning, unneeded surgery. After these descriptions, she does acknowledge that women have been complicit in the ideologies which sanction the domination of both nonhuman nature and themselves: "To the extent that we make our own flesh an enemy, or docilely submit ourselves to medical experts, we are participating in the domination of nature" (119).

In addition, in her discussion of childbirth, King does not fall into the dualism of rejecting technology wholesale for more "natural" methods, instead describing approvingly how

many more women want to be told what all their options are and many choose invasive medical technologies only under unusual and informed circumstances. They do not necessarily reject these useful technologies in some cases, but they have pointed a finger at motivations of profit and control in the technologies' widespread application. (119)

However, she also does not discuss the extent to which women have participated in the "medicalization of childbirth" (118) to a much greater extent than simply by accepting the tyranny of medical experts. In fact, more and more women are becoming such experts, participating in the dominant forces of

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20. Here I am citing the second (1990) version of this essay, which appears in Reweaving the World, because the earlier version does not include the discussion of body consciousness.
Western science and medicine, as doctors and researchers, marketers who promote the technologies in question, nurses who administer them, and so on. Although such participation need not always reinforce dominant ideologies, it is important to note that many women actively contribute to not only their own oppression but to the domination of nonhuman nature in some aspects of their lives.

In Woman and Nature, Griffin includes a brief section which acknowledges the differences between women and nonhuman nature. The woman or women watching a blackbird sense their own complicity in the cultural ideology and practices which have abused it, and thus sense their difference and distance from the bird:

_We imagine like the violincello, the cello we have made in our minds, the violin we have imagined, as we have imagined the prison, as we have made up boundaries, or decided what the fate of these birds should be, as we have invented poison, as we have invented the cage, now we stand at the edge of this marsh and do not go closer, allow them their distance, penetrate them only with our minds, only with our hearts, because though we can advance upon the blackbird, though we may cage her, though we may torture her with our will, with the boundaries we imagine, this bird will never be ours, he may die, this minute heart stop beating, the body go cold and hard, we may tear the wings apart and cut open the body and remove what we want to see, but still this blackbird will not be ours and we will have nothing._ (225-26).

By presenting this admission of possible complicity in the abuse or destruction of the blackbird in the italics she reserves for the voice of woman and nature, Griffin opens the possibility that women and nature are not a seamless whole, that women have participated in the domination of nonhuman nature.

However, this isolated recognition of difference in her text is undermined by the emphasis Griffin puts on patriarchal language as the force
responsible for separating women from nature. In contemplating the difference between a free blackbird and a tame one, the voice insists that

for the creature we have tamed, the creature we keep in our house, we must make a new word. For we did not invent the blackbird, we say, we only invented her name. And we never invented ourselves, we admit... Only now, we name ourselves. (226)

Thus, the separation between women and nature — and even within woman herself — created by the naming of patriarchal language can be overcome by women’s new vision, a vision inspired by their sisterhood with each other and nonhuman nature. The voice goes on to express the sense of oneness this vision creates:

We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature. The red-winged blackbird flies in us, in our inner sight. We see the arc of her flight. We measure the ellipse. We predict its climax. We are amazed. We are moved. . . . And yet the blackbird does not fly in us but is somewhere else free of our minds, and now even free of our sight, flying in the path of her own will, she wrote. (226)

Here, the oneness between outer and inner nature expressed by the blackbird within and without the woman/women’s mind also leaves room for the difference between the two. However, outside of the two pages on which the acknowledgment of differences through the image of the blackbird occurs, Griffin consistently conflates women and nature, appropriating nonhuman nature’s status as uninvolved in patriarchal ideology for women as well, going so far as to represent nonhuman nature as sanctioning and returning the same kind of identification:

This earth is my sister; I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have lost, all that we have suffered, all that we know: we are stunned
by this beauty, and I do not forget: what she is to me, what I am to her. (219)

Thus, it is the consistent conflation of women and nature by writers like King and Griffin that resists an attention to the differences between women and nature, and results in a vision of women's identity which is monolithic (all women are equally identified with nonhuman nature) and static (women's identity is virtually determined by this association, despite its culturally constructed nature). This limited view of identity allows such writers to appropriate nature's status as exploited victim of human culture for all women, thus allowing women to place the blame for environmental degradation outside themselves. A desire to subvert and rewrite the dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy which never extends to an acknowledgment of the need to interrogate one's own complicity in that ideology can only have a limited effect.

The final problem to arise out of the tendency to over-identify traditionally oppressed groups with nonhuman nature occurs when some ecofeminist writers use the association not only to appropriate nature's status as exploited victim for women in general and ecofeminists in particular, but also to then position these "victims" as morally superior to other humans. Perhaps the most prevalent example of this tendency is the viewpoint within ecofeminism that dismisses the ideas of deep ecology as irredeemably colored by the influence of patriarchal ideologies. Ecofeminists who hold this viewpoint demonstrate an admirable awareness of the pervasiveness of dominant ideologies; however, it is problematic that they so often condemn deep ecology for manifesting the influences of those ideologies yet never search for their traces within ecofeminism itself.
Ironically, proponents of ecofeminism and deep ecology share many important beliefs. They both reject theories of environmental rights or ethics which are based on atomistic conceptions of self, and thus both reject a radical dichotomy between subject and object. As Marti Kheel points out in "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference," both also "call for an inward transformation in order to attain an outward change" (128). However, many ecofeminist writers are concerned about "the possibility (or inevitability) that the methods employed for overcoming alienation by deep ecologists will be precisely those methods which originally produced or now sustain that alienation" (Cheney 118). More specifically, many ecofeminist theorists see in deep ecology a patriarchal bias, a masculine tinge to the conception of self which prevents the deep ecology movement from overcoming human alienation from nature. They believe that deep ecology's focus on expanding the sense of self contains within it the danger of enveloping

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21 Deep ecology itself is a philosophically-based field that grew out of the work of Arne Naess, who first used the term in his 1973 article, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements" to distinguish it from traditional, scientifically-based ecology and conservation. According to Bill Devall and George Sessions, authors of Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered, deep ecology is founded on an ecological consciousness which sees humans as part of the organic whole of Earth. This consciousness grows out of an expansive, or field-like, sense of self (see Fox) that renders ethics superfluous because 'care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves' (Naess, "Self-Realization" 39-40).

According to Devall and Sessions, one of deep ecology's two ultimate norms is the realization of this expansive sense of self: "The deep ecology sense of self requires a further maturity and growth, and identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world. . . . Only in this way can we hope to achieve full personhood and uniqueness" (67). Deep ecology differs from conservation movements in this conception of self, but even more so in its second ultimate norm: biocentric equality. "The intuition of biocentric equality is that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger Self-realization" (67). While traditional conservation movements which seek to preserve the environment for the sake of the human population are anthropocentric, deep ecology is biocentric, giving equal priority to each component of the biosphere.

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the other within the expanded self, thereby denying the other its relative individuality. This danger is most compellingly articulated by Jim Cheney in "Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology," where he notes the

strong tendency on the part of male theorists to understand networks of defining relationships [according to Carol Gilligan, a feminine way of viewing the world] on the model of expansion of the self to the boundaries of the whole. This is, to be sure, a way of overcoming alienation, and as a way of having one's cake and eating it too, it can't be beat: one overcomes alienation from the other by absorbing the other into the self. There is, however, no respecting the other as other. (124)

Marti Kheel believes this tendency may "reflect the familiar masculine urge to transcend the concrete world of particularity in preference for something more enduring and abstract" (136).

While ecofeminists are right to hold that deep ecology is not free of the pervasive effects of patriarchal ideologies, their willingness to explore those effects rarely extends into the field of ecofeminism itself. Instead, ecofeminist critics of deep ecology often propose an ecofeminist perspective, or even "women's unique, felt sense of connection to the natural world" (Kheel 137), as the solution to the dilemma of how to overcome dualism without erasing the particularity of the individual. While Kheel's statement conjures up the specter of essentialism, ecofeminist perspectives are not necessarily problematic in this way; for example, Cheney turns to the feminist notion of contextualization (based principally on the work of Carol Gilligan) as an answer to the problems he sees in deep ecology; he proposes that we deal with ethical issues not by speaking of rights, or the good of the whole, but by considering the context within which the moral decision is made. Cheney compares the kind of responsibility we should feel for nonhuman nature to the kind incurred in

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friendship, a responsibility not concerned with rights. To understand what our moral obligations are, Cheney believes, "... it is necessary to understand the individuals involved (or the nature of the kinds of individuals involved), their relationship to one another, and their place in the complex community or ecosystem" (141). How can we come to such a complex understanding? For Cheney, Aldo Leopold's writing shows how "the day-to-day observations of the field naturalist" (143) can generate such an understanding, and also a genuine sense of care that makes the place part of Leopold's moral community. In other words, we need to get to know nonhuman nature if we are to make decisions about it in a context of understanding and care.

While ecofeminist critiques of deep ecology can lead to valuable insights like Cheney's, in some cases the desire to speak for nature and similarly oppressed groups of people seems to take a back seat to the desire to position ecofeminism as the one way of thought free from the contaminating effects of patriarchal ideology, and thus to position ecofeminists as the moral superiors of other people. This desire to establish moral superiority — and, no doubt, political and professional advancement as a result of this privileged position — is suggested even more clearly in the superior and even mocking tone some ecofeminists take when writing of deep ecology. For example, in Janis Birkeland's "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice," her critique of deep ecology's dependence on rationality descends into sarcasm:

*Deep ecologists* reason that Man's failure to identify and empathize with the rest of nature results from the way He experiences or visualizes the world (rather than from power relations). ... hence, personal transformation through the cultivation of a 'biocentric' perspective — expanding one's identification to encompass all of nature — would heal Society as a whole. Thus, deep ecologists also rely ultimately on reason to persuade people to take up deep
ecology. Once realizing that to harm nature is to harm Himself, Rational Man will then presumably change His ways. (29)

This tendency on the part of some ecofeminists to use the culturally constructed association between women and nature to set themselves up as morally privileged group unfortunately does little to counter the ideology of dualism and hierarchy they critique in patriarchy. In addition, it reveals an attempt to reach a position beyond criticism that runs counter to an acceptance of the need for constant change and self-interrogation. Ecofeminists and deep ecologists share many subversive beliefs in common, and could productively work together and build on each other’s ideas to truly move beyond dualism, not to a place beyond criticism, but to a place where critical self-reflection goes on as often as the examination of others’ beliefs and motivations.

**Taking Responsibility and Forging Alliances: Concepts of Identity that Engage both Connection and Difference**

As I have discussed in the preceding section, authors who seek to act as environmental advocates on the basis of traditionally perceived connections between certain groups of people and nature risk unconsciously reinforcing the very cultural beliefs and attitudes that they wish to transform. In particular, they risk the dualism and hierarchy of valorizing essentialist connections between these groups of people and nature rather than destabilizing dualism and hierarchy with a sense that the human subject is socially and discursively constructed, multiply organized, and constantly shifting. Even when they do convey such a sense, they risk focusing on the socially constructed connections between certain groups of people and nature to such an extent that they in fact reinvoke dualism and hierarchy. An overemphasis on one group’s connections
with nature can lead to a hierarchical sense that certain forms of oppression are prior to or the source of all others. Such an overemphasis can also reinforce dualism and hierarchy by effectively erasing differences between certain groups of people and nonhuman nature, and then elevating that group along with nature over dominant culture. This can lead to a sense that certain groups are innocent of any complicity in human degradation of the natural environment, to an erasure of difference between members of the group, and to a sense that the group is morally superior to other human beings.

In order to explore some strategies that authors who wish to "speak for nature" can employ to help avoid these types of recontainment, I now turn to four texts of environmental advocacy that specifically deal with the relationship between nonhuman nature and a group (or groups) of people who have been traditionally linked with nature: Dian Fossey's *Gorillas in the Mist*, Alice Walker's "Am I Blue?", Ursula Le Guin's "Buffalo Gals Won't You Come Out Tonight?", and Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. Fossey's text reveals her gendered connection with the mountain gorillas of Rwanda, and yet her connection does not lead her to ignore the ways in which her actions and discourse might contribute to forces threatening the gorillas' survival. Her tremendous sense of ethical responsibility towards the gorillas grows out of a balance between her sense of connection and an awareness of her many differences from the gorillas. Alice Walker, while demonstrating more of an awareness than Fossey does of her position as an advocate for nature and of the multiple issues of identity at stake in such a position, also moves from a sense of connection with nonhuman nature to an awareness of her complicity in the suffering of nonhuman animals. Le Guin's story builds on traditions that associate nature with both women and Native
Americans, but avoids essentialism through a complex representation of identity as constructed by multiple axes, including nature and the supernatural. Her text explicitly rejects the myth of original wholeness with nature, instead rewriting traditional associations to create a dynamic model of human identity that carefully negotiates both differences from and connection with nonhuman nature. It is in Terry Tempest Williams' narrative, however, that I see a model of identity that most successfully acknowledges and employs traditional, even essentialist, connections between a group of people and nature while simultaneously destabilizing them with a context that challenges dominant ideologies by stressing the complex, constantly changing, and constructed aspect of human identity. Ultimately, she provides a model of a woman consciously employing discourse to participate subversively in the multiple forces that affect nonhuman nature and that shape her own and other women's identities.

Acknowledging the Responsibilities of Difference: Dian Fossey and Alice Walker

In Gorillas in the Mist, Fossey describes her efforts to study and protect the mountain gorillas of Rwanda; her work with the gorillas began in the late 1960s and lasted until December, 1985, when she was murdered in her research camp, Karisoke. In her text, Fossey does not make an issue of how her gender affected her relationships with the gorillas. For her, the only important issue was to "speak for" the gorillas to whom she had devoted her professional and personal life. In Farley Mowat's biography of Fossey, Woman in the Mists, he includes a journal entry in which she grumbles about the difference between her editors' vision of Gorillas in the Mist and her own: "This book is about gorillas, not people. It is not even about me, and there is too much "me-itis" in it.
already as a result of editorial decisions" (281). However, Fossey’s work with the endangered gorillas, and the text she wrote to publicize their plight, participates in a strong tradition of women’s interactions with wildlife. Even her determination to leave herself out of the book can be interpreted as a gendered desire for self-effacement in the service of others.

Gender played a role in Fossey’s work from the very beginning. It is widely known that gender was a major consideration in Louis Leakey’s choice of Fossey to study the mountain gorillas as well as in his selection of Jane Goodall to work with chimpanzees in Tanzania and Biruté Galdikas with orangutans in Indonesia. As Vera Norwood explains in Made from this Earth, "Leakey chose women to study the primates because he felt that their gender-coded sensitivity to interpersonal relations would encourage just the sort of interaction Fossey succeeded in establishing" (250). Norwood places Fossey in a tradition of women including Delia Akeley and Lois Crisler, whose stories demonstrate the potential conflict between a desire for connection with wild animals and a feeling of responsibility for negative consequences to the animals resulting from that connection. Fossey’s experiences with the mountain gorillas exemplify the pattern Norwood traces:

Women have been taught that, as females, their strengths lie in empathy with and concern for other individuals. They have entered the habitats of wolves, gorillas, and elephants expecting to immerse themselves in a network of relationships requiring reciprocity and ethical responsibility. (211)

As was the case with many of the women Norwood describes, Fossey’s reciprocal and responsible relationship with the gorillas she studied involved a profound challenge to her culture’s ideology of a radical dualism between nature and culture. Because Fossey’s text does succeed in muting and censoring
out some of her personal reactions to the gorillas, it is her journal that reveals how profound and antidualistic was the connection she felt with the gorillas, even the first time she ever laid eyes on them. She conveys her reaction by quoting the words of an African boy who had accompanied her expedition as a cook: "'Kweli nudugu yanga!' These words in Swahili, whispered by the awestruck Manual, who was also seeing his first gorilla, summed up exactly what I was feeling. 'Surely, God, these are my kin'" (Mowat 14). Fossey's text suggests that her tremendous sense of commitment to and responsibility for the gorillas resulted not from such a sense of kinship alone, though, but from her ability to sustain an awareness of her differences from the gorillas at the same time that she felt a profound sense of connection with them. However, her work also reveals the ways in which her potentially subversive blurring of the culturally constructed boundary between herself and the gorillas was limited in its political possibilities; ultimately, she saw herself as choosing nature over culture rather than mediating between the two.

Fossey represents herself as interacting with the gorillas by trying to "act like a gorilla," an approach which reflected her willingness to blur the culturally mandated boundaries between nature and culture, observer and observed. Fossey claimed that this technique violated textbook instructions "merely to sit and observe" when conducting animal behavioral studies, although Norwood asserts that Fossey's techniques matched "widely accepted practices" for such studies (Fossey, "Making Friends" 51; Norwood 246). However, what was unquestionably unique about Fossey's approach was the attitude underlying it: a sense of deep respect for the gorillas as well as a willingness to regard them as individual subjects rather than merely the objects of her study. For example, Fossey's resolution never to follow a gorilla group once it chose to leave grew
not only out of her practical need to win the gorillas' trust but also out of a sense that she was an "intruder" in the gorillas' domain (Gorillas 14). In addition, her sense of the complexity of the "character and depth of the gorillas' lives" led her to refuse to use standard tools of animal behavior studies such as predetermined sampling schedules and check sheets of typical behaviors (Montgomery 147). Although such indications of her respect and admiration for the gorillas provoked some criticism from her doctoral thesis advisor, she persisted in conducting her research on her own terms.

Fossey's strong regard for the inherent dignity and rights of the animals she studied was rooted in her sense of the animals as subjects, as living beings with whom she had much in common, such as the capacity to feel pain and fear. Despite indications in Gorillas in the Mist that she was concerned about accusations of anthropomorphism or lack of objectivity, she also acknowledges and empathizes with the suffering of gorillas wounded by poachers and with the terror they feel when unknown humans intrude upon their territory. When she describes how Digit, one of her favorite gorillas, was killed and mutilated by poachers, she conveys a sense of an almost overwhelming empathy: she tells the reader, "I tried not to allow myself to think of Digit's anguish, pain, and the total comprehension he must have suffered in knowing what humans were doing to him" (Gorillas 206). Her sense of significant connections and relationships between herself and the gorillas also brought her joy, however. For example, in describing an encounter initiated by a gorilla named Macho, Fossey writes: "On perceiving the softness, tranquillity, and trust conveyed by
Macho's eyes, I was overwhelmed by the extraordinary depth of our rapport. The poignancy of her gift will never diminish" (Gorillas 201).\textsuperscript{22}

Fossey's relationship with the gorillas came to resemble one of extended kinship. The quality she most often describes with admiration is the gorillas' loyalty to their family groups, a quality graphically illustrated by Fossey's descriptions of several instances when all the adults in a family fought to the death in an attempt to prevent poachers from capturing an infant member of the group. In addition, she tends to judge individual gorillas based on their contribution to the harmony and stability within family groups. In particular, she admires the leader of Study Group #5, a male silverback whom she calls Beethoven, writing that "the members of Group 5 have taught me how the strong bonds of kinship contribute to the cohesiveness of a gorilla family unit over time. The success of Group 5 remains a behavioral example for human society, a legacy bequeathed to us by Beethoven" (105).\textsuperscript{23} And Fossey herself followed that example, behaving with as much courage and single-mindedness in her defense of the gorillas as they did in their defense of each other. In a very real sense, Fossey transgressed the species boundary to claim these gorillas as

\textsuperscript{22}In addition to the influences of gender discussed earlier, Fossey's willingness to see similarities between herself and the gorillas may also have been influenced by a tendency among social scientists of her era to use primatological data to hypothesize about human behavior in reconstructions of human evolution (Sperling 158). In fact, one of the primary reasons Leakey initiated primate studies (including Fossey's) was his hope that they might provide insight into the behavior of early humans that would aid him in his research in paleoanthropology (Montgomery 74).

\textsuperscript{23}Fossey's tendency to see the gorillas as behavioral examples for humans fits into a pattern that Susan Sperling identifies in the popularized primate studies of the 1960s and 1970s, which she sees as sharing "a marked prescriptive attitude — that to understand and cure human social ills we must look at primate biological roots and attempt to align our own behavior more closely with our primate nature" (180).
her family. Both Fossey and those who knew her seemed to sense this transgression, sometimes speaking of her as having "become" a gorilla.\footnote{See Montgomery, pp. 271-72.}

Despite her powerful identification with and loyalty to the gorillas, Fossey also recognizes important differences between herself and the gorillas, in particular when she demonstrates more scientific approaches to gorilla behavior and biology. She attributes certain gorillas' actions, such as leaving one family group for another, to the tendency to seek out opportunities for reproduction, and she matter-of-factly accepts their tendency to eat their own dung, speculating that it "might "allow vitamins synthesized in the hindgut to be assimilated in the foregut" (46). Sometimes, though, her role as scientific observer forces her to accept and explain behavior which severely challenges her desire to identify with the gorillas, as when she realizes that one female gorilla has killed and eaten another's infant. Fossey even acknowledges the reader's (and perhaps her own) possible discomfort with the behavior of gorillas whom she has described as abusing a female group member dying of malaria; however, she simultaneously explains the inappropriateness of judging the gorillas by human standards, writing that "it is possible that there is a likely explanation for what to a human appears as unreasonable and heartbreaking abuse" (101). She goes on to suggest that the family group members may have been trying to elicit conventional reactions from the female, reactions she was too weak to produce.

In addition to this strong sense of the biological differences between herself and the gorillas, Fossey was also very much aware of the cultural privilege she, as a member of human culture, held in relation to them; it was
this cultural privilege that made her able to act as their advocate. However, her strong sense of difference also made her constantly and painfully aware that she might unwittingly contribute to the forces threatening to harm them. As Vera Norwood notes, what was most unusual about Fossey's techniques for studying the gorillas was her unshakable ethical commitment to the animals themselves (245-46). Her book is filled with passages which reveal her deep sense of responsibility for the fate of the gorillas she studied, whether through impassioned condemnations of poachers who threatened the gorillas' safety or through her fears that human contact — including human contact which Fossey herself initiated — could spread diseases to the gorillas.

Most telling were the experiences which involved the complex, unpredictable forces of public opinion or national or park politics, such as the dilemma over publicizing Digit's death which I discussed in Chapter 2. Fossey faced another, even more agonizing choice when the Park Conservator delivered two half-dead infant gorillas to her, infants he had contracted to sell to a German zoo and had hired poachers to capture. Fossey eventually learned that both infants' family groups, a total of eighteen gorillas, had died trying to protect them from the poachers. After Fossey spent months nursing the infants, whom she named Coco and Pucker, back to health in her own living quarters, the Conservator demanded that she hand over the gorillas so they could be sold to the zoo. If she refused, he informed her he would hire more poachers to obtain other infants, a path of action that she knew would leave still more family groups dead in the defense of their infant members. Fossey describes giving in to these demands as "one of the biggest compromises I had to make during the years of my gorilla research" (122). She writes that she felt like a traitor as she hugged the baby gorillas after deciding that she had to give them
up to a life she was certain would be unhappy, unhealthy, and unnaturally short. After tricking them into entering their travel crate and latching the door, she explains "That was all I could endure. I ran out of the cabin, ran through the meadows of our countless walks, and ran deep into the forest until I could run no more. There is no way to describe the pain of their loss, even now, more than a decade later" (124).

For Fossey, the welfare of the gorillas came before the progress of her own research or the goals of the institutions who funded her work. She frequently challenged the management of the Rwandan national park within which she worked, insisting that their desire to protect the gorillas' habitat through tourism would only familiarize the gorillas with humans and make them more vulnerable to poachers. Instead, Fossey was committed to what she called "active conservation," which meant vigorously and regularly patrolling the gorillas' habitat to keep it empty of poachers and their traps. Norwood documents the extent to which Fossey's loyalty to the gorillas, and the challenge to the nature/culture dualism which that loyalty represented, defied the norms of traditional science when she explains that Fossey's "radical intervention in the park management structure led to much tension with scientific and conservation groups like the National Geographic Society, which ultimately withdrew its support from her project, declaring that her approach was not scientific enough and that she was too emotionally involved with the gorillas" (249).

However, while Fossey's intense devotion to the gorillas' welfare challenged dominant ideologies that strictly separated humans from animals like the gorillas, another aspect of her construction of her own identity and her relationship to the gorillas simultaneously undermined her challenge to those
ideologies. In particular, in most of her work, Fossey consistently opposed the welfare and interests of native Rwandans to her own priority: the advocacy and protection of the gorillas. For example, in *Gorillas in the Mist*, she points out that the gorillas' jungle habitat is in danger of being converted to fields for growing pyrethrum, a flower used to make natural insecticides. She does so with an understanding that "the average Rwandan living near the boundaries of the Parc des Volcans and raising pyrethrum for the equivalent of four cents a pound" cannot be expected to make the welfare of the gorillas a priority above his or her own survival (239). However, her evaluation of the situation leads her not to a greater appreciation of the plight of the native Rwandans, but rather to a dismissal of the possibility that they can be persuaded to see "the notion of wildlife as a treasured legacy"; such a hope, she writes, overlooks "the reality that to most of a local impoverished and inert populace wildlife is considered an obstacle" (*Gorillas* 241). As this passage suggests, she sees native Rwandans as fundamentally unable to appreciate the gorillas in the way that she and other Westerners could; elsewhere, she blames the species' endangered status on "the encroachment of native man upon its habitat — and neglect by civilized man" ("Making Friends" 67). Such an attitude on the part of a white Westerner in post-colonial Africa can only be interpreted as an oppressive reinscription of ethnic and racial hierarchies, a clear message that Fossey saw native Rwandans not only as inferior to "civilized" Westerners in matters of conservation, but also as less important to her than her chosen family of gorillas.

Ultimately, Fossey's construction of her connection with the gorillas across the culture/nature boundary is one that excluded the possibility of any other connections. As Haraway points out, the economic and political realities
of Rwanda "enter Fossey's book only as a disrupting force in the Garden, through murderous poachers, selfish graduate students, and mendacious politicians" *(Primate Visions* 147) rather than as the products of a history of racism and colonialism that have shaped the fate of both the native Rwandans and the gorillas. The ideologies that divide humans from nature and different groups of people from each other in order to sanction domination and abuse have played a particularly important role in Rwanda's recent history of civil war between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority. Prior to colonial domination in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, a shared language and religion as well as centuries of intermarriage had erased most physical and many cultural differences between the two ethnic groups. However, colonial policies worked to reinscribe social divisions and hierarchies. For example, the Belgian government which controlled Rwanda from 1920-1962 issued ethnic identity cards to the native population, using the ownership of ten or more cattle as the criterion for labeling someone Tutsi. After re-establishing ethnic and class divisions between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi in this way, the Belgians then capitalized on these divisions by ruling through the Tutsi minority. It is the results of such history that make Rwanda a place where native people feel the need to choose between their own welfare and the preservation of a species like the gorilla.

Rather than seeing herself as radically destabilizing boundaries which divide different groups of people from each other and from animals like the gorillas, Fossey envisioned her work as taking her across the culture/nature divide, out of the painful complexities of human culture and history, and into what Haraway describes as "her culture's dream of an original and timeless nature" *(Gorillas* 267). This escapism is graphically illustrated in the second
chapter of *Gorillas in the Mist*, which begins with a discussion of Rwanda's extreme poverty and ethnic divisions and the ways these conditions affect the gorillas through threats of habitat loss and poaching. However, Fossey's description soon leads away from these troubling issues, through a stone tunnel which she describes as creating "a dramatic entrance into the world of the gorilla. It served as a passageway between civilization and the silent world of the forest" (22, emphasis added).

By insisting on her need to choose between the poles of nature and culture, Fossey constructed her own identity in a one-dimensional way that served to reinforce dominant ideologies that radically separate those poles, the same ideologies she attempted to challenge with her message of the gorillas' inherent rights and dignity. Because Fossey saw herself as able to connect only with the gorillas, she failed to see the many interconnections between the oppression of the gorillas and of the people with whom they shared the country. Thus, she largely failed to see how she could extend a sense of kinship not only to the gorillas but also to the humans living in Rwanda by looking for the forces working against the survival of both. Sadly, Fossey's approach protected her beloved gorillas only while she was present to enact it, leaving the cultural and political roots of the threats to the gorillas unaddressed. As Haraway explains in describing Alison Jolly's work with lemurs in Madagascar, a more effective goal would be to destabilize the nature/culture boundary more fully by "participating in negotiating the terms on which love of nature could be part of the solution to, rather than part of the imposition of, colonial domination and environmental destruction" (275). However, in her transgression of the cultural boundaries between herself and the gorillas,
Fossey gives us a place to start exploring the environmental and ethical potential of identifying with and learning from beings other than ourselves.

While Fossey's text reveals a single-minded dedication to arguing for the value and preservation of the nonhuman animals for whom she speaks, Walker's essays show more of an awareness that speaking for nature is a broad issue that goes beyond particular species or instances. In "Why Did the Balinese Chicken Cross the Road?", an essay near the end of the same volume that contains "Am I Blue?", she explains that

the writer's pen is a microphone held up to the mouths of ancestors and even stones of long ago. That once given permission by the writer — a fool, and so why should one fear? — horses, dogs, rivers, and, yes, chickens can step forward and expound on their lives. The magic of this is not so much in the power of the microphone as in the ability of the nonhuman object or animal to be and the human animal to perceive its being. (170)

The other essays in this volume, Living by the Word, reveal that Walker is profoundly aware of the interconnectedness of all sorts of oppression, and that it is exactly that awareness of interconnection that compels her to speak for nature, which she does most explicitly in "Am I Blue?".

In this brief essay, Walker describes renting a house in the country and coming to "perceive the being" of the white horse, Blue, that lived in a neighboring field. The first part of the essay details how her encounters with Blue reminded her of what she had once known as a child and forgotten, of "the depth of feeling one could see in horses' eyes" (4). However, she is shocked and saddened to realize that Blue's eyes are telling her that he is "horribly lonely and bored" (5). Of course, her sense that children brought up around animals realize that "human and nonhuman animals can communicate quite well" (5) does potentially imply that people have an inborn affinity for nonhuman
animals, an affinity that human culture causes them to lose or repress. Such an implication does set up a potentially dangerous opposition between nature and culture, but Walker’s focus on childhood as the prototypical state of openness to communication and connection with the nonhuman is liberating in the sense that it becomes a possibility for every person, not just women or members of other traditionally oppressed groups.

In her ruminations on Blue’s unhappy state, Walker makes clear that she sees human mistreatment of animals as inextricably intertwined with other forms of oppression. She compares her own experience of forgetting her childhood knowledge of connection and communication with the nonhuman to the experience of white children during the days of slavery, children "who were raised by black people, who knew their first all-accepting love from black women, and then, when they were twelve or so, were told they must 'forget' the deep levels of communication between themselves and 'mammy' that they knew" (6). She goes on to draw a parallel with the ways still other groups of people have, like nonhuman animals, been constructed as silent, as inferior, as the "other" of dominant culture:

And about the indians, considered to be 'like animals' by the 'settlers' (a very benign euphemism for what they actually were), who did not understand their description as a compliment. And about the thousands of American men who marry Japanese, Korean, Filipina, and other non-English speaking women and of how happy they report they are, 'blissfully,' until their brides learn to speak English, at which point the marriages tend to fall apart. What then did the men see, when they looked into the eyes of the women they married, before they could speak English? Apparently only their own reflections. (6)
Significantly, Walker does not seek to prioritize or hierarchically order these types of oppression, focusing instead on their similar effects on the oppressor and oppressed.

As Walker's narrative progresses, it becomes clear that the connection she feels with Blue is grounded in a shared history of oppression, not just in a forgotten essential connection. One day, she notices that another horse is sharing Blue's pasture, and she observes as the two animals slowly become friends. Then she sees that the look in Blue's eyes has changed to "a look of independence, of self-possession, of inalienable horsemess" (6). But one day, the other horse is gone, and Walker goes to visit Blue, telling us that

I dreaded looking into his eyes — because I had of course noticed that Brown, his partner, had gone — but I did look. If I had been born into slavery, and my partner had been sold or killed, my eyes would have looked like that. The children next door explained that Blue's partner had been 'put with him' (the same expression the old people used, I had noticed, when speaking of an ancestor during slavery who had been impregnated by her owner) so that they could mate and she conceive. Since that was accomplished, she had been taken back by her owner, who lived somewhere else. (7)

As an African American woman referring to a past of gender and race oppression, Walker identifies with Blue's position in terms of historical parallels. On a more individual level, she refers to Brown as Blue's "partner," a word she uses for her own living companion as well. Blue reacts to the situation "like a crazed person" (7), galloping furiously, whinnying, tearing at the ground with his hooves, butting himself against a tree, looking "always and always toward the road down which his partner had gone" (7). Walker's sense of identification with Blue spurs in her a sense of connectedness that repudiates dualism and hierarchy: when she looks in his eyes, she sees "a look so piercing,
so full of grief, a look so human, I almost laughed (I felt too sad to cry) to think there are people who do not know that animals suffer" (7).

However, Walker’s sense of connectedness with Blue masks an important difference between them, a difference in privilege that implicates her in Blue’s suffering. In something of a surprise ending, she confronts the reader with her own sudden realization of an aspect of her identity which contradicts her identification with Blue: her participation in one of her culture’s practices that contribute to the suffering of nonhuman animals. When a visiting friend, seeing Blue in his lonely pasture, remarks that a white horse is the very image of freedom, Walker reacts with the sad realization that

Yes, the animals are forced to become for us merely ‘images’ of what they once so beautifully expressed. And we are used to drinking milk from containers showing ‘contented’ cows, whose real lives we want to hear nothing about, eating hamburgers and drumsticks from ‘happy’ hens, and munching hamburgers advertised by bulls of integrity who seem to command their fate.

As we talked about freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks. I am eating misery, I thought, as I took the first bite. And spit it out. (8)

Having recognized her complicity in her culture’s mistreatment of nonhuman animals, Walker takes personal/political action to reduce that complicity by becoming a vegetarian (and by writing an essay testifying to animals’ ability to suffer and to communicate). However, she never takes a tone of moral superiority, instead emphasizing the difficulty of her struggle to avoid eating meat in the essays that follow "Am I Blue?".

By constructing her own identity as contradictory and changing in relationship to a nonhuman animal, Walker achieves the "permanent partiality" of point of view that Donna Haraway describes as an antidote to feminist visions that seek to erase difference:

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We do not need a totality in order to work well. The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one. In that sense, dialectics too is a dream language, longing to resolve contradiction. Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos. (173)

However, as I will discuss in the next section, Ursula Le Guin and Terry Tempest Williams explore what "we can learn" from embracing the contradictory nature of our "fusions" with nonhuman nature in even more self-conscious and complex ways, transgressing the nature/culture dualism without reinscribing dualism or hierarchy. They go beyond representing and advocating a sense of responsibility towards nonhuman nature to exploring how an identity that takes on this kind of responsibility is constructed. Even more significantly, they acknowledge the crucial role that discourse plays in constructing human identity, and they consciously rewrite legends and narratives in an attempt to construct identity in ways that challenge dominant, oppressive ideologies. As Haraway notes,

Contests for the meaning of writing are a major form of contemporary political struggle. Releasing the play of writing is deadly serious. . . . Cyborg [subversive] writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before man. Cyborg writing is about power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. (175)

Rather than predicing the power of oppressed groups traditionally linked to nature on some form of innocence of the ideologies of dominant culture, Le Guin and Williams show how people belonging to such groups can acknowledge their legacies as both oppressed and oppressors to create a new
story that destabilizes the dualistic ideologies that construct such categories to begin with.

Destabilizing the Subject: Ursula Le Guin and Terry Tempest Williams

"Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?," the first work in Le Guin's volume of stories and poems entitled Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences, advocates a radical transformation in Western culture's dominant attitudes and behaviors towards nonhuman nature by telling the mythical story of a little girl's transformative experience with a world based on Native American legends of the First People, whom anthropological linguist William Bright describes as "members of a race of mythic prototypes who lived before humans existed" (xi). Le Guin's use of a female protagonist and Native American legends evokes traditional connections between nature and both women and Native Americans, but she rewrites those traditional connections in ways that avoid the dualism and hierarchy that total identification can lead to. In particular, she destabilizes the boundaries between nature and culture in a way that allows her protagonist to reinterpret and redefine her own identity in relation to both those entities.

In the introduction to Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences, Le Guin makes clear that her primary purpose in the volume is to "speak for" nature, to write about animals and other nonhuman living things in ways which belie the myth of Western culture that "animals are dumb: have no words of their own." (9). In doing so, she addresses the problems caused by "Civilized Man's "deafness to the nonhuman voices which would remind him of the connectedness of all life. Significantly, though, Le Guin does not recommend a point of view that allows connectedness to erase all difference, criticizing the "sloppy identifications" (12) of Walt Whitman which annihilate the otherness of
nature by engulfing it in his own ego. Instead, in "Buffalo Gals," Le Guin creates a conception of human subjectivity and reality that engages both connection and difference without allowing one to overwhelm or absorb the other.

Le Guin's story begins when a little girl, injured in a plane crash somewhere in a desert landscape in the American West, is discovered by Coyote, who tells the girl "You fell out of the sky" (17). Coyote's unexplained command of human language creates the sense that this story will challenge the idea of a firm nature/culture boundary, a sense that grows as she leads the little girl, Myra, to her home. In the process, Myra's perception of the coyote is suddenly, inexplicably transformed from an animal "gnawing at the half-dried carcass of a crow, black feathers sticking to the black lips and narrow jaw" to a tawny-skinned woman with yellow and grey hair and bare, hard-soled feet" (21). Once Myra arrives at Coyote's village, she meets more characters who, despite predominantly human appearances, also possess qualities which identify them with particular species of nonhuman animals: Doe, for instance, could be identified as a deer simply by her walk — "a severely elegant walk, small steps, like a woman in high heels, quick, precise, very light" (33) — and the chipmunks live as a huge family in a dark, burrow-like house. In addition, these people possess characteristics that are distinctly supernatural: Blue Jay replaces Myra's eye, damaged in the plane wreck, with a new eye made out of pine pitch, and after a few healing licks from Coyote's tongue, it works quite well.

Le Guin's representation of these characters, and especially Coyote, as ambiguous and irreducible to animals, humans, gods, or legends corresponds to the Native American conceptions of the mythical First People. As Barre
Toelken explains, the Navajo conception of Coyote is particularly representative of this ambiguity:

> There is no possible distinction between Ma'i, the animal we recognize as a coyote in the fields, and Ma'i, the personification of Coyote power in all coyotes, and Ma'i, the character (trickster, creator, and buffoon) in legends and tales, and Ma'i, the symbolic character of disorder in the myths. Ma'i is not a composite but a complex; a Navajo would see no reason to distinguish separate aspects. (204)

Ultimately, Le Guin's complex First People represent a worldview that resists definite boundaries and dualisms, neither choosing one side over the other or collapsing difference. Nevertheless, this world is separated from the world of Myra's origin, a world inhabited by what the First People call the New People. This separation represents not an inevitable opposition between the two peoples, but rather the dualism that human culture has constructed, not only between itself and nonhuman nature, but also between its dualistic way of perceiving reality and a perceptual mode that refuses such boundaries. While the First People thus cannot be labeled "nonhuman" in the sense that they have no human aspects, they do represent the nonhuman to Myra in that they offer an alternative to the dominant, dualistic human culture that she comes from. On this level, the story is about the process of Myra adapting to, learning about, and coming to love the nonhuman, and to love Coyote in particular as their representative.

Significantly, although Myra is female, Le Guin does not represent her gender as giving her an inherent or essential bond with Coyote or any of the other First People. In addition, while Le Guin has transformed the

25 Other stories in Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences may be more likely to create the impression of an essentialist connection between women and nature. In particular, "She
traditionally male Coyote of Native American legends into a female who "adopts" Myra in some human senses of the word, many of Coyote's behaviors fly in the face of human expectations about nurturing mothers (including Mother Nature). 26 Coyote possesses an irreverent and often crude sense of humor, she entertains a constant stream of "boyfriends," sometimes in the bed right next to Myra, she is boastful and lazy, and she talks to her own excrement. Of course, all of these characteristics correspond to the way Coyote is represented in Native American legend, but for Myra, "a lot of things were hard to take about Coyote as a mother" (37) and require a great deal of adjustment.

Le Guin's introduction to the volume containing "Buffalo Gals Won't You Come Out Tonight" makes it clear that, for her, it is more important that Myra is a child than that she is female: "for the people Civilization calls 'primitive,' 'savage,' or 'undeveloped,' including young children, the continuity, interdependence, and community of all life, all forms of being on earth, is a lived fact, made conscious in narrative (myth, ritual, fiction)" (10). Rather than predicking an ability to connect with the nonhuman on an exclusionary, gender-based essentialism, Le Guin acknowledges the biological and physical interdependence all humans have with the rest of nature. 27

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26 As Vera Norwood notes, "Locating the connection between women and nature in the physical form of a coyote, however, Le Guin goes on to deny much of the romanticism accompanying concepts of women's identification with 'mother earth' " (267)

27 Le Guin's sense that "Civilization" masks it or destroys an inborn sense of this interdependence does risk the same opposition between nature and culture as Walker's assertion that all children are open to the belief that nonhuman animals can communicate with
Despite Le Guin's assertion that children possess an awareness of the interdependence and community of all life similar to the worldview of the First People, Myra's identity is also clearly a construction of her "civilized" culture. Before falling asleep on her first night with the First People, Myra's last thought is "I didn't brush my teeth" (27). This sense that Myra, as a subject, is culturally constructed is heightened by the way she changes throughout the story in response to forces outside of herself. But by including nonhuman nature as an aspect of those forces, Le Guin avoids a human solipsism that refuses to acknowledge the power or effect of any force outside of human discourse. Instead, Myra's interactions with Coyote and the rest of the First People illustrate what Patrick Murphy identifies as the "ecological process of interanimation": "the ways in which humans and other entities develop, change, and learn through mutually influencing each other day to day, age to age" (Murphy, "Ground" 149).

Although Myra is affected by all of her interactions with the First People, it is Coyote who seeks out connections with her most actively and who shapes her identity most profoundly. In the legends of Native American cultures, particularly those native to the American Southwest, the figure of Coyote has links with human culture in addition to the human aspects shared by all First People. In A Coyote Reader, William Bright characterizes the legendary Coyote as "a Levi-Straussian 'mediator' who links the world of humanity, with all of its curiosity, self-awareness, and resultant 'cultural' baggage, to the 'natural' world of animals" (22). The legendary Coyote's affinity for humanity is paralleled to some degree by the relationship of the biological coyote to dominant human

them. However, it avoids dualisms and hierarchies among groups of people in terms of their connections with nature because childhood is a state everyone passes through.

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culture: it has shown an impressive ability to adapt to the changes human cultures have imposed upon its environment, often expanding its range to include areas where wolves have been eliminated or adapting to life in close proximity to human beings.\textsuperscript{28} Even more incredibly, the species thrives in North America today despite persistent and brutal campaigns intended to eliminate it.\textsuperscript{29}

True to this biological and legendary relationship with human culture, Le Guin's Coyote represents such an openness to interconnection, even when connecting means crossing hostile boundaries erected by human culture. As Myra figures out, "That was Coyote's craziness, what they called her craziness. She wasn't afraid. She went between the two kinds of people, she crossed over" (39). Eventually, Myra realizes that although some of the other People accept her, it is only with "the generosity of big families" (39). Coyote alone consciously chose to take care of her, a choice growing out of Coyote's "crazy" ability and desire to cross over and make connections with human culture. In response to Coyote's attitude and actions, Myra chooses to connect across the boundaries as well. She decides to stay with Coyote rather than Chipmunk or Rabbit, even though Coyote's house is filthy and her bed is smelly and full of fleas. Ultimately, as Myra lies listening to Coyote singing "one of the endless tuneless songs that wove the roots of trees and bushes and ferns and grass in

\textsuperscript{28} See William Bright's \textit{A Coyote Reader} for more extensive discussions of the similarities between the biological coyote and the coyote of Native American legend.

\textsuperscript{29} In \textit{Of Wolves and Men}, Barry Lopez describes how "the unrestrained savagery that was once a part of wolf killing in the United States continues with efforts in America to control 'brush wolves' or coyotes. These animals are hunted down by ranchers from helicopters with shotguns. Their dens are dynamited. Their mouths are wired shut and they are left to starve. They are strung up in trees and picked apart with pistol fire. They are doused with gasoline and ignited" (196).
the web that held the stream in the streambed and the rock in the rock's place and the earth together," she tells Coyote "I love you" (56).

Although Myra clearly changes in response to the worldview represented by Coyote and the rest of the First People, the question remains how significant any such change can be. After all, these People reach her precisely because of the human aspects of their appearance and language, so how successfully can their effect on her subvert the dominant cultural ideologies so deeply interwoven into human behavior and language? And how much agency does Myra possess if she changes only in reaction to the extraordinary forces acting on her in the First World; can she actually intervene in any of the forces constructing her?

As I have discussed, for many poststructuralist feminist theorists, it is the subject's ability to interpret the contradictory and often conflicting discursive systems and axes of difference constructing her identity that allows her to participate in the construction of those forces and her own identity. In particular, de Lauretis' "eccentric subject," defined by her "excessive critical position" achieved through personal and political displacement across boundaries, is in a position to recognize the discrepancies and possibilities of meaning that allow for interpretation.30

30. Lee Quinby sees in ecofeminism a similar potential for imaginatively transgressing the boundaries of experience and identity in ways that allow for the possibility of reinterpretation: "Ecofeminism as a politics of resistance forces us to question the categories of experience that order the world and the truths we have come to know, even the truths of our radical politics, by confronting us with the truths of other women and men, differently acculturated, fighting against specific threats to their land and bodies. This questioning must also extend to the anthropocentric assumption that only human beings have truths to tell about their and our experiences. The cries of factory farm animals, the suffocation of fish in poisoned waters, the sounds of flood waters rushing over deforested land -- these are also voices we need to heed. Listening to all voices of subjugation and hearing their insurrectionary truths make us better able to question our own personal and political practices. This questioning may well risk
Significantly, "Buffalo Gals" begins with Myra's displacement across a boundary, into a realm where she is asked to take a drastically different view of identity and community than that held in dominant human culture. Le Guin represents this boundary quite vividly by the change in Coyote's appearance from unambiguously animal — Myra first notes that the coyote is "a big one, in good condition, its coat silvery and thick. The dark tear-line from its long yellow eye was as clearly marked as a tabby cat's" (17) — to ambiguously human, animal, and supernatural. Near the end of the story, when Myra decides to try to re-approach the world of the New People, her experience suggests that the boundary between the two worlds extends beyond physical appearance to the way the people on either side of it perceive and name reality. As Myra draws near,

It did seem there was a line, a straight, jerky line drawn across the sagebrush plain, and on the far side of it — nothing? was it mist?

"It's a ranch," the child said. "That's a fence. There's a lot of Herefords." The words tasted like iron, like salt in her mouth. The things she named wavered in her sight and faded, leaving nothing — a hole in the world, a burned place like a cigarette burn. (46)

Because she has crossed this boundary, at Coyote's invitation, Myra is confronted with confusions and inconsistencies, with multiple interpretations of reality and of her own identity. Throughout the course of the story, she learns to negotiate these multiple interpretations in a way that allows her consciously to step beyond her culturally constructed human perception and, at least

the end of ecofeminism as currently constituted, for, like any social movement, ecofeminism is inevitably a provisional politics, one that has struck a chord of resistance in this era of ecological destruction and patriarchal power. And if another term and a different politics emerge from this questioning, it will be in the service of new local actions, new creative energies, and new alliances against power" (126-127).
temporarily, perceive as the nonhuman. For example, at one point Myra wonders why Coyote sleeps in the night and wakes in the day like humans rather than the other way around, but "when she framed the question in her mind she saw at once that night is when you sleep and day is when you're awake" (34-35). While the readers of Le Guin's story may never be physically displaced across a boundary in the way Myra is, her experience can lead us to imagine situations which would encourage us to take the perspectives of identities and positions different than those we are accustomed to.

Significantly, Myra's displacement does not lead her dualistically to choose one side of the boundary over the other, or to try to erase the boundary by some form of homogeneous union of the two sides. Her response is instead dialogic, in the sense that Patrick Murphy explains in "Ground, Pivot, Motion": "A dialogic method can recognize that the most fundamental relationships are not resolvable through dialectical synthesis: humanity/nature, ignorance/knowledge, male/female, emotion/intellect, conscious/unconscious" (148). When Coyote first meets Myra, she names her "Gal," and Le Guin suggests that Myra tries to interpret this gesture from Coyote's point of view: "She said it as a name; maybe it was the child's name, Myra, as spoken by Coyote" (23). Although Myra becomes better and better at understanding and adopting the worldview of the First People, she never entirely rejects her human perspective either, somehow dialogically positioning herself on the boundary between the two: "The child thought of herself as Gal, but also sometimes as Myra" (39).

Of course, Myra's guide in learning to resist dualism or dialectical synthesis is Coyote; like her Native American antecedents, Coyote functions as
a mediator between polar opposites. The potential of Coyote figures to model connections that do not erase difference has been recently recognized by several feminist theorists. As Stacy Alaimo points out, Donna Haraway's use of the Coyote Trickster of Native American legend "not only resists glorified mystification, . . . [but] also destabilizes the dualism of active/passive, resource/user, knower/known on which an epistemology and a politics of domination is based" (145). Haraway sees in the liminal figure of Coyote a way to perceive

that historically specific human relations with 'nature' must somehow — linguistically, ethically, scientifically, politically, technologically, and epistemologically — be imagined as genuinely social and actively relational; and yet the partners remain utterly unhomogeneous. . . . Curiously, as for people before us in western discourses, efforts to come to linguistic terms with the non-representability, historical contingency, artefactuality, and yet spontaneity, necessity, fragility, and stunning profusions of 'nature' can help us refigure the kind of persons we might be. These persons can no longer be, if they ever were, master subjects, nor alienated subjects, but — just possibly — multiple heterogeneous, inhomogeneous, accountable, and connected human agents. (Simians, Cyborgs, and Women 3)

What Myra learns from Coyote in Le Guin's story is precisely how to be such a human agent, and she achieves this state by learning to perceive reality in a new way. Myra's two eyes, one original and thus linked to the world of her origin, and one given by the people of the First World, come to symbolize the ways of seeing represented by the two worlds. When she uses just her original eye in the world of the First People, "everything [is] clear and flat"; she learns

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31 As Jarold Ramsey explains in Reading the Fire: Essays in the Traditional Indian Literature of the Far West, Native American constructions of Coyote as Trickster function as a "dynamic interposing of the mind between polar opposites, as if affirming 'either/and'" (29).
she must use them both together if she is to gain depth perception. Chickadee hints at the potential power of such perception when she explains that

"Things are woven together. So we call the weaver the Grandmother." She whistled four notes, looking up the smokehole. "After all," she added, "maybe all this place, the other places too, maybe they're all only one side of the weaving. I don't know. I can only look with one eye at a time, how can I tell how deep it goes?" (50)

Of course, learning to use both eyes together is difficult in either world. The new eye doesn't work well until Coyote licks it, and Myra starts to feel like it is not seeing at all as she approaches the world of her origin. Adapting to her new eye, though, does not mean adopting from the First People some monolithic way of seeing that is opposed to her original mode of perception, for there is no one way of seeing among the First People. Just as Myra sees them as human in form, they each see everyone as resembling their own species: As Coyote explains, "Resemblance is in the eye... So, to me you're basically greyish yellow and run on four legs... To Hawk, you're an egg, or maybe getting pinfeathers" (35). It is clear Myra cannot abandon her old eye, her human perception. Instead, she learns to see with both eyes at once, adopting the realization that there are many ways of seeing, and learning to figure that realization into her own perception. This alteration of perspective is not a simple integration of opposites, however, for the two eyes and the two worlds they represent cannot be reduced to a dualistic opposition. One eye roots her in her human origins, while the other gives her depth perception: the knowledge of her interconnections with other species and other spiritual planes, an understanding of the multiple ways of seeing related to those other species and places, and the ability to respect the difference among those ways of seeing. In his article "Voicing Another Nature," Patrick Murphy gives us the term
"anotherness" for this perception of otherness which respects difference without using it to justify domination or prohibit connection; as he explains, "'Anotherness' proceeds from a heterarchical — that is, a nonhierarchical — sense of difference" (63).

Le Guin's story deals with the possibility of integrating the two worlds represented by the two eyes more overtly as well. Chickadee tells Myra that once the boundary between the two did not exist: 'When we lived together it was all one place,' Chickadee said in her slow, soft home-voice. 'But not the others, the new people, they live apart. And their places are so heavy. They weigh down on our place, they press on it, draw it, suck it, eat it, eat holes in it, crowd it out" (49). But the idea of resolving the dualism between culture and its oppressed and repressed "others" by returning to some Edenic state or golden past where there are no discernible differences between humans, animals, and spirits is not a feasible one. While such a promise of the possibility of holism might seem the antidote to the hierarchical domination which proceeds from our culture's dualistic ideology, that sort of unity often requires that some entities be appropriated by or incorporated into others. Such an erasure of difference is just another kind of domination.

Le Guin, too, rejects the possibility that dualism may be resolved by returning to an original state of unity. Chickadee predicts that "Maybe after a while longer there'll only be one place again, their place. And none of us here. I knew Bison, out over the mountains. I knew Antelope right here. I knew Grizzly and Greywolf, up west there. Gone. All gone" (49-50). Thus, the possibility of achieving one place again is presented only as negative, as predicated on the eradication of the First People. The story also refuses the possibility of ending human culture's alienation from its "other" by rejecting the
world of the New People. Myra has learned to adapt to and value the world of the First People, primarily through her emotional attachment to Coyote. Soon after Myra confesses to Coyote that she loves her, Coyote eats a poisoned salmon set out by one of the New People and dies an agonizing death. In her grief, Myra wants to reject all her connections with the world that killed Coyote; looking out at the town of New People, she pronounces, "I hope you all die in pain" (58).

However, Myra learns she cannot abandon her identity as a New Person; Chickadee and the spider-like Grandmother tell her that Coyote was in the process of taking her back to her own people before she was killed. Going back to the New People, though, does not mean leaving behind all her new connections with the First People or her newly learned way of seeing. They tell her she can keep her new eye, and Chickadee promises she will come if Myra makes gardens for her. Grandmother promises, "I'll be there too, you know. In your dreams, in your ideas, in dark corners in the basement" (60). Myra learns she may even re-encounter her beloved Coyote, who, true to her legendary prototype, "gets killed all the time" ("Buffalo Gals" 59). Corresponding to the persistence of the coyote species, this lack of finality to Coyote's death may seem to undercut the importance of human culture's need to transform its destructive behavior toward nonhuman nature. Yet, as Chickadee has revealed, species like Bison and Greywolf have been unable to survive the pressures of human culture. And as Myra's experience attests, any diminishment of the diversity of the world of the First People represents a loss to all people. In the end, Myra's experience demonstrates a way that human beings can forge a relationship with nonhuman nature for political ends without positing essential or static connections that erase difference and reinscribe dualism or hierarchy.
In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway turns to a model of political identity formulated by Chela Sandoval called oppositional consciousness: a kind of postmodernist identity constructed out of "otherness, difference, and specificity" (155). Importantly, "this identity marks out a self-consciously constructed space that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of natural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship" (157).

Ultimately, Le Guin's story provides us with a sense in which we can each act as conscious agents of political change. Through an openness to viewpoints and communities outside dominant human cultural experience, Myra becomes, and accepts the necessity of remaining, what Haraway would call a "split and contradictory self." Such a self holds potential for subverting dominant ideologies because her divisions and contradictions allow her to connect without oversimplifying her identity in ways which reinscribe those ideologies in new forms; such a self "is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history" (Haraway 586).

Thus, Le Guin's story provides an approach to identity which acknowledges historical/cultural connections between certain groups of people and nonhuman nature without erasing the important differences or suggesting that Western culture can adopt unchanged Native American spiritual traditions that confer some mystical wholeness with the nonhuman. She rewrites such connections and traditions in a way that destabilizes views of both human subjectivity and nature, refusing static, definite boundaries between nature and culture, myth and reality, or any other traditionally constructed dualisms.

Given this transformed vision of identity, differences between humans and the
rest of nature as well as the differences among humans, including gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, need not be the roots of conflict; instead, they can be the potential source of new and more sustainable relationships both within human culture and between culture and nonhuman nature.

In her autobiographical narrative, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*, Terry Tempest Williams takes as her topic the connections between women and nature as they have manifested themselves in her life and experience. While her narrative focuses less on the idea of displacement across boundaries than Le Guin, she is more explicit about her efforts to use discourse as a tool to recreate her identity and subvert oppressive cultural ideologies. She begins by highlighting three issues: women, nature, and the reconstruction/rewriting of identity.

In the past seven years, Great Salt Lake has advanced and retreated. The Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, devastated by the flood, now begins to heal. Volunteers are beginning to reconstruct the marshes just as I am trying to reconstruct my life. . . I remember the country I come from and how it informs my life. Most of the women in my family are dead. Cancer. At thirty-four, I became matriarch of my family. The losses I encountered at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge as Great Salt Lake was rising helped me to face the losses within my family. When most people had given up on the Refuge, saying the birds were gone, I was drawn further into its essence. In the same way that when someone is dying many retreat, I chose to stay. (3-4)

As Williams suggests here, her narrative chronicles the destruction of both people and a place which she loved; women and nature are linked because both have been lost. As the narrative proceeds, we come to understand just how integral the Bird Refuge and the women in her family were to Williams' life and to her sense of identity. When these connections are lost, she feels her identity is set loose from its moorings and that she must "reconstruct her life."
Eventually, she realizes that her identity is not stable but rather constantly shifting and changing as the places and people she is connected to shift, change, and even die. She comes to believe that her "refuge" in change is not the ability to retreat to some stable place or person, but to adapt by consciously participating in the outside forces continually shaping her identity. As we see in the prologue, she considers this narrative to be an important method of self reconstruction; she discursively participates in these forces shaping her identity by weaving a complex relationship between women and nature, a relationship which includes her double loss of women and of a natural place, but involves a number of other connections as well.

One way she connects with nature is by identifying with aspects of her natural environment that she sees as wild and resistant to oppressive cultural forces. As she faces the multiple ways that her culture works to suppress and silence her in Refuge, she looks to the landscape around her for metaphors or models for how she and other women should live their lives. Noting the futility of human efforts to stop the Great Salt Lake from rising, she wants to align herself with its strength against male-dominated culture: "I want to see the Lake as Woman, as myself, in her refusal to be tamed" (92).  

In other spots, though, she goes beyond representing a metaphoric relationship between women and nature to asserting a connection that is more essential, implying that there is something inherent in women's biology that

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32 In this way, Williams seems to belong to a tradition of Southwestern women writers that Vera Norwood traces in "Crazy-Quilt Lives: Frontier Sources for Southwestern Women's Literature." These women writers question "male fantasies of dominance, not because they see the landscape as an already-tamed paradise, but because they recognize its resistance to such manipulation. Linking the domestication of wilderness to their own domestication, they find freedom in the harsh, demanding terrain they encounter" (94).
gives them a special bond with the natural world that men lack. At one point, describing the daily stress of coping with her multiple losses, she consoles herself by linking her energy cycles to the cycles of nature: "Today, I feel stronger, learning to live within the natural cycles of a day and to not expect so much from myself. As women, we hold the moon in our bellies" (136). In the last of several dreams that she relates, she seems to suggest that women's biological role as mothers gives them a special responsibility and ability to protect nature:

One night, I dreamed women from all over the world circled a blazing fire in the desert. They... made promises that they would never fear the witch inside themselves... They would reclaim the desert for the sake of their children, for the sake of the land. (287)

By fostering a sense that women are inherently connected to the earth through biological, gendered processes like menstruation and motherhood, Williams seems to participate in the cultural feminist project of valorizing essential connections between women and nature in order to counteract dominant traditions that have associated the two groups in order to justify the subjugation of both. However, she also evokes the negative associations and risks that accompany essentialist constructions of women's identities. If we look at Williams' seemingly essentialist statements in the context of her work as a whole, however, we find that Williams draws not only metaphoric and essentialist connections between women and nature, but also seemingly contradictory connections that echo poststructuralist views that our subjectivities are constructed by (sometimes contradictory) cultural/historical forces outside of ourselves.
Unlike most poststructuralists, however, Williams sees nonhuman nature as one of the outside forces acting to structure subjectivity. For example, she tells of a magical day in her childhood spent floating on the Great Salt Lake, "imprinting on Great Basin skies" (33). She points to moments like these as the source of her complex and intimate relationship with the landscape around her. This relationship is also inextricably intertwined with the history of her connections to the other women in her family. She explains how her grandmother nurtured her youthful interest in birdwatching and how she and her mother spent time together during family camping trips. As a result, she tells us, "our attachment to the land was our attachment to each other" (15).

Williams' sense that her own identity is intimately tied up with her relationships to her family and to the landscape of her home suggests that she would agree with the poststructuralist insight that identity is relational. Williams is also vividly aware that her relationship to nature has been constructed through her cultural and family history. She points out that

In Mormon culture, . . . [where you've come from] is one of the things you do know — history and genealogy. . . . I have known five of my great-grandparents intimately. They tutored me in stories with a belief that lineage mattered. Genealogy is in our blood. As a people and as a family, we have a sense of history. And our history is tied to land. (13-14)

Because of this family and cultural history with the landscape, Williams can turn to the natural environment to recapture a sense of her mother's spirit after her agonizing death from cancer:

I am reminded that what I adore, admire, and draw from Mother is inherent in the Earth. . . . Her love, her warmth, and her breath, even her arms around me — are the waves, the wind, sunlight, and water. (214)
Thus, Williams draws a wide variety of connections with nature; no one connection defines a woman's identity completely or permanently. From time to time Williams finds it strategic to represent the connection in a way which could be interpreted as essential; if it gives her strength to think that, as a woman, she is in tune with the cycles of nature, she does so — temporarily and consciously. However, in her overriding awareness that her own relationship with nature and women's connection to nature in general is constructed, shifting, and variegated, Williams occupies a middle ground between essentialism and constructionism by representing her subjectivity and her relationship with nature as constantly shifting and changing in relation to forces outside herself rather than as inherent and unchanging.

While Williams' work clearly places her own and other women's identities in the cultural and natural contexts that have shaped them, she comes with more difficulty to the poststructuralist realization that identity is constantly shifting and changing in response to outside forces. She most graphically illustrates the painfulness of achieving this understanding in *Refuge*, as the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge and her mother's health are gradually eroded away. She tells us, "I could not separate the Bird Refuge from my family. Devastation respects no boundaries. The landscape of my childhood and the landscape of my family, the two things I had always regarded as bedrock, were now subject to change. Quicksand" (40). For Williams, the notion of stability becomes known as "refuge;" despairing at the loss of a place and women who seemed to anchor her identity, Williams asks, "How do you find refuge in change?" (119). This question is clearly the guiding force behind the self-exploration and self-reconstruction that propels Williams' narrative,
just as the question of how to cope with the realization that our identities are constantly in flux in response to outside forces is a central concern for feminists. Like poststructuralist feminists such as Linda Alcoff who stress that "the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context" ("Identity Crisis" 434), Williams realizes she cannot retreat from the realization that identity is unstable; she cannot find refuge in any other person or place. Eventually, she comes to accept that her identity must constantly shift and change as the places and people to which she is connected shift, change, and even die. However, again echoing the concerns of poststructuralist feminists, Williams still resists the idea that she is without agency, helpless in the face of seemingly uncontrollable outside forces shaping and changing her identity. She comes to believe that her "refuge" in change is not the ability to retreat to some stable place or person, but to adapt by consciously participating in the outside forces continually shaping her identity. Later in the book, she explains that she came to understand that "refuge is not a place outside myself. Like the lone heron on the shores of Great Salt Lake, I am adapting as the world is adapting" (267).

Williams' sense that she can and must adapt by participating in the cultural forces acting on her grows out of her realization that her culturally encoded sense of history and identity is not only unstable, but also insufficient to sustain her. At one point, she hears a choir singing "Abide With Me" and reflects on the attitude of patient acceptance which her cultural and religious background has taught her:

Abide: to wait for; to endure without yielding; to bear patiently; to accept without objection; to remain in a stable or fixed state; to continue in a place. "Abide with me," I have sung this song all my life.
Once out at the lake, I am free. Native. Wind and waves are like African drums driving the rhythm home. I am spun, supported, and possessed by the spirit who dwells here. Great Salt Lake is a spiritual magnet that will not let me go. Dogma doesn’t hold me. Wildness does. (240)

Although Williams’ culture and religion have taught her that an attitude of patience and acceptance is appropriate for a woman, she comes to realize that such an attitude is damaging not only to women's health but also to natural entities like the birds she loves so much. Consequently, she decides that she must reject this attitude and instead participate in wildness, in the ongoing forces constantly altering her identity; she presents herself to us as “a woman rewriting my genealogy” (241).

Importantly, Williams’ insight that she can discursively participate in the forces shaping her identity parallels Alcoff’s claim that "all women can (and do) think about, criticize, and alter discourse and, thus . . . subjectivity can be reconstructed through the process of reflective practice" (425). And it is through her discourse — *Refuge*, the journals it was based on, her conversations with friends and family members, her defiant, obscene gesture to men who had destroyed the home of a burrowing owl — that Williams actively and consciously reconstructs her identity in a way which foregrounds the constructed and shifting, yet vital, connection between women and nature.

In light of poststructuralist feminists’ sense that "the very subjectivity . . . of women is constituted by women’s position" (Alcoff, "Identity Crisis" 434), it is significant that Williams’ overriding justification for discursively linking women and nature in *Refuge* and other works is not an inherent essence that she believes they both share, but their similar positions in our culture. Throughout *Refuge*, she is forthright about the fact that all the women in her family have
cancer, but she only begins to suggest why near the end. On page 261, she shares with us her suspicions; in a conversation with her cousin, she asks, "This cannot be a coincidence, can it? . . . Three women in one family unrelated by blood, all contract cancer within months of each other?" In the epilogue, provocatively titled "The Clan of One-Breasted Women," we finally learn that Williams' entire family (and community) was exposed to fallout from nuclear bomb testing in the 1950s.

Given this context, some of Williams' statements take on new meaning. In the epilogue, she reports a dream in which all the women of the world observed underground nuclear testing, a type of testing actually occurring in Williams' area:

The women couldn't bear it any more. They were mothers. They had suffered labor pains but always under the promise of birth. The red hot pains beneath the desert promised death only, as each bomb became a stillborn. A contract had been made and broken between human beings and the land. A new contract was being drawn by the women, who understood the fate of the earth as their own . . . The time had come to protest with the heart, that to deny one's genealogy with the earth was to commit treason against one's soul. (288)

As essentialist as this may sound, the rest of Williams' book eloquently illustrates just such a genealogy of women and the earth: how human culture has abused the bodies of women and the landscape, thus linking their positions and their fates in this context. Williams' conscious and diverse strategies for linking women and nature all play a part in her attempt to rewrite that genealogy and change that cultural context. Of course, the reader may wonder why Williams sees the flooding of the Bird Refuge as "unnatural" in the same way that the cancer caused by human-produced atomic bombs is unnatural. As
Williams explains mid-way through her narrative, it is the lack of other suitable habitat for the birds that is unnatural, not the flooding itself:

In the normal cycle of a rising Great Salt Lake, the birds would simply move up. New habitat would be found. New habitat would be created. They don't have those options today, as they find themselves flush against freeways and a rapidly expanding airport. (112)

In the end, by "rewriting her genealogy" and actively participating in the construction of her own identity, Williams relinquishes the search for "refuge" in change — if refuge is interpreted as a stable, safe place — as a futile one. Listening to a flock of curlews, she divines that "their unexpected calls remind us the only thing we can expect is change" (146). She also learns from nature how to cope with such change. Watching starlings feed on a garbage dump, she admires their adaptability, noting that their home is everywhere: thus, they have no need for a place of refuge (55). Throughout the narrative, she emphasizes that the key to nature's adaptability is its diversity. In Williams' exploration of her own identity, we see that she achieves diversity, and thus adaptability, by a continual search for new connections. As she puts it: "The headless snake without its rattles, the slaughtered birds, even the pumped lake and the flooded desert, become extensions of my family. Grief dares us to love once more" (252).

After both her mother and grandmother have died, she describes looking out at the Lake:

I see waves rolling in one after another. My mother, my grandmother, myself. I am adrift with no anchor to hold me in place.

A few months ago, this would have frightened me. Today, it does not. I am slowly, painfully discovering that my refuge is not found in my mother, my grandmother, or even the birds of
Bear River. My refuge exists in my capacity to love. If I can learn to love death then I can begin to find refuge in change. (177-78)

By saying she must learn to love death, Williams suggests that she must learn to love the letting go of connections and the forming of new connections which is the consequence of death and the consequence of accepting the shifting and relational nature of her identity. Although she must relinquish, at least on one level, her ties to her mother and grandmother and the birds of the flooded Bear River Refuge, in her reconstruction of herself she has created a strategic alliance composed of multiple, diverse connections with other women and with natural entities based primarily on their positioning in our culture.

However, Williams realizes that her commitment to using her discourse to challenge cultural forces that endanger the health of women and nature will place her on the margins of that culture. In Refuge, she tells us that "In Mormon culture, authority is respected, obedience is revered, and independent thinking is not" (85). Nevertheless, her positional alliance with other women and nature requires that she defy this background — that she must change her identity by breaking her connection with this tenet. Finally realizing how her cultural background blinded her to the reasons for the loss of the place and the women she loved, she states that

> The price of obedience has become too high... I must question everything, even if it means losing my faith, even if it means becoming a member of a border tribe among my own people. Tolerating blind obedience in the name of patriotism or religion ultimately takes our lives. (286)

However, in her border tribe she will not be alone, but rather accompanied by other women and nature in an alliance based not on essential identity but on political situation, on positionality. The strength of such an alliance comes out nowhere more clearly than at the end of Refuge, when she
describes how police treated her and a group of other women who had trespassed on military lands to protest nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site:

The officials thought it was a cruel joke to leave us stranded in the desert with no way to get home. What they didn’t realize was that we were home, soul-centered and strong, women who recognized the sweet smell of sage as fuel for our spirits. (290)
CHAPTER 4

DEFENDING THE WILDERNESS:
ECOWARRIORS, LANGUAGE, AND THE VOICE OF NATURE

At the end of the introduction to Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness, first published in 1968, Edward Abbey warns the reader

Do not jump into your automobile next June and rush out to the Canyon country hoping to see some of that which I have attempted to evoke in these pages. In the first place, you can't see anything from a car; you've got to get out of the goddamned contraption and walk, better yet crawl, on hands and knees, over the sandstone and through the thornbush and cactus. When traces of blood begin to mark your trail, you'll begin to see something, maybe. Probably not. In the second place most of what I write about in this book is already gone or going fast. This is not a travel guide but an elegy. A memorial. You're holding a tombstone in your hands. A bloody rock. Don't drop it on your foot — throw it at something big and glassy. What do you have to lose? (xii).

Of course, the conclusion of this passage tells the reader that the book is meant to be much more than a memorial; Abbey doesn't simply mourn the passing of the wilderness of the American Southwest, but alternately inspires, harangues, and persuades his readers of the need to defend what's left of the wilderness against the ravages of technology and what he calls "culture": "the inert mass of institutions and organizations which accumulate around and tend to drag down the advances of life" (276). In this way, he sets a tone of uncompromising environmental advocacy in a book that has gone on to become a classic of the
contemporary nature writing tradition and an almost sacred text for the wilderness preservation movement.

The relationship with wilderness that Abbey recommends in this passage — physical, immediate, and even dangerous and painful — is significant as well; for Abbey and other contemporary wilderness advocates, the right and responsibility to speak for nature is grounded in this kind of intimate experience with the natural world in its most extreme, nonhuman form. For these writers, wilderness is a place virtually free of human influence, a place where, as Gary Snyder explains, "the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and nonliving beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order" (*Practice* 12). These writers feel they have come to comprehend their true relation to the natural world through immersing themselves in such places, casting off the trappings of technology and culture and seeking an immediate, embodied experience of their connections to wild nature. In claiming a special relationship to nature as the basis for advocacy, these wilderness writers parallel some of the writers discussed in Chapter 3. However, the relationship claimed by the wilderness advocates is not based on traditional categories of identity such as gender or ethnicity, but rather on what the philosophical movement of deep ecology has described as a biocentric vision: the sense that every living thing in the biosphere has an intrinsic worth and right to existence, that all living things and their environments are interconnected, and that no one species — even the human race — is inherently more important than any other. Such an outlook grants all humans an equal inherent connection to the natural world; however, it seems that certain people — such as the wilderness advocates — have achieved a special understanding of humanity's place in the biosphere, and this is what sets them apart.
Unlike writers discussed in Chapter 2 who feel that traditionally oppressed groups of people possess a special relationship with nature which prevents them from damaging it, wilderness advocates do not fall into the trap of believing they are unable to harm nature because of their special understanding of humanity's humble, yet integral, place in the larger system of the biosphere. Instead, their biocentric vision leads them to identify with the larger system in a way that provokes a tremendous sense of responsibility for the welfare of the natural world. In fact, this sense of responsibility leads them to act as some of the strongest, most explicit advocates for nature, and for wilderness in particular, that can be found. While this demonstrates an acknowledgment that they hold a privileged position within human culture in relation to nature — they must act as advocates because nonhuman nature has little cultural standing — their stance holds its own dangers. Chief among these is the potential for them to take the idea of their cultural privilege too far, to assume that their ability to speak and be heard within the realm of human culture means that nonhuman nature has nothing to offer in its own defense; in possessing this potential, their position parallels that of feminists who neglect to ask what they can learn from the less privileged women for whom they speak.

In this chapter, I will discuss this stance as it occurs in the writings of wilderness advocates Dave Foreman and Edward Abbey. Foreman's construction of himself and other wilderness activists as ecowarriors suggests that they are speaking and acting for a natural world that is passive and silent; such a construction reinscribes dominant ideologies and cuts the activists/advocates off from the valuable sources of power and knowledge that they could find in their nonhuman environment. In addition, in their zeal to defend the natural world, Foreman and activists who follow his lead risk
alienating human culture from their cause, thus limiting their effectiveness as advocates. Abbey is much more aware than Foreman of the need to somehow gain access to the natural world, to listen to it and learn from it in order to represent its interests. However, as I will discuss, his frequent representation of the human inability to gain this kind of access creates an image of the human-nature relationship that radically limits the possibilities of advocacy.

In the second section of the chapter, I explore the works of Gary Snyder and other writers concerned with wilderness whose approaches work towards solving some of the problems Foreman and Abbey represent and confront. In addition, I return to Foreman and Abbey at points where their work parallels or can contribute to those approaches. These writers draw on three major sources for models of human relationships with the natural world that accord nature an active, speaking role: the worldviews of indigenous cultures, personal experiences — both physical and spiritual — with wilderness, and certain trains of thought in contemporary science. After examining the ways these sources contribute to a construction of nature that acknowledges the ways advocates can listen to and learn from it, I move on to the problem of language and how environmental advocates might conceive of language as a way to participate in the natural world rather than as a barrier to such participation.

**The Limits of Wilderness Advocacy: A Passive, Silent, Inaccessible Nature**

As I will discuss, the positions of Dave Foreman and Edward Abbey on wilderness advocacy are similar in many ways. This is not surprising, for Foreman acknowledges that Abbey's works deeply influenced his own philosophy and actions as well as those of Earth First!, the activist group he
helped to found. However, there are significant differences between the ways the two writers construct the relationship between the advocate and the natural world as well. In particular, Abbey manifests a deep concern with the need to gain access to the hidden meaning he senses in nature, to listen to the voices of nature and learn what they have to teach—a need that Foreman largely overlooks.

_Dave Foreman and the Ecowarrior Stance_

Although Foreman has written numerous essays and articles and given countless talks, his approach to environmental advocacy is best represented by his 1991 _Confessions of an Ecowarrior_ and his involvement in the movement known as Earth First!.

At one time a lobbyist for the Wilderness Society, Foreman joined with four other wilderness advocates in 1980 to leave the mainstream environmental movement, which they felt had become too willing to compromise to be effective. The alternative movement they founded, known as Earth First!, was committed to preserving biodiversity by protecting important wild ecosystems—and to backing up their stated positions with actions. Concerned that a bureaucratic structure could weaken their radical political commitment, the founders resolved that the movement should avoid instituting leadership positions, a constitution, or even official memberships. Thus, Earth First! became not an organization, but a movement of individuals.

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1While I will focus on the potential shortcomings of the stance held by Foreman and Earth First! in this chapter, it is important to note that their efforts to protect wilderness areas are widely considered to have been effective in two major ways. The first is by making the demands of mainstream environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club or the Wilderness Society, look more reasonable in contrast with their own, more extreme, position. The second is by calling widespread public attention to the issue of wilderness destruction in general and to particular proposed developments (clearcuts, dams, etc.) that have threatened what they consider to be especially important wilderness areas.
and small, autonomous regional groups united by a shared biocentric philosophy.

In the first pages of Confessions, in which Foreman inextricably weaves the philosophies of the early Earth First! movement with his own beliefs, he introduces the reader to this biocentric outlook:

There is another way to think about man’s relationship to the natural world. . . . According to this view, all living beings have the same right to be here. . . . A Grizzly Bear snuffling along Pelican Creek in Yellowstone National Park with her two cubs has just as much right to life as any human has, and is far more important ecologically. All things have intrinsic value, inherent worth. (3)

This biocentrism converges with the insights of the science of ecology in Foreman’s emphasis on the importance of natural systems: "Forests are not simply collections of trees. All natural forest ecosystems (including seral forests, born in natural wildfire, and recovering second-growth forests in the East) are integrated, complex systems" (155). A biocentric perspective places the welfare of the system above the welfare of the parts that make it up, and ecology likewise emphasizes the importance of the habitat, or system, to the individual or species. Foreman seems to combine these perceptions when he explains that the best way to preserve biodiversity is by protecting wild ecosystems; he cites David Brower, who has argued

that you cannot imprison a California condor in the San Diego Zoo and still have a condor. The being of the condor does not end at the tips of the black feathers on its wings. The condor is place as well; it is the thermals rising over the Coast Range, the outcroppings on which it lays its eggs, the carrion on which it feeds. (5)

Biocentrism also leads Foreman to a sense of the power and endurance of the natural world. He insists that the "real" (natural) world creates humanity
and human consciousness, not the other way around: "The real world is out there — independent, autonomous, sovereign, not ruled by human awareness. The real Grizzly is not in our heads; she is in the Big Outside — rooting, snuffling, roaming, living, perceiving on her own. . . . We do not create reality; reality creates us" (51-52). According to this perspective, nature will outlast human culture and its depredations. Foreman tells a story of an Australian aborigine, who explained to wilderness activist John Seed that his people considered the city of Sidney as "just a scab," and that beneath its concrete they could still see the land: "where the forest grows, where the kangaroos graze. . . . where the streams flow" (7). Foreman suggests that wild nature persists this way in North America, too, if only we could perceive it:

So it is in North America. In the scrub forests of New England, the spirits of 220-foot-tall White Pines still stand. In the feedlots and cornfields of the Great Plains, ghost hooves of Bison and howls of wolves echo back from a century ago. On San Francisco shores, phantom Grizzlies feed on the beached carcasses of whales. (7)

According to Foreman's biocentric view, humans occupy a humble place in this powerful, enduring system; he implies that he and his compatriots are distinguished from other humans because they, like the Australian aborigine, understand nature's power, endurance, and importance: "human beings must adjust to the planet; it is supreme arrogance to expect the planet and all it contains to adjust to the demands of humans" (26).

Deep ecology, which Foreman claims as his "mythology" in Confessions, not only promotes a biocentric worldview but also advocates an expanded or expansive sense of self that goes "beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world" (Devall and Sessions 67). Deep ecologists such as Warwick Fox and Neil Evernden have proposed that humans can achieve such a sense of self through
the process of identification. While most versions of deep ecology would
differentiate between types of identification\(^2\) or at least acknowledge that we
identify most with the places and natural beings we know best, Foreman
demonstrates a rather characteristically oversimplified yet graphic version of an
expanded sense of self when he claims that

> When a chain saw slices into the heartwood of a two-thousand-
year-old Coast Redwood, it's slicing into my guts. When a
bulldozer rips through the Amazon Rain forest, it's ripping into
my side. When a Japanese whaler fires an exploding harpoon into
a great whale, my heart is blown into smithereens. I am the land,
the land is me. (5)

As the preceding quote suggests, Foreman not only identifies with the
natural world of which he is a part, but also possesses a keen sense that it is in
crisis. A great deal of *Confessions* is devoted to rather non-confessional
descriptions and explanations of the various forces and practices currently
threatening biological diversity through the degradation and destruction of
wilderness. For example, Chapter 8: "The Destruction of Wilderness," details
fifteen of the greatest threats, which range from road building, logging, and
mining to off-road vehicles and "slob" hunters with no regard for the integrity
of wild systems. On the first page of the book's first essay, "In Time of Crisis,"
Foreman makes his sense of this crisis very clear: "Never before — not even
during the mass extinctions of the dinosaurs at the end of the Cretaceous era, 65
million years ago — has there been such a high rate of extinction as we are now
witnessing, such as drastic reduction of the planet's biological diversity" (1).

\(^2\)Warwick Fox, for instance, identifies three types of identification — personal,
ontological, and cosmological — in *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*. Personal identification is
brought about through personal involvement with other entities; ontological identification is
brought about through a deep-seated realization of the fact that things *are*, experiences which
language is often inadequate to convey and which are often achieved through practices such as
Zen; and cosmological identification is brought about through the deep-seated realization that
we and all other entities are different aspects of a single unfolding reality.
Significantly, Foreman’s biocentric sense of identification and his sense of environmental crisis combine to ground his insistence that he — and anyone who identifies with the larger natural world — must come to the defense of the earth, and in particular to the defense of the wild ecosystems where biodiversity is most threatened, in this time of crisis.

Foreman characterizes such defenders of nature as “ecowarriors” engaged in "a battle for life itself, for the continued flow of evolution [through preservation of biodiversity]" (2). In Chapter 3, "Putting the Earth First,
Foreman explains that what distinguishes an ecowarrior is "her" commitment to the greater system of which "she" is a part:

A warrior recognizes that her life is not the most important thing in her life. A warrior recognizes that there is a greater reality outside her life that must be defended. For us in Earth First!, that reality is Earth, the evolutionary process, the millions of other species with which we share this bright sphere in the void of space. (34)

Foreman cautions his readers that the ecowarrior's stance "is not an arrogant defense, an attitude of Lord Man protecting something less than himself. Rather, it is a humble joining with the Earth, becoming the rain forest, the desert, the mountain, the wilderness in defense of yourself" (9). However, despite Foreman’s biocentric images of humans as humble participants in a larger natural system that is strong and enduring, both Confessions and the history of Earth First! highlight the many threats facing wilderness and the necessity of defending it, thus testifying even more strongly to a different aspect of the relationship between the biosphere and its human defenders. The

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3This disclaimer may be a reaction to criticisms of Foreman and Earth First! and reflects what Harold Fromm calls Foreman’s "unremittingly revisionary narration of his own personal history in ecology, which he rewrites like crazy as each new event or philosophic encounter shakes up his universe once again" (27).
ecowarrior emerges not, as Foreman protests, as someone humbly joining with the earth, but rather as someone with the awesome responsibility of acting as the sole barrier between the defenseless, silent, passive natural world and the many human forces that threaten its ultimate destruction.

During Foreman's association with Earth First!, the movement has reflected and reinforced his image of the ecowarrior by using a variety of methods to enact the defense of the wild. While these have included less confrontational methods such as lobbying, lawsuits, and "guerrilla theater" stunts which Earth First!ers performed to draw public attention to the destruction of wilderness, by far the most publicized and controversial of their tactics has been monkeywrenching. The term itself comes from Edward Abbey's 1976 novel *The MonkeyWrench Gang*, in which four people travel throughout the Southwest destroying billboards, disabling bulldozers and even blowing up a highway bridge to preserve wilderness. As outlined in Dave Foreman's 1985 *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* (with a foreword by Edward Abbey), monkeywrenching includes such acts as pulling up surveying stakes and disabling equipment in hopes of stalling or even permanently preventing the development of wild areas deemed to have special importance in terms of biodiversity. The most publicized type of monkeywrenching, though, is tree spiking, in which activists drive metal or ceramic nails into trees slated for logging, camouflage their work, and then

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4 Foreman announced his formal separation from the Earth First! movement at the end of *Confessions*, citing his dissatisfaction with the anarchist/leftist faction — which he also refers to as the "revolution-for-the-hell-of-it rowdies" — which he felt had distracted the movement too far away from its original goal of wilderness preservation by the late 1980s (217). He went on to found the Wildlands Project, a movement to not only protect existing wilderness areas in the U.S. but also to return other areas to a wilderness state in order to establish a connected system of reserves throughout North America that will be large and diverse enough to enable the perpetuation of the continent's biodiversity.

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notify the logging company. Because the nails can damage expensive machinery, the logging companies often postpone cutting the area; sometimes, the cost of looking for and removing nails becomes so high that logging never occurs at that site.

While tree spiking and other acts of monkeywrenching have drawn intense criticism, Foreman resolutely defends them in Confessions, devoting five chapters to descriptions of how, why, when and where to monkeywrench (with whom isn't an issue; it's best to monkeywrench alone to minimize the chance of being caught). He is adamant that the disregard for private property inherent in monkeywrenching is justified by the higher cause of preserving vital ecosystems; he presents the practice as part of an American tradition of destroying property for political reasons which goes back to the Boston Tea Party. However, more importantly, he insists that "When we fully identify with a wild place, then monkeywrenching becomes self-defense, which is a fundamental right" (140).

Despite Foreman's characterization of monkeywrenching and other acts of wilderness defense as "self-defense," his own focus on this practice tends to romanticize the human ecowarrior: a solitary figure driven to acts of sabotage because of the immensity of the threat against the natural area whose value only he/she realizes. Ultimately, the ways Foreman's book and Earth First's practices have constructed the ecowarrior serve to reinforce a split between the human defender and the natural world which must be defended. As Chaia Heller has noted in her critique of what she calls "romantic ecology," the idea of defense and protection conjures up an image of nature as "weak and vulnerable" (224).
Although Foreman tries to dilute the gendered connotations of a masculine warrior defending a feminized nature by consistently referring to the ecowarrior as "she," other factors make these connotations impossible to escape. For example, the slogan of Earth First! implies a rejection of the traditionally feminine practice of cooperation in favor of a more no-nonsense approach: "No compromise in defense of Mother Earth." The paradigmatic ecowarrior, surely Foreman himself as he is portrayed on the cover of his book, also exudes stereotypically masculine qualities: with the "Ecowarrior" portion of the title precisely placed next to his head, a bearded, "rough and ready, burly and forty-fivish" Foreman stares seriously out at the reader, arms crossed, wearing a camouflage hat and an Earth First! t-shirt (Fromm 26). As William Cronon has noted, Foreman's representation of himself and the more generalized "ecowarrior" participate in the American myth of the frontier hero who values the vanishing wilderness as a "last bastion of rugged individualism"; of course, "the mythic frontier individualist was almost always masculine in gender" and saw wilderness as a place where "a man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization sapped his energy and threatened his masculinity" (78). Such images only further promote a dualistic view of the relationship between the ecowarrior and the earth: male and female, defender and victim, active and passive.

While Foreman's position as an activist leads him to devote much of his book to the issue of acting in defense of nature, as a prolific writer and speaker he is also clearly aware on some level of the need to speak for nature. He does devote one short section of Confessions to this issue: a chapter entitled "Who Speaks for Wolf?" In this chapter, Foreman turns to the Oneida Indians as an example of a culture that took the need to identify with and speak for nature
seriously. He retells an Oneida story that describes a time when the people's use of a place came into conflict with that of the community of wolves that also lived there. Rather than deciding to kill off the wolves, the people decided to limit their impact on the animals by considering the interests of the nonhuman world in all their decisions by asking "Who speaks for Wolf?" Foreman recommends this strategy for our society as well, stating that

In all our councils, in all our decisions, both individual and collective, we must not forget the others who are not represented. We must represent them ourselves. *Who speaks for Wolf? Orca? Gila Monster? Red-cockaded Woodpecker? Bog Lemming? Big Bluestem? Oak? Mycorrhizal fungi?* We must constantly extend the community to include all. (48-9)

However, Foreman leaves open the question of what exactly this means, especially in a culture like ours, which can claim a much weaker sense of community with the natural world than the Oneida. Rather that exploring how we might know what to say when we speak for these natural entities, he starts from the assumption that he can accurately represent the position and needs of the natural world, and much of his book consists of laying out for the reader the problems he believes must be our primary concerns when speaking or acting for nature. He and the ecowarrior he constructs seem to have succumbed to the danger that Lee Quinby describes when she warns that the position of speaking for the nonhuman is often accompanied by "a diminished capacity to hear what others have to say about our circumstances as well as their own... [and] the anthropocentric assumption that only human beings have truths to tell about their and our experiences," (126-27). As Foreman does not acknowledge and she reminds us, "The cries of factory farm animals, the suffocation of fish in poisoned waters, the sounds of flood waters rushing over deforested land – these are also voices we need to heed" (127). Foreman might argue that the
ecowarrior has already heard these voices, and this is what motivates his or her actions and words. However, this is not the message he conveys. Instead, he gives us a defender of nature who need not listen, thus cutting the human defender off from any communication with a natural world that is thus rendered silent.

The potential for arrogance in the ecowarrior stance can also cut off the would-be advocate from human society in a way that minimizes the effectiveness of the advocacy. Foreman, apparently aware of this potential, warns of the dangers of the ecowarrior conceiving of herself as in opposition to human society, of allowing her opponents to become "the enemy, become the other, become evil men and women instead of men and women who commit evil" (168). He claims that it is ineffective to separate oneself from society:

How do you change society when you are apart from it? How do you understand yourself when you deny the social environment that produced you? How can you gain support for your goals and actions when your behavior alienates potential supporters?

Wise guerrillas know that they are part of society and need support from the population base. The isolated, alienated guerrilla is just as lost and vulnerable as the isolated, alienated Gorilla. (170)

However, such disclaimers only slightly dilute his predominant message: there is a war on, ecowarriors are the defenders of nature, and the rest of human society is the enemy. Foreman makes it clear that the ecowarrior's enemy is whoever or whatever endangers wilderness, a stance which places the ecowarrior in opposition to most of Western civilization and, in fact, to most human beings. As he explains, "John Muir said that if it ever came to a war between the races, he would side with the bears. That day has arrived" (116).

This message of ecowarriors in opposition to human culture reaches its apotheosis in Foreman's characterization of ecowarriors as "Antibodies against
the Humanpox": "Antibodies need no justification. Their job is merely to fight and destroy that which would destroy the greater body of which they are a part, for which they form the warrior society" (58). This is a telling image, for, as Donna Haraway explains in "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse," the research of Nobel Prize-winning immunologist Niels Jerne has suggested that the immune system does not work in the simple, antibodies-protect-self-against-outside-invaders fashion that Foreman's metaphor implies. Instead, the immune system recognizes the body's "enemies" because "any antibody molecule must be able to act functionally as both antibody to some antigen and as antigen for the production of an antibody to itself" (218). In other words, the immune system contains the representation of each possible "enemy" within itself; as Haraway explains, "in a sense, there could be no exterior antigenic structure, no 'invader,' that the immune system had not already 'seen' and mirrored internally" (218).

Similarly, what Foreman leaves out is that even ecowarriors embody both nature and culture and participate both in what must be protected as well as in what it must be protected from. Not only does such an omission perpetuate dualistic ideologies, but images like "the humanpox" run the risk of alienating human society to such an extent that they harm rather than help the cause of wilderness preservation.

Gary Snyder succinctly describes the issues inherent in a stance such as Foreman's in "The Yogin and the Philosopher":

If we are to treat the world (and ourselves) better, we must first ask, how can we know what the nonhuman realm is truly like? And second, if one gets a glimmer of an answer from there, how can it be translated, communicated, to the realm of humanity with its courts, congresses, and zoning laws? How do we listen? How do we speak? (Place 48)
However, Foreman does not explore these questions in *Confessions*. Rather than exploring how to listen, he assumes that he knows what to say and do. Rather than analyzing how best to speak, he assumes that merely doing so is sufficient. Ultimately, he and the ecowarrior are left in a kind of limbo, cut off from a participatory relationship with either the natural community or the rest of human culture.\(^5\)

As Christopher Manes has written in "Nature and Silence," "To regard nature as alive and articulate has consequences in the realm of social practices" (340), and the reverse is true as well. Manes also points out that "For human societies of all kinds, moral consideration seems to fall only within a circle of speakers in communication with one another" (340). By constructing wilderness and the ecowarrior as he does, Foreman risks sabotaging his aim of improving nonhuman nature's cultural standing by presenting it as an entity outside the realms of moral consideration. As Thomas Berry discusses in *The Dream of the Earth*, while it is essential for humans to reevaluate the meaning and direction of their existence on this planet, it is just as important to resist the feeling "that we alone are determining the future course of events. The future

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\(^5\)This sense of a profound split between nature and culture is also embedded into the very definition of wilderness that Dave Foreman subscribes to: "the stream of life unimpeded by human manipulation" (4). In constructing the idea of wilderness as a natural system empty of humans and of human impact, he not only creates a "no trespassing" zone that belies his insistence that humans are part of the greater whole of nature, but he also denies the reality that, until quite recently, there were almost no areas of "wilderness" on the North American continent that fit his definition: Native American peoples lived in and with natural systems in ways that seldom destroyed them but did affect them, often dramatically. As William Cronon has discussed, "Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their livings from the land" (80). Of course, given Western cultural attitudes toward nature, Foreman’s insistence that "wild" ecosystems be protected makes sense; however, his justification — that nature is inherently at its best when humans are kept away from it — simply reinforces the idea that culture and nature are, in fact, radically separate.
shaping of the community depends on the entire earth in the unity of its organic functioning, on its geological and biological as well as its human members" (23).

Edward Abbey and the Problem of Language

Although Edward Abbey's works have had a great influence on Foreman and bring up many of the same issues, they represent a more complex view of the relationship between human advocate and nonhuman nature and raise different, more interesting questions. Abbey was a prolific writer, producing one book of poetry, ten novels, twelve works of nonfiction, and boxes of handwritten journals totaling 12.1 feet, now stored in the University of Arizona's Special Collections Library and edited into the more manageable Confessions of a Barbarian by David Petersen. However, as Don Schese has noted, Abbey's classic Desert Solitaire can be taken on its own as an accurate statement of his views, since his "philosophy is not so much refined as merely repeated in subsequent works" (224). As John Knott observes, though, Abbey's career also demonstrates a movement from a concern with the romantic attraction of the desert to a preoccupation with defending wilderness. While both of these issues are primary themes in Desert Solitaire, I will also discuss The Journey Home; written a decade after Desert Solitaire, it gives a sense of this movement from attraction to defense and also suggests answers to some of the questions Abbey raises in Desert Solitaire.

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6Ann Ronald has differentiated Abbey, the author, from the first-person narrator of his nonfiction essays, whom she labels "Ed" in The New West of Edward Abbey. This is an apt distinction, for Abbey as an author seems much more aware than Foreman of the subtle differences between a writer's sense of him or herself (even when writing nonfiction) and his or her narrative persona (his depiction of Thoreau in "Down the River with Henry Thoreau" makes this especially evident). However, for my purposes, which are to discuss Abbey as he creates himself through discourse, this distinction is not especially relevant; when I refer to Abbey, I refer to the Abbey we know through his writings.
Like Foreman, Abbey demonstrates a biocentric view of the world, noting that

A weird, lovely, fantastic object out of nature like Delicate Arch has the curious ability to remind us—like rock and sunlight and wind and wilderness—that out there is a different world, older and greater and deeper by far than ours, a world that surrounds and sustains the little world of men as sea and sky surround and sustain a ship. (41-42)

In other words, as James McClintock has noted, Abbey sees the "objective world as real, more enduring, and worthy of more concern than human subjectivity" (75). Abbey's work suggests that he is constantly trying to take the point of view of that greater, objective world rather than that of narrow human interest; however, he is just as likely to reveal this in remarks calculated to offend his reader's anthropocentric assumptions than in straight proclamation. For example, he explains that "We need more predators. The sheepmen complain, it is true, that the coyotes eat some of their lambs. This is true, but do they eat enough? I mean, enough lambs to keep the coyotes sleek, healthy and well fed" (Desert 35).

Like Foreman, Abbey stresses his role as an advocate for the nonhuman; in the dedication to The Journey Home, for example, he represents himself as having learned "to hate injustice, to defy the powerful, and to speak for the voiceless." Also like Foreman, he suggests that he has been inspired to take on this role by a biocentric understanding of humanity's true relationship to nature. In the earlier Desert Solitaire, he muses that

All men are brothers, we like to say, half-wishing sometimes in secret it were not true. But perhaps it is true. And is the evolutionary line from protozoan to Spinoza any less certain? That also may be true. We are obliged, therefore, to spread the news, painful and bitter though it may be for some to hear, that all living things on earth are kindred. (24)
Sometimes Abbey’s sense of the threats facing the desert wilderness he loves inspires such a protective zeal that he, like Foreman, constructs the natural world as a passive victim. As John Knott notes, Abbey feared that "development and exploitation would overwhelm what he saw as ‘this wild innocent and defenseless beauty’" (343). This construction is reinforced by the ways that Abbey feminizes the desert, which he admits, at times, to wanting to "possess . . . intimately, deeply, totally, as a man desires a beautiful woman" (Desert 6). He even seems to achieve this goal briefly when floating down the Colorado River in a raft, an experience which produces in him "a pleasure almost equivalent to that first entrance — from the outside — into the neck of the womb" (176). The images of femininity and defenseless passivity work together, as Knott astutely observes:

> In describing the desert as "virginal" and "defenseless" Abbey was of course evoking a particular image of femininity. The desert is "lovely" and "sweet" because innocent and in need of protection. This is a "wild" innocence, paradoxically, as if mingling seductiveness and vulnerability like an unframed Eve. (343)

However, this tendency in Abbey is undercut and even overshadowed by his insistence on the desert's inherent strength, often represented by the harsh and dangerous aspects he considers indispensable to a wild place. In The Journey Home, he proudly affirms that "It has been said, and truly, that everything in the desert either stings, stabs, stinks, or sticks. . . . Something about the desert inclines all living things to harshness and acerbity" (14). However, for Abbey this is part of the desert's attraction, for "A wild place without dangers is an absurdity" (Journey 38). As James McClinton has observed, for Abbey nature is ultimately not the "fragile, benign, and life-
sustaining" construction of writers like Aldo Leopold or Joseph Wood Krutch, but rather "Darwinian — dangerous, violent, brutal, killing" (72).7

Abbey also stresses that the greater world of nature "out there" is strong, enduring, and wise and will outlast humans and their concerns; as he puts it: "men come and go, cities rise and fall, whole civilizations appear and disappear — the earth remains, slightly modified. The earth remains, and the heartbreaking beauty where there are no hearts to break" (Desert 219). However, this view comes out most vividly in his various apocalyptic scenarios which promise "that the engineers and developers and politicians will be defeated in the end by natural forces that they only imagined they controlled" (Knott 346). In a chapter of Desert Solitaire entitled "Water," he discusses how America’s dominant philosophy of "growth for the sake of growth," which he labels a "cancerous madness," is exemplified by obsessive scheming of developers and government agencies to divert more and more water to support burgeoning human populations in the arid Southwest. However, he ends by explaining that, "No matter, it's of slight importance. Time and the winds will sooner or later bury the Seven Cities of Cibola, Phoenix, Tucson, Albuquerque, all of them, under dunes of glowing sand" (145). While the desert cannot sustain the kinds of communities we have tried to put there, Abbey suggests it will always have enough water for its own needs, describing how "the community of quiet deer [will] walk at evening up glens of sandstone through tamarisk and sage toward the hidden springs of sweet, cool, still, clear unfailing water" (146). He concludes The Journey Home with a similar scenario entitled "Dust: A Movie," which leaves the reader with the image of the burning yellow

7While not everyone would agree with this characterization of Darwin, McClintock’s definition of "Darwinian" accurately reflects a popular view of Darwin’s ideas.
eyes of a mountain lion, in which we can see "the reflection of the sunrise, the soaring birds, the cliffs, the cloud, the sky, the earth, the human mind, the world beyond this world we love and hardly know at all" (242).

Through such an unrelenting representation of nature's strength and endurance, Abbey avoids any delusions that he alone can save it. In the end, he seems to feel that nature will have the last say. And he represents his own acts in defense of nature in a humble, unassuming light. In Desert Solitaire, he describes encountering a government surveying crew while working as a ranger at Arches National Monument; they had been sent to lay the course for better roads that will increase tourism in the park. While Abbey politely entertains and converses with the men, he also goes out and views their work after they are finished:

Teamwork, that's what made America what it is today. Teamwork and initiative. The survey crew had done their job; I would do mine. For about five miles I followed the course of their survey back towards headquarters, and as I went I pulled up each little wooden stake and threw it away, and cut all the bright ribbons from the bushes and hid them under a rock. A futile effort, in the long run, but it made me feel good. (67)

However, Abbey's most significant difference from Foreman for my purposes is his deep concern with the need to "listen" to nature; in addition to possessing a passionate personal desire to communicate with nature, Abbey seems to sense that his legitimacy as an advocate for the nonhuman world rests on his ability to claim access to its essence and meaning. But Abbey's nonfiction reveals that he never saw the task of speaking "for the voiceless" as simple or easy. In fact, his texts suggest that negotiating the complexities of the relationship between human consciousness and language and the "reality" of nonhuman nature was a problem with which Abbey continually struggled.
This problem is rooted in Abbey's sense of the basic incompatibility of language and "reality"; as he explains in the beginning of Desert Solitaire (1968), "you cannot get the desert into a book any more than a fisherman can haul up the sea with his nets" (x). Nevertheless, in order to represent the desert so his readers can share his perceptions of its beauties, dangers, and mysteries, he resolves to "create a world of words in which the desert figures more as medium than as material. Not imitation but evocation has been the goal" (Desert x). As Ann Ronald points out in The New West of Edward Abbey, "only by reshaping his own desert universe into a mythic place can he finally know, possess, embrace the real one" (65).

However, Abbey is acutely aware of the dangers of using language to create a whole world, corresponding to the other world out there. Or we trust that it corresponds. Or perhaps, like a German poet, we cease to care, becoming more and more concerned with the naming than with the things named; the former becomes more real than the latter. And so in the end the world is lost again. No, the world remains — those unique, particular, incorrigibly individual junipers and sandstone monoliths — and it is we who are lost. Again. (Desert 289)

As Peter Fritzell has demonstrated in Nature Writing and America, Abbey's struggles with the tools of consciousness and language represent a dilemma central to American nature writing: the use of words, while essential, is also "at irreconcilable odds with that ultimate merging in the predawn wilderness — because language and writing (and science and art) are history and society and civilization, 'the cultural apparatus' the original, questing American would leave behind" (290).

And yet, if Abbey is to feel authorized to speak for the "voiceless" world of nature, he must find a way to gain access to the essence or reality of that world. In fact, his nonfiction conveys a continuous quest to penetrate the
surface of reality and get to its essence, to find the meaning or message that voiceless nature would convey if it could. As both Abbey and his critics are well aware, the desert landscape possesses a particular allure for him; near the end of Desert Solitaire, he spends a number of pages attempting to figure out why the desert is, for him, "more alluring, more baffling, more fascinating than the mountains or the oceans" (269). In the process, he suggests that the answer lies in the promise of meaning the desert continually seems to hold out, luring "a man on and on, from the red-walled canyons to the smoke-blue ranges beyond, in a futile but fascinating quest for the great, unimaginable treasure which the desert seems to promise" (Desert 272). As John Knott has observed, for Abbey it offers "glimpses of a deeper and more elemental world and [holds] out the possibility of some kind of transcendence" (332). However, as Knott also notes, the desert remains ultimately unknowable for Abbey; his attempts to connect with nature and grasp its meaning almost always end in failure. For example, when describing a tree he has had "under surveillance" since his arrival at Arches National Monument, Abbey explains that he has been "hoping to learn something from it, to discover the significance in its form, to make a connection through its life with whatever falls beyond" (Desert 30). He goes on to report: "Have failed" (30).

Significantly, Abbey often expresses his quest for connection and meaning as the attempt to understand the language of nature, particularly when he is dealing with animals: referring to an incident where two mating gopher snakes suddenly turned and moved towards him in unison, he asks

What do coyotes mean when they yodel at the moon? What are the dolphins trying so patiently to tell us? Precisely what did those two enraptured gopher snakes have in mind when they came gliding toward my eyes over the naked sandstone? If I had
been as capable of trust as I am susceptible to fear I might have learned something new or some truth so very old we have all forgotten it (24).

Similarly, he frequently represents his failure to achieve his goal by a sense that he cannot understand the language of nature: "Three ravens are wheeling near the balanced rock, squawking at each other and at the dawn. I'm sure they're as delighted by the return of the sun as I am and I wish I knew the language" (Desert 7).

Abbey's failure to establish some kind of satisfactory connection with nature grows out of his sense of the difficulty of avoiding the potentially anthropomorphic and anthropocentric projections of the human mind and language. He tells us in an often-quoted passage near the beginning of Desert Solitaire that

The personification of the natural is exactly the tendency I wish to suppress in myself, to eliminate for good. I am here not only to evade for awhile the clamor and filth and confusion of the cultural apparatus but also to confront, immediately and directly if it's possible, the bare bones of existence. ... I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges with a nonhuman world and yet somehow survives still intact, individual, separate. Paradox and bedrock. (6)

For Abbey, the paradox is that his only access to the "bedrock" reality of nature is through the cultural apparatus of human imagination, consciousness, and language — the very barriers that stand in his way.

In The Environmental Imagination, Lawrence Buell writes admiringly of "the degree to which Abbey realizes his self-division" (72) between the desire to experience and convey the "nitty-gritty" of nature and the need to employ consciousness, language, and imagination to do so. However, for Abbey, this inability to detach from the hallmarks of human culture often leads him to
reflect on the guilt he believes the human race should feel towards the natural world. He implies that his inability to communicate or connect with nature is due to the fact that, as member of a deeply flawed human culture, he doesn't deserve the privilege. In one scene in *Desert Solitaire*, he shouts after a group of deer who are running away: "Come back here! . . . I want to talk to you" (36). But the deer are "not talking," and Abbey realizes that it is all for the best: "Why should I lead them to believe that anything manlike can be trusted? That is no office for a friend" (36). When he finally comes face-to-face with a mountain lion near the end of *The Journey Home*, he suppresses the "kind of affection and . . . crazy desire to communicate, to make some kind of emotional, even physical contact with the animal" that he feels, ultimately deciding that he is "not yet quite ready to shake hands with a mountain lion" (237-38).

A corollary of Abbey's belief that he doesn't deserve the privilege of communicating with nature is his sense of the natural world's "implacable indifference" to humankind (*Desert* 216). For example, he mocks his own naive efforts to use "sympathy and understanding" to gain the trust of Moon-Eye, an "independent" horse who had escaped from his owner and evaded all attempts at capture for ten years; after spending a blazing hot afternoon in the desert trying to gain the horse's trust, Abbey concludes that Moon-Eye "wasn't really much interested in what I was saying" (*Desert* 169).

Despite the many occasions on which Abbey laments the ways in which his standing as a member of human culture prevents him from connecting or communicating with the natural world, there are moments in his nonfiction when he feels he has temporarily overcome these impediments. As Scott Slovic describes in *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*, Abbey's nonfiction alternates between perceptions of disunity and unity with the natural world.
However, his moments of unity reveal that he really doesn't want to leave language and individual consciousness behind; in other words, he finds that the price he must pay to achieve unity with nature is ultimately too high. When describing the five weeks he spent alone in the wilderness of Havasu Canyon, he conveys the sense that, for once, the voices of nature spoke to him in a familiar language: "I listened to the voices, the many voices, vague, distant but astonishingly human, of Havasu Creek" (*Desert* 225). However, he explains that over time, "I lost to a certain extent the power to distinguish between what was and what was not myself: looking at my hand I would see a leaf trembling on a branch" (225). Abbey presents this loss of self as more unnerving than ecstatic; only a brush with death jolts him into regaining "everything that seemed to be ebbing away" (226). The one situation in which Abbey can see this type of complete union through loss of self as fully satisfactory is in the case of physical death, as when he advises the traveler in danger of perishing of thirst to "Comfort yourself with the reflection that within a few hours, if all goes as planned, your human flesh will be working its way through the gizzard of a buzzard, your essence transfigured into the fierce greedy eyes and unimaginable consciousness of a turkey vulture" (*Desert* 135).

But the most troubling impediment to communion with nature for Abbey is his nagging suspicion that the essence of the natural world is unattainable or even nonexistent, that the only meaning he will ever find will be the projection of his own mind. As a result, in his quest for some essential or transcendent meaning, he almost always ends up "earthbound... with a vision not of the universal but of a small and mortal particular, unique and disparate" (*Desert* 256). In other words, he comes back again and again to the notion that there are no depths to plumb, that the "bedrock" surface of things is all that
there is. Despite the promise of meaning that it holds out, eventually "the
desert reveals itself nakedly and cruelly, with no meaning but its own
existence" (*Desert* 155).

However, Abbey ultimately finds this revelation "that the desert has no
heart, that it presents a riddle that has no answer, and that the riddle itself is an
illusion created by some limitation or exaggeration of the displaced human
consciousness" (*Desert* 273) inspiring rather than cruel:

Under the desert sun, in that dogmatic clarity, the fables of
theology and the myths of classical philosophy dissolve like mist.
The air is clean, the rock cuts cruelly into your flesh; shatter the
rock and the odor of flint rises to your nostrils, bitter and sharp.
Whirlwinds dance across salt flats, a pillar of dust by day; the
thornbush breaks into flames at night. What does it mean? It
means nothing. It is as it is and has no need for meaning. The
desert lies beneath and soars beyond any possible human
qualification. Therefore, sublime. (*Desert* 219)

It is the limited capacity of the human being for imagination, for wonder, that
searches for meaning that is beneath or beyond the surface of things:

If a man's capacity for imagination were not so weak, so easily
tired, if his capacity for wonder not so limited, he would abandon
forever such fantasies of the supernal. He would learn to perceive
in water, leaves and silence more than sufficient of the absolute
and marvelous, more than enough to console him for the loss of
the ancient dreams. (*Desert* 200)

Donna Haraway has suggested that, if we wish to acknowledge the
nonhuman world as "active subject, not as resource to be mapped and
appropriated in bourgeois, Marxist, or masculinist projects," we need to
perceive that

Actors come in many and wonderful forms. Accounts of a "real"
world do not, then, depend on a logic of "discovery" but on a power-
charged social relation of "conversation." The world neither speaks
itself nor disappears in favor of a master decoder. The codes of the
world are not still, waiting only to be read. ("Situated Knowledges" 198-99)

In his sense of the need to engage the natural world in conversation, Abbey indeed avoids the arrogant stance that he has nothing to learn from the wilderness he wishes to defend and opens the possibility of seeing the nonhuman world as a system full of power, strength, and wisdom. And, in his insistence on the difficulty of gaining access to the elusive "codes of the world," he constructs that world and its "actors" as possessing qualities and agendas quite independent of human consciousness and culture. However, he conveys a sense that, as Peter Fritzell has noted, he "finds the discord between nature and culture very much, too much, within himself. What others might call 'our environmental problems' are his immediate and psychic troubles, including his troubles as a user of language" (289). By locating the conflict or incompatibility between nature and culture within as well as without, he refrains from constructing an unbridgeable gap between himself and the rest of human culture. His frequent, often despairing sense that it is impossible to understand what the world has to say without projecting his own human concerns onto his interpretation, though, could ultimately could lead to giving up on the task.

While these aspects of Abbey's work emphasize the need of the writer who wishes to speak for nature to somehow gain access to nature's wisdom and power, a need that Foreman largely overlooks, they leave both Abbey and the reader with little hope for achieving such access. However, as I will discuss in the next section, other writers and scientists who have explored these issues have worked towards conceptions of nature that, as William Cronon puts it, recognize and honor "nonhuman nature as a world we did not create, a world with its own independent, nonhuman reasons for being as it is" but
simultaneously sustain a sense that humans are intimately connected to that world and can learn to understand at least some of its languages (87). In addition, I will explain how other aspects of Abbey's work (and, in a more limited way, Foreman's) can be seen as contributing to such conceptions.

Constructing and Participating in a Strong, Active, Speaking Nature

Writers who seek to perceive nature as strong, active and speaking yet accessible to human understanding draw their information and inspiration from many sources; however, the three sources that recur most regularly are the beliefs and traditions of indigenous cultures, personal experiences of living with and in nature, and certain currents within Western science. In the first part of this section, I will explore these sources as discussed in the works of Gary Snyder, Edward Abbey (and, briefly, Dave Foreman) as well as in the scientific theories of James Lovelock and Wes Jackson. Then, in the second half of the section, I will return to the problem of language as a barrier to human participation in nature and suggest how to build on the models presented by these writers in order to work towards solving it.

Indigenous Cultures, Experience and Practice, and Science

The idea that Westerners can adopt or even simply learn from cultures that have predominantly been considered "primitive" is very widespread among environmental advocates, and as Foreman demonstrates in Confessions, the idea that we can turn to Native American cultures in particular for models of how to include nonhuman nature in our realms of moral and political consideration is especially popular. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, deep ecologists like Devall and Sessions frequently point to indigenous peoples as providing philosophies and practices in regard to nature that they feel Western
culture can, and probably should, emulate. Eco-theologian Thomas Berry even suggests that these models are somehow "more authentic" ways of being than those practiced in more industrialized cultures: "just now one of the significant roles of the primal people of the world is not simply to sustain their own traditions but to call the entire civilized world back to a more authentic way of being" (4). As I have explained in Chapter 3, looking to indigenous cultures in our quest to construct more sustainable relationships with the nonhuman does hold several dangers: not only the possibility of misrepresenting the potential of any culture to interact with the natural world in a damaging way or of appropriating traditions and beliefs that are not our own, but also the possibility of restricting the kinds of relationships our culture might develop with the natural world to those that already exist.8

Gary Snyder invokes the worldview of indigenous peoples as a model for Western culture's relationship with nature with a consciousness of these dangers, and his treatment of this topic is one of the most complex and interesting found in the literature of wilderness. While Snyder probably would not categorize himself as a wilderness advocate in the tradition of Foreman and Abbey, he has demonstrated a recurring and evolving interest in the concept of "the wild" and what it might mean for Western culture's relationship with the nonhuman environment. In *The Practice of the Wild* he pledges that "I for one will keep working for wildness day by day" (5). Treated in more detail in his

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8 Other writers have located traditions within Western culture that construct nature as speaking, active, and participating in the lives of humans. Christopher Manes and David Abrams find such a tradition in the animistic worldview that they see as beginning to break down due to growth of literacy during the medieval period; in *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant traces a similar movement from animistic to mechanistic worldview by focusing on the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As both Manes and Merchant explain, such a worldview, like all ideologies, plays a normative function within its culture; as Manes asserts by quoting Hans Peter Duerr, "people do not exploit a nature that speaks to them" (340).
nonfiction than in his poetry — in particular, in the essays at the end of *Turtle Island*, his Pulitzer-prize winning volume of poetry; *The Old Ways; The Practice of the Wild*; and *A Place in Space* — Snyder's discussions of "the wild" and of the ways indigenous cultures have conceptualized it address many of the issues raised by Foreman and Abbey and begin to suggest solutions to some of the problems they present.

Throughout all of these works, Snyder repeatedly refers to various Native American accounts of the ability to hear the voices and songs of plants and animals. He ties this ability to hear the voices of nature to Native American traditions of including those voices in their decision-making, and asserts his desire to represent those voices within Western culture as well. For example, in "The Wilderness" (one of the essays in *Turtle Island*), he grounds his desire to act as the voice of the wilderness, "a realm that is not usually represented in intellectual chambers or in the chambers of government," in his belief that Western culture is quite mistaken when it assumes "that nature is something less than authentic, that nature is not as alive as man is, or as intelligent, that in a sense it is dead, and that animals are of so low an order of intelligence and feeling, we need not take their feelings into account" (106, 107). In doing so, he represents himself as following the tradition of Native Americans: "What we must find a way to do, then, is incorporate the other people — what the Sioux Indians called the creeping people, and the standing people, and the flying people, and the swimming people — into the councils of government" (108).

While Snyder's references to Native Americans and other indigenous cultures have been taken as a nostalgic longing for a return to primitivism, critics like Patrick Murphy and Max Oelschlaeger insist that this would be a misinterpretation of Snyder's works. Snyder himself resists the idea that he and
other non-natives have nothing in common with indigenous peoples and that learning from their traditions or poetry would be either invasive or a "return" to primitivism:

We are all real people. Everyone on this earth is a native of this planet. All poetry is 'our' poetry. Diné poetry, people poetry, Maydy poetry, human being poetry. In the forty-thousand-year timescale we're one people. We're all equally primitive, give or take two or three thousand years here or a hundred years there. (Place 141-42)

Snyder thus rejects the idea that indigenous people are any more "primitive" than any other cultures and, in fact, constructs himself not as looking back to the past, but, as James McClintock points out, as looking forward, past the constraints of traditional humanism to "posthumanism": as Snyder puts it,

the 'post' in the term posthumanism is on account of the word human. The dialogue to open next would be among all beings, toward a rhetoric of ecological relationships. . . . it's not enough to be shown in school that we are kin to all the rest: we have to feel it all the way through. (Practice 68)

Snyder does not offer Native American practices of listening to and speaking for nature as models without acknowledging that it is quite a serious and difficult undertaking for someone from Western culture to achieve a relationship with nature that could legitimately ground the kind of advocacy practiced by these native cultures. In fact, the problem of how non-native people can learn to "feel it all the way through" is one of his central concerns: "For the non-Native American to become at home on this continent, he or she must be born again on this hemisphere, on this continent, properly called Turtle Island" (Practice 40). Being born again and becoming what Snyder calls an "inhabitant" involves both information and experience (Practice 39).

Information includes perceptions and information gleaned from indigenous
cultures; Snyder's insistence on the term "Turtle Island" reflects his recognition that Native American place names convey a different type of information than names imposed by Europeans, often information that is more true to the area's ecology as well as evocative of the history and stories of its original human inhabitants.

Snyder's concept of experience serves to differentiate his use of this information from mere appropriation; it involves incorporating such information into a disciplined, reflective process of living in a place that he also refers to as "practice." As Patrick Murphy has observed, "Snyder is . . . concerned with people conducting practice in place" (Understanding Snyder 155). For Snyder, the idea of "practice" comes from Zen Buddhism (which he has studied in Japan), in which a disciplined schedule of meditation, work, and ceremony is designed to lead away from a focus on the individual self to a sense of oneness with all of the phenomenal world. However, Snyder acknowledges that the kind of practice he is recommending encompasses other experiences as well:

So our models of practice, training and dedication need not be limited to monasteries or vocational training, but can also look to original communities with their traditions of work and sharing. There are additional insights that come only from the nonmonastic experience of work, family, love, loss, failure. (Practice 152)

This notion of practice hearkens back to Snyder's idea of "the real work," which he described in Earth Household as the process of making"the world as real as it is, and [finding] ourselves as real as we are within it" through the work of our everyday lives: hoeing the garden, hand-adzeing a beam, or typing in the office (82).
While Snyder's ideas work to ground environmental advocacy in the sense of nature as active and speaking more successfully than those of Foreman or even Abbey, it would be unfair to the latter two authors not to mention that they, too, convey a sense that one must work for an intimate relationship with a place in order to be able to defend it or speak for it. Foreman disagrees with idea that "one does not need to know a particular area to fight effectively for it" (*Confessions* 211), and instructs fellow ecowarriors that "Our passion comes from our connection to the Earth and it is only through direct interaction with the wilderness that we can unite our minds and our bodies with the land, realizing that there is no separation" (6). Abbey — recall his advice about crawling in the desert until blood marks your trail — is even more insistent about the fact that you have to be willing to suffer and take risks to earn a true intimacy with a place. James McClintock characterizes Abbey as "engaging the 'unknowable' or an organic wholeness, through direct and difficult encounters with the land, which, finally, radiates a beauty that transfigures the spirit" (86).

Snyder takes a similar stance on the necessity of direct and difficult encounters with the land when he recommends walking in the wild as a practice that can help us to feel our interdependence with our place "all the way through":

The pathless world of nature is a surpassing school . . . Out here one is in constant engagement with countless plants and animals. To be well educated is to have learned the songs, proverbs, stories, sayings, myths (and technologies) that come with this experiencing of the nonhuman members of the local ecological community. Practice in the field, "open country," is foremost. Walking is the great adventure, the first meditation, a practice of heartiness and soul primary to humankind. Walking is the exact balance of spirit and humility. Out walking, one notices where there is food. And there are firsthand true stories of "Your ass is
somedbody else's meal" — a blunt way of saying interdependence, interconnection, "ecology," on the level where it counts. (Practice 18)

It's important to note, though, that for Snyder the practice of walking not only brings you into direct, physical contact with the implications of your ecological interdependences but also involves a solid grounding in the human lore and aspect of the place. The relationship that develops with the place encompasses culture as well as nature.

In "Penance or Perception: Spirituality and Land in the Poetry of Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry," Patrick Murphy contrasts Berry's vision of the human relationship with nature, which he characterizes as the "Promised Land," with Snyder's vision of a "Garden" in which he "conceives of the land as a part of nature, which enables humans to understand their own part within that larger whole through the altering of perception to recognize the perfectibility of humanity within the perfect balance of the world" (237). Rather than presuming a human fall from grace that requires penance or restitution, as Berry does, Snyder emphasizes the need for "real" work or experience. "The function of labor, of experience, is to place a person back into contact with the reality of the earth as Garden, particularly in its wild, self-perpetuating state, where one can recognize the interpenetrating unity that exists among all of nature's elements, including the human" (247).

This idea of the wild, self-perpetuating system of nature is at the heart of Snyder's philosophy.9 In "Four Changes" (the most well known of the Turtle Island essays), Snyder expresses his sense that dominant Western culture needs

9As McClintock documents, Snyder's sense of the dynamic processes at the heart of nature is indebted to ecologists such as Eugene Odum who focus on the process of energy transformation within ecosystems. It is important to note that, as Donald Worster has explained, "Over the past two decades the field of ecology has pretty well demolished Eugene Odum's portrayal of a world of ecosystems tending toward equilibrium" ("Nature and
to go beyond the idea of 'man's survival' or 'the survival of the biosphere' and to draw our strength from the realization that at the heart of things is some kind of serene and ecstatic process which is beyond qualities and beyond birth-and-death. 'No need to survive!’ 'In the fires that destroy the universe at the end of the kalpa, what survives?’ — 'The iron tree blooms in the void!’

Knowing that nothing need be done, is where we begin to move from. (102)

When Snyder writes that "nothing need be done," he is not suggesting that we take any aspect of the environmental crisis lightly. In fact, the essays in Turtle Island were remarkable at their time of publication, according to Murphy, for "a note of urgency, a confrontational directness, and a political activism never so overt or didactic in Snyder's previous writing" (Understanding Snyder 127).

What he is emphasizing is that the processes at the heart of nature are self-sufficient and maintaining, and that we need only try to become aware of them and understand our human place in them.

In his characterization of "the serene and ecstatic process," Snyder is drawing on both Native American and Buddhist traditions of the Original Mind, which all things express; as James McClintock explains, for Snyder the

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Disorder" 72). The growing sense that ecosystems do not pass through a recognizable series of increasingly stable stages of succession, ultimately reaching the most stable "climax community," has given way to a focus on the disturbances — both natural and human — that natural systems are subject to, and thus to a vision of systems as constantly changing in a more chaotic fashion. As Worster notes, this new focus makes ecosystems much more difficult to define and limits the usefulness of the concept of the ecosystem. However, he also makes clear that both viewpoints are open to criticism and that there are ecologists who still defend the Odum school of thought. In addition, he speculates on the ideological implications of each approach to ecosystems and how those implications might influence ecologists to prefer one approach over the other. (For a more detailed discussion of the recent revisions to the idea of the ecosystem and to the theory of succession in particular, see Worster's "The Ecology of Order and Chaos." However, Snyder's sense that nature is made up of complex, interdependent systems linked by processes remains scientifically accurate; as Worster explains, current ecology still holds that "living nature, for all its private, individualistic strivings, works by the principal of interdependency" (78). Snyder's more recent works (most notably A Place in Space) also reflect the new ideas in ecology to some extent; he sees the processes of nature as possessing a "chaotic order."
Original Mind is "that state of awareness that is free from presuppositions and untarnished by narrow, sectarian religious education. Not only humans express it, but animals, plants, and even rocks and the earth" (121). In his later work, he is more likely to convey this idea through the concept of the wild, which he sums up with the following list of qualities: "eluding analysis, beyond categories, self-organizing, self-informing, playful, surprising, impermanent, insubstantial, independent, complete, orderly, unmediated, freely manifesting, self-authenticating, self-willed, complex, quite simple" (Practice 10).

Significantly, while Snyder explains that the full potential of the wild is expressed in wilderness, he also notes that it can be found everywhere, in the wild systems of energy that sustain life in the forest and in the city, from the single-celled to the human. It can also be found in the human body: "the involuntary quick turn of the head at a shout, the vertigo at looking off a precipice, the heart-in-the throat in a moment of danger, the catch of the breath, the quiet moments relaxing, staring, reflecting — all universal responses of this mammal body" (16). Even more importantly, it can be found in "the depths of mind, the unconscious" (16). Like the biocentrism of Foreman and Abbey, Snyder's concept of the wild positions human beings within the larger systems of nature. However, he explores in much more detail the paradoxical aspect of that human place, balancing a sense of the self-reliance and pervasiveness of "the wild" with an awareness that humans can either repress or nurture the potential for wilderness both within and without. He is also careful to stress the dynamic nature of the wild, avoiding the reductive sense that there is some original, natural condition to which we should strive to return. In his most recent work, A Place in Space, he explicitly states that "there is no 'original
condition' that once altered can never be redeemed. . . . The wild has—nay, is—a kind of hip, renewable virginity" (240).

In "Wilderness," Snyder points out that humans' sense of the wild has historically been expressed through art, such as "the paintings of bisons or bears in the caves of southern France" or the Pueblo dancers who were seized with the spirit of a deer and "danced as a deer would dance"; in this way, "The animals were speaking through the people and making their point" (109). In his later writings, Snyder further develops his ideas about the role of the artist in this process. In "The Yogi and the Philosopher," he discusses the similarities between the role of the yogan in Zen Buddhism and that of the shaman in Native American cultures. He explains that the yogan "is an experimenter whose work brings forth a different sort of discourse, one of deep hearing and doing" through specific practices or disciplines that allow a deeper level of understanding than can be achieved through rationality alone (Place 49). Like the yogan, the shaman achieves a heightened awareness of the ways "in which all are one and all are many, and the many are all precious" (51). Because of this awareness, "the shaman speaks for wild animals, the spirits of plants, the spirits of mountains, of watersheds. He or she sings for them. They sing through him. This capacity has been achieved via sensibilities and disciplines" (50).

Significantly, the shaman's awareness extends to the sense in which "wilderness and the unconscious [are] analogous: she who knows and is at ease in one will be at home in the other" (50). As James McClintock discusses, for Snyder the artistic dimensions of the shaman's role are especially important; through stories and songs, the shaman leads the community in rituals that help them to share "life in a sacralized natural and social community. Through story, for example, the contents of external wilderness, its wild creatures, and of internal
wilderness, the unconscious, are brought into culture and reconciled” (121).
Snyder suggests that if a poet of our culture can achieve, through discipline and practice, a similar awareness of the wildness or original mind expressed in all things, he or she can perform a similar function, both speaking for the voiceless and leading the human community to a sense of their participation in the whole.

Abbey also senses the importance of grounding his art and advocacy in an experience of participation in nature that somehow negotiates the barriers of rationality and language. Despite his repeated experiences of the difficulties and dangers of connecting with the natural world, he never completely abandons his quest for some form of meaning, for a sense of his place in the vast system of nature that is similar to that achieved by Snyder's yogin/shaman/poet in that it goes beyond his rational capacity to understand. In The Journey Home, published almost ten years after Desert Solitaire, Abbey refers to himself as "all my life a prospector . . . for revelation" (65). Even after he gives up his opportunity to "shake hands" with the mountain lion, he still holds out the hope that "someday, possibly, one of our children's children will discover how to get close enough to that mountain lion to shake paws with it, to embrace and caress it, maybe even teach it something, and to learn what the lion has to teach us" (Journey 238). The type of meaning or connection that Abbey seeks in many ways resembles the awareness of Snyder's yogin or shaman; Abbey is particularly aware of the ways rationality, like language, might prevent him from reaching his goal, often opposing the rational and sensible to his irrational and reckless romance with the desert.10

10Almost every critic who has written on Abbey has noted the paradoxical quality of his work: his ceaseless alternation between unity and disunity with the natural world, between a romantic attraction to the desert's mystery and an insistence on confining himself to the
In *The Practice of the Wild*, Snyder explains the paradox of the Buddhist conception of "the way," or "the path," in which one studies the self to forget the self and achieve a sense of oneness with the rest of creation: "One can be called on not to spare one's very bones in the intensity of effort, but at the same time we must be reminded that the path itself offers no hindrance, and there is a suggestion that the effort itself can lead one astray" (149-50). Like the follower of the way, Abbey paradoxically sometimes achieves a sense of unity with the natural world when he focuses less on his own efforts and more on that world. As he puts it, "Sometimes . . . One no longer searches for any ulterior significance in all of this; as in the finest music, the meaning is in the music itself, not in anything beyond it" (Journey 57). John Knott observes that in moments such as these, when Abbey temporarily relinquishes his search for significance or meaning and finds the fact of the desert's "bedrock" existence enough, he "appears to settle for simply participating in the 'being' of the desert" (339). However, Abbey does not always present this experience as "settling"; on the contrary, he can also convey the sense that he has at last achieved his most precious goal:

In the mixture of starlight and cloud-reflected sunlight in which the desert world is now illuminated, each single object stands forth in preternatural though transient brilliance, a final assertion of existence before the coming of night: each rock and shrub and tree, each flower, each stem of grass, diverse and separate, vividly isolate, yet joined to every other in a unity which generously includes me and my solitude as well. (Desert 113-14)

Ironically, perhaps it is moments like these — born of relinquishing the search for meaning in nature — that prevent Abbey from giving up on his romantic quest for unity; he cannot accept for long that nature does not have rational, "surface-level" facts that he knows through sense experience (see Slovic and Knott in particular).
languages of its own, whether or not he feels he can or should try to learn to understand them. He criticizes himself for imagining that the call of the mourning dove is "a kind of seeking-out, the attempt by separated souls to restore a lost communion," acknowledging that it is "foolish and unfair to impute to the doves, with serious concerns of their own, an interest in questions more appropriate to their human kin" (Desert 18-19). But he also cannot accept that their calls are meaningless, insisting that "it's a foolish, simple-minded rationalism that denies any form of emotion to all animals but man and his dog" (Desert 24).

However, he finds what may be his most satisfactory solution by integrating rather than choosing between these two perspectives. Again and again, the dilemma for Abbey comes down to a matter of balance: how to avoid the
danger well known to explorers of both the micro- and macrocosmic — that of confusing the thing observed with the mind of the observer, of constructing not a picture of external reality but simply a mirror of the thinker. . . . without falling into an opposite but related error, that of separating too deeply the observer and the thing observed, subject and object, and again falsifying our view of the world? (Desert 270)

In The Journey Home, he seems to arrive at a sense of how to achieve this balance while contemplating the Colorado Plateau:

The moral I labor toward is that a landscape as splendid as that of the Colorado Plateau can best be understood and given human significance by poets who have their feet planted in concrete—concrete data — and by scientists whose heads and hearts have not lost the capacity for wonder. (87)

With such an approach, one can "make the discovery of the self in its proud sufficiency which is not in isolation but an irreplaceable part of the mystery of the whole" (Journey 88). The insights that science and data provide into nature
and the human place in nature mitigate the romantic, artistic tendency to project human qualities and desire onto the nonhuman; the poetic "capacity for wonder" and imagination prevents the observer from separating him or herself too radically from the rest of the world.

Significantly, Abbey is not alone in his sense that poetry and science need not be polar opposites but can somehow work together to lead to the kind of understanding and connection with nature that he seeks. Both Snyder and Lopez, among others, have expressed similar points of view. As Thomas Berry puts it, a culture's "mythic vision" plays a large role in shaping that culture's attitudes and behaviors towards the natural world. While it would be inappropriate and probably impossible for outsiders to adopt the "mythic vision" of an indigenous culture wholesale, Berry and these others have suggested non-native people can work within our own culture to come to a similar realization of our place in the whole, an understanding that includes but goes beyond what we can understand or express with the tools of rationality or language. Paradoxically, they suggest that certain theories and discoveries within modern science — those that incorporate the capacity for wonder that Abbey mentions — can serve as one source for the mythic vision we need to achieve such an understanding that goes beyond the rational. Thomas Berry presents concepts like the anthropic principle, which conceptualizes the human as "that being in whom the universe comes to itself in a special mode of conscious reflection" (16), as examples of the way that "Our scientific understanding of the universe, when recounted as story, takes on the role formerly fulfilled by the mythic stories of creation" (15).

In Crossing Open Ground, Barry Lopez also proposes Western science as a path to the kind of consciousness of nature found in indigenous cultures;
however, he includes the broad discipline of field biology as his example rather than selecting particular, more esoteric theories as Berry does. Lopez feels that

Science's strength lies with its rigor and objectivity, and it is undoubtedly as rigorous as any system available to us. Even with its flaws (its failure, for example, to address disorderly or idiosyncratic behavior) field biology is as strong and reliable in its way as the collective wisdom of a hunting people actively involved with the land. The highest order of field work being done in biology today, then, from an elucidation of the way polar bears hunt ringed seals to working out the ecology of night-flying moths pollinating agaves in the Mojave Desert, forms part of the foundation for a modern realignment with the natural world. (200)

Significantly, Lopez feels such a realignment should involve three other major sources of information as well. One would be "work done by anthropologists among hunter-gatherer people and studies by natural geographers," which would provide us with models of indigenous cultures that are actively involved with the land and holistically aware of their relationship to it. He also mentions "philosophical work in the tradition of Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson," thus acknowledging the role of what Abbey might call poetry and Snyder might call art, and, echoing Snyder's emphasis on practice and work, ends with a reference to "the nearly indispensable element of personal experience" (200).

Abbey himself sometimes seems to incorporate all these elements, writing as a poet with his feet planted in the concrete of biology and natural history (not to mention an intimate, lived knowledge of the place he writes about). Ironically, Abbey is well known for his protestations that he is not a naturalist: he begins the introduction to The Journey Home by asserting, "I am not a naturalist. I never was and never will be a naturalist. I'm not even sure what a naturalist is except that I'm not one" (xi). He further denies occupying a place in the tradition of nature writing, refusing "the mantle and britches of
Thoreau and Muir. Let Annie Dillard wear them now" (xiii). However, his books are full of what Don Scheese has called "precise floral, faunal, and geological description" (217); Abbey is not denying that his "facts" are accurate — he admits they are all "stolen from reliable sources" (Journey xiii) — but rather that evocation has been his main goal. He is too aware of the filter of consciousness and language that always affect his presentation, or evocation, of the natural world to strive for an objective depiction of reality. While he so often conceives of this filter as irreparably preventing him from an authentic understanding of or connection with nature, when his sense of understanding is grounded in science he feels more successful. For example, one of the few times he feels comfortable seeing himself as interpreting the language of an animal is when he speculates on the possible evolutionary advantages of the joy he suspects he hears in the singing of the spadefoot toads after a rare desert shower (Desert 142-3). Similarly, an interpretation based on the predator-prey relationship gives him a sense of belonging to the community of his natural environment: "I am not alone. From the vicinity of Balanced Rock comes the cry of the great horned owl. Suppertime, for the owl. The mice, squirrels, gophers, rabbits know what I mean" (112).

For Abbey, the quest to find and understand the meaning at the heart of nature is consistently opposed to a contentment with contemplating the surface of things, the bedrock, physical reality of nature, the mere fact of the existence of the animals, plants, and landforms around him. Paradoxically, though, it is most often by focusing on the surface of the natural world through scientific/experiential knowledge of his surroundings that Abbey comes closest to achieving the understanding of and unity with the nonhuman that he so persistently longs for. This type of close attention to the nonhuman life and
processes around him leads Abbey to understand that nature operates in complex systems whether or not human beings comprehend them; observing the arches and canyons of Arches National Monument, he notes that

At first look it all seems like a geologic chaos, but there is method at work here, method of a fanatic order and perseverance: each groove in the rock leads to a natural channel of some kind, every channel to a ditch and gulch and ravine, each larger waterway to a canyon bottom or broad wash leading in turn to the Colorado River and the sea. (11)

It is this kind of awareness, which lets go of the need to penetrate the surface of nature while still acknowledging its independent existence, that prepares Abbey for the insight that "The earth is not a mechanism, but an organism, a being with its own life and its own reasons, where the support and sustenance of the human animal is incidental" (Journey 225).

In addition to coming to a balanced understanding of humanity's humble participation in the larger patterns of a nature conceived as alive, powerful, and potentially even active in its own defense, Abbey demonstrates that he is actually very skilled in interpreting the "signs" of nature in the most basic, surface-level, survival-oriented way. For example, in a description of a walk up the canyon of the Escalante River, he describes himself as "reading the register: many deer, one coyote, the three-toed track of a big bird, many killdeer or sandpipers, many lizards, the winding trail of a snake, no cattle, no horses, no people" (Desert 199). This familiarity with at least one nonhuman sign system allows Abbey to listen to and learn from nature in certain ways: He can tell, from plant species and other clues, how to locate water in the desert, and he is adept at identifying potable from poisonous springs. Acknowledging that, given time and effort, "a man like other animals can learn to smell water" (Desert 131), Abbey's attention to what he can learn from the bedrock surface of
the physical landscape and from modeling his behavior on that of nonhuman animals shows a profound respect for what Wes Jackson has called "the wisdom of nature."

In his sense that the earth is alive and potentially active and in his awareness of the ways he can listen to and learn from nature, Abbey parallels the insights of two contemporary scientists, James Lovelock and Wes Jackson. While Abbey demonstrates these insights more than he explores them and their implications for those who speak for nature, Lovelock and Jackson more fully develop ways of constructing the natural world that allow us to see it as actively participating in its own defense and advocacy.

British biologist and inventor James Lovelock first introduced the Gaia hypothesis along with American microbiologist Lynn Margulis in 1974 when they co-authored two papers advancing the idea that the earth's living organisms, together with its soil, air, and water, make up a vast, complex system that regulates chemical and thermal conditions in a way which promotes the continued existence of life. At the suggestion of author William Golding, Lovelock named this system "Gaia" after the ancient Greek goddess of the earth. Because of the system's ability to maintain homeostasis, or relatively constant conditions, Lovelock has been known to characterize Gaia as a living organism. However, he has responded to criticisms of this description by suggesting the word "quasi-living" to distinguish systems which regulate themselves and contain living things from actual organisms. In a 1987 essay, he explains that the word "Gaia" simply refers to "the hypothetical system which regulates this planet" ("Gaia: A Model" 88).

11 Although both Lovelock and Margulis were responsible for the creation of the hypothesis, Lovelock has written much more extensively on the topic than his partner. Thus, I will focus on his representation of the hypothesis in my work.
For Lovelock, the Gaia hypothesis first grew out of his observation that the earth's atmosphere, which has contained approximately 21% of the highly reactive gas \( \text{O}_2 \) for the past 200 million years, clearly resists the natural tendency of gases to reach equilibrium. Furthermore, the earth's atmospheric level of \( \text{O}_2 \) is not a random one; at 21%, it is just enough to support life without reaching levels where combustible materials would spontaneously burst into flames. Lovelock concluded that such a consistent concentration of an unstable gas could only be explained by the activity of living things; in other words, the life forms maintaining this precise level of \( \text{O}_2 \) have been contributing to their own survival.

According to Lovelock, the earth's temperature also reveals signs of regulation by living things. Although the sun's output of heat has increased by 25-30% since life began, the earth's temperature has remained within the range of 15-30°C (50-68°F). Most scientists believe that atmospheric concentrations of \( \text{CO}_2 \), which traps heat, steadily dropped as the sun heated up, thus keeping temperatures within the range that supports life. While some claim that the inorganic geophysical systems of the earth alone are responsible for removing the \( \text{CO}_2 \), Lovelock links this atmospheric alteration to the activities of several types of microorganisms. Two major ways \( \text{CO}_2 \) leaves the atmosphere are through incorporation into the calcium carbonate shells of single-celled ocean organisms and through absorption by soil. As the atmosphere warms, it stimulates growth of both the ocean organisms and microorganisms which break rock down into soil. As the shells of the marine organisms drop to the ocean floor and increasing levels of soil absorb more and more \( \text{CO}_2 \), atmospheric levels of the gas decrease. Thus, these organisms prevent temperatures from rising too high for their own survival through negative
feedback: a mechanism by which living things react to environmental changes in ways which reduce the effects of those changes.

As these two examples suggest, the Gaia hypothesis is based on the idea that organisms interact with their non-living environment as a total homeostatic system which maintains conditions conducive to the continued existence of life. The idea of homeostatic systems in general has come under fire in recent years (see note 9), and critics of Lovelock's ideas have pointed out that the earth's history is not one of uninterrupted stability, as Gaian homeostasis would suggest. For example, the advent of photosynthetic organisms millions of years ago changed the atmosphere from anaerobic to oxygenated and thus dramatically undermined many anaerobic species' chances for survival. Lovelock has modified his hypothesis to one of "punctuated homeostasis" to account for such dramatic shifts. According to his revised hypothesis, "Gaia evolves as a system, gradually, during long periods of homeostasis that are punctuated by sudden simultaneous changes in both organisms and environment. Such changes move the system to new and different homeostatic states" ("Hands Up" 100-101). At first, the Gaia hypothesis gained far more

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12 The other major criticism of the hypothesis has come from molecular biologists who maintain "there is no way by which Darwinian natural selection could lead to a quasi-immortal entity like Gaia. Selfish genes could never form so altruistic an association (Lovelock, "Gaia: A Model" 93). Because no shift in temperature or atmospheric concentration to maintain homeostasis would benefit all organisms, such critics argue that self-regulation involves some organisms suffering reproductive losses at certain times. This type of "altruism" contradicts the basic principles of natural selection, which favors organisms which reproduce more successfully than others. However, Lovelock believes that the basic assumption of this critique, "that adaptive evolution occurs independently of the environment in which adaptation occurs," is false ("Gaia: A Model" 93). In addition, the Gaia hypothesis' emphasis on the role of cooperation, in contrast with traditional evolutionary biology's focus on competition, is supported by other recent discoveries, such as Margulis' widely accepted explanation for the origin of cells with nuclei. She traces them back to symbiotic, cooperative relationships between pairs of non-nucleated cells, one of which evolved into the nucleus. Finally, to refute such critiques, Lovelock designed a computer model known as Daisyworld to demonstrate that Gaian self-regulation can work along with evolutionary principles. Daisyworld, a planet populated by black and white daisies, is subjected to differing intensities of heat from its sun.
support among those who were attracted to the spiritual possibilities of a powerful, personified earth than among scientists. However, the potential of the hypothesis to explain complex phenomena such as temperature regulation and weather patterns eventually attracted attention from earth systems scientists and climatologists, who helped develop a productive conversation between proponents of Gaia and its more adamant scientific critics. Lovelock, along with three colleagues, even received an award from the World Meteorological Office for work backing up the Gaia hypothesis that advances the understanding of climate.

Significantly, Lovelock presents himself as a spokesman for the nonhuman in one of his articles, explaining to "hardcore geologists" who haven't considered life a factor in climate regulation that "I am speaking here partly in my capacity as a sort of shop steward for the nonhuman segment of the biosphere. . . . We think that conditions on the Earth are just right for life because we and the rest of life, by our struggles, have made and kept it so" ("Gaia: A Model" 84). However, he is careful to differentiate himself from environmentalists who see the Earth as something fragile that they must save: "Whenever an environmentalist tells me that life on Earth is fragile and may fall apart if, say, the ozone layer is slightly depleted, I think of my Victorian grandmother. If we accept Gaia, at least for argument, this fragility is nonsense.

The black daisies grow better under cooler conditions because they can absorb heat, but this very tendency means that their proliferation increases the planet's temperature. As temperatures increase, so do the white daisies, which withstand heat better because of their reflective capabilities. With an increase in their population, the planet tends to cool. These self-regulatory negative feedback mechanisms keep the planet from growing too hot or cool for any daisies to survive at all. Thus, although both types of daisies are temporarily restricted from reproducing at certain times, the mechanisms enhance their overall chances for survival.
Gaia... is very tough indeed" (94). Lovelock has asserted that his hypothesis also grants a kind of intelligence to Gaia, explaining that although the feedback mechanisms of the Gaian system operate without conscious thought or foresight (except, perhaps, those that humans are involved in),

it must be recognized that some form of intelligence is required even within an automatic process, to interpret correctly information received about the environment. To supply the right answers to simple questions such as 'Is it too hot?'... requires intelligence... If Gaia exists, she is without doubt intelligent in this limited sense at the least. (Gaia 146)

This view of Gaia, the perception that all of the earth's living and nonliving components interact in a complex system that works through negative feedback to maintain life, gives us a scientifically-grounded way to see nature as a living entity that is strong, enduring, and even intelligent in a sense. Thus, it can help to counter the tendency among defenders of wilderness to underestimate nature's strength, to cut themselves off from the vast network of which they are but one component. While Lovelock's work has concentrated on the biogeochemical cycles which seem most basic to life, he has also discussed the human role within Gaia, explaining that we are a unique part of the Gaian system and yet no more essential to the whole than any other part: "I see the world as a living organism of which we are a part; not the owner, nor the tenant, not even a passenger on that obsolete metaphor 'spaceship earth.' To exploit a living world on the scale we do is foolish as it would be to consider our brains supreme and the cells of other organs expendable" ("Gaia: The World" 28). As the following statement suggests, Lovelock seeks to forestall anyone who might suggest that Gaia's capacity for self-regulation will allow it

13 See Patrick Murphy's "Sex-Typing the Planet: Gaia Imagery and the Problem of Subverting Patriarchy" for a critique of Lovelock's use of a feminized image to represent the system of his theory.
to recover from any damage we inflict upon it. He points out that the system's long-term maintenance of conditions conducive to life does not guarantee the short-term survival of any one species: "If we succeed in altering the environment significantly, as may happen with the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide, then a new adaptation may take place. It may not be to our advantage" (95).

While Lovelock's hypothesis provides a model of nature as active and strong that includes humans without either over- or under-emphasizing their role in the system as a whole, another scientist — Wes Jackson — has evolved what he calls "a different way of thinking about our relationship with the earth" that allows us to see nature as full of information that we can learn from ("A New Relationship" 332). Jackson, who holds a Ph.D. in genetics, holds the belief, similar to that of many wilderness advocates, that humans have lived in a "fallen" world — in the sense that we have been alienated from nature — during the 8000-10,000 years that we have practiced agriculture. This is because agriculture, which "shapes nature to our own ends using human cleverness," tends to ignore "the wisdom of nature." By the "wisdom of nature," he specifically means the information nature has "accumulated" over eons of evolution; as he puts it in Altars of Unhewn Stone, "most of the mistakes of nature have been corrected over time" (57). Jackson does not subscribe to the belief that humans must never interfere with nature's processes, though; instead, he recommends a humble attitude which combines an acknowledgment of the ways we must interact with the nonhuman in order to survive with a sense of respect for the accumulated "wisdom" of natural
systems. As he explains, "The chances of disrupting nature's patterns, upon which we are dependent, are greatly reduced if we assume this modest posture" (Altars 9).

In Jackson’s own research, he has focused on the problem of soil degradation and erosion on agricultural land. He traces this problem to the fact that we have bred our grain plants to be dependent on massive inputs of energy, fertilizer, and other chemicals rather than functioning as part of a self-maintaining ecosystem.14 He suggests we can move towards a more sustainable agriculture by turning for a model to the "wild" relatives of our grains in the North American prairie:

> With the wheat field, an annual monoculture, come industry-produced pesticides and fertilizer, fossil energy — soil erosion. The prairie, a polyculture which features perennials, counts on species diversity and genetic diversity within species to avoid epidemics of insects and pathogens. The prairie sponsors its own fertility, runs on sunlight, and actually accumulates capital, accumulates soil. . . . We need to tap the vast knowledge Nature has accumulated over the centuries and use it to devise an alternative to the catastrophe which our present agricultural practices are causing rather than sitting back and passively watching the tragedy unfold. ("A New Relationship" 332-33)

To this end, Jackson currently runs The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas, where he is working to produce perennial polycultures of grain plants that will be viable for agriculture. (One problem he faces, for example, is the need to breed the wild grains to hold onto their seeds so they can be harvested rather than dispersing them as they do in the prairie.)

Jackson’s conception of nature’s wisdom, and of ways that humans can learn from natural systems in order to interact more sustainably with them,

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14His critique of dominant agricultural techniques in the West is developed most fully in New Roots for Agriculture.
provides a powerful antidote to constructions of nature as silent and unable to contribute to its own "defense." However, it is also important to integrate insights of scientists like Jackson and Lovelock with the two other types of models I have discussed: indigenous cultures and the experience or practice of the wild. Gary Snyder, of all the poets and scientists concerned with these issues, has most fully integrated the insights of what he has described in "Four Changes" as the "most imaginative extensions of science" with "models of . . . nature related cultures" and the awareness gained through his own experience and practice (Turtle Island 102). By doing so, and by carefully thinking and writing about the implications of doing so, he has created a body of work that acknowledges the human place in natural systems and takes seriously the need for humans to speak for nature without lapsing into arrogant or unthinking assumptions about humans' power or wisdom relative to the rest of the natural world.

In Snyder's most recent book of essays, A Place in Space, he is particularly insistent that modern science can grant us access to a worldview similar to that of the "sacramental food-chain mutual-sharing consciousness" demonstrated by the Ainu people of Japan and other indigenous cultures (96). In industrialized Western culture, though, ecology and other sciences have placed us, in a sense, in the position of "our Mesolithic forebears," whom he speculates held similar views to those of the Ainu: "We once more know that we live in a system that is enclosed in a certain way, that has its own kind of limits, and that we are interdependent with it" (188). Significantly, Snyder mentions the work of both Lovelock and Jackson in his writings, even referring to the enclosed system in which we live as Gaia at one point; his sense of the dynamic, self-perpetuating
processes of the wild is clearly compatible with Lovelock's active, living Gaian system as well as Jackson's "wisdom of nature."

However, Snyder's sense of nature as a system or process just as clearly reflects the influence of Buddhism as it does contemporary science or primal peoples. This influence manifests itself when he connects the poet of our culture with the yogin as well as the shaman, or when he compares the relationships within an ecosystem to Indra's net:

The public and private forests and grasslands of the western Sierra Nevada make up a sizable ecosystem, marked by pines, oak, songbirds and owls, raccoons, deer, and such. The web of relationships in an ecosystem makes one think of the Hua-yen Buddhist image of Indra's net, where, as David Barnhill describes it, 'the universe is considered to be a vast web of many-sided and highly polished jewels, each one acting as a multiple mirror. In one sense each jewel is a single entity. But when we look at a jewel, we see nothing but the reflections of other jewels, which themselves are reflections of other jewels, and so on in an endless system of mirroring. Thus in each jewel is the image of the entire net. (Place 67)

This insight — that each jewel contains the image of the entire net — captures the way in which the system of an individual organism reflects the larger system(s) in which it participates. However, it also provides a way to conceptualize the human place in nature: Each of us has a place in the larger system, and yet the energy, wildness, and complexity of the system is within us as well; in this sense, we are unique yet inseparable from the whole. In a later essay in A Place in Space, Snyder goes on to explain what such an insight might mean in terms of practice:

The ethics or morality of this is far more subtle than merely being nice to squirrels. The biological-ecological sciences have been laying out (implicitly) a spiritual dimension. . . . The expression of it is simple: feeling gratitude to it all; taking responsibility for
your own acts; keeping contact with the sources of the energy that 
flow into your own life (namely dirt, water, flesh). (188)

Language as Participation

The problem of language which Abbey in particular wrestles with 
remains, however. Language is the privileged form of communication within 
human culture, and cannot be avoided by any person seeking to act as an 
advocate for wilderness or any other conception of nonhuman nature.
However, we need to develop a way of using language that does not radically 
separate us from the natural world for which we speak, that reflects what 
Patrick Murphy has called the "ecological process of interanimation": "the ways 
in which humans and other entities develop, change, and learn through 
mutually influencing each other day to day, age to age" ("Ground" 149). To do 
this, we must first learn to think of language not as just a cultural construction, 
but also as a system that has been influenced by the nonhuman. We must also 
learn to grant the status of sign systems, of language in at least a metaphoric 
sense, to the many ways that nature could speak to us; doing so will value the 
wisdom nature could impart to us in a way that might help us refrain from 
arrogantly holding ourselves above and apart from it. Peter Fritzell has faulted 
the conventional history and criticism of nature writing "because it does not 
sufficiently consider the biotic or ecological functions and contexts of language," 
and, consequently, "cannot adequately represent nature writing as participation 
or the nature writer as participant" (64). It is this sense of human language as a 
form of participation in the vast, multi-lingual conversation of nature, rather 
than as the very cultural tool that prevents us from such participation, that can 
help us to speak from an understanding of our unique yet humble place in the 
larger system.

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The idea that nonhuman nature affects not only our bodies but also our minds, a concept I have discussed in Chapter 2, is not uncommon among writers who are concerned with environmental advocacy. For example, Barry Lopez expresses this viewpoint succinctly in Crossing Open Ground, testifying that "the shape and character of [the] relationships in a person's thinking" are influenced by the sensory experiences of "the intricate history of one's life in the land" as well as by "the thread of one's moral, intellectual, and spiritual development. The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes" (65).

However, Gary Snyder has been particularly insistent about applying this viewpoint to the issue of language; he believes that language is not a purely cultural artifact but rather that "Language and culture emerge from our biological-social natural existence, animals that we were/are. Language is a mind-body system that coevolved with our needs and nerves" (Practice 17). This perspective grows out of his sense of the myriad ways that humans have been shaped by their natural environment over the course of evolution:

Two conditions — gravity and a livable temperature range between freezing and boiling — have given us fluids and flesh. The trees we climb and the ground we walk on have given us five fingers and toes. . . . The land gave us a stride and the lake a dive. The amazement gave us our kind of mind. (Practice 29)

He does not see language as prior to physical or mental experience, but rather as intimately caught up with it, explaining that "We write to deeply heard but distant rhythms, out of a fruitful darkness, out of a moment without judgment or object. Language is a part of our body and woven into the seeing, feeling, touching, and dreaming of the whole mind as much as it comes from some
localized 'language center'" (Place 179). Thus, he vehemently refutes as deluded the "logos-oriented philosophers [who] uncritically advance language as a unique human gift which serves as the organizer of the chaotic universe"; instead, he maintains that "the subtle and many-layered cosmos of the universe have found their own way into symbolic structure and have given us thousands of tawny human-language grammars" (Practice 76-77).

Writers such as Snyder, Thomas Berry, and Patrick Murphy have suggested that if we see humans — including the attributes that we like to claim as uniquely human, such as consciousness and language — as shaped by natural systems, then we can see ourselves and our thoughts and words as expressions of those very systems. As Murphy has speculated, "If emotion and instinct arise from historical natural influences on the evolution of the species, then their exertions on our behavior, their entering into consciousness, are a form of the natural world 'speaking' to us through signs that our conscious renders verbally" ("Ground" 152). Snyder comes to the similar view that humans (along with all other organisms) are given meaning by the world rather than granting it (Place 210). He turns to conservation biology to help illustrate this view, proposing that the species viewed as especially typical of an area — known as "indicator species" because their health is an indicator of the health of the natural system they inhabit — can be viewed as expressions of that system: "The old conifer forests can be measured by 'Spotted Owl,' and the great Plains once said (and would say again) 'bison.'" (Practice 109). This leads him to ask, "What says 'humans'? What sucks our lineage into form?", and he asserts that the answer "is surely the 'mountains and rivers without end' — the whole of this earth on which we find ourselves more or less competently at home" (Practice 109-10).
While it is important to contemplate the extent to which human culture and language have been shaped by natural systems, it is also crucial not to lapse into the position that all humans are implicitly able to speak for nature because they and their languages are part of nature. Human languages are only one type of sign system, and we must respect the rest of nature enough to seek out what we can learn from its other sign systems before we venture to represent its rights and needs. In "Ground, Pivot, Motion: Ecofeminist Theory, Dialogics, and Literary Practice," Patrick Murphy proposes a model of the human relationship with nature which demonstrates this kind of respect. His model builds on the work of Bakhtin, which represents the individual "as a chronotype within the 'story' of human interaction with the physical world" (151). However, Murphy points out, the type of human-centered narratives we are accustomed to are told from a limited perspective; a contrasting perspective could be "the predominantly non-human, contiguously structured story of the universe that allots us only episodes — the self in and as part of the 'other' " (151).

While Murphy's sense of the ways the human self and nonhuman 'other' shape or "interanimate" each other at first sounds similar to the Gaia hypothesis, his use of the idea of narrative allows him to also extend interanimation to the realm of language: "just as that self enters into language and the use of parole, so too does the 'other' enter into language and have the potential, as does any entity, to become a 'speaking subject' " (151). Murphy's formulation is important, for if we hold that language shapes or affects human subjectivity, in order to recognize the way nonhuman entities or natural systems can participate in that shaping, we must contemplate their capacity to
participate in language. This type of contemplation raises a number of questions. As Murphy has explained,

The pivotal question here will be the degree to which language is recognized as one type of sign system, the degree to which volition is assumed as prerequisite for becoming a speaking subject, and the degree to which the other speaking subjects who do not use the parole of human beings can "speak" in a sign system that can be understood by humans. (151)

Within our culture, especially when modern science is taken into account, it is fairly well accepted that nonhuman nature possesses a wealth of information. As Snyder points out in Turtle Island, "Life biomass . . . is stored information, living matter is stored information in the cells and in the genes. . . . There is more information of a higher order of sophistication and complexity stored in a few square yards of forest than there is in all the libraries of mankind" (117). In fact, the idea that nature can offer us useful information, such as natural models for chemical compounds that can cure human diseases, is often cited as a reason to preserve primarily nonhuman systems such as the South American rainforests. However, the implications are slightly different when we see nature as replete with not just information, but with texts. In "Nature's Writing," Snyder explains that "A text is information stored through time. The stratigraphy of rocks, layers of pollen in a swamp, the outward expanding circles in the trunk of a tree, can be seen as texts" (Practice 66). If we adopt this view, we come closer to suggesting that nature, as the "author" of these texts (presuming we don't accord that honor to God) is actually speaking or communicating in some way, raising the issue of volition that Murphy mentions.

If we interpret the idea of communication as conveying changing information about a changing state or situation (as opposed to conveying
information that remains static), we can conceive of communication in a way that does not have to be volitional. Snyder makes it clear that the "texts" of nature are more like oral than written traditions, constantly changing over time: "Metaphors of 'nature as books' are not only inaccurate, they are pernicious. The world may be replete with signs, but it's not a fixed text with archives of variora" *(Practice 69)*. However, it is not necessarily difficult to make sense of at least some of these shifting sign systems. When Snyder suggests that we incorporate the nonhuman into our "councils of government" in "Wilderness," he points out that "This isn't as difficult as you might think. If we don't do it, they will revolt against us. They will submit non-negotiable demands about our stay on the earth. We are beginning to get non-negotiable demands right now from the air, the water, the soil." *(Turtle Island 108)*. Murphy asks, "When a person cries out in pain, is it volitional? When selenium poisons groundwater, causes animal deformities, and reduces the ability of California farmers to continue to overcultivate, are these signs that we can read?" *("Ground" 153)*. Together, they make the point that volition is not required for communication that we can understand, and that nature is already communicating with us in ways we can and must learn to acknowledge.

The claim that we can understand communications of the nonhuman is inevitably open to the charge of anthropomorphism. As Abbey might ask, how can we know that our interpretation of the communication isn't just the projection of our own minds? It is important to be aware of this danger, and to differentiate Disneyesque forms of anthropomorphism which ignore the biology and lived reality of animals from a more scientifically (and experientially) grounded and useful approach which Randall Lockwood calls "applied anthropomorphism." This approach combines scientific knowledge
with "the use of our own personal perspective on what it's like to be a living being to suggest ideas about what it is like to be some other being of either our own or some other species. This process is a form of projection, and it is a process that makes our life on earth as social beings possible" (Lockwood 49). Mary Midgley has addressed this issue in relation to animals in particular, and she echoes writers like Snyder who insist on seeing humans as part of and shaped by natural processes when she argues that animal ethologists who compare patterns in the social lives of nonhuman animals to those of humans are justified:

This is not because they illicitly project human qualities onto animals, but because human life really does have an animal basis — an emotional structure on which we build what is distinctively human. In spite of the differences, quite complex aspects of things like loneliness and play and maternal affection, ambition and rivalry and fear, turn out to be shared with other social creatures. (14)

Midgley points out that it is no more improbable to claim to know how an animal feels than to claim to know how another person feels; we can never share the experience of even another human being, and "The barrier to sharing it is already a complete one, so it cannot be made any more complete by adding the species-barrier to it" (130). However, sensations such as alarm, hunger, and pain are not only experienced privately, but rather are expressed through their public aspects as well. As Midgley explains, "In the normal case . . . inner perception and observed conduct go together. Their correspondence, though, is good enough to give us our shared public world. We constantly check one against the other" (130). Despite the slippery nature of language or any form of communication, humans can usually express themselves and sympathize with others well enough to gain a general understanding of each other's emotional
states and ideas. By constantly checking each other’s behavior and expressions to see if they correspond to the hypotheses we have created about what they mean, we "fine tune" our ability to understand others. And, posing the question of whether or not we can do the same with nonhuman animals, Midgley suggests that

This question can only be answered in terms of success, of improved interaction, resting on interpretation and prediction of their actions. But then that is true on the human scene as well. To go on using a concept successfully in a wide variety of situations is to have that concept. And the answer is that those who try to understand animals, and give time and attention to the matter, often come to understand them quite well. Those who do not, fail, which is also true with human beings. (133)

While Midgley does not address the matter of interpreting the communications of natural systems that may include animals but are not confined to them, it stands to reason that the same method of interpretation and prediction can be brought to bear (and is, in the case of ecological science, for example) in this scenario as well.

As Midgley suggests, the question is whether the languages of nature and the languages of human culture should be considered different in kind or in degree. There are many ways that they can be seen to parallel each other in both structure and function. In his well known essay, "Landscape and Narrative," Barry Lopez describes the experience of a particular landscape:

If you walk up, say, a dry arroyo in the Sonoran Desert you will feel a mounding and rolling of sand and silt beneath your foot that is distinctive. You will anticipate the crumbling of the sedimentary earth in the arroyo bank as your hand reaches out, and in that tangible evidence you will sense a history of water in the region. Perhaps a black-throated sparrow lands in a paloverde bush — the resiliency of the twig under the bird, that precise shade of yellowish-green against the milk-blue sky, the fluttering whit of the arriving sparrow, are what I mean by 'the
landscape.' Draw on the smell of the creosote bush, or clack stones together in the dry air. Feel how light is the dessicated dropping of the kangaroo rat. Study an animal track obscured by the wind. (Crossing Open Ground 64)

Then he points out that what makes the landscape comprehensible is not the individual elements of the land, but the relationships that connect them to each other: "One learns a landscape finally not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationships in it — like that between the sparrow and the twig" (64). This is significant in light of Saussurean theories of human language that hold that meaning is produced by the relationships, or differences, between elements or signs rather than by the elements themselves. And as I have suggested in the previous discussion of Midgley, the gap between the verbal or visual signifier and the meaning or concept it signifies is a tricky space filled with the possibility of misinterpretation, whether the sign system is human or nonhuman.

While we can use theories of human language to describe the sign systems of the nonhuman, we can also use the process of energy flow, typically employed in the study of primarily nonhuman natural systems, to explain human language. In A Place in Space, Snyder conceives of energy flow as the vital process that links individual parts into systems. In this view, "natural" effects such as the songs of birds or the rhythms of insects and "cultural" products like music or language are all expressions of energy being organized into more complex forms. He extends the concept by explaining how certain uses of language "compress" the energy into even more complex forms: "Concentrations of communication energy result in language; certain kinds of compression of language result in mythologies; compression of mythologies bring us to songs" (Place 145).
Perceiving human and nonhuman sign systems or languages as similar in these ways opens up the possibility of dialogue, which, as Murphy points out, can be viewed at its most basic levels as "energy/information exchange, as in gene pools and cross-fertilization (conversari, the root for conversation, according to my desk dictionary meant 'to live with,' and was the medial form of conversare, 'to turn around')" (63). However, it can also be seen as the type of information exchange we humans are more attuned to, the type of exchange that occurs when you walk through a forest or meadow and what Snyder terms "a ripple of report" spreads out from your passage: "The thrush darts back, the jay squalls, a beetle scuttles under the grasses, and the signal is passed along. Every creature knows when a hawk is cruising or a human strolling. The information passed through the system is intelligence" (19).

For Snyder, such parallels support his view that human characteristics like consciousness and language are inseparable from natural processes. He explains that "Sensation and perception do not exactly come from the outside, and the unremitting thought and image flow are not exactly inside. The world is our consciousness, and it surrounds us" (Practice 16). They are all part of the basic natural process he refers to as "the wild"; in "Unnatural Writing" he argues that "consciousness, mind, imagination and language are fundamentally wild. 'Wild' as in wild ecosystems — richly interconnected, interdependent, and incredibly complex. Diverse, ancient, and full of information" (Place 168). He cites the fact that the four thousand or so human languages of the world each model reality in their own way, and that the complexity of each of these language systems "eludes the descriptive attempts of the rational mind" as evidence that languages are naturally evolved wild systems (Place 174).
According to this view, art or language does not impose order on a chaotic nature but rather uncovers or reveals "the ordered chaos that structures the natural world" (Place 168). Snyder's conception of "the wild" is equivalent to this "ordered chaos"; in "Language Goes Two Ways," he makes clear that "Wild" alludes to a process of self-organization that generates systems and organisms, all of which are within the constraints of — and constitute components of — larger systems that again are wild, such as major ecosystems or the water cycle in the biosphere. Wildness can be said to be the essential nature of nature. As reflected in consciousness, it can be seen as a kind of open awareness — full of imagination but also the source of alert survival intelligence. The workings of the human mind at its very richest reflect this self-organizing wildness. So language does not impose order on a chaotic universe, but reflects its own wildness back. (174)

Because language is part and parcel of the ordered chaos of the wild, it "goes two ways"; in other words, it allows us what Snyder refers to as "a small window onto an independently existing world," but its structures and vocabularies also shape how we see that world (Place 174).

Given this perspective, the ways that language and consciousness shape human perceptions of nature cease to pose the insurmountable barrier that they do for Abbey; due to the wild nature of language, the ways it shapes us become a form of participation in nature rather than an obstacle to it. But we must be open to the many possibilities of mind and language and be willing to play with them if we want to come to an understanding of language as participation, as "a vehicle of self-transcending insight" (Snyder, Place 175). And it is through such a sense of participation, a participation in which humans and nature mutually shape each other in multiple ways that include multiple "languages," that environmental advocates can learn to speak for nature without arrogantly

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or unthinkingly assuming the natural world has nothing to contribute to its own defense.
CHAPTER FIVE

CREATING THE WORLD WE MUST SAVE: REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE IN ADVERTISEMENTS AND TELEVISION DOCUMENTARIES

In the July 1993 issue of Outside magazine, there is an eye-catching advertisement splashed across the bottom of two pages. The ad is divided into three horizontal sections. The first, labeled "Before," consists of a bank of clouds hovering over a range of craggy, blue-gray mountains topped with a sprinkling of snow. A pine forest rolls down the lower slopes of the mountains, giving way to a scrubby, rocky landscape with a dirt road cutting across the bottom left-hand corner of the photo. The second section, labeled "After," is identical to the first. The third section consists of printed copy informing the reader of Toyota's commitment to "environmentally conscious backcountry travel."

The National Geographic television program entitled "Jewels of the Caribbean" introduces the viewer to the exotic appearance and behavior of the undersea life in and around the coral reefs of the Caribbean. Throughout the hour episode, the viewer is guided and informed about these life-forms and the dangers that threaten them by an eloquent, disembodied male voice. No human beings appear until the very end, when scuba divers are shown playing with dolphins as a hopeful model of the kind of human engagement with nature that can save the area from the hazards of development, pollution, and overfishing.
In many ways, these two representations of nature seem to be quite different: in the aspect of nature portrayed, the form of media used to portray it, and in the purpose of the portrayal. But both ad and documentary claim to be speaking in the interests of nonhuman nature, and thus both participate in the discourse of environmental advocacy. And both participate in this discourse somewhat differently than the texts I have examined thus far; the ad and the documentary choose to sidestep or downplay the representation of humans and human relationships with nature and instead concentrate on portraying nonhuman nature and its "needs" directly. It is true that visual media like print advertisements and television documentaries can more successfully escape the sense of a human presence than written texts can. However, even primarily visual "texts" with minimal human presence imply and assume certain human/nature relationships in their message of advocacy, with implications and assumptions extending beyond the overt prescription that humans should try to care about and care for their natural environment.

In this chapter, I will examine two genres of visual texts which participate in the discourse of environmental advocacy: the "green" print advertisement and the television nature documentary. The advertisements I will discuss are from the past several years (1991-1995) and appeared in five magazines that would be likely to have readerships somewhat sympathetic to the environmental cause: *Outside, Audubon,* and *Sierra* because they appeal to people who enjoy the outdoors and value conservation, and the *New Yorker* and the *Atlantic Monthly* because they are targeted at a primarily liberal audience. In appealing to environmentally friendly readers, advertisements in these publications would be likely to have a similar audience as nature documentaries and the texts I've examined in previous chapters. The nature documentaries I will explore

Interestingly, these genres seem to have evoked less critical response than other texts of environmental advocacy. Perhaps this is because they focus more completely on nonhuman nature than the other texts: it is easier to objectify and construct nature in any way we choose than to do so to human beings because nature cannot contradict our representations in human language. However, as José Knighton has pointed out in "Eco-Porn and the Manipulation of Desire," natural "objects" like "The Grand Tetons and the Grand Canyon, both stereotyped objects of idealized, romanticized desire in our cultural psyche, are in fact living environments more vital than any single human being" (78).

Unfortunately, in their attempts to participate in environmental advocacy, visual genres like print advertisements and television documentaries lend themselves to representations of the natural world that can ultimately misrepresent the needs of at least certain aspects and parts of those living environments. Like the discourse of feminists who lapse into a sense that their representations of the needs and experiences of other, less privileged women are "true" in some objective way, these visual texts fail to acknowledge the partial and mediated nature of all representation and promote their incomplete, often falsely totalized pictures of the natural world as "real."

As I will discuss in the first half of this chapter, the advertisements that claim to promote the interests of nature often construct a monolithic, inaccurate representation of the natural world that ultimately reinforces a dualism between nature and culture. By focusing on one aspect of the natural world to the exclusion of others, by decontextualizing that part of nature, they erase the differences and interdependences within nature. The incomplete picture that
they create in this manner allows them to promote the questionable idea that sustainable human relationships with the environment are compatible with current ideologies of materialism and consumption. While the nature of advertisements means that their potential to subvert dominant ideologies is even more severely limited than that of most discourse, I discuss one advertisement that works against the strategies represented by the others. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to the documentaries, which can also erase differences within nature. However, they are more likely to do so by constructing it as a place without room for human beings and by promoting the view they provide as unmediated "reality." By doing so, they ultimately distance humans from the natural world with which they are biologically and perceptually interconnected and reinforce the dominant cultural ideologies responsible for environmental degradation. At the same time, as I will discuss, these documentaries also contain examples of strategies that are more subversive of those ideologies.

Green Advertising: Totalizing Nature, Promoting Consumer Culture

The advertisements I will discuss in this section may seem, upon first glance, to be different from the other texts I have examined in one obvious way: the reader most likely doubts the sincerity of the ad's environmental advocacy from the start, while he or she is probably willing to accept that the writers I've looked at so far and the nature documentaries I will eventually discuss have primarily "good intentions" toward the natural world they represent. The research of communications specialists Michael Howlett and Rebecca Raglon bears out such doubts. In an article based on their study of over 500 newspaper and magazine ads from 1910, 1930, 1950, 1970, and 1990, Howlett and Raglon argue that the use of natural imagery by business to sell products is nothing new.
The ads they survey reveal "a long, on-going process which seeks to convince the public that a world composed of consumer goods is 'natural'" (68). However, while companies have sought to associate certain products with nature since 1910, the tactic of creating "corporate images which are environmentally friendly or benign" (54) has emerged within the past 25 years. Some advertisers, such as the lumber or nuclear power industry, are working to counter environmentally negative associations, while others just want to "share in current public approval for environmental causes" (55). As James Shanahan notes in "TV and the Cultivation of Environmental Concern: 1988-92," despite the fact that what might be called a "'light-green' environmentalism is becoming rather commonplace in the mainstream media and among many consumers, opposition to the more radical forms of environmental concern is making itself manifest" (182). In other words, the environmental message in the media in general is not very radical and more likely reflects an attempt to appeal to popular concerns than a true commitment to environmental reform.

Although it is likely that the immediate motivation behind these advertisements is economic profit, with concern for damage to nonhuman nature a minor goal if it is truly a consideration at all, it may not be as easy as we would like to think to separate such selfish, short-sighted motivations from some of the motives of other authors of texts of environmental advocacy, motives such as gaining professional status or a sense of moral mastery and superiority. In addition, as Howlett and Raglan point out, advertisements represent "an attempt by a powerful social actor — business — to manipulate and alter popular sentiments and beliefs to its advantage" (54), and so it is important to analyze their discursive dynamics and potential effects. It may be argued that advertisements, more than most discourses, evoke a sense of skepticism and
caution in their audience and thus may be discounted as having a significant effect on "popular sentiments and belief." However, as I will explain, "green advertisements" may overcome this skepticism because they almost always tell consumers a story they want to hear: that environmental reform can occur simultaneously with, and even through, the ideologies and practices of Western consumer culture.

These advertisements ultimately reinforce the dominant ideologies responsible for much of our culture's environmental degradation to begin with by misrepresenting nonhuman nature in several related ways that I will explore in this section. First, they foster a sense of radical separation between human culture and nonhuman nature that belies humanity's interconnectedness with its natural environment. In addition, they often erase differences within nature, focusing on certain areas or species while paying little attention to anything else in nature or human culture that, ultimately, affects those areas or species as well. Finally, these misrepresentations sustain the cultural myth that true, adequate environmental reform can take place without any change in the prevailing ideology and culture of continual consumption and economic growth. While it is difficult to find advertisements that do not participate in at least some of these destructive dynamics, I will end this section by discussing one example of an ad that works to counter dominant ideologies in more substantive ways.

_Reinscribing the Nature/Culture Dualism_

One type of ad commonly found in _Outside_ fosters a potentially destructive dualistic attitude toward nature by valuing it primarily for its similarities to cultural artifacts. These ads are oriented towards tourists, encouraging them to visit a state or region to see its natural wonders. And the ads' visual elements and their copy make it clear that the most wonderful aspects
of nature are those that can most readily be compared to culture. An ad in the March 1994 *Outside* uses a shot of Carlsbad Caverns, filled with prominent stalactites and stalagmites, to advertise New Mexico: "New Mexico's unfinished symphony was started 250 million years ago." The caverns are indeed unfinished, for the natural processes that formed them continue to change them as time goes on. But why the comparison to a symphony? The copy vaguely refers to rooms "the size of concert halls," but no other attempt at an explanation is made. The ad's strategy is to convince potential tourists that visiting a natural phenomenon like the caverns carries the same societal cachet as attending a cultural event like a symphony.

Other ads provide variations on this theme: North Carolina promotes its evergreen forests, shot from below as the sunlight filters down, as one of the world's "awe-inspiring cathedrals" (*Outside*, April 1994). Virginia advertises its wooded landscapes, lit with gold from a low sun, as the setting for "the kind of vacation you thought only happened in the movies" (*Outside*, June 1995). Montana compares an experience in its golden grasslands backed by lakes and mountains to a "drama" (*Outside*, March 1994). By insisting on comparing the breathtaking natural scenes in their photos with cultural productions or activities, these ads imply that nonhuman nature is only worth appreciating if it can be substituted for culture. By selecting certain types of landscapes — the towering forests, mountain vistas, and sweeping plains that are what José Knighton would call stereotyped ideals — and valuing them as comparable to cultural artifacts, these ads include these landscapes in the traditionally valued realm of culture and banish "homely, flat-chested, overweight landscapes" (Knighton 78) to the traditionally devalued realm of nature. Thus they focus
only on certain aspects of nature in a way that reinforces the nature/culture dualism.

Another way "green" advertisements foster a sense of separation between humans and nature is by capitalizing on and promoting the myth of the natural world as an escape from civilization, a refuge for those independent and rugged enough to seek it out. The March 1995 issue of Outside contains a two-page ad for Nike featuring the tiny figure of a man running toward the viewer out of a foggy valley into an expanse of grass and trees. The copy advises "DO NOT SUFFER FROM LONELINESS. Go outside. Go away. It's all the people making you lonely... Go to your favorite place... This is what you need to do. Not just because it fuels your independence. But because it reminds you you're a part of something bigger." It goes on to set "you" apart from "baffled onlookers" who might not understand: "You aren't the one who's lonely. Just do it." In this ad, Nike is hoping to construct its products as the mark of the elite who need to be away from — to stand out from — the crowd. The Nike consumer knows he (or possibly she) is "part of something bigger," the modern-day, environmentally conscious version of the lone cowboy. A Chevrolet ad campaign that appeared in Audubon and Outside alludes to the cowboy image even more directly. These two-page ads feature male figures fly-fishing in dramatically lighted, wild landscapes. One figure is dressed in a cowboy hat and a vest, while another almost seems to be whirling a lariat as the fishing line he is casting swirls over his head and behind him. These figures are accompanied by poetic copy testifying to their love of the wilderness and respect for its eternal wisdom: "From this day onward I will restore the earth where I am and listen to what it is telling me" (Audubon, November/December 1994). The ads go on to proclaim
Chevrolet's commitment to "pristine" environments and its sponsorship of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

In updating the myth of the cowboy for the nineties, these ads transform him from someone who shuns crowds and civilization in order to conquer nature into someone who shuns them in order to appreciate it. In doing so, ads like this promote the sense that the world can be divided into two kinds of places: civilization and wilderness. They promote a sense that humans are not part of nature; even the elite loners who enjoy the wilderness clearly are only visiting it for recreational purposes. By fostering such a dualistic ideology, they deny the value of "nature" when it is found within less pristine landscapes or within civilized places like city parks or backyards or even human beings. And they deny the profound interconnectedness of humans and nonhuman nature, thus helping to sustain the cultural attitudes and practices which threaten the wild areas that their ads claim need our protection.

*Nature Out of Context*

Automobile advertisements in particular are prone to catch the reader's attention with a message of environmental advocacy, while providing little information to suggest that their products or corporate culture is particularly friendly to the environment. An ad for the Jeep Grand Cherokee that appeared in the May 1995 issue of *Outside* is fairly typical: An immaculately clean Jeep Grand Cherokee is shown parked on an elevated, rocky surface in front of a range of snow-covered peaks. Across the blue sky above the peaks is written in large letters: "We've designated this a protected area." However, it quickly becomes clear that Jeep's concern for the natural area portrayed is fairly perfunctory. The small print explains that "At Jeep, we're continually looking for ways to protect the planet, and we think we've come up with some pretty good
ideas to protect one area in particular. We are talking about the area known as Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited." After a description of the Cherokee's features, the ad includes a nod toward environmental concerns: The Cherokee uses a non-CFC refrigerant, and Jeep has sponsored a program called Tread Lightly!™ to encourage responsible off-highway driving.¹

This association of the car (and its absent driver — presumably the driver's seat is left empty so the viewer can imagine him or herself in it) with rugged, spectacular natural scenery² and the implication that the car and the company are environmentally responsible is not much different than a ploy practiced by the car industry in years past: using the visual appeal of traditionally beautiful, seductively dressed women to suggest that the ownership of the automobile will somehow confer a special aura of attractiveness. And the promise of environmental concern is about as reliable as the promise of instant sex appeal. What the Jeep ad, and similar ads for Toyota and Ford, leave out is that overall, cars are not very good for the environment. The Tread Lightly!™ program notwithstanding, drivers of off-road vehicles can and do inflict a great deal of unnecessary damage on delicate ecosystems. Cars in general depend on oil, which has a myriad of environmental hazards associated with its production and transportation, and they produce a variety of pollutants, including carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides (precursors of acid precipitation). These ads also misrepresent the auto industry's willingness to change for the good of the environment, omitting the fact that the reason Jeep and all other auto

¹A similar ad also appeared in the February 1995 Atlantic. One noticeable difference is that the Atlantic version mentions the Tread Lightly!™ program directly after the sentence about looking for ways to protect the planet. The protection of the "Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited" area comes second, although it still takes up the bulk of the ad's copy.

²The scope of this dissertation does not allow an extended discussion of the problematic association of this vehicle with a Native American nation.
manufacturers are not still contributing to the depletion of the ozone layer by using an air-conditioner refrigerant that contains CFCs is that the reauthorized Clean Air Act of 1990 has made it illegal for them to do so. They also fail to mention that the technology currently exists to make automobiles significantly less polluting and more energy-efficient and that the automobile industry has historically resisted almost all such innovations.  

Sometimes, the advertisements provide a little more substantiation that the company and its employees care about the natural world. A two-page ad that appeared in the December 1994 and January, May, and June 1995 Atlantic as well as the May 1 1995 New Yorker shows a family of three standing behind a Cadillac DeVille as they gaze appreciatively at the mountainous, forested landscape around them. On the other page is a photo of "Trina Barta, Cadillac Employee Volunteer" against a background of evergreens and above a quote: "There's a company that's making cars safer for people and the environment. My company." The copy below explains how Cadillac protects the environment as well as its customers: 75% of the DeVille can be recycled, it gets better fuel economy than some smaller cars, Cadillac is a corporate sponsor of the Nature Conservancy, and Cadillac employees donate their time as well. While some more radical environmental organizations criticize the Nature Conservancy for working with corporations and for perpetuating the political and economic status quo by buying up natural areas in order to protect them from development, it has definitely saved an impressive number of natural areas and the species that live in them. Cadillac is helping the environment by contributing to an established, effective environmental organization.

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And yet, ads like this one leave out the same information that the Jeep Grand Cherokee ad omits — information that testifies to a legacy of environmental damage that no amount of contributions to bona fide environmental organizations can erase. And, by the way they represent nature, these advertisements contribute to a cultural ideology that constructs nature as an object to be manipulated and used. Even more than the landscape photographs José Knighton critiques in "Eco-Porn and the Manipulation of Desire," they operate by using certain types of landscapes and photographic techniques to promise the viewer an unearned, irresponsible intimacy with the natural settings they portray.\(^4\) Even more than landscape photographs, their intention is to "appeal to, even seduce, the beholder with an image removed from its physical context, amplified into a commodity by technique" (77-78). Because the lovely settings of the automobile advertisements are isolated from a larger physical context, we do not see the coastal ecosystems ravaged by oil spills, the smog hovering over cities like Los Angeles or Mexico City, or the fragile desert ecosystems destroyed by off-road vehicles. Even the forests or mountain ranges we do see are presented in a way that encourages us to perceive them as backdrops, as objects for our viewing or driving pleasure, rather than as complex, living systems with which we are interconnected both physically and culturally.

While automobile advertisements are some of the most obvious in their misuse of the position of "speaking for" nature, their basic strategy —

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\(^4\)Knighton explains how certain photographic techniques can hold out this promise of unearned intimacy: "The stereotyped ideal, the towering peak or other monumental landform, is posed in a setting of intimacy from the scenic viewpoint. Perspective and foreground further reveal familiarity. Selectively provocative lighting — dawn, alpenglow and stormlight — is preferred. A suggestive atmosphere manipulated by rose-colored, diffusing or polarizing filters reveals those physical attributes most alluring to the viewer, attributes otherwise available only after achieving an intimate relationship" (77).
constructing nature as a monolithic entity in a way that misrepresents the interests of nonhuman nature and erases the advertiser's participation in activities that harm or threaten natural areas or wildlife — is one that appears in other types of advertisements as well. By focusing on selected representatives of "nature" that their activities apparently do not harm, and generalizing from those representatives to the entire environment, such ads erase difference within nonhuman nature in a way that oversimplifies natural systems and processes in very misleading ways.

One of the most blatant producers of this type of advertisement is the U.S. Council on Energy Awareness (USCEA). According to The Greenpeace Guide to Anti-Environmental Organizations, USCEA is the official public relations branch of the nuclear power industry" (96). One of their ad strategies is to include a photo of an idyllic natural scene, such as an expanse of blue sky over a stretch of thick forest, with a tiny, white nuclear power plant nestled between the forest and a blue lake (Atlantic, January and April 1992), or the upward view of a tall redwood with snow on its lower trunk set against a blue sky (Atlantic, June 1992). The copy explains that nuclear plants (unlike power plants fueled by coal or oil) do not pollute the air with sulfur and nitrogen dioxides [which lead to acid rain] or greenhouse gases. Then it explains that more plants are needed "to help satisfy the nation's growing need for electricity without sacrificing the quality of our environment" (Atlantic, January and April 1992) and invites the reader to contact the USCEA for more information. In addition to the fact that these ads do not reveal the neutral-sounding USCEA's relationship to the nuclear power industry or refer to the possibility that a nuclear accident could "pollute" the air in a way that would make acid rain or the greenhouse effect look like very minor problems, their suggestion that nuclear energy is environmentally sound because
it does not pollute the air seriously erases difference within nonhuman nature. By focusing only on one aspect of nature (the atmosphere), they totalize the needs of the natural world, ignoring the fact that other, different aspects of nature, such as the soil and groundwater, in fact have been and are being polluted by nuclear waste.

The timber products company Georgia-Pacific similarly erases difference within nonhuman nature by focusing on a limited, decontextualized aspect of nature in an ad published in the October 17, 1994 New Yorker: A photo of a misty forest with sunlight streaking through the trees includes the tiny figure of a man in a hard hat climbing up one of the trees. The copy explains that he is Carlton White, a GP Forest Specialist, engaged in one of their plans to "take care of the forest and the things that live here" by protecting the red-cockaded woodpecker. They accomplish this by "creating safe areas" around the woodpeckers' nesting sites. However, the ad does not account for the fact that forests are complex ecosystems, and that simply not cutting down a patch of trees around each woodpecker's nesting site may fatally remove the birds from their natural, physical context. Ecosystems are normally quite interdependent, and isolated remnants of them often can't survive intact. It is likely that some of the other living things the woodpeckers need to exist (the insects they eat, for example) will be eradicated or seriously reduced in numbers when the rest of the area is logged. It is also likely that some or all of the streams that the woodpeckers may depend on for water may be severely polluted by runoff once the trees are no longer there to hold the soil in place. By focusing on only one part of nature, the woodpecker, and cutting it off from the context of the entire natural system of which it is a part, Georgia Pacific minimizes the harmful impact of logging on
forest species and effectively misrepresents what "nature" needs from companies like Georgia Pacific.

*The Spirit of Compromise*

The USCEA, along with Chevron and International Paper, also use a slightly different type of "green" advertisement. This approach features people more prominently — either visually or in the copy — than most green advertisements, which often show no human figures at all or dwarf them in immense landscapes. These people act as characters with whom the reader can identify: they are "ordinary" people who have jobs to do and families to support, but they want to balance these needs with their concern for the environment. The USCEA seems to have switched to this approach in 1993, when many of its ads featured characters like "Dr. Karen Strauss, environmental engineer," resting against a wooden fence with her son and daughter (*Atlantic*, February 1993), plaid-shirted Oscar Welsh, "mayor of a small Pennsylvania town not far from Bald Eagle Mountain . . . 8 miles from a nuclear plant that started generating electricity about 10 years ago" (*Atlantic*, May 1993), or Patti Anne Vassia, shown holding binoculars and looking out of the upper window of a house, from which, we are told, she can see the nuclear power plant, where she finds her best sightings of bluebirds (*Atlantic*, July 1993). These characters are shown in homey, natural settings, and the ads stress their concern about the environment, a concern grounded variously in scientific background, motherhood, responsibility to a constituency, and love of songbirds. Interestingly, by 1993, the USCEA had given up its campaign to promote the construction of new nuclear plants; in the face of the American public's growing concerns about nuclear power, it adopted a new, more reasonable approach: "No single energy source is the whole answer
to America's energy needs. But... nuclear energy is part of the answer" (Atlantic, May 1993).

Characters like these help to construct what Lisa Lebduska calls the "ecoconsumer" as someone who has valid concerns about the environment, but who wants to be reasonable, who doesn't want to stand in the way of progress. If nuclear energy is good for the air, for children, and for bluebirds, why not let it be "part of the answer"? Chevron and International Paper claim to be operating in the same spirit of compromise. Chevron has run an extensive series of ads in the Atlantic based on the theme of "People Do" — in other words, people do go out of their way to protect nature. Each ad features an illustration of an unusual, often aquatic, species of wildlife and a box of text explaining how people apparently involved in the oil industry carefully plan their work so it interferes with this wildlife as little as possible. These groups of people conceal the light from their operations so it won't confuse newly hatched sea turtles who are guided to the ocean by moonlight, or they carefully avoid disturbing the Dugong Reef when they want to explore beneath it "by finding another, more difficult approach instead." These ads are distinguished by their vagueness: the species of animal pictured is rarely named, the location is rarely given, the "people" involved are not specifically associated with Chevron, and their tasks are described only in the most ambiguous way. The reader received virtually no information about Chevron's relationship to the environment, but is left with the sense that the oil industry and nature can co-exist in harmony if only "people" would take a few extra precautions.

International Paper's ads in the New Yorker are much more specific, but promote the same sense of compromise between economic and environmental concerns. They show children, often identified as the children of International
Paper (I.P.) employees, in forested settings. They carefully address concerns the "ecoconsumer" might have about recycling (I.P. makes recycled paper and packaging materials, although all paper can't be made out of recycled paper because there is not enough recycled material, paper fibers weaken during the recycling process, and recycled paper is not of a high enough quality for better grades of paper), excessive packaging (I.P. is engaged in efforts to use less wood fiber in packaging, although proper packaging is essential if consumers are to have access to unspoiled food), and forest management (I.P. knows it has a "responsibility to protect and care for this vast, renewable resource. We believe that a balance must exist between land preservation and land utilization"). Although these ads create the illusion of providing the reader with a great deal of information that shows I.P. is doing everything within reason to protect the environment while still giving consumers what they need, as usual, even more information isn't included. The possibility of using less paper to begin with, or of buying food that is produced locally so it won't require elaborate packaging, is never mentioned.

I.P. also claims to practice "sustainable forestry," but, as David Orr points out in Ecological Literacy, "the word 'sustainable ... conceals as much as it reveals" (23). In this case, I.P. conceals the fact that "sustainable forestry" usually entails the replacement of complex forest ecosystems, made up of many species of trees and other vegetation, wildlife, insects, and bacteria, with monocultural "tree farms" that support only a fraction of the original forest's biodiversity. Perhaps most telling of all is I.P.'s proud touting of its new contribution to "sustainable" forestry: the development and planting of SuperTree™ seedlings which produce 30% more wood per acre over a 25-year growing period. In developing this tree, International Paper has constructed the ultimate compromise between
"nature" and economics: a tree designed first and foremost to contribute to cultural consumption, with its role in larger natural systems and processes disregarded. Trees, any sort of trees, come to stand in for forests and even for nature as a whole — never mind what they have replaced, what sort of habitat they provide for other living things, or how humans can interact with them in ways beyond economics that include aesthetic, spiritual, or communal relationships. While the SuperTree™ is living proof that human beings do interact with and construct "nature," it is also a symbol of the destructive belief driving so many of those interactions: the belief that we can preserve nature and maintain our current patterns of consumption and growth.

It is very unlikely that we can become a sustainable society by making only the kinds of efforts mentioned in Chevron’s and I P ’s ads, efforts which do not significantly challenge or alter the way we think about and interact with nature. As David Orr explains, "A sustainable society, as commonly understood, does not undermine the resource base and biotic stocks on which its future prosperity depends" (Orr 23). However, the Western capitalist ideology of consumption and growth is based on the idea of growth economics and the model of "economic man":

Economic man knows no limits of discipline, or obligation, or satiation, which may explain why the growth economy has no stopping point, and perhaps why good neighbors are becoming harder to find. Psychologists identify this kind of behavior in humans as "infantile self-gratification." When this kind of behavior is manifested by entire societies, economists describe it as 'mature capitalism. (Orr 9).

Economic man knows no responsibility to other people or to natural systems, and he is inclined to choose short-term gratification no matter what the long-term drawbacks. He does not recognize his embeddedness in larger cultural and
natural webs of interdependence. The system of growth economics which assumes people are like "economic man," and which helps to construct them in his image, "assumes that the human economy is independent of the larger economy of nature with its cycles and ecological interdependencies, and of the laws of physics that govern the flow of energy" (Orr 11).

Of course, human beings and human culture are not independent of these larger systems. Orr discounts arguments that claim that human beings have always been able to — and will always be able to — overcome any physical or biological limits to growth by ingenuity, the "ultimate resource":

Optimists of the "ultimate resource" genre neglect the fact that history is a tale written by the winners. The losers, including those who violated the commandments of carrying capacity, disappeared mostly without writing much. We know of their demise in part through painstaking archaeological reconstruction that reveals telltale signs of overpopulation, desertification, deforestation, famine, and social breakdown — what ecologists call "overshoot." (19)

The kinds of compromises between the needs of nature and culture (if culture is defined along the lines of continually increasing consumption and growth) that these ads reflect simply disregard or radically oversimplify the larger systems that wildlife, and trees, and human beings need to exist. As Orr explains, true sustainability can only be achieved by questioning dominant cultural ideologies like the inherent virtue of continually growing consumption and production, all types of technological "progress," and the drive to dominate nonhuman nature — by nothing less than "finding alternatives to the practices that got us into trouble in the first place; it is necessary to rethink agriculture, shelter, energy use, urban design, transportation, economics, community patterns, resource use, forestry, the importance of wilderness, and our central values" (Orr 24).
Even ads by conservation organizations often undermine their own, more sincere attempts to represent the interests of nonhuman nature by buying into and promoting compromise with the culture of consumption. The Sierra Club advertises an MBNA credit card, featuring a scene of a lake and snow-covered mountains, that is "good for the environment; a contribution is made to Sierra Club when you get the card and each time you use it" (Sierra, January/February 1995). They also offer Sierra Club Message!Checks; one dollar is contributed to the Sierra Club when you order a supply. In addition, the checks allow you, the "ecoconsumer," to truly speak for nature with each check you write; the checks bear the messages: "Protecting ancient forests," "One earth, one chance," and "Clean air, clean water" (Sierra, March/April 1995). Sierra also regularly features ads for investment funds that represent themselves as being concerned with social and environmental responsibility. All of these campaigns sell the myth that, to protect the environment, all we have to do is spend our money the right way, or entrust it to those who know how to invest it properly. As Lisa Lebduska explains, such ads construct the "ecoconsumer" solely in terms of his or her buying power (16), and thus they reinforce the same ideologies promoted by the ads from the USCEA, Chevron, and I.P.

Given that the primary purpose of advertisements is to sell products, services, or images, it is difficult to imagine any that might significantly subvert Western consumer culture. However, I did come across one ad in the May 15, 1995, New Yorker that impressed me with its no-compromise attitude toward dominant cultural ideologies and practices. It stands out from most "green" advertisements in that it features only a small black-and-white photo and a great deal of text. The photo in particular is strikingly atypical: a mountain peak denuded of almost all vegetation except for a pile of cut lumber and brush in the
foreground. The copy parodies typical tourism campaigns: "Visit beautiful British Columbia. Picnic in the clearcut forests. Hike the eroded hillsides. See the dried-up salmon streams." The ad, sponsored by a coalition of environmental groups, goes on to give statistics on the destruction of forests worldwide, and then to explain that in particular, on Vancouver Island and the coast of mainland British Columbia, "some of the world’s last intact stretches of magnificent ancient rainforest" remain. It describes one of these areas, Clayoquot Sound, in detail, and then explains how presently planned clearcuts would affect the area and how the devastation would be hidden from tour boats by "beauty strips" near the water’s edge. The ad claims that the majority of the Canadian public opposes the planned clearcuts, but that the large corporations planning the cuts persist nonetheless. It explains that both Canada and the US are responsible for the logging: the majority of the lumber products produced will be used in the US, and the Canadian government has failed to protect the nation’s natural heritage. The information is specifically addressed to people who might want the area preserved so that they can someday visit it as "ecotourists," but it does more than ask for money, providing a list of people and organizations to write to and products to boycott.

By showing a photo of environmental destruction rather than of idealized, pristine landscapes, this ad confronts its readers with the unpleasant, ugly side of the relationship between nature and consumer culture. And it reminds its primarily American readers that, ecologically concerned though they may be, they are complicit in the forces threatening Clayoquot Sound (or other forests, by extension). Correspondingly, it gives them a way to undermine those forces beyond simply sending money, an act which, though necessary, cannot alone work the ideological changes necessary to make the protection of places
like Clayoquot Sound a true cultural priority. In addition, by placing the
clearcuts planned for Clayoquot Sound into the larger cultural/natural contexts
of global deforestation and the economies of both Canada and the U.S., this ad
works to expose the "systemic exploitations" (Lebduska 16) of which individual,
localized environmental problems are just a part.

**Television Documentaries: The Construction of Nature and the
Dangers of Denial**

Even more than the printed images and words of "green" advertising,
television nature documentaries might be seen as a form of discourse that
primarily represents nonhuman nature rather than focusing on the relationship
between humans and the rest of nature. In addition, the explicit and implicit
claims of these programs to be advocates for nonhuman nature seem more
sincere than those of the ads. After all, they are not trying to sell particular
products (especially when they're shown on public television). The
organizations that produce them often support conservation in other ways (for
example, National Geographic has sponsored the research of scientists like Dian
Fossey). In their more detailed treatment of the variety of animals, plants,
behaviors, patterns, and ecosystems to be found in the natural world, they are far
less likely to gloss over the differences within nonhuman nature. However, they,
too, exhibit tendencies to construct nature in ways that do minimize the
difference and variety of nature. By constructing it in ways that reinforce a sense
of human beings as outside of and separate from the natural world and
simultaneously hiding the constructed nature of this representation, they deny
our perceptual and biological interconnectedness with it — they deny us our

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place as some of the different, yet deeply interconnected, participants in the entity we call nature.

In *The Culture of Nature*, Alexander Wilson makes clear that environmental advocacy has not always been a goal of the wildlife/nature show genre when he identifies the "constricting logic" of the Disney productions that popularized the wildlife movie in the 1950s. One element of this logic was their use of stories about nature as "transparent allegories of progress, paeans to the official cult of exploration, industrial development, and an ever rising standard of living" (118). He points to the award-winning time-lapse sequences of blooming cactus in Disney's *The Living Desert* (1953), noting how such blooming flowers functioned to reinforce Western metaphors about economic growth: "The flowers were typically shown only to the point of 'perfection.' Rarely did we see them fading, decaying, consumed by microorganisms that returned them to the earth — part of some other economy, a larger collective cycle of life and death of which we humans are also a part" (118-19). Wilson also relates how these movies created a space outside of politics and history during "the social and geographical disruptions of the postwar years" (119). He reveals that "Disney's stories of a nature 'in balance' and somehow outside of human history functioned as a kind of utopian fantasy" for him as a youth growing up in a U.S. city full of "race-related violence and catastrophic urban 'redevelopment'" (119). A third 'organizing strategy' he identifies in the Disney nature movies of the period is symbolized by a cartoon that usually followed the opening credits. Wilson describes the paint brush creating an animated North American continent, representing it in a way that recreated the frontier myth of European "conquest of an unpeopled land, a totalizing view of a continent as seen from a helicopter"
or space ship, a map of the empire" (120) — a human, Anglo-European empire destined to expand.

With the growth of the environmental movement in the 1960s, especially in the Western region of the U.S. that so often served as the setting for nature movies and programs, some wildlife filmmakers moved on to places like Africa and the Arctic, areas "that could still support narratives of exploration and domination." (Wilson 121). Other creators of the nature movie "shifted their focus from animals to science" (Wilson 121). Wilson emphasizes that even that approach was a retreat from the political, though:

One reason the mass media have been able to take up environmental issues over the past thirty years is because those issues were understood to be 'scientific' — quantifiable, reasonable, and perhaps above all articulated by scientists working in official institutions. . . . Ecological ideas were now backed by a legitimate science, ecology, so to understand humans as animals it was no longer necessary (and no longer desirable, its proponents would have argued) to develop an ethic. (144)

However, as time has passed and the environmental movement has progressed, it has become more obvious that, as Wilson puts it, "ecology has an ethics" (146). As a consequence, "In recent years many nature films and TV shows have adopted an overtly political stance." (147)

In fact, many of the nature documentaries currently shown on public television stations, after educating the viewer about an animal, or, more rarely, an ecosystem, include some fairly obvious statement of advocacy for the species and natural places they have just described. At the end of an episode of Wild America focusing on the wildlife of South Dakota Badlands National Park, Marty Stouffer distills the episode's meaning as shots of bighorn sheep, bison, and elk are silhouetted against a setting sun: "In a time when wildlife is all too often declining, it's comforting to know that, given the opportunity and a little help,
wildlife can make a comeback. If we can ever learn how to avoid harming these wild creatures in the first place, we will have learned the most important lesson of all." As in this example, these pleas for conservation are most frequently included at the end of the show; however, they range from forthrightly polemical statements like Stouffer's to less directive comments suggesting why the viewer should be interested in preserving the species. But even these less directive remarks are given the force of admonitions to the viewer by the illustration of the species' value, both inherent and to humans, that precedes them. In this sense, almost all of these documentaries in some way "speak for" nature, playing the role of advocate for nonhuman species and natural places that are threatened by human activities and seemingly cannot speak on their own behalves.

However, as with other types of environmental advocacy, it is important to ask how effectively these educational and subtly polemical documentaries move their viewers in ways that improve the standing of nonhuman nature within human culture. In The Age of Missing Information, Bill McKibben speculates about the power of nature programs to affect their audiences, citing some specific examples of major ways that even older, less routinely polemical nature movies have contributed to significant alterations in our culture's attitude and actions toward other species. He points to the 1963 film Flipper, and the spin-off television program of the same name, as key reasons why, close to thirty years later, the American public cared enough about dolphins to successfully support campaigns to boycott the tuna industry until it ended its unnecessary slaughter of the dolphin (72). He also links Jacques Cousteau's introduction of his television audience to the mysteries of the world's oceans with the concurrent movement to end the commercial killing of many species of whales. However, he admits that "measured in the largest terms, such appeals aren't working"
(73). Even after viewers have been introduced to the diverse wonders of the natural world through these programs, they are "still not willing to do anything very drastic to save that world" (McKibben 74).

Most evidence supports McKibben's assertion. Despite the regular programming of nature and wildlife documentaries on public television and a number of cable stations, the rate at which species continue to go extinct and their habitats succumb to development, agriculture, or pollution is still increasing. Of course, we need to keep in mind that these documentaries are not the only forces working to construct people's identities and perceived relationships with nonhuman nature. However, we must also ask whether these documentaries are "speaking for" nature as effectively as possible. I suspect that many viewers share the experience of Alexander Wilson:

Wildlife movies — like realist wildlife genre paintings—promise us ... photographic intimacy with nature. ... Very often nature movies can't deliver because this restricted medium alone—and its appeal to the eye, and less so, to the ear — can't bridge the cultural and philosophical abyss between us and what in recent years we have come to call environment. (122).

I would go a step further, however, and assert that not only do they fail to bridge our culture's dualistic conception of nature and culture, but they also all too often reinforce it. Oddly enough, they reinforce a radical separation between humans and nature by constructing the natural world in a way that erases the differences within it, but that erases it in a different way than the print ads of the USCEA or the timber industry. They misrepresent nature by drawing a totalizing picture of it that leaves no place for human beings, either as participants in the natural world or as participants in the version of nature that they deliver to us on the screen; in this way, they deny both our biological and perceptual
interconnectedness with the other living things and the nonliving environment around us.

*Distortions that Distance Us from Nature*

Critics like Alexander Wilson and John Fowles see a measure of distortion of the relationship between human and nature, even of alienation, as an inherent part of the visual medium.\(^5\) Because the perspective of the camera is restricted both in space and in terms of the sensory impressions it can convey, the documentary can therefore evoke/transmit only a limited sense of the natural scene it supposedly documents. Although Fowles admits that "Selection from total reality is no less necessary in science than it is in art," he recognizes that "outside those domains (in both of which the final test of selection is utility, or yield, to our own species) it seriously distorts and limits any worthwhile relationship" (51). Wilson focuses on the way in which the camera separates the visual from the rest of the senses. The camera, with its insistence on perspective and the narrow field, exaggerates the eye's tendency to fragment, objectify, and estrange. Staring through a viewfinder, we experience the physical world as landscape, background — the earth as if seen from space, or a map. (122)

Of course, the genre of the nature documentary encompasses other, less inherent distortions as well. Perhaps the most widely remarked upon are its tendencies to feed our culturally encouraged desire for speed and conflict, making nonhuman nature itself seem slow and uneventful by comparison. Although cultural critics of television such as Bill McKibben, Charles Siebert and Jerry Mander have analyzed these tendencies and their effects from various

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\(^5\)Fowles extends his skepticism to the art of words as well, emphasizing in "Seeing Nature Whole" that his relationship to nature is "an experience whose deepest value lies in the fact that it cannot be directly described by any art . . . including that of words" (52).
perspectives, you don’t need to conduct an in-depth analysis to be aware that these programs favor certain themes within nonhuman nature: one way viewers refer to the cable channels which frequently feature these programs is as the "animal sex and death" channels.

The "nature" portrayed by these documentaries is seemingly overflowing with animals (often large, rare, or exotic ones) and activity. Everywhere the camera turns, animals are stalking prey, mating, fighting, and raising their young. Of course, the viewer realizes that the creators of the program have selected the most interesting and significant scenes for his or her appraisal; as Charles Siebert notes in "The Artifice of the Natural," the typical nature show is "rapid, focused, and framed, a potent distillation of someone else’s waiting designed precisely for me" (44). This "distillation of someone else’s waiting," not to mention someone else’s observant eye and painstakingly gleaned knowledge, contributes to a problem that Bill McKibben constructs in terms of how little "information" these programs convey, if we define information as "vital knowledge about who we are and where we live" (McKibben 9). He points out that "Half the time they specialize in misinformation, undercutting their message with their pictures" (74). In other words, even when the narrator assures us that a particular species is rare or even endangered, the camera shows a large number of representatives of that species in good health. For example, in an episode of Wild America focusing on the weasel family, Marty Stouffer explains that the black-footed ferret exists in such small numbers that it was once believed to be extinct, and even today is only known to exist at a research center in Wyoming. Concurrently, we see footage of numbers of these ferrets, to the happy strains of ragtime music, busily popping in and out of holes in a prairie landscape — the very landscape Stouffer tells us can’t support them any longer because

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agriculture and ranching practices have eliminated the prairie dog, and the black-footed ferret depended upon prairie dog burrows for shelter and the prairie dogs themselves for food. Perhaps a long shot of barren, overgrazed rangeland or a prairie devoid of prairie dogs or ferrets wouldn’t attract many viewers, but, as McKibben points out, the "void" that would be revealed by such an approach to nature documentaries "is the true revelation about an awful lot of the world" (75).

These programs can also undercut their message of advocacy by their visual symbolism. More often than not, the end-of-the-show pleas for conservation are accompanied by an image of various animals against a setting sun, as if to warn viewers that they may be witnessing the end of the species — beautiful yet tragic in its finality — as well as the end of the day. However, the sense that the sun’s setting is inevitable, and that it will just as inevitably rise the next morning, may give viewers a false sense that the extinction of a particular species or eradication of its habitat is only "natural," in fact inevitable, and won’t ultimately make much of a difference in the grand scheme of things anyway.6

Another type of "information" missing or at least distorted by most of these documentaries regards the types of species they focus on and what they tend to show them doing. McKibben concisely sums up this problem:

Even at its best, TV covers only a small slice of the natural world. There are perhaps ten million (some say thirty million) species on earth; of those that we know about and have catalogued, only a few

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6The argument that extinction is "natural" because it sometimes happens without human interference or because humans, being part of nature, cannot do anything that is not natural, is one I hear fairly often from acquaintances and students. Of course, scientists like E.O. Wilson have documented that the massive extinctions that can be attributed to current human activity are of a much greater magnitude than any that have occurred since the extinction of the dinosaurs. In addition, as I have argued in Chapter 2, humans have both the ability and the responsibility to consider the effects and ethics of their behavior and to modify their behavior based on those considerations.
meet the requirements for extensive television coverage — cuteness (or grotesqueness so complete it borders on the cute), great amiability or ferocity, accessibility, . . . correct size, and so on. . . . but even the most unengaging, hard-to-get-at, drab little animal has a great advantage over any plant except a Venus's-flytrap, and that is mobility. . . . The only hope of star-struck vegetation is time-lapse photography" (77-78).

In addition to selecting as their subjects the living things that most viewers would be least likely to encounter in "nature" should they venture into it, these programs also tend to focus on interactions and activities that are more remarkable for their drama than their prevalence in the world to which the documentary claims to give us access. For example, a 30-year retrospective by National Geographic spends an entire half hour on the theme of "eating" in nature. The footage focuses primarily on animals eating other animals, with one exception: a plant eating an animal. Never once is the viewer shown an animal eating a plant, a practice considerably more common than the reverse, if less exciting. Another approach which heightens the drama of the natural world often occurs in programs constructed more along the lines of a narrative: in Nature's "Elephant Seals: Those Magnificent Diving Machines," the narrator informs us that "Our story follows the adventures of a pup on its way to becoming the greatest diver in the ocean." However, the "story" places much more emphasis on the huge, ill-tempered adult male elephant seals, violent storms, and predators that constantly threaten our protagonist's survival than on her less dangerous and dramatic diving exploits.

Despite the fact that most viewers probably realize that "trying to understand 'nature' from watching Wild Kingdom is as tough as trying to understand 'life' from watching Dynasty" (McKibben 77), these documentaries do subtly transform our expectations of the "real" natural world. Charles Siebert, in
the context of an extended critique of the ways these documentaries distort the actual experience of being in the natural world, speaks of his own "disappointment rooted in the disparity between the ways in which we now represent nature to ourselves and the way it actually is; between that flitting, omniscient, nature-show overview delivering me from one available, arcane wonder to the next, and the plodding, myopic bulk of me within such a mute and long-lived presence" (50). A fulfilling experience one-on-one with the natural world involves more than passively sitting back to be informed and entertained. You must be patient. You must be willing to engage yourself fully in a world that does not automatically offer itself up for your pleasure. You must be willing to look for the small and the unobtrusive, to note the subtle differences between members of a species or the changes that occur from day to day: these are the differences and changes that comprise the bulk of nature's true diversity. You must be willing to put up with some degree of physical discomfort, with heat, cold, damp and dirt. You must be willing to discover the characteristics of species and areas for yourself rather than receiving an encyclopedic gush of information from an omniscient, disembodied narrator. As Charles Siebert explains, you must be willing to experience a sense of your own insignificance and possess "the daring to linger in a non-specific, un-narrated, and ongoing anonymity; a prolonged visit with that absence of us." The reward of so doing is that we learn to "walk away from what we know toward an understanding — in both the physical and abstract senses of that word — of what surrounds us" (50).

There is a prospect perhaps even more troubling than the possibility that the selection and editing that these programs perform may discourage us from experiencing "real" nature, may effectively substitute what James Shanahan calls "a simulacrum of a real environmental experience" (195) for an experience that
would provide us with a sense of our physical embeddedness in our natural environment. It relates to these programs' tendency to leave out even the more abstract "information" that would help us understand the contexts that not only link particular species to ecosystems, but also place our own culture in relationship to our natural environment. As Bill McKibben laments, "The upshot of a nature education by television is a deep fondness for a certain species and a deep lack of understanding of systems, or of the policies that destroy those systems" (79). An extreme example of this erasure of the natural or socio-political systems that contain the "nature" we see on the screen is Nature's five-part series The Nature of Sex. This series is organized around themes such as the ways various factors like moonlight and sunlight trigger the reproductive cycles of different species. The program moves rapidly from one animal's unusual reproductive method to another, sometimes so quickly that we don't even discover what part of the world the animal inhabits. Further contextualization, such as how the animal interacts with other parts of its ecosystem or how historical or current social forces affect it, are even less likely to be mentioned.

Even programs which move less rapidly and spend more time on one location or ecosystem tend to back away from political issues which might reveal the complex web of cultural and natural relationships connecting the viewer to the destruction or endangerment of a particular species or place. Programs such as National Geographic and Nature often focus on species and areas exotic to the North American viewer. Threats to species are typically mentioned briefly, in a very generalized way, such as National Geographic's look at the African elephant. As a group of elephants finish cooling off in a waterhole and proceed across the savannah, the narrator tells us of the threats they face: "Poachers slaughtering them for ivory and farmers usurping their land are posing a very
serious threat. Hundreds of thousands have died and the killing is still going on." By directing our attention to environmental problems that our behavior affects only indirectly, they allow us to feel superior to people such as the Africans involved in elephant poaching or farming on the land "usurped" from the elephants while we ignore our own implication in the world-wide economic forces limiting the options for survival of people like the poachers and farmers, as well as our more direct responsibility for pollution, habitat destruction, and other problems in our own locales. As Alexander Wilson notes, nature programs tend to model two roles for human beings: the destroyers of nature or its saviours, with no combination of or compromise between these diametrically opposed poles available (134).

Another way these documentaries can distance us in terms of our connections to and responsibility for nonhuman nature is by focusing on damage done to species by past, unenlightened generations of Americans such as the 19th century whalers cast as the villains of an episode of Nature for hunting the elephant seal to the edge of extinction. Contemporary people are shown only in roles that help the seals' survival, such as scientists or tourists attentively listening as a naturalist informs them about the seals. While overfishing is mentioned as a possible threat to the species' survival today, no commercial fishing rigs are shown, and the problem is downplayed. The overall effect is to implicitly contrast the villains of the past with the enlightened people of today, including the viewer, who is thus exempted from responsibility for currently dwindling populations of endangered species. Possibilities for connecting explicitly environmental issues with issues such as racism or colonialism, such as the passing mention of a coral reef growing on the wreck of a nineteenth century
molasses ship in National Geographic's "Jewels of the Caribbean," are rarely explored.

Alexander Wilson and John Berger place contemporary Western visual representations of nature, and of animals in particular, in the context of the progressively waning contact between humans and nonhuman nature within Western culture. In "Why Look at Animals?", Berger links this pattern to the growth of industrialism and capitalism: "The 19th century, in western Europe and North America, saw the beginning of a process, today being completed by 20th century corporate capitalism, by which every tradition which has previously mediated between man and nature was broken" (1). Wilson points specifically to the technical and industrial advances of World War II, which helped to produce in most North Americans a decidedly ambivalent attitude toward the natural world:

In everyday material life, nature was a laboratory full of 'things' to be observed and increasingly managed in the name of social mobility and economic progress. Yet at the same time people persisted in inventing a kinship with a natural world understood to be in some way authentic, primeval, and immanent — as if trying to make sense where there was none" (125).

As I will discuss, although these attitudes — one an objectification of the natural as resource to be used, the other a romanticized nostalgia for the natural world as the primitive, pure location of our origins that we always long to return to but cannot— may at first seem diametrically opposed, both construct nature as completely separate from human culture, thus denying humans' participation in the world they share with other living things and natural processes. And both of these attitudes persist in today's nature documentaries, contributing to the ways these programs can alienate the human from the natural.
Most of the makers of today's nature documentaries avoid blatantly constructing nature as "resource" in the sense of object or machine, although we can still hear echoes of Descartes' characterization of animals as machina animata in titles like Nature's "Elephant Seals: Those Magnificent Diving Machines." However, they have not escaped a pervasive cultural sense that, as John Fowles points out, our relation with [nature] must be purposive, industrious, always seeking greater knowledge" (52).

These programs almost always justify focusing on and advocating for a species or area by stressing ways it can be of value to humanity. Sometimes, the value is constructed as the enjoyment people can gain from interacting with nature. In National Geographic's "Jewels of the Caribbean," the show's focus on symbiotic relationships among the fish and other marine life forms of the coral reef is ultimately extended to a hopeful model of what human relationships with nature should be: as sport divers are shown frolicking with dolphins, the narrator explains that, "They give us joy; we must provide protection against overfishing and pollution." In an episode of Wild America focusing on how viewers can provide food and shelter for local wildlife, creator and narrator Marty Stouffer several times refers to the "joy" or "peace and harmony" the viewer can gain from this type of interaction with nature.7

Even more common is the trope that we should care about and preserve nature because of what we can learn about or from it. The final shot of National Geographic's "The African Elephant" shows us a herd of elephants silhouetted

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7This episode in particular is actually a very positive example of how nature documentaries could overcome some of their tendencies which reinforce destructive attitudes toward nature, for reasons that I will discuss later in this chapter. However, its emphasis on what the viewer can get out of helping local wildlife is more than just an added incentive for the viewer to do what he or she should to help nonhuman nature close to home; it participates in what is a very dominant and primarily distancing trend, and so deserves mention here.
against the setting sun as the narrator warns, "just as the complexity and ingenuity of the elephant is being appreciated, its future is in jeopardy. If it does not survive, we may never discover all there is to know about this magnificent animal." While such an attitude could be taken as a commendable interest in other species, John Fowles points out that the human fixation with learning all there is to know about nature often amounts to "treating nature as some sort of intellectual puzzle, or game," an approach that "insidiously casts nature as a kind of opponent, an opposite team to be outwitted and beaten" (51). John Berger sees the human quest for knowledge about the nonhuman as something even less equal than a competition; he theorizes that because human culture has gained such control over other animals, the reciprocity that historically occurred when a human and another animal looked at each other has been lost. Now, animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them. The more we know, the further away they are. (14)

Nowhere is this more true than in the nature documentary, where, if we encounter the animal’s gaze at all, we encounter it in a form that is safe, sanitized and, above all, offers no possibility of the animal observing or learning anything about us.

Sometimes these programs take the position that what is most important is what we can learn from, rather than about, the natural world. In an episode of Nature on the coyote, the camera dramatically flashes from a coyote running through grass to a painting of a coyote staring out at the viewer as the narrator explains that "This is old man Coyote, using his powers to teach us the limits of our own" ("American Trickster"). Speculating on the South Dakota Badlands, an
area that settlers tried and failed to bring under human control, Marty Stouffer asserts that "Many lessons are hidden in these chiseled canyons: lessons from the past and lessons for the future." This approach is definitely more respectful and grants nature more standing than a sense that the natural world is valuable as an object of knowledge. And yet, by participating in what seems to be an almost obsessive focus on what humans can gain from nature, even these bows to nature's wisdom help to perpetuate the sense that a species or area must be of use to us if we are to value and preserve it rather than broaching the even more radical notion that animals, plants, and their habitats have an inherent worth and right to existence.

Alternating and even coexisting with the sense that we must justify nature's value through its usefulness to humans is a romanticized conception of the natural world as an Edenic realm that humans can best serve by leaving alone. As Rosalind Coward points out in "The Sex Life of Stick Insects," nature programs often take as their theme "how tiny aspects in the life-cycle of one species are vital to the life of another species... [how] everything fits together, perfectly" (210-11). In *National Geographic*'s special on "The African Elephant," the narrator marvels at how well these animals have adapted to their environment, especially when their immense size is taken into consideration. While this type of focus on a species' place in its environment does move towards the positive goal of providing a sense of ecological context, it also perpetuates an unfortunate construction of that context as an environment untouched by, empty of, and presumably separate from human culture. In fact, the ultimate message behind most visions of nature as a complex, perfectly functioning whole is that we should leave the "balance of nature" alone, as though humans play no part in it. Marty Stouffer, in an episode on The Wyoming National Elk Refuge, expresses a
related point of view when he explains that, because humans have killed off the elk’s natural predators, it is necessary to allow hunting on the Refuge every year: "We've upset the natural balance and have little choice but to control herds by hunting. The more we disrupt, the more we must interfere." While it is true that human activities are responsible for the elk’s overpopulation, creating a sense that there can only be destructive, interfering roles for people within "the natural balance" merely reaffirms the nature/culture dualism that has played a part in creating the elk’s situation.

The construction of nature as a self-contained, self-regulating domain governed by the forces of evolution and instinct gains a special poignancy, however, through the pervasive sense that humans once belonged to and now are exiled from this world. And there is some validity to the idea that, within many cultures, humans have become increasingly distant and alienated from the natural environment that their species evolved within, sometimes to the extent of distancing themselves from and striving to dominate the body and the instincts which they see as representing the "animal" side of their natures. But what we see in these documentaries is more often the price of this kind of distance: a deep nostalgia for the unity with the natural world that seems forever lost. As John Berger explains,

What man has to do in order to transcend the animal, to transcend the mechanical within himself, and what his unique spirituality leads to, is often anguish. And so, by comparison and despite the model of the machine, the animal seems to him to enjoy a kind of innocence... [which] begins to provoke in man a kind of nostalgia. (10)

This nostalgia — its longing for union with nature constantly countered by the sense that human culture has lost its innocence, its pre-Oedipal immersion in the flux of the rest of creation — manifests itself through the contradictory and often
clumsy ways nature documentaries treat human beings when they take them as their subjects. It is in portrayals of sexual behavior that these programs come closest to linking humans with nonhuman nature. Our sexuality, our bodies, the imperatives of evolution, instinct and genetics, are often constructed as forces that constrain the human and nonhuman equally. The series "The Nature of Sex" seems to take the overall perspective that, at least in terms of the biological bases of sexuality, humans can be treated as part of the natural world. Each episode begins with a reference to or scene from human culture. In the first episode, the narrator reveals the major focus of the entire series: the primal instinct for all animals to pass on their genes. This instinct explains why, he informs us, "men and women and other animals spend so much energy on getting together." The third episode, "The Sex Contract," begins with a scene of the type of wedding ceremony traditional within Western culture, and quickly moves to shots of various animals' "courting" behavior as the narrator remarks on the desire for a mate and what it can make "us" do.

But even such an overt assertion that humans are part of nature is soon undermined. "The Nature of Sex" in particular takes such an unrelenting, totalizing view of biological determinism that it cannot sustain the sense that humans are part of, or even much like, the rest of its subjects. True to the focus stated at the beginning of the first episode, the program almost always explains any interesting or unusual sexual behavior on the part of nonhuman animals in terms of the instinctual drive to pass on genes to the next generation. We learn that naked mole rats (in one episode) and termites (in another) live in colonies in which one female gives birth to all the offspring and the rest of the animals help care for them. The viewer is disabused of any notion that this is unselfish behavior, however — the narrator states in no uncertain terms that the rats and
termites are all passing on their genes, albeit indirectly, through the mother's offspring since they are all "siblings." The program applies its same rigid logic to primates like baboons and Rhesus macaques. A male baboon who grooms a female's infant by another father does so "in the hope that she'll let him sire her next offspring." A female Rhesus macaque who "sneaks off" to mate with a male new to the group rather than to her group's dominant male is portrayed as characteristic; while the dominant male is supposed to hold sexual rights to all the females in the group, females actually prefer "newcomers." This preference is attributed to a need or desire for genetic diversity rather than to boredom, loneliness, a spirit of adventure, or any of the other motives we might imagine if the situation instead occurred in another species of primate: *Homo sapiens.* The boundary between humans and the rest of nature is strictly reinforced at the end of every episode as well. The second episode, "A Time and a Place," is typical; it ends with the narrator musing on the "many things we have in common with our fellow creatures," such as the habits of displaying and competing for mates. However, "we complicate it with a search for something more — love."

When it comes to native or indigenous peoples, though, nature documentaries are even more conflicted. Perhaps their confusion results from the fact that many of these cultures sustain and perceive closer ties with the natural world than the dominant culture does. When nature documentaries try to represent human relationships with or within nature, they all too often

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8This type of biological determinism appears to be an example of what Kate Soper describes as "the currently very influential attempts within sociobiology to explain all human and other animal forms of 'social' behaviour in terms of the individual genotype or 'selfish gene" (57). Sociobiology in its applications to human beings has been the subject of a wide variety of critiques, as I have discussed in Chapter 2; however, programs such as *Nature* usually reserve strict sociobiological explanations for nonhuman animals. Nevertheless, by representing all other animals' behavior as completely determined by evolutionary imperatives, such explanations serve to reinforce the sense that a radical dichotomy exists between human and nonhuman.
misinterpret the worldviews of indigenous cultures and proceed to represent native peoples in ways that reinforce the nature/culture dualism by depositing such people on the "nature" side of the boundary. As Alexander Wilson notes, nature documentaries tend to equate "the natural with the tribal, the biological and the 'primitive'" (150). In programs that explicitly set out to draw connections between the human and the natural, like "The Nature of Sex" or a PBS special on diversity that spanned biological and cultural diversity, indigenous cultures serve as an easy bridge, but the bridge is inevitably collapsed, leaving them on the side of nature. When "The Nature of Sex" moves from the nonhuman to the human in its portrayals of "ritualized singing and dancing" to attract mates, it shows us a tribal ritual among the Wodabi people of Sierra Leone. When it moves on to make the point that humans' desire for love sets them apart from other animals, it shows us scenes from contemporary Western culture. The program uses examples of polygamy and polyandry from Sierra Leone and the West Himalayas to demonstrate that people, like nonhuman animals, do not all pair up as part of the "sex contract." Western cultural norms are firmly established as typical human behavior, however; the narrator quickly reassures the viewer that, in most societies, "we tend to pair up and raise a family together."

The human nostalgia and longing for wholeness and connection with nature takes another form in these programs as well: anthropomorphism. Imposing distinctly human narratives and interpretations onto the actions of animals and plants is, after all, an assertion of some sort of connection between humans and nonhuman nature. As I have discussed in Chapter 4, anthropomorphism takes many forms and need not always misrepresent the biological realities of the natural world that it seeks to make comprehensible
through the lens of human motivation. As Alexander Wilson notes, anthropomorphism at least "allows animals to be addressed as social beings, and nature as a social realm" (155) and thus can challenge the dominant ideologies of a culture "where the frontier between the human and the non-human is well policed" (Wilson 127-28).

However, all too often nature documentaries indulge in forms of anthropomorphism that go far beyond imaginative speculations about what it would be like to be a member of another species. Making the point that some animals "will risk their lives for sex, "The Nature of Sex" shows a male jawfish on the ocean floor displaying his sexual availability. Next, the camera shifts to another jawfish peeking out of a crevice. We learn that it is a female, and that she "will have to leave home if she wants to get a date." In some cases, as Rosalind Coward points out, the anthropomorphic aspects of these shows serve to transfer assumptions about what is appropriate human behavior onto nonhuman animals. In a Wild America episode on the "swift, carnivorous" weasel, Marty Stouffer comments on a female weasel shown returning to her den of young: "Like all good mothers, she hastily returns to her responsibilities."

Bridging the gap between culture and nature by this kind of excessive (and culturally normative) anthropomorphism ignores the diverse ways in which nonhuman nature is different from humanity. Such strategies are ultimately another form of human dominance over the nonhuman: by accepting the absorption of animals, plants, and even ecosystems into the sphere of human culture, we participate in the colonizing move of turning what was other into the same with no respect for its difference from us.

Perhaps the most subtle way that these programs undercut the goals of environmental advocacy is by "naturalizing" the view they present as
unconstructed. As Charles Siebert notes, in today's nature documentaries, "the maker's hands are kept out of the frame" (45). These programs encourage us to believe we are receiving an unmediated view of the natural world by minimizing human presence on the screen. In the more expensive slick productions in particular, even the narrator is kept out of the camera's view. And the way these programs "hide" their narrators from view is just the tip of the iceberg of human manipulation and mediation that goes into the making of such productions. Alexander Wilson recognizes that

 detachment is an illusion that nature movies at least partly promote. Many of them don't reveal the deep involvement with nature necessary to their making: helicopters, camera blinds, sets, telescopic lenses, remote sound, and trained animals flown in from another part of the continent. (122)

Another technique nature documentaries use to create the illusion that they are presenting an unmediated view of nature is the seamless insertion of "technical events" of camera work or editing into the program. Cultural critic Jerry Mander defines technical events as "alterations of the image [which] could not happen in ordinary life; they are technical alterations only possible within moving-image media: films, video, or television" (85). In nature documentaries, these tend to take the form of slow motion, changes in viewpoint such as the shift from a close-up of a coyote hunting a weasel to a wider perspective that includes them both, and shots into hard-to-access locations such as a nest of termites. For my purposes, the significance of these technical events is not that they occur, but that the documentaries are so often edited as to avert the viewer's attention from the fact that they are occurring, that the perspective they are getting has been carefully constructed and shaped by human minds and technologies. For
example, I was completely unable to determine if the speed had shifted into slow motion or not in a scene of red-crowned cranes "dancing" in "The Nature of Sex."

The other important question to ask about the point of view these documentaries provide is how they construct the viewer who is being asked to accept their perspective as "real," as unmediated. As Kaja Silverman explains in "On Suture," film critics use the notion of "suture" to "account for the means by which subjects emerge within discourse" (199). She goes on to explain that "The classic cinematic organization depends upon the subject's willingness to become absent to itself by permitting a fictional character to 'stand in' for it, or by allowing a particular point of view to define what it sees. The operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, 'Yes, that's me,' or 'That's what I see'" (203). Except in programs that follow the adventures of a (usually) anthropomorphized protagonist, nature documentaries rarely offer any character — human or nonhuman — that the viewer can identify with for more than a few moments. The exception to this is, of course, the narrator, who is often disembodied, even nameless (or close to it, given the amount of close attention it takes to locate their names in the credits of most National Geographic and Nature programs), and always filled with knowledge about the scenes that unfold before the camera. By identifying with the narrator, and with the perspective of the camera that so often appears to be the narrator's eye, the viewer is constructed as omniscient and capable of penetrating even the most inaccessible reaches of the natural world, such as the ocean floor or the den of an exotic animal. In addition to giving the viewer a sense of power over the natural world he or she surveys in this manner, an identification with the narrator produces a sense of fundamental unobtrusiveness, an assurance of innocence of involvement in the forces affecting the natural world the camera reveals for good
or ill. In National Geographic's "Jewels of the Caribbean," the presence of the camera crew and their equipment under the ocean's waters is undercut by shots of parrotfish sleeping undisturbed. This sense of invisibility and uninvolvment is heightened by a scene of a manatee "nodding off" as the camera observes, "oblivious to the tide of change sweeping away his world," and thus the viewer is promised exoneration from complicity in this tide. The viewer is never encouraged to identify with the tourists, represented only by a far-off cruise ship on the horizon, who "pass this way briefly . . . [unaware] of their fatal impact on the wonders all about them."

As Alexander Wilson notes, the basic contradiction of the nature documentary genre, that

this is nature as she really is even though we've staged it all, . . . only works if the culture draws a sharp distinction between the human and the non-human. Nature is in part a human construction after all. Like a set of maps laid over the earth, our culture's ideas about nature are already out there on the land itself as we move around it. (123-24)

And by covering over and denying the ways that humans create nature onscreen — both immediately, through the artistic and technical creation of the documentary, and more broadly, through participation in the natural and cultural forces acting on the animals and ecosystems presented— these programs deny our interconnections with nonhuman nature and establish us in fixed, dualistic relationships with the natural: viewer and viewed, self and other, subject and object. By denying the ways that they create the reality that we see on-screen, these programs further deny the way each of us creates the world around us through our necessarily subjective perception of it.
Acknowledging Biological and Perceptual Connections

Despite the many ways that nature documentaries perpetuate and create destructive, irresponsible and dualistic attitudes towards the natural world for which they attempt to speak, there are also more promising trends within the same programs. As Alexander Wilson explains, "Often a single TV program will be a hybrid of different documentary forms and will express deeply contradictory ideas about nature and its relation to human culture" (117), and some of these ideas go against the dominant ways of looking at nonhuman nature by stressing human beings’ fundamental interconnections with the world around them. Surprisingly, it is the seemingly unsophisticated Wild America that demonstrates many of the most promising trends, although they exist in other programs as well.

While Wild America does show its share of animal reproduction and predation, it gives a more compete picture of "nature" than many other programs. In part because of his focus on wild America, Marty Stouffer tends to highlight animals that are more common and accessible to the viewer, such as shrews, frogs, deer, and coyotes. He also spends a significant amount of time on vegetation, such as oak trees or prairie grasses. When one animal is shown hunting another, sometimes the prey escapes and other times it is caught. In an episode focusing on the South Dakota Badlands National Park, the viewer is even shown a dead ram covered with flies, and Stouffer explains that it has probably succumbed to the harsh, dry summer weather because it was weakened by disease. While death is not unusual in nature programming, the sight of a rotting carcass that has been lying dead for several days, with no scenes of a predator stalking or killing its prey, gives us a picture of the cycles of nature that
goes beyond rosy promises of rebirth or the drama of predation to the essential, unifying fact of decomposition.

Stouffer's approach also goes beyond exposing the viewer to the wonders of the natural world or advocating its preservation to encouraging viewers to "Enjoy our wild America," the phrase with which he ends every episode. And he doesn't just tell the viewer to get up off the couch and interact with nonhuman nature. Several aspects of his program may serve to motivate viewers to experience "the real thing." First, Stouffer is himself a presence in most episodes. We see him sitting on a boulder in the natural area he is describing, carrying home orphaned wildlife to his house, as well as in his study where he sums up the "lesson" of every episode. By providing a representation of a human being actively engaged with his natural environment, he constructs this environment as one where humans can and do belong. In addition, he often focuses on areas or wildlife that the viewer can encounter without too much trouble. For example, in one episode he explores Shenandoah National Park, which lies only 85 miles from Washington D.C. In another episode, he even concentrates on how the average viewer can "provide food and shelter for birds and mammals," thus encouraging viewers to interact with local species in non-destructive ways. By showing his brother's family building birdhouses and buying birdseed and by interviewing other people in various parts of the country who have provided food or habitat for local wildlife, Stouffer provides models of interactions with nature that are based on a sense of community with the nonhuman rather than on its value to humanity or its existence as a separate, pure realm.

As John Fowles has explained, the direct experience of a primarily nonhuman environment, such as a forest, is "an experience whose deepest value lies in the fact that it cannot be directly described by any art . . . including that of
words" (52). It is this kind of experience that can best convey the reality of human interconnectedness with the rest of nature.

As long as nature is seen as in some way outside us, frontiered and foreign, separate, it is lost both to us and in us. The two natures, private and public, human and nonhuman, cannot be divorced; any more than nature, or life itself, can ever be truly understood vicariously, solely through other people's eyes and knowledge. (Fowles 68)

But when a vicarious experience like a nature documentary can actually motivate viewers to get outside and experience the nonhuman in a way that leads to the understanding of the community of all life, it can positively contribute to the preservation of the species and ecosystems that nature documentaries represent.

Another positive trend is a perspective that provides a rich natural context for the species highlighted. Nature's episode on elephant seals spends little time on the ways the seals interact with other elements of their climate or ecosystem, except when storms or other animals threaten a seal's survival, but it does make the point that the seals cannot survive unless their habitat is protected as well. Near the end, the narrator points out that in the nineteenth century, when the elephant seal was almost driven to extinction, "we killed the seals but left their habitat untouched so they could recover." The narrator goes on to suggest that, even though these animals seem to be "the great survivors, back from the brink of extinction," we shouldn't become complacent about their ability to withstand the pressures of human culture: "they can't do it without the world that shaped them." Wild America, too, sometimes goes beyond a focus on the animals and plants of an area. In an episode on Olympic National Park, Stouffer emphasizes the role of the glacial activity of ages past and of weather in creating and maintaining the climate and species of our nation's only temperate rainforest. He even traces the water cycle from a waterfall to stream to ocean, then explaining
how the ocean water rises to form the clouds that produce rain, thus completing "the cycle of life in the Olympics."

The programs which provide the richest sense of natural context are usually those with an ecosystem focus. These shows often do not focus on any one species, instead following an organization based on structures including the interactions among animals, such as the movement from a hawk unsuccessfully attacking a beaver to the same hawk observing an otter, then to the otter catching a fish in the Olympic National Park episode. Other organizational strategies include the migratory route of a predominant species, such as the elk in the Wyoming National Elk Refuge, or the different physical areas or aspects of the ecosystem, such as the summit, interior, and coastal areas of the Olympic National Park. Wild America's "Springtime in Shenandoah National Park" follows the changes in the area that occur as the spring progresses. While an ecosystem focus is not the only way a television documentary can engage in effective environmental advocacy, it importantly stresses the many interconnections among the animals, plants, and landscape of a natural area, which makes it easier to see the variety of ways — both positive and negative — that humans could interact with the ecosystem.

Another form of context these shows occasionally provide is a sense of the viewer's cultural implication in the historical and current forces threatening the species or area being presented. While the viewer is not particularly encouraged to identify with the tourists who unwittingly threaten the coral reef ecosystem in "Jewels of the Caribbean," the idea that someone from another place, like the viewer, could even affect an exotic locale like the Caribbean is in progress. This same documentary features a vision of a "new predator" — a fishing boat — from the underwater point of view of whales and other sea mammals who must
compete with commercial fishing outfits for food, and stresses that oil rigs, while providing some habitat for undersea species, can also pose serious threats. Of course, viewers must make the connections between their own consumption of fish and gasoline and the "threats" represented on the screen, but the larger cultural context is at least suggested. *Wild America* routinely pinpoints the ways that American culture has, both in the past and present, endangered wildlife and natural areas, although the viewer is never directly implicated in this program, either. However, the program's choice of wildlife and areas in the United States makes it more likely that American viewers will be able to sense their own complicity in the forces that may threaten what they see on the screen. In a move notable for its venture into the territory of linking the oppression of indigenous cultures and nonhuman nature, Stouffer explains that bison became extinct in the area of the South Dakota Badlands National Park because they were shot by whites not only for meat and hides but also as a part of a strategy to drive Indians onto reservations.

I have yet to see a nature program that successfully counters the imperative that nature must be of use to humans to be valuable. The closest, such as episodes of *Wild America* that show vacationers enjoying a hike or the *Nature* episode on the elephant seal that represents scientists studying the seals and tourists learning about them, still present some problems in terms of perpetuating ideas of nature as object of knowledge or recreation, although they at least show human beings interacting with the natural world in nondestructive ways.

*Wild America* does sometimes counter the sense that nature is a pure, separate realm best left alone by human beings, however. One way it does this is by presenting relationships between indigenous peoples and nonhuman
nature that not only avoid excluding Native Americans from the realm of human culture, but also use their worldview to model what Alexander Wilson has described as "a world in which humans and animals can once again be proximate, in a world in which all life is interrelated and yet autonomous" (151). In an episode on the courtship rituals of grouse, Stouffer explains how the mating "dance" of the prairie chicken inspired rituals of "the first humans who shared the prairie with them," such as the prairie chicken dance of the Sioux people. Later in the episode, a Sioux describes drawings of a hunter stalking a prairie chicken. In the episode on providing food and habitat for wildlife, Stouffer explains that Native Americans used to hang hollowed out gourds as homes for purple martens, which they relied on to eat insects. By presenting Native Americans as engaged in meaningful cultural activities which connect them to nature in nondestructive ways, Stouffer provides an example of a human relationship with nature that avoids either separating nature and culture or collapsing native peoples onto the nature side of the dualism.

Sometime these programs also strike a balance between the desire to connect with nonhuman nature represented by anthropomorphism and a colonialist co-optation of the sphere of the nonhuman into the human. In a *Wild America* episode on the weasel, the viewer is shown the astounding sight of a weasel, driven by the scarcity of food brought on by winter, killing a rabbit six times its size. The struggle is long and gruesome, and the viewer is tempted to identify with a squirrel that appears to be watching the whole scene in horror and disbelief. However, Stouffer cautions us that categorizing "animals as innocent victims or as guilty killers" is an unwarranted projection of human values onto nonhuman nature. "Nature itself makes no such judgments," he explains as the twitching rabbit finally seems to expire. The weasel must kill to
live, he goes on, and "by following instinct, it fulfills a vital role in maintaining the balance of nature." While discouraging overly anthropomorphic interpretations and judgments of animal behavior, he sometimes invites us to imaginatively assume the perspective of wildlife. In the episode on the South Dakotan Badlands, he contrasts the human perspective on the area which led to its name with the perspective of the animals who live and depend on this landscape: for them, there is nothing "bad" about it. In a similar effort to engage the viewer with the "perspective" of wildlife, a Nature episode on the coyote balances scenes of Los Angeles residents recounting stories of coyotes killing or threatening their pets with naturalists who explain that the human residents have invaded the coyote's habitat, not vice versa.

Finally, sometimes these programs self-consciously stress the act of viewing and the technical manipulations that make what the viewer sees possible. Wild America often includes "technical events" is ways that are obvious, that make them stand out as technical manipulations of the viewer's perspective. One of the sequence of scenes that begins each episode is instructive in this regard; a mountain landscape is shown swiftly changing from the greenery of summer to the snow-blanketed guise of winter. While it could be argued that the time-lapse photography that creates such a spectacle merely reinforces the viewer's desire for speed, I find that it highlights the constructed aspect of the program in a way that can be a positive reminder that what is on the screen is a product of human interaction with nature. Another aspect of Wild America that emphasizes the technical manipulations that produce the program is the often obvious way "technical events" are inserted into the footage. In one episode, one ermine weasel attempts to expel another from its burrow. The camera shifts back and forth from a view of the weasel outside the burrow to the weasel inside, but
the inside view is framed by a ring of earth, highlighting the sense that the camera is intruding into the weasel's space. In addition, Stouffer sometimes refers to the fact that a view being presented, such as a close-up of the intricate pattern of air sac inflation of a sage grouse, is in slow motion, leaving no doubt in the viewer's mind that the nature he or she is viewing has been manipulated and constructed for his or her interest and edification.⁹

At times, Stouffer's narration also works against the construction of the viewer as a floating, invisible presence innocent of any intrusive or destructive interactions with "nature." As mentioned earlier, Marty Stouffer is frequently included as a physical presence in his programs, thus stressing the human participation in the landscape that lies behind every nature program. In addition, in the episode focusing on Shenandoah National Park, he explains the unusual behavior of a mockingbird by speculating that the bird may be uncomfortably aware of "our" presence. Perhaps most telling, though, is another of the opening sequence of scenes, in which the camera rapidly shifts from an owl seemingly looking at the viewer to Stouffer peering at the viewer through his binoculars. Although he quickly removes them and smiles mischievously,

⁹Early in 1996, A Denver Post investigation brought into the public eye a variety of accusations against nature documentary programs, including Wild America. These accusations primarily focused on the many invisible ways that these documentaries construct their images of nature: staging scenes, passing off captive and even tame animals as wild, and using computer technology to alter filmed scenes. As I have explained, this sort of construction is inevitable — it is the extent to which it is disguised and its effects are naturalized that can deceive viewers and promote and idealize an image of nature as disconnected from humans both physically and perceptually. My sense is that Stouffer is better than many other documentary makers in his willingness to admit to the ways he constructs his images of nature, and in response to the recent criticism, he has offered to put disclaimers on episodes that include staged scenes. However, he was also accused of cruelty to some of the animals he has worked with; an incident in which he allegedly tied a rabbit to a post with a fishing line so that a raccoon could attack it was repeatedly cited in the Post's reports on the investigation. Of course, abusing animals in this way can only undermine the basic premises of nature advocacy.
the gesture serves as a reminder that the viewer is looking at "nature" through the aid of human technology and art. In addition, this gesture momentarily asks the viewer to imagine he or she is in the place of the animals that he or she will be observing throughout the rest of the program. Thus, by reminding us of the act of looking, this brief scene highlights human involvement with and participation in nature, physically and perceptually.

However simple some of these more positive trends may seem, they all help to stress that the view of nature presented in these programs is constructed, partial, and temporary. Thus, they allow us to imagine a multiplicity of ways we can connect or relate to nonhuman nature besides domination or even resource management. Paradoxically, it is when these programs acknowledge the ways they create a particular representation of nature that they best work to save it; by foregrounding the constructed nature of what we see on television, they encourage us to move from the position of voyeur or colonizer of an alien, nonhuman nature to the position of participant in a natural world which includes a multitude of other entities fascinatingly different from, yet intimately connected to, our own species. And it is the perception of such a dynamic interconnection that can truly work against environmental degradation by transforming our old, destructive attitude of separation from and domination over nature into one of respect and cooperation.

When viewing or creating texts like the advertisements and documentaries I have discussed, it is essential to keep in mind that we cannot represent nature without implying certain things about humans and human relationships to nature. And, even when those implications have been carefully considered, the representation we view or create will always be incomplete and constructed from a particular perspective. Acknowledging the incomplete and
limited nature of these representations is a first step; the next is seeking out a variety of representations from different points of view to, as N. Katherine Hayles recommends, imaginatively bring together "the different knowings that all the diverse parts of the world construct through their interactions with it" (58). As she explains, such an approach can ground a view of the world that values all of its parts and interactions: "To sacrifice animals or exterminate species in this model directly reduces the sum total of knowledge about the world, for it removes from the chorus of experience some of the voices articulating its richness and variety" (58).
CONCLUSION

BRINGING ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY HOME

In this dissertation, I have explored a wide variety of texts that participate in the contemporary discourse of environmental advocacy in the United States. In doing so, I have focused on three aspects of these texts: the ways they construct human subjectivity, the ways they conceive of human relationships with nature and the role of language(s) in mediating those relationships, and their representations of nonhuman nature itself. As I have discussed, even when created with the most subversive of intentions, such texts are vulnerable to the influences of dominant ideologies that alienate humans from the natural world and from each other. They reinforce these ideologies when they construct falsely unified, static pictures that erase differences of all kinds: those within the human subject, between groups of people and nonhuman nature, and within the natural world. However, as I have pointed out, some texts that speak for nature also actively resist such constructions. They work towards a view of the world as complex and shifting, in which humans and nature mutually shape each other through innumerable relationships (including those mediated by language) that produce differences as well as commonalities.

Significantly, discourse plays a crucial role in many of the interactions I have discussed: it is an important force in shaping human subjectivity as well
as in constructing the ways we perceive, represent, and interact with nature. Given that discourse is instrumental in perpetuating dominant ideologies, its power can be daunting to those who would use it to subvert such ideologies. However, its power can also hold great potential for those of us who wish to transform dominant cultural relationships to the natural world if we practice the kind of critical self-reflection on our practices of writing and reading that I have recommended. If we can learn to intervene in discursive forces and to be open to and facilitate the ways that natural entities can intervene in them, we may be able to rewrite our relationships with each other and nonhuman nature in ways that are enriching and sustainable for all.

However, as I think back to the childhood experiences of nature that I described in the introduction, I wonder what such interventions might mean in the practices of everyday life. How might the texts and ideas I have discussed make a difference in our lived relations to specific aspects of nature? As I have discussed, the discourse of environmental advocacy holds great potential for providing people with models for new ways to think about nature and their relationships to it. In order to achieve its aims, though, any discourse of advocacy must evoke action: it must not only change the way we "read" the world, but also change the ways we interact with it. While our actions certainly affect environments all over the world (and beyond), and those environments in turn affect us, it is with our local places that we often have the most immediate sense of this dialectical relationship. And, I would argue, it is in those local places that we can best begin to enact the kinds of relationships and changes we would like to see occur on a wider scale. As Scott Russell Sanders puts it in "Settling Down," "Local knowledge is the grounding for global knowledge" (332).
One of the issues I have emphasized in the preceding pages is the danger of falsely glossing over differences to create illusory unities, and it is important to ask what kinds of differences may exist between the places — both geographic and cultural — each of us inhabit and those of writers such as Alice Walker, Terry Tempest Williams, or Gary Snyder. By assuming that we can simply extrapolate from their stories, experiences, and landscapes to our own, we risk participating in what Jim Cheney describes as "totalizing discourse." As he explains in "Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative,"

The possibility of totalizing, colonizing discourses arises from the fact that concepts and theories can be abstracted from their paradigm settings and applied elsewhere . . . The effect of totalizing discourse is to assimilate the world to it. Totalizing language provides an abstract understanding that cuts through individual differences when these are irrelevant to its purposes. (120)

As an alternative, Cheney offers "contextual discourse," a type of discourse that is grounded in and expresses the diversity of specific places. In order to cultivate a contextual discourse that incorporates as many aspects of a specific place, both cultural and natural, as possible, Cheney recommends what he calls the bioregional narrative: an "elaboration of relations which forgoes the coherence, continuity, and consistency insisted on by totalizing discourse. . . . Self and geography are bound together in a narrative which locates us in the moral space of defining relations" (126).\footnote{The term "bioregional" refers to the concept of the bioregion, which Kirkpatrick Sale defines as "any part of the earth’s surface whose rough boundaries are determined by natural characteristics rather than human dictates, distinguishable from other areas by particular attributes of flora, fauna, water, climate, soils, and landforms, and by the human settlements and cultures those attributes have given rise to" (55). The concept of the bioregion is at the heart of the bioregional movement, which emphasizes an intimate knowledge of one’s bioregion, a lifestyle that depends as much as possible on food, energy, and other resources from one’s own bioregion, and an overall relationship with the bioregion that is sustainable within the limits of}
conjures up the idea of what Cheney calls the "linear, essentialized . . . self" as author, bioregional narratives would be constantly changing in response to a plurality of authors "writing" in different languages, not all of them human.

In order to enact environmental resistance to dominant ideologies that is grounded in our own positions, in our own experiences of specific places, we need to seek out the many stories that make up the narratives of those places. In *The Rediscovery of North America*, Barry Lopez suggests that those of us who are "recent arrivals" to our places can gain a better sense of how we came to be there by reading local history and can gain a better sense of the costs of our being there by reading "in the anthropological and archeological literature about those we moved out of our way" (33). And we can learn alternative stories about human relationships to place not only from the lifestyles of native cultures, but also from others who have chosen to live more intimately and sustainably with our local environments; perhaps there are Amish or Mennonite communities in our areas, or bioregional movements working to cultivate place-specific knowledge and ways of life.

However, we need to make sure to look beyond the written, oral, and visual texts of human cultures and ask what the natural inhabitants and aspects of our place have to say. Lopez emphasizes the need to truly listen, "to pay attention rather than constantly to pose questions" (36). We can bring this kind of respectful attention to bear as we "memorize and remember the land, walk it, eat from its soils, and from the animals that ate its plants. We would have to know its winds, inhale its airs, observe the sequence of its flowers in the spring and the range of its birds" (Lopez 33-34). As Gary Snyder explains in *The

its natural systems. See Andruess et al., Berg, Christopher Plant, and Sale for further descriptions of the bioregional movement.
*Practice of the Wild,* "if you . . . know what is taught by plants and weather, then you are in on the gossip and can truly feel more at home" (38).

By opening ourselves up to the variety of cultural and natural discourses that contribute to our own bioregional narratives, we can better ground our participation in or response to environmental advocacy in a complex understanding of the many ways our own stories are intertwined with those of the other inhabitants with whom we share our places. Importantly, though, we will also be able to integrate the understanding of the ways we are connected to those other inhabitants with the knowledge of our differences from them in order to expand the range of what we can imagine for our shared future. In this way, we can reconcile a sense of the power of discourse with the knowledge that, in the words of Scott Russell Sanders, "There is only one world, and we participate in it here and now, in our flesh and in our place" (335).
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