

Has Ecocriticism Gone Off the Deep End?  
Rethinking Ecological Formalism and Social Ecology

by

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## Abstract

Ecocriticism, with its dual interests in the study of nature and the protection of the environment, seems as though it should be a discipline that flourishes in a liberal academy that is comfortable with theory. It is not. This project looks at the dominant ideology that structures much ecocritical writing, deep ecology, and it suggests that the seemingly radical environmental politics that it proposes are really articulations of traditional anti-theoretical conservatism. In the first chapter, I look at *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), as a watershed publication in the rise of the new discipline, a publication that, at its foundation, deploys deep ecology as a given, even attempting to bring it in line with theory. The following chapter employs varying techniques to show how deep ecology functions on ideological grounds that are flawed, criticism levied from philosophy and science; central to that chapter is a parallel that I draw between deep ecology as a type of ecological formalism and the literary formalism of the New Critics and the Russian Formalists. The final chapter suggests a new direction that ecocriticism can take after the dismissal of deep ecology; social ecology, unlike deep ecology, is not anathema to theory, and by rehabilitating culture from its position on the bottom of deep ecology's hierarchy, social ecology can offer new ways to think about the discipline.

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## Chapter 1

### The Deep Roots of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, like many of the disparate discourses that have shaped literary studies in recent years, should be considered a cultural studies meta-discourse. That is, like gender studies, queer theory, postcolonial studies, critical race theory, and critical disabilities studies, ecocriticism takes up a specific subject, specifically nature, and, with a battery of tools and theories, determines that there is something significant to say, made evident through literature and language, that might otherwise be overlooked or under-examined. As Cheryll Glotfelty suggests in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), cultural studies discourses already share affinities with ecocriticism and nature studies, such that recent gender, multicultural and even linguistic theories become articulated in terms of the landscape; we “remap and redraw boundaries” (xv), and women’s bodies, for example, become borderlands in Gloria Anzaldúa’s critical apparatus. While mappable lands are, indeed, the key to the metaphorical language of our postmodern discipline, I argue that the reverse is true too; nature suffers from the ineffable bonds of social immobility, linguistic colonialism and the structural matrices of coded language. In a whirr of metaphorical transposition, bodies become landscapes and landscapes become bodies.

Mimicking civil-rights era discussions of academic responsibility towards the bodies of the abused, Glotfelty further suggests that literary critics are responsible, nay required, to answer ecological historian Donald Worster's call to arms, that even though we "cannot do the reforming," we can "help with the understanding" (xxi). It might seem obvious that the subversive techniques of deconstruction – the uncovering of that which the powerful hegemony of language is incapable of fully revealing – is the method through which theorists and critics reveal the narratives of the underrepresented in a worldwide discursive web of white, male

(which is to say, *Homo sapiens*) media. In discourses such as these, those subalterns whose voices never fully reach the surface or are relegated to the niche status of local culture are granted the floor in a flourish of publications that, for instance, re-think medieval genres in terms of the queer or read a Renaissance drama in terms of the long history of disability and corporeal demystification.

This model of ecocriticism is a type of reading “in terms of” x, where x equals the non-traditional, postmodern perspective gained by our privileged position in the post-democratic, politically correct West, in the shadows of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and so on. Ecocriticism, like feminism, is political. And at our current socio-historical moment in the early twenty-first century, where questions of global climate change and ecological responsibility consistently become fodder for twenty-four hour news outlets and left-right-and-center blog fora, nature itself has been brought into the legislative chambers and into academic journals. Michael Branch and Scott Slovic, editors of *The ISLE Reader*, respectfully reject Glotfelty’s definition of ecocriticism in their introduction as “the study of the relationships between literature and the physical environment.” They more broadly suggest that “the ecocritical bailiwick includes not only the study of the explicit treatment of human-nonhuman relationships in literature, but also the reading of any work of literature (in any genre) in an effort to discern its environmental implications” (xix). They believe that every literary work can be read from a “green” perspective, and that “linguistic, conceptual, and analytical frameworks developed in any [...] discipline may be incorporated into an ecocritical reading” (xix).

In 1996, Glotfelty and Harold Fromm edited a collection of essays that, on the one hand, consolidated the work of scholars from around the world who were independently beginning to think about the relationship between literature and the environment. On the other hand, *The*

*Ecocriticism Reader*, the product of their collaboration, crystallized the new discipline; binding a collection of essays and titling it in such a general, yet pointed, way constructs an imagined, if not actual, homogeneity among the texts. Fromm and Glotfelty's book became, in a sense, *the* ecocriticism book, and since 1996, that collection has been found on university curricula around the world, as the primer on the short history of ecocritical studies. This is not so much a problem as it is a statement of historical reality. Glotfelty's claim that *The Ecocriticism Reader* consolidated disunited texts presents an implicit critique of the separation of early ecocritical writers from the 1970s, onward; writers like Raymond Williams, whose critique of pastoral literature in 1973, and Joseph Meeker, whose look at comedy and tragedy in human and biological systems in 1974, were not writing in the ecocriticism discipline. Ecocriticism itself did not exist, as such, and Glotfelty notes that "these critics rarely cited one another's work; they didn't know that it existed. [...] Each was a single voice howling in the wilderness" (xvi). They were developing their own "environmental approach to literature in isolation" (xvii) in their particular fields, Williams' Marxism and Meeker's Genre Studies. Glotfelty co-founded The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment and its official journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* in 1992 during a special session of the Western Literature Association, in Reno, with the stated purpose of "sharing [...] facts, ideas, and texts concerning the study of literature and the environment" (ASLE Bylaws 2.1). And it is a shared sense of community that both the founding of ASLE and the publishing of *The Ecocriticism Reader* propagated in a population of scholars, the majority of whom seem, as Kate Soper put it in *What is Nature?*, to be "nature endorsing" (8). In practical terms, ASLE sprung forth from the American West, the most-recently-conquered, yet unarguably wildest, frontier of

the Continental U.S. And Glotfelty, in describing these ecocritics, does so through western images of wolves howling under dark skies.

If Soper is accurate in describing the prerequisite endorsement of nature – I would even go so far as to say nature-love – that the majority thinkers of scholars and students in this new field share, then I want to suggest that a re-examination of both the foundational theory and praxis of ecocriticism is necessary to rehabilitate it as a viable discourse in a postmodern academy that is skeptical of ideological unity beyond the unity of disunity. In other words, as Michael Bennett laments, the discipline is dangerously approaching “wilderness fetishism” (297) that does not take into account, for example, urban experience. The role of the ecocritic is, as imagined by Glotfelty, to conserve through the reformation-via-information paradigm of Worster, because nature, unlike identity politics, is incapable of speaking for itself, in a way that subaltern people might. Yet ecocriticism in its initial impulses runs a distinct risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater; that is, in essentializing nature through an adherence to “deep ecology”, it gets precariously close to undermining its whole endeavor.

### **Deep Ecology**

Since ecocriticism has its roots in ideologies that are not easily mapped onto the deconstructive methods of poststructuralism, I hope to show that it is a discourse that has been, by its very nature, antagonistic to postmodern cultural studies. The rise of “deep ecology” as a way of conceptualizing the environment has been swift and pervasive since the 1970s, and today it underscores the work done in mainstream eco-activist organizations, like Greenpeace, and in popular media, like Al Gore’s Oscar-winning *An Inconvenient Truth* and the very-not-Oscar-winning remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. However, utilizing ecocriticism from a deep

ecology standpoint could be better done through examining what deep ecology is, and being aware of the implications of deploying it.

Deep ecology's initial impulses come from natural and philosophical unity; interestingly, its genesis coincided with the rise of poststructuralism. At the same time that Derrida's essay collection, *"Speech and Phenomena" and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of the Sign* was being published in 1973, Arne Naess was writing "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movement" to be published in *Inquiry*. It was a revision of a presentation he had given in Bucharest the year prior, at the Third World Future Research Conference, where he first coined the phrase, "deep ecology." Coming on the heels of the environmentalist movement of the 1960s and the popularity of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Naess claimed that two distinct trends were defining the field of ecology. The first, what he calls the "shallow ecology" movement, is ominously described as "presently rather powerful" (95). The second is deep ecology.

According to Naess, deep ecology is, at its heart, a fundamental paradigmatic shift in conceptualizing the environment in terms different from the mainstream ecological movement, which was at that time concerned with the advancement of the developed world (95). Shallow ecology is corporate-centered and superficial campaigns for conservation, recycling, research, and technological development that more efficiently and sustainably use natural resources. Luc Ferry, in *The New Ecological Order*, argues that the dichotomy boils down to deciding whether we should be "merely...safeguarding" the spaces that we live in because "their deterioration might affect *us*" or whether we should be protecting nature "because we are discovering that it is not simply a collection of raw materials, endlessly pliable and exploitable, but a harmonious and fragile system" (60). When I say that deep ecology is a dramatic shift, I mean that it relies on

reconceiving the natural world not as a set of resources for the proliferation of Western interests, but as a “total field image” (Naess 97) a direct rejection of the man-in-environment image, a holdover from humanist thought. Deep ecology is based on what William Rueckert, in “Literature and Ecology,” calls the “Commoner’s first Law of Ecology”: “Everything is connected to everything else” (112). While “The Shallow and the Deep” provides the first outlines of Naess’ personal ecology, Alan Drengson, editor of the deep ecology journal, *The Trumpeter*, recognizes that “[i]n 1972, not many people appreciated that Naess was characterizing a grass-roots social movement, not stating his personal ultimate philosophy” (Online).

In “The Shallow and the Deep” Naess describes organisms as “knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations.” What follows is a relational identification system where one part (A) is defined by its relationship to another part (B); A without B is “no longer the same thing.” Moreover, this “total field image” should promote what Naess calls “Biospherical egalitarianism” where the “ecological field-worker acquires a deep-seated respect, or even veneration, for ways and forms of life” (97). This veneration, Naess insists, should be modeled on the type of “understanding that others reserve for fellow men and for a narrow section of ways and forms of life” (98). Dogs, cats, humans, birds, protozoa, snakes, and pine trees, the logic follows, all require the same respect that is granted to fellow humans, and those organisms assimilated into human value systems, like companion species, already receive a version of the fundamental rights granted to citizens in the developed world, human rights. “[T]he equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom,” which will stem from the “deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership with other forms of life” (97). Evolution and survival of the fittest should be “interpreted in the sense of the ability to coexist

and cooperate in complex relationships” rather than to justify exploitation and suppression. It is therefore an “anti-class posture” that includes an “ethics of responsibility” so that, during the “fight against pollution and resource depletion” (96), short-sighted changes and legislative statutes that are costly and increase class differentiation are all but eliminated (98).

Naess’s final two points focus on how people generally perceive the complexity of human society compared to the relatively simplistic biosphere; he rejects this ecological perspective by highlighting how ecosystems function on a scale of “such astoundingly high level” of complexity that cannot be conceived of in any other way than thinking of them in terms of a total system (99). Where human actions often appear complicated – navigating a chaotic city by map, is his example – a “multiplicity of more or less lawful, interacting factors... operate together to form a unity, a system” in the entire ecosystem (99). Humans exhibit a “profound ignorance of biospherical relationships and therefore of the effect of disturbances” (99), since human actions are inaccurately perceived as more complex.

In 1984, fifteen years after “The Shallow and the Deep,” Naess and soon-to-be co-author of *Deep Ecology* (1985), George Sessions, articulated a set of platform principles, a clear indication that deep ecology was more than just one man’s personal ecology; the platform, which was presented while Naess and Sessions were speaking in California, was an effort to bring together members of political movements that shared diverse beliefs and backgrounds. These principles refine Naess’ initial observations, shifting his language, which was directed towards the moral role of the “ecological field worker” (95), to the role that all humans have in a burgeoning eco-responsibility.

- 1) The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth; intrinsic value; inherent value).

These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.

2) Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.

3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.

4) Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

5) The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.

6) Policies must therefore be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7) The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

8) Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

(“Platform”)

In creating a quasi-political platform, Naess and Sessions, create a dichotomy – either you are one of *us*, or you are one of *them* – and a call to arms, an “obligation” to enact change, both

politically, ideologically, and personally. Few questioned, for example, point number five, that startlingly gestured towards vague notions of population control. This platform, Drengson says, “can be endorsed by people from a diversity of religious and philosophical backgrounds as well as differing political affiliations” – they are, according to deep ecology, “supporters of deep ecology” and not “deep ecologists.” One must simply adhere to the distinguishing characteristics, the “recognition of the inherent value of all living beings and the use of this view in shaping environmental policies” (Online).

### **Shallow Ecology**

The deep ecology movement concretized in contradistinction to the other, more prominent mode of ecological conservation; “The Shallow Ecology” movement in “The Shallow and the Deep” is concerned with the “fight against pollution and resource depletion” and has as its central objective “the health and affluence of people in developed countries” (95). Naess’s initial characterization is impressively effective in calling attention to the possibility that a widespread ecology movement can actually be a type of political posturing:

Fight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries. (95)

His textual belittlement is also a direct offensive, a combative turn that puts the majority thinkers against the less influential minority. By using the term “shallow” his nomenclature becomes multiply metaphorical, for it is shallow in the sense of superficiality, or as the *OED* informs, “wanting in depth of mind, feeling or character,” as well as quite literally a smaller amount of textual space used in contrast to that which he has actually dedicated the essay, deep ecology. Even though Naess claims to “make an effort to characterize the two” ecology movements, he

lays out in over 1800 words the “less influential movement” of deep ecology; to shallow ecology he devotes one bullet point, three lines, twenty-three words.

Eventually, I hope to show how conceptualizing ecocritical thought as a binary of deep and shallow limits the involvement that one who employs an ideological perspective rooted in the construction and circulation of culture, for instance social ecology, can have in ecocritical discourse. Shallow ecology, in Naess’ binary, is everything that deep ecology is not – it is corporate or state-centered, shortsighted, and stuck in the confines of the market system. Naess’ implicit warning, that a dearth of character, mind, or feeling indicates that one is only concerned with only the “health and affluence of people in the developed countries,” seems particularly timely, given the setting of his 1972 speech; during that same year, Pinochet would seize power in Chile, while 3000 citizens would disappear; the oil embargo would cripple transportation in the U.S.; and the year prior, Nixon had met with Mao and later ordered the Christmas holidays carpet bombings of North Vietnam. Geopolitical tensions between the developed countries and the so-called “third world” perhaps defined the post-war, Cold War era, and Naess’ implication that deficiencies in intellect, compassion and morality bankroll trends in ecological sciences that favor the developed world is a particularly biting critique of the politics of the developed nations during the 1960s and 1970s.

The specific offenders, the users of “shallow” ecological thought, while not called out by name, are, at least in the U.S., easily aligned with the environmental-political lobby; they are those who follow in the philosophy of Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the United States Forest Service (1905-1910) and the coiner of the phrase “conservation ethic” and the motto “the art of producing from the forest whatever it can yield for the service of man” (13). Since the expansion of the Forest Service under Pinchot’s reigns, legislative thought in the United States followed a

direct line from his brand of wise-use conservation through to the passage of the National Environmental Protection Act, which was signed into law by Richard Nixon in 1970. This perspective on environmental concerns is based on the same values as was the industrial economy; that is, recycling and automotive efficiency, for example, provided technical fixes for consumption-oriented anxieties about diminishing resources. Lynton Caldwell, in *The National Environmental Protection Act* (1999), writes that “[t]o a large number of people, including many congressmen, environment was a surrogate term for antipollution measures” (27), that would protect national *resources* from disappearing due to changes in the technological advancements of American industrial culture. Preservation and conservation for aesthetic or ethical purposes did not exist, as such, in the 1960s, and it was only in the 1960s that ecology as a science became mainstream. Between 1967 and 1968, forty environmental bills crossed the floor of the U.S. Congress (28), and a years-long lag between Congressional wisdom and the scientific community, Caldwell implies, realistically saw the passage of the NEPA with a significant amount of confusion. It was only in 1962 that the first distinction, in politics, between “environment” and “natural resource” was made in a report to Kennedy by the obtusely and confusingly named Committee on Natural Resources of the National Academy of Sciences-Natural Resource Council (28). Caldwell goes as far as to suggest that “many congressional votes” for NEPA were actually votes in support of antipollution measures, a “misconception” shared by the news media. The American media had been quick to adopt this resource-oriented perspective through the earth-as-spaceship model, propagated by the first views of the planet from orbit provided by Apollo VIII (27).

NASA images, however, were not first in that trend. In 1879, Henry George, the American economist and political scientist wrote in *Progress and Poverty* that the earth “is a

well-provisioned ship, this on which we sail through space. If the bread and beef above decks seem to grow scarce, we but open a hatch and there is a new supply, of which before we never dreamed” (243). *Progress and Poverty* is a progressive treatise that examines why industrial civilizations have higher rates of poverty than primitive societies (which actually, he argues, had none), and the idea that the earth is an endless supply of resources for human development was at the centre of George’s work. He lamented in 1871 in *Our Land and Land Policy: National and State* that the American government seems to have the “desire to get rid of our lands as fast as possible,” by transferring ownership (selling) to private organizations and public-private projects, citing the Commissioner of the General Land Office (4). Since private industry increases the value of land – through both its spatial and resource qualities – then the free market sees the monetary value of the right to use that land increase, especially dramatically if land is scarce. This led George to an almost frantic conclusion that the U.S. would run out of usable land.<sup>1</sup> The population pressure, which George attempted to estimate for the coming half-century

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<sup>1</sup> See George, *Our Land and Land Policy: National and State*, specifically the “The Lands of the United States” and “How a Large Quantity of Public Land may be Freed” for specific examples of his concern for rapidly increasing land consumption and commodification in the U.S. He lamented that timber-rich land in California contains *single* trees that yield \$500 worth of timber, land that under a bill in the 1871 legislative session would be salable for \$2.50 per acre, benefitting a “small ring of large capitalists, who would then have put the price of lumber at what figure they pleased” (24). That is, the land is actually valued by examining market trends in terms of its usefulness to the industrial needs of the community: ecologically, in terms of trees, streams, minerals, and so on; and socially, for example in terms of proximity to other valued industrial parts of the community, the railroad and the farm.

in *Our Land and Land Policy* (overestimating, but not dramatically), would be apparent by 1965, when nearly 200 million residents lived on the 1.8 billion acres of the continental U.S, or 9 acres per resident, an exponential change from the 46 acres per resident in 1870.

And in 1965, speaking to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in Geneva, Ambassador Adelai Stevenson, serial loser of the Democratic presidential nomination, would invoke Henry George, if implicitly, in the last speech of his political career. “We travel together, passengers on a little space ship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil,” he said, “all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and, I will say, the love we give our fragile craft.” He is not speaking, literally, about environmental politics.

We cannot maintain it half fortunate, half miserable, half confident, half despairing, half slave – to the ancient enemies of man – half free in a liberation of resources undreamed of until this day. No craft, no crew can travel safely with such vast contradictions. On their resolution depends the survival of all.

(Stevenson)

Stevenson’s call for international unity in fighting global poverty through an economic plan that transcends the borders of the developed nations invokes the image of spaceship earth, a resource rich and populous planet. It also moves Glotfelty’s claim about the cartographical metaphors in academics, to the political arena. That craft, Stevenson suggests, is vulnerable to economic and political policies, like the war in Vietnam, that threaten the health of those inside it. His conflation of economic, political, and environmental language is indicative, from the perspective

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of deep ecology, of the shallow ecology movement's frantic anxiety about the health of the industrial world and the dominance of the developed nations.

*Spaceship Earth* is, in a not-so-ironic turn, the iconic and symbolic structure of Epcot Center, part of the Walt Disney World resort in Orlando, Florida. Built in 1982, the ride transports its customers through the history of the world, first from a starfield, into scenes of prehistoric humans, who are using rudimentary tools and developing language. It then moves through to the inventions of the twentieth century. The focus, of course, is on human technological invention, disproportionately under-representing millions of years of natural history and biological evolution. As David S. Whitley argues in *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* (2008), it was Arne Naess who "reminded us how fundamental the capacity for empathy with other life forms is in structuring our relationships with the natural world," and Disney methodically misses its chance to connect young people with the "potentially profound, emblematic connection" with nature, opting for "mass marketing" of entertainment for children (87). In Walt Disney World, Baudrillard's simulacrum of American capitalist culture to the second power, *Spaceship Earth* replicates in miniature the ideological underpinnings of this shallow ecological movement where the primary concern is man and man's techno-industrial progress.

### ***The Ecocriticism Reader and Ecological Ideology***

This understanding that technology can, according to deep ecology, signify the use of shallow ecology and anthropocentric narratives of progress is at the heart of how the editors of *The Ecocriticism Reader* relate ecocriticism's genesis. Since it has an almost iconic status as *the* ecocriticism primer, I will approach Glotfelty's collaborative text looking for how and under what conditions it presents ecocriticism; that is, since ecocriticism is a metadiscipline whose

practitioners share a common subject, nature, I want to explore the explicit and implicit ways that *The Ecocriticism Reader* constructs a shared ideological groundwork in the ecoliterary community, specifically with its relationship to deep ecology. *The Ecocriticism Reader* is divided into three sections: “Ecotheory: Reflections on Nature and Culture”; “Ecocritical Considerations of Fiction and Drama”; and “Critical Studies of Environmental Literature,” and my focus will be on so-called ecotheory, since my project here is not to overview *how* one utilizes ecocriticism, but rather under what terms and with what field of ideology ecocriticism gets deployed.

Lynn White Jr., who Glotfelty calls one “of the most widely read and influential medievalists of his generation” (“Contributors” 408), upheld the dichotomy I have been tracing here between deep ecology and shallow ecology in his widely cast origin story of the ecological movement. The first essay in *The Ecocriticism Reader* is his; “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” by its placement at the front of the anthology and by its explicit designation as an origin story, in effect sets the tone of the world of ecocriticism espoused in Glotfelty’s collection. It was first published in the journal *Science* in 1967, and it is firmly situated in the deep ecological milieu, focusing on the ecological “crisis” as a matrix of effects that humans have had on their environment. He writes, almost immediately (in the first sentence of his second paragraph): “All forms of life modify their contexts” (3), a rearticulation of Naess’ conceptualization of “knots” in a biospherical net, and Reuckert’s Commoner’s Law. White argues that St Francis of Assisi is a “patron saint for ecologists” (14), because his theological position exemplified how man and his natural contexts are inseparable. He uses the divide of science and technology to argue that man has “fouled its nest” (5) to an extent never before seen in the Animal Kingdom, a statement that in essence, if not tone, is articulated by Sessions and

Naess in the platform of deep ecology: “Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.”

Science, for White, historically, has been an aristocratic, intellectual endeavor, while technology has been empirical, lower-class and action-oriented; science is noble, while technology is not; science transcends social class, while technology is often directly related to class and economic positions. This divide vilifies technology as the despoiler, while exalting science as the theorizer. This same dichotomy, used by White in 1967, seems particularly familiar in terms of deep ecology’s paradigmatic world-view. White, for instance, looks at the implementation of new plow-technologies in around A.D. 830 as the moment when man was suddenly no longer at the mercy of nature, but the exploiter of nature (8). That is, “early plows, drawn by two oxen, did not normally turn the sod but merely scratched it,” thereby facilitating a land-distribution system that was sustainable by those proportionate to the owning of two oxen, capable of cross-plowing fields – one family (8). When the new plow was introduced in wetter climates, it required eight oxen to pull it in order to “slice under the sod, and...turn it over” (8). Subsistence farming required plow teams, and land distribution became based on the “capacity of a power machine to till the earth” and specifically that family’s technological contribution towards the goals of the team: “Man’s relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature” (8). The use of new technologies, it follows, represents for White a starting point, an originary moment, when human-in-nature became human-mastering-nature; that is, technology itself does not separate humanity from the animal world, but rather a particular mindset towards that use of technology as capable of simultaneously altering the natural world *and* contributing to the proliferation of civilization at its expense makes the rise of the West particularly anti-ecological. Moreover,

while the family, White implies, is the most natural agricultural unit, technologically-based formulated *societies* are unnatural. It was not the family-unit of sod-scratchers that White saw as dangerous to the ecological world; the sanctioning of sod-management and the differentiation of land value and economic commodity was the culprit.

At the same time, White argues, larger intellectual patterns in Judeo-Christian theology fundamentally changed how humans viewed their surroundings. The nature of Christian dogma, that the Book is the revelation of God's Word, was transposed onto nature in a parallel process, where nature, created like God's Book, must then reveal the "divine mentality" (11). Pagan rituals were based on an identification of man as part of the processes of the natural world; Christian ones re-drafted the human self-image as modeled after Christ – the new Adam, man-as-divine. In Latin Christendom (for the Eastern church is always more "artistic," less "logical"), scientists were "natural theologians" intent on understanding God's creation:

Since both *science* and *technology* are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature... If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt (12)

To solve the ecological crisis that is rooted to the bases of the Christian West, White offers Saint Francis as a model. Franciscan theology axiomatically invokes the friar preaching to the birds, and White sees Francis not as showing "human dominance over creatures" (13), but instead representing a "view of nature and of man rested on a unique sort of pan-psychism of all things animate and inanimate, designed for the glorification of their transcendent Creator" whose

ultimate humility resulted in the crucifixion (13). Without actually using the phrase, “deep ecology,” (because, as such, it had not been coined), White represents the grass-roots ecological movement that Drengson mentions and for which Naess eventually platforms. Francis, to White, is the “greatest spiritual revolutionary” in history, who represented an “alternative” view of “nature and man’s relation to it.” He promoted “equality of all creatures, including man” to “man’s limitless rule of creation” (14).

Francis’ view, though, does not reflect that of majority-thinkers within the post-Christian West. By removing the phrases “deep” and “shallow” from Naess’ 1972 presentation, his words reflect, nearly identically, the argument that White is making: “a presently rather powerful movement, and a less influential movement, compete for our attention” (95). White’s plan requires that humility towards all things animate and inanimate are the solutions to the ecological crisis. In his view, we must reject the *dominant* Christian axiom that nature has no purpose other than to serve man. White not only recognizes that dramatic changes in religious belief must take place to change which side of the binary is favored in today’s culture, his historicization projects Naess’ dichotomy to the foundations of Western civilization.

The article that follows “Historical Roots” complements White’s arguments in terms of its binary-thinking. “Nature and Silence,” written in 1996, by Christopher Manes first appeared in Glotfelty’s anthology, and he argues that “[n]ature is silent in our culture... in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative” (15). Even though he takes advantage of the previous three decades of progress in postmodern linguistics, Manes’ article, at its core, restates White’s thesis from 1967, that humans exploit nature, rather than co-exist with it. Using the philosophical capital of Foucault and Lukacs, Manes demonstrates the power held by the subjective “speaker” to the extent that silencing the

real voice of nature is part of the power paradigm that humans exploit in order to hold dominion. Like White, Manes' entire project critiques the (post) Christian worldview, since pre-Christian and non-Christian beliefs allow an "'animistic subject' a shifting, autonomous, articulate identity that [cuts] across the human/nonhuman distinction" (18). In historicizing his argument, Manes begins with the transition to alphabetic writing, suggesting that a limiting of natural voice takes place when "voice" must be placed in the context of abstract lettering; furthermore, medieval exegesis articulated the divine voice found in nature (a spilling over of the *littera* from the Book to the Book of Nature), only to the extent that, for example, eagles speak to "man's redemption" – a version of God's voice that is not autonomous for the eagle.

Where White elevated Saint Francis as the patron saint of ecologists, Manes looks to Thomas Aquinas as an early Christian ecophilosopher. Thomas Aquinas used the concept of the Great Chain of Being to argue for a proto-biodiversification:

The goodness of the species transcends the goodness of the individual, as form transcends matter; therefore the multiplication of species is a greater addition to the good of the universe than the multiplication of individuals of a single species. The perfection of the universe therefore requires not only a multitude of individuals, but also diverse kinds, and therefore diverse grades of things. (in Manes 20)

In his footnote, Manes admits that Aquinas was not actually arguing against monoculture, but rather he was speaking of "philosophical species," what I take to mean different men of different ideological and philosophical mettle. But, he continues, "the principle is strikingly similar" to biodiversification (28). Just as White posits that Francis is misinterpreted by the centuries of church teachings, Manes concludes that the rise of humanism has displaced this vein of Aquinas'

theology. Insisting on an “ontological difference between *Homo sapiens* and the rest of the biosphere... 'Man' has become the sole subject, speaker and rational sovereign of the natural order” (21).

Manes’ language is deeply deep ecological, utilizing notions that the biosphere should be re-centered from the man-on-top order, to one that grants subjectivity to a hitherto objectified nature that has been silent since the Renaissance. He invokes many of the standard-bearers of deep ecology, for instance, Bill Devall, co-author (with George Sessions) of *Deep Ecology*, who declared that deep ecology involved “learning a new language” (24). Manes’ proposed response to the ecological silence, like White’s, is religious; he suspects that “the medieval contemplative tradition with its sparseness, sobriety, and modesty of speech” can offer a “new language.” He backs up his proposition by citing Alan Drengson, who also established the Ecostery Project, “which hopes to revive a medieval social form: monasteries whose purpose is to promote an understanding of, reverence for, and dialogue with nature” (25). Retrofitting new linguistic modes with pre-Enlightenment practices, Manes thinks that “communicating without the agenda of reason” is possible (26). He ends with such a provocative notion, but no practical method of meshing humility with communication, beyond avoiding ecology “infused with the language of humanism” (24).

These first two items in *The Ecocriticism Reader* not only firmly establish the ideological grounding of the movement, but they also present deep ecology as the answer to the exploitative relationship humans have with nature that has, according to these critics, been part of our cultural mythos since the rise of western civilization. Both articles suggest a (forward) movement to a former ideological stance, a revival that is radically counter to traditional humanism. This similarity extends beyond the realm of coincidence, and represents what I observe as the deep

ecology basis of *The Ecocriticism Reader*; the third article, editor Harold Fromm's "From Transcendence to Obsolescence: a Route Map" is described by Glotfelty as speculating "on how the Industrial Revolution affected humanity's conception of its relationship to nature, warning that technology has created the false illusion that we control nature, allowing us to forget that our 'unconquerable minds' are vitally dependent on natural support systems" (xxvii). The opening triad, taken together, discusses various versions of alienation from some original relation with nature that humans have inherited from our shared ideological backgrounds.

### **Beyond Origins**

I would be remiss to employ reductionist generalizations to a book that carries with it significant cultural weight in terms of influence, widespread appeal, and cross referentiality. When taken in its entirety, *The Ecocriticism Reader* does not so much directly promote a deep ecology agenda as it un-selfconsciously deploys deep ecology in Glotfelty's aim for the book to be a "general introductory text," a "sourcebook" that "will help people new to this field [of ecocriticism] to gain a sense of its history and scope" (xxviii). This engagement based on deep ecology *as* ecocriticism plays out in both the introduction and the general structure of the first section of the collection. Glotfelty, it seems, differentiates between the overt use of deep ecology as a philosophical framework that is used to explicitly engage with text using ecocritical techniques, and the unspoken (by her, even) values of deep ecology that underscore many of the articles and assumptions that the book promotes. By name, she mentions "deep ecology" only as one of several philosophical trends, along with environmental ethics, ecofeminism, and social ecology, that are useful for ecocritics working from disparate backgrounds and in different geological locations (xxi). Moreover, Glotfelty is quick to draw our attention to her desire to not

codify or systematize ecocriticism as unilateral or homogeneous, insisting on its status as an open network of differing perspectives.

And yet her characterization of the theoretical modes of ecocriticism (the third in a three-stage model of discursive practices borrowed from Elaine Showalter's stages of feminist discourse) seems to inevitably converge on deep ecology. She begins by describing what sounds like a postmodern cultural studies approach based on poststructuralist linguistics – “examining the symbolic construction of species” (xxiv) – yet she quickly progresses into what, on the surface, appears to be distinctly different theoretical questions that would, she hopes, represent the “brilliance” of contemporary ecocritics, and allow new-comers to the metadiscipline to “see the world in a new way,” by turning on the metaphorical “lightbulb” (xxvi). However, the three theoretical modes that she describes are all based on the assumptions of deep ecology: the “critiques [that] question the dualism prevalent in Western thought, dualisms that [...] wrench humanity from nature,” specifically repositions humanity as part of the biosphere, a vicious re-articulation of deep ecology's anti-anthropocentrism; ecofeminism, the “theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature” re-states in feminist terms the Foucauldian domination paradigm that Manes described; and, the “ecological poetics” of scholars like William Reuckert, which, as I show in the final chapter, is based on systemic and not relational ecology that, other than stating that the sun is the life-force-giver of the entire biosphere, offers little more by way of new cultural or scientific analyses. Finally, Glotfelty, for the second time in the introduction, mentions deep ecology by name, as a theoretical position that utilizes a “radical critique of anthropocentrism [and the implications it] might have for literary study” (xxiv). By insisting on deep ecology's radicalism, Glotfelty masks

the fact that deep ecology ideologically functions as the foundation of ecocriticism itself, at least as she imagines it in *The Ecocriticism Reader*.

This impulse, the naturalization of deep ecology, as *the* ecology is the impetus that drives two articles that, I believe, on a fundamental level attempt to reformulate deep ecology in an academy that has now grown comfortable with the gains of theory in the past few decades. SueEllen Campbell's "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Poststructuralism Meet" (originally 1989, but included in *The Ecocriticism Reader*) and Michael Branch's "The Nature of Nature in Literary Theory and Practice" (1994) both attempt to reconcile critical theory and deep ecology, by suggesting that their basic structures of radically reformulating deeply held assumptions about power and hierarchies are more similar than different. While Branch's article does not appear in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, I, perhaps unfoundedly, suggest that Branch's thesis is so similar to Campbell's that inclusion would be redundant; regardless, another essay by Branch is included in Glotfelty's primer. What results are admittedly what Campbell calls "idiosyncratic" unions of nearly diametrically opposed discourses (126), attempts to reduce the anxiety that deeply held ideologies based on deeply held notions of realism do not offer answers in discursively postmodern disciplines. In the following chapters, I hope to map out some of the ways that this paradoxically revolutionary revivalism, which is found in more than just the first few articles in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, is particularly problematic when approaching literary media in an academy that is, almost by reflex, suspicious of totalizing systems of unity.

## Chapter 2

### A “New” Criticism of Deep Ecology: Ecological Formalism

I want to return, for a moment, to *The Ecocriticism Reader*’s origin story, and the conclusion that Manes draws, as a way to bring contemporary western culture into the fold of deep ecology through Drengson’s “humility of speech” approach. In looking backward (in time, and in philosophy), Manes undermines one of his strongest admissions, one that White never could have made, that “[p]ostmodern philosophy has [...] challenged this transcendental narcissism, viewing the subject as fragmented and decentred in the social realm, a product of institutional technologies of control rather than the unmoved mover of all possible knowledge” (22). It is from this point that Manes sees impetus for “the reevaluation of the silence of nature imposed by the human subject” (22). Yet he and White come to similar conclusions, ones that are not only based on anti-humanism, but also see a usefulness in a paradoxically simultaneously hindsight-foresight. This conservative-revolution is at the heart the opening triad of essays; they suggest a simultaneous forward and backward gaze, a revival of old forms in order to sustain long-term environmental change. For Manes, postmodernism has shown us that the subjectivity of *humans* conceals a fractured, imperfect identity, articulated as a powerful hegemony capable of silencing nature through the ultimate Foucauldian power-play. If the way to repair the damage done to nature is to become a follower of deep ecology, then what results is the clearest example of the incongruity in the worldview of one who invokes postmodernism and deep ecology in the same breath. This is the reason that Campbell’s and Branch’s articles are based on flawed principles: the biosphere, to which *Homo sapiens* belongs, is a system that has an overall organic unity, because deep ecology insists that primordial unity can re-emerge, yet human culture, *congregatio humanus*, is characterized by disunity and disharmony – the plight of the fractured subject.

Within deep ecology, the biosphere itself is the primary, ultimate object of attention, while humanity, itself, is only one of many organisms that make up the knots on the net. It is the savvy ability of western humanism to silence (for Manes) or subvert (for White) or control (for Fromm) nature that brought about the current “crisis” of environmental degradation.

This humanism/anti-humanism schism that separates the disciples of deep ecology from those who are not began almost as soon as the movement itself. Luc Ferry, a Sorbonne professor of Philosophy and one of the biggest opponents to deep ecology, claims that while humanist-centered ecological efforts and anti-humanist-centered deep ecology may “sometimes meet in practice” they are in fact “diametrically opposed” (60). Ferry asserts in *The New Ecological Order* (1995) that deep ecology is in significant opposition to three hundred years of philosophical tradition that began with Descartes, an initial presupposition that has darker implications. Daniel Botkin, in *No Man’s Garden* (2000), tracks in broad strokes Ferry’s criticism of deep ecology as he writes about another man who is often held up as a sanctified figure in deep ecology circles, paradoxically, an avid humanist, Henry David Thoreau: “on the surface, deep ecology appears to be a well-intentioned and well-articulated, if anti-human and anti-humanity, extension of prior rationales for protection of the environment” (38). As if plunging into a pool that on the surface offers answers to the debate about “biological diversity, sustainable forests, or other specific topics related to biological nature,” Botkin’s invocation of Ferry suggests a deeper, murkier agenda for deep ecology. Where the post-Enlightenment tradition is characterized as “emphasizing individuality, humanism, reason, rationality, and democracy -- the very characteristics that Thoreau appreciated” (38), deep ecology “begins with the premise that the persistence of life is a property of ecosystems and of the biosphere, the Earth’s global life-supporting and life-containing system” (39). Environmental science since

mid-century has offered information that, Ferry ominously determines, led those who support deep ecology to deduce a “strange hierarchy” that the biosphere is more important than its parts (ecosystems, species, populations, individuals), which leads to the deduction that “the totality is morally superior to individuals” (39):

The result of this apparently simple and innocent premise is a complete inversion of our moral order. The biosphere – an abstracted global system – is at the top, perceived as a “quasi-divine entity” [... N]ext are the nonsentient, nonrational forms of life that are innocent of intentional evil and are simply trying to survive and at the bottom is *Homo sapiens*, doomed by its very rationality, which is seen as an original sin because it makes human being uniquely capable of messing up the biosphere and therefore morally inferior to the likes of cockroaches, parasitic worms, and bacteria. (39)

Ferry is right to point out that deep ecology is paradoxically a “new fundamentalism” and a revolutionary movement, picking up on the language of Bill Devall, who says that deep ecology “is revolutionary, seeking a new metaphysics, epistemology, cosmology, and environmental ethics of the person/planet” (299). In practice, though, as we have seen, deep ecology insists on older models of thought.

Ferry’s critique of deep ecology is both extensive and biting, showing how deep ecology results in a denunciation of both platonic dualism and the Judeo-Christian tradition because each regarded the human spirit and rationality as above nature. Naess, for instance, argued that the “arrogance” of stewardship in the Bible represents a “superiority which underlies the thought that we exist to watch over nature like a highly respected middleman between the Creator and the Creation” (187). Science and the entire industrial-technological society are likewise rejected, and

Ferry fears that supporters of deep ecology dream of a “global government that can subjugate populations in order to reduce pollution and alter desires and behaviors through psychological manipulation” (62). People will be, if the logic is taken to the extreme, be tried for crimes against nature. Botkin’s interpolation of Ferry in *No Man’s Garden* predicts an “anti-individualistic, anti-democratic political ideology” where, in this inverted hierarchy, the individual “must be sacrificed for the good of the whole and our species must be sacrificed for the persistence of all other life on Earth and the Earth system that makes life possible” (40). Mass die-offs are, beyond just allowed, actively encouraged! It is notable that Ferry’s book chapter, “‘Think Like a Mountain’: The Master Plan of ‘Deep Ecology’,” is followed by “Nazi Ecology: The November 1933, July 1934, and June 1935 Legislations,” a loaded, if not directly aggressive, articulation that stretches his view of the ideological positions of deep ecology to the limits of the political spectrum, fascism.

### **Mapping Deep Ecology onto the History of Literary Criticism**

Ferry’s critique is both enlightening and fantastically illogical, more useful as an exercise in looking at the structures of the ideology, not necessarily its projected path in the political arena; the purpose of this chapter is to look at what it is, in our literary academy, that offers the most useful mode of understanding this global activist network and how its ideologies might or might not work in terms of literary studies. That is, Ferry is right to push deep ecology to the extreme of its political implications in order to begin to critique the ideologies upon which it forms its basis; but since deep ecology permeates ecoliterary discourse as a “given,” then framing it in terms of literary theory might also offer interesting ways to reach conclusions about how its ideologies construct our notions of nature. I suggest, as Michael Bennett does, that the majority of practitioners of ecocriticism use deep ecology; he calls them “deep ecocritics” (297).

Since deep ecology seems to offer a radical platform for change, these deep ecocritics consider it to be the revolutionary enterprise that Glotfelty characterizes in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, not the fascist anti-humanism that Ferry suggests. I respectfully dissent from the views of SueEllen Campbell and Michael Branch that highlight affinities between deep ecology and poststructuralism based on upending hierarchies because I think that a more appropriate model of literary criticism on to which we can map deep ecology is far more conservative, indeed as much more structured and formalist than the free-play, fractured relativism through which poststructuralism is characterized, and yet much less extreme and totalitarian than Ferry deduces.

In fact, I contend that a nearly opposite analogy is more accurate, specifically that deep ecology is analogous to formalist trends in literary criticism from the early to mid-twentieth century. In the spirit of the deep ecology theorists themselves, I look backwards, not forwards, to a field where its scholars understood themselves as revolutionary, but revolutionary based on conservative principles. Analogies, of course, are approximations of shared affinities, subject to generalizations and the subjective selection of evidence, but by thinking of deep ecology as “ecological formalism,” more or less uncritical assumptions of the roots of ecocriticism become open for discussion by virtue of the same critiques that have undermined the effectiveness of formalism in literary studies in recent years. I intend to show that attempts to reconcile deep ecology with the discourse of a post-theory academy are not only inadequate but actually wrong. From this angle, I can focus on critiques deployed against literary formalism as a pattern for questioning the total-field mentality of deep ecology that conceptualizes nature as a unified object based on the objectivity ascribed to it through its interdisciplinary assumptions about positivist science.

In making this leap, I take for granted that nature is a “text.” This is a problematic that has been the subject of countless books, dissertations, discussions, arguments, and fistfights. *At this point*, I am only suggesting that “nature” is a text insofar as deep ecologists consider it a unified whole, objectively describable in the same way that literary formalists, in general, consider a text in terms of its hermetically sealed form. My prejudices about that larger ideological schism, whether nature is real or not, should already be clear but take my argument as it unfolds, as clumsily as it may. My analogy is based on the supposition that the attitude taken towards literary texts (mostly poetry) by the early twentieth-century critics, though separated by thousands of miles and several decades, is one of unity, where the text in its entirety exists superior to those individual parts that can be extrapolated from it. That is, to lay bare the terms of my logic, literary formalists conceptualize the text in similar ways that ecological formalists conceptualize the entire natural world.

The first point of contact between ecological formalism and literary formalism is the insistence that a text, for the literary formalists, is ideally situated outside of immaterial and social contexts, a shared assumption that the New Critics held; the text is, as if in a vacuum, a self-referential system that functions based on its own unity, as Cleanth Brooks describes in the eponymous 1947 book, the now famous image of the “well wrought urn.” Mid-century American and British critics were explicitly interested in isolating the text outside of its contexts, and they warned against reading any text with the “intentional fallacy” – a phrase coined by Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946 to describe how “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (468). In that isolation, the text’s immutability allows for the critic, like Brooks, to retain his “criteria of good or bad” and to be able to make “universalizing judgments” (*Well Wrought Urn* 198). In his 1934

introduction to *Determinations: Critical Essays*, F.R. Leavis, in discussing the role of criticism, takes a moment to mention those who theorize “about the relation of literature to the Class War” (6). That is, those scholars who fall for the intentional fallacy (though it had not been invented yet) would “do well to realize that the only ‘content’ or ‘significance’ worth extracting from works of art cannot be extracted without a delicate and appropriate response to sensibility, and that an argument betraying Book Society taste discredits itself” (6-7). Though not actually a New Critic himself, Leavis’ brief caveat encapsulates the spirit of the formalist unity that would define the following years of criticism. Wary of critics whose views of literature “extract” socio-political information from the text, Leavis insists, at least at this point in his career, that to discuss a text in terms of its extra-textual contexts can move the author precariously close to formulating a reading that is no longer “true” to the text as a whole, upon which the collective consciousness of more-or-less similarly thinking scholars, the Book Society, would agree. This is the text self-referential; its themes, its pieces, its constituent parts are always considered part of the building up of the whole text.

Brooks writes in “The Formalist Critic” (1951), the “articles of faith” that he subscribes to when he approaches literature, a set of platform points not so dissimilar from Naess and Sessions’ platform for deep ecology. First, he writes, “literary criticism is a description and evaluation of its object.” The New Critic’s primary object of analysis is the whole text itself, therefore “the primary concern of criticism is with the problem of unity – the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of the various parts to each other in building up this whole” (72). What follows is the New Critic’s understanding of those various parts, the forms that come together to make the text: “form is meaning” and “in a successful work, form and content cannot be separated” (72). Despite Aristotelian rhetoric that divides

*logos* (the content of a speech) and *lexis* (the style and delivery of the speech, the form), the New Critics insist that good literature condenses content and form; in a collapsing of bi-directional causality, T.S. Eliot's fractured style emerges from and helps to create the fractured narrative of, say, *The Waste Land* (1922). As formalist critics, the New Critics focus on the features of a text that make up its overall form – grammar, syntax, meter, tropes, metaphor; their primary concern is with how a poetic system works, and by what means that system (the text) arrives at its articulated meaning.

Deep ecology is likewise insistent on taking its object of study as a whole system. Perhaps most essential in my analysis is the New Critic notion that texts, or rather, good texts, are unified; this “unity” is the standard by which the text is analyzed. Note that Brooks is concerned with the relationship between the various parts *in building up this whole*, always focusing on the entirety over its parts, in a more-or-less stable system. The notion that deep ecology sacrifices the individual to the greater good of the biosphere has a clear basis in the ideological stances of Naess and Sessions – as Ferry demonstrated. If the well-being of human and nonhuman life has value in and of itself, the plurality and, from the deep ecology platform, “diversity of life forms [,] contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.” Value that is outside the realm of human culture, “values in themselves,” logically require a set of criteria that is separate from the value attributed to human lives, the promoting of a type of “understanding that others reserve for fellow men and for a narrow section of ways and forms of life.” Thus, it should come as no surprise that the “flourishing of human life” is taken as only one part of the flourishing of the biosphere, since “everything is connected to everything else.” As humans are unseated from the top of the hierarchies that organize the biosphere, non-human forms that receive the humanist-guarded “values of life” replace them.

The tenets of deep ecology, moreover, are significantly structured by a relationship between content and form, where the healthy biosphere is the form, and the actions of the individual species that make up the biosphere are the content. With Aquinas as his touchstone, Manes recognized the importance of this relationship, since “form transcends matter,” and species multiplicity superseded individuality. Terence Hawkes, in reflecting on formalism, sees New Criticism in a way that can clarify this connection to deep ecology. New Criticism insists that “the subject and object of study – the reader and the text – are stable and independent forms” (Jancovich 8). Close reading, the method of reading a text, usually a poem, paying attention to its internal logic, metaphor, symbol and paradox, works because the art under analysis is inherently balanced; as Hawkes writes in *Structuralism and Semiotics*, this is true because a “fruitful tension between opposing impulses organizes and refines” it and that a “multiplicity of meaning available in words and their poetic usage [...] maintains a balance, enabling the reader to avoid a reductive opting for single meaning” (126-127). In other words, New Criticism looks at how the intrinsic structures of the work not only form the favored whole, but also how these structures form an emergent text of balance, no doubt an equipoise resting in part on the convergence of content and form. For deep ecology, the analogous process is simpler; the entirety of the biosphere, according to Naess, is the object of investigation in deep ecology. That biospherical form, by its very nature, represents an equilibrium that has been thrown out of balance by “excessive” human intervention; this is to say that the biosphere has historically mediated itself, giving itself a natural form – the originary nature that deep ecology claims has been lost, the nest that White claims we have fouled. Thus the ideal biosphere is one where the healthy functioning of its component parts reflects the overall health and shape of that system. Like the platform of New Criticism, deep ecological ideology seeks a more formally perfect biosphere, one that

articulates nature's true *logos*, not the logos of human action and technology that has caused the ecological crisis. For the New Critics, the object is a well-wrought urn; for Naess and the followers of deep ecology, every species in the ecosystem is a knot in a web of interrelation. That web is the form, and deep ecology offers a way back towards equilibrium.

Brooks' articles of faith represent a distancing between the critic's subjectivity and the text, a sort of desensitization to Victorian criticism's overt politicism, a desensitization that would emerge as a form of scientific realism. According to Yiannis Stamiris, New Criticism arose in opposition to an "increasing dissatisfaction with the Victorian insistence on the moral, social, political and religious significance of literary works, as well as to the insufficient linguistic education that the educational institutions offered to American youth" (152).

Therefore, Brooks' final points deal with the relationship between criticism and morality, as he insists that "literature is not a surrogate for religion" and that "specific moral problems are the subject matter of literature, but that the purpose of literature is not to point towards a moral."

Brooks is adamantly trying to justify the scientific rationale that is behind the formalist literary imagination; by looking at how the whole is constituted by the perfect working of its constituent parts, like the physics that allows a clock's gears to keep time, the New Critics required that the reader and critic regard the mechanisms of literature with a near-perfect objective eye. The critic does not moralize; he simply reports on the object of description, and how well it, perhaps, moralizes. The New Critical perspective that the good literary object is amoral is not so far removed from the mixture of science and morality that comprises deep ecology. That is, objective scientific observation is the basis of an ecological standpoint that, at its heart, speaks from a moral position. In the two texts that begin *The Ecocriticism Reader*, White and Manes, insistent on both historical and scientific bases to the current ecological situation, which with

scientifically quantifiable data can be presented objectively, both converge on a form of religious morality as environmental guidance. Moreover, the opposition to the value-systems of late-Victorian society that New Criticism promoted can be seen as similar to the opposition of deep ecology to the value systems that promote the developed world; for those who subscribe to deep ecology, science proves that shallow ecology is more interested in pushing ideology, not ecology.

### **The Russian Formalists and Scientific Objectivity**

The formalist belief that approaching a text objectively can be done scientifically was not new when the New Critics refined their approach. In this section, I still maintain the analogy that links ecological formalism to literary formalism, and I intend to advance its validity beyond the aestheticism of the New Critics and backward toward the scientific claims that the Russian Formalists insisted founded their endeavor. In turn-of-the-century France, Ferdinand de Saussure contended that linguistics at the end of the nineteenth century had failed to establish the study of language on a scientific footing chiefly because it had “never attempted to determine the nature of its object.” For, he argued, “without this elementary operation a science cannot develop an appropriate method” (qtd in Bennett 38). Anticipating the work of formalists in the coming decades, Saussure admitted that a linguistic-literary science (compared to, say, physics) required a firm establishment of the object in question, which is to say, the text: “far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object” (38).

The objectification of the text, then, presupposes a scientific approach to it. The Russian Formalists rose to prominence in the years immediately preceding the October Revolution, and central to their platform was the approach of a text scientifically – for science, and the objectivity

of the scientific method, were perceived as incapable of politicizing the critical endeavor. The Moscow Linguistic Circle (1915) and the Society for the Study of Poetic Language, or *Opojaz* (1916), both developed, similarly to New Criticism, in opposition to the dominant literary approaches in Europe, “the positivist sociological, biographical and psychological determinism” (Stamris 133). They held contempt for literary study that focused solely on the historical, the sociological, or the philological, and they were especially critical, indeed positioned themselves as antithetical to, the Symbolists in Russia, who contested that poetic linguistic forms always pointed to extraliterary, quasi-mystical forms; to the symbolists, the language of poetry is a “mystical Logos, reverberating with occult meanings” (134). The Formalists thus developed a nearly scientific way to approach a text. In 1927, Boris Eichenbaum explained that their approach was infused with scientific positivism:

We engaged in battle with the symbolists in order to wrest poetics from their hands and, once having divested poetics of any ties with subjective, aesthetic, or philosophical theories, to redirect it to the route of a scientific investigation of facts. [...] The basic motto uniting the original group of formalists was the emancipation of the poetic word from philosophical and religious biases to which the Symbolists had increasingly fallen prey. That is the source of the new spirit of scientific positivism that characterizes the Formalists: the rejection of philosophical premises, psychological or aesthetic interpretations, and so forth.

Art had to be approached at close range, and science had to be made concrete. (6)

For both the New Critics and the Russian Formalists, though developing thousands of miles apart, the perception that science offered neutral objectivity offered a reprieve from overtly political, which is to say, ideological, approaches to literature. Science, for early-twentieth

century theorists offered an alternative from the ideologues and politicians of late-Victorian and turn-of-the-century political unrest.

The history of objectivity in the philosophy of science is a crucial part of this story, but a history that is well beyond the scope of this project; I will attempt to outline the highlights here, and how they relate to both literary formalism and ecological formalism. In short, both types of formalism insist on a positivist view of science, which means that science works because science explains the world as it really is, progressing towards an ever-more-perfect totalizing view. Central to the formalist's reliance on the objectively observed text, is that science offers a method that is not ideologically laden; if the text can be observed objectively, then its meaning cannot be skewed for political purposes. Given the contexts from which New Criticism, Russian Formalism and deep ecology all rose, overt politicism needed to be, in an ironically political move, countered by objective realism.

Organizing before the October Revolution, the Russian Formalists would just miss the catastrophic worldview shift that took place as Eastern and Western Europe began to crumble. By the 1950s, the morbid cynicism of early-twentieth-century modernism had given way to a slightly less cynical, and slightly less morbid scientific worldview that Ian Hacking would characterize in *Scientific Revolutions* as a re-emergent scientific positivism, and it is from *this* milieu that both New Criticism and deep ecology sprang. Understanding that science itself is discursive, that is a "linguistic or numerical set of statements," scientific positivism's impulse was still to "demonstrate the logical structure and coherence" of such statements. As a transcultural, cumulative endeavor, scientific positivism still insisted that a "unity of the sciences" underlay "once science about one real world" (12). Bullock and Trombley, nuancing

this definition, focus on its axiomatic systemic structure, specifically that “biological organisms are reducible to physical systems” (737).

Taken together, this systemization of the natural world is thoroughly and profoundly universalizing, and a core tenet of deep ecology. At this point, my analogy is collapsing in on itself; literary formalists rely on the possibility that humans can objectively observe without changing the system that they are observing – thus close reading (even still today) offers a seemingly neutral way to approach a text. Now, however, the tools used to describe literary formalism’s praxis become the tools to describe deep ecology itself; scientific positivism is not just salient to literary formalism. It helps us to understand deep ecology. Positivist science offers systematic, objectifiable observation of natural processes, transposed onto, interestingly, “*linguistic* or numerical” data (Hacking 12), a holdover from linguistics of Saussure’s turn-of-the-century structuralism. With Hacking’s outline of the ways that positivism maintained a mainstream position in mid-century scientific culture, it is not surprising that Naess, and proponents of deep ecology in the following decades, raise their platform on the legs of scientific positivism, even if postmodernity would later, if only philosophically, threaten to undermine that base from the bastion of the Frankfurt School and Marxist cultural criticism. While making an argument by analogy is potentially misleading, I maintain that this analogy is valid because the rise of deep ecology happened in parallel with the rise of literary formalism, both as indicative of the shifting cultural modes that characterize the twentieth-century.

### **Practical Problems: Critiquing Formalism from the Inside and the Outside**

Brooks continues “The Formalist Critic” with a few caveats that, I think, are important in understanding the immediate responses that such a disinterested, objective approach to literature incited in its critics. Such statements as his articles of faith would not, he says, “serve any useful

purpose” in outlining what it is that the formalist critic does, since the articles are subject to “some persistent misunderstandings and objections” (1-2): mainly, that the critic sees the object of discourse as separated from its contexts, that the work can be objectively observed. Brooks is clear in his response:

The formalist critic knows as well as anyone that poems and plays and novels are written by men – that they do not somehow happen – and that they are written as expressions of particular personalities and are written from all sorts of motives – for money, from a desire to express oneself, for the sake of a cause, etc.

Moreover, the formalist critic knows as well as anyone that literary works are merely potential until they are read (2).

Brooks perhaps undermines the “givens” that underlie the formalist approach to literature by making this concession. What are the implications of articulating such a wrench-in-the-machine caveat? Brooks, here, makes a distinction between the theory and the praxis of formalism, and he is conceding that a double-consciousness of near-hypocritical proportions is part of the process of observing the textual object, a hypocrisy built into deep ecology as well. From within New Criticism itself, the basic formulation of the critiques that would be levied against it in the decades following was already finding its roots.

By 1978, Rene Wellek would concisely point out the critical double-think that New Criticism is based on. First, “the New Criticism is an esoteric aestheticism, a revival of art for art’s sake, uninterested in the human meaning, the social function and effect of literature” (611). Second, “the New Criticism, we are told, is unhistorical. It isolates the work of art from its past and its context” and finally, perhaps most salient to the deep ecology analogy, “the New Criticism is supposed to aim at making criticism scientific, or at least, bringing literary study to a

condition rivaling that of science” (611). Wellek’s aim, though, is to resuscitate New Criticism from its opponents, suggesting that the praxis of close reading garners results despite incongruities in its ideological underpinnings. Mark Jancovich, in *The Cultural Poetics of New Criticism* (1993), discusses the poetic problematics that were attributed to the New Critics. Jonathan Culler, according to Jancovich, shows how New Criticism “fails to analyze the literary system... [and] as a result, regards the process of reading as natural and unproblematic” (8). Terence Hawkes sees New Criticism as based on the assumptions of “stable and independent forms,” failing to see it literature as “products of the unconscious process of signification” (8). In Hawkes’ words, an articulation of *the* poststructuralist critique of mid-century formalism, New Critics see a poem as a “presentation and sophisticated organization of a set of complex experiences in a verbal form,” not a “series of referential... statements” (*Structuralism and Semiotics* 126). New Critics insist, like Naess’ metaphor of humans navigating a busy city, that the complexity of human culture (literature, here) is systematically maneuverable.

Hawkes represents the major criticisms that were leveled against literary formalism from within the academy, those that came at the hands of the poststructuralist critics who understood language as not referring only to signifiers within the neatly organized system of language; poststructuralism, in its most basic form, Derrida’s deconstruction, supposes that the system of signification is never grounded on discrete totality, but rather always in flux, a constant cycle of referentiality, so that the assumption of a well wrought urn, or a concrete basis of literary analysis, is irreconcilable with a poststructuralist understanding of language. According to J. Hillis Miller, “deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently-solid ground is no rock, but thin air” (34). A text cannot exist simply in a vacuum structured by the logical equilibrium of paradox, metaphor

and the well-wrought unity of its constituent parts, because language, for Derrida in 1967, “no longer issues from a *logos*. Further, it inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the *logos*” (10). When language is deployed, it does not emanate from a self-referential *logos* of the user of that language, or the internal system of that instance of its usage; language is always extending beyond the limits of its words because language exists as a system that has a world-wide referentiality, a logic that is beyond the control of that person who uses it.

Hawkes’ poststructuralist critique of New Criticism is based on the linguistically deconstructed apparatus of balance and form, fruitful tension and internal logic. Deep ecology is based on the assumption that the ecosphere is naturally balanced, and that an unbalancing has occurred due to human interaction in nature; but the major impulse of deep ecology is that a return to such balance is possible, indeed natural, since the movement out of balance has been due to human actions, and, paradoxically, the movement back into balance must be at our hands – albeit, ideally, at the hands of fewer of us. The poststructuralist critique of formalism has its analogue in ecology itself, that the assumption of equilibrium is a false premise that contemporary scientific research has all but proven.

The science of population ecology itself does not currently support the model for ecological unity that Naess and his followers determined was central to conceptualizing the biosphere. William Schaffer, in the widely cited article, “Order and Chaos in Ecological Systems” (1985), used trapping records for the Canadian lynx to suggest that “equations exhibiting complex periodic or chaotic behavior [which] can sometimes be associated with one-dimensional mappings [...] may have application to real-world populations” (93). Chaos theory holds that deterministic systems act more and more chaotically given the presence of even

miniscule changes in conditions, the so-called butterfly effect. Deterministic, in this case, means that the future dynamics of a system is predictable barring the inclusion of random or extrinsic elements; populations increase based on deterministic criteria; sexual reproduction is, on the small scale, unpredictable, but in a large enough sample, it is predictable. Schaffer's study is based on a routine problem that ecologists encounter when predicting plant and animal populations in the real world:

- 1) The species under study are embedded in more complex communities.
- 2) The dynamics, as well as the equilibrium densities, of the species of interest undoubtedly reflect the embedding.
- 3) As a practical matter, ecologists will probably never be able to write down the complete governing equations for any natural system.

From this initial three-part problem, which he describes as a given in ecological fieldwork and theory, we can return to the initial suppositions of deep ecology. Naess was adamant in describing the complexity of biological systems, which are, in his view, nearly unperceivable in human sociological terms. Schaffer directly states what Naess never could in his initial writings or would want to: that ecology is incapable of even coming close to observing, much less, predicting the way that ecosystems work, or the ecosystem's "governing equation" (93).

Schaffer's analysis consisted of a review of scientific literature on biological population systems. Commonly held assumptions about the erratic nature of population growth were based on a conclusion of "intrinsic stability" that experiences "irregular behavior" due to "a mathematical curiosity." That is, populations are stable, identifiably consistent systems – representing in deep ecology terms, a "total field" unity – that are made erratic due to external influence:

Note the essential implication: if real-world populations of insects have dynamic populations which are inherently stable, i.e. if, in the absence of disturbance, their numbers would tend towards a stable equilibrium, then the fact that these populations fluctuate violently [...] can *only* mean that external forcing in the form of climatic variation is paramount. Viewed in this light, low-dimensional chaos may be the last hope for a deterministic theory of ecology. (97)

Deterministic population ecology is based on the assumption that population numbers can be mathematically estimated if the population is large enough; the margin of error – births and deaths – is small enough that numbers can be obtained with relative accuracy. At this point, we are still in the realm of the systemic balance that deep ecology requires, but only tenuously; studies of the intrinsic stability of individual populations have moved from systemic ecology to reductionist ecology, but, for argument's sake, systemic extrapolation of species-level intrinsic stability is still deep, even if it ignores Naess and Session's insistence on the total-field.

Schaffer, though, is not convinced that intrinsic stability does define population systems (97). Citing contemporary studies that bridge chemistry and population dynamics through the use of the Belousov-Zhabotinskii reaction, he extrapolates the BZ conclusion to nonequilibrium biological phenomena, that chemical reactions do not have to be defined by equilibrium thermodynamic behavior (99). Applying BZ techniques to data for the Canadian lynx, which he says "every ecologist knows [...] exhibited large-scale fluctuations in density for at least 200 yr (1735-1940) as recorded by the number of skins shipped by the Hudson's Bay Company" (99), he concludes that deterministic dynamic systems (that naturally progress towards chaos) are not based on the premise of intrinsic stability, but rather on nonequilibrium. Similar to how linguistics, a salient discourse in terms of literary criticism, calls attention to the unreliability of

language and its non-static, ever-referential nature, contemporary population ecology, a salient discourse in terms of deep ecology, suggests that ecological systems are not based on equilibrium, a conclusion that undermines deep ecology's ideological core.

### **The Failure of Deep Ecology**

To connect deep ecology to the formalist modes of mid-century literary criticism serves not only to illustrate the mechanisms through which deep ecology forms its ideologically static basis, but it serves a larger rhetorical purpose, aimed at the political conservativeness of both enterprises; both the New Criticism and deep ecology are intrinsically interested in conservation. New Critics saw the properly unified and well-functioning text as modes through which the traditional literary canon is both created and upheld; its conservative mode is inward looking, relying on the text to speak for itself, a methodology that establishes a value system based on underlying truths and aesthetic sensibilities. Deep ecologists see the biosphere's intrinsic unity as dangerously close to being destroyed, which can be solved by making changes that seek to conserve and to re-unify; to suggest that deep ecology is interested in radical revolution is wrong-headed, because even though it overturns important hierarchies and calls the structures of dominance into question, it ultimately aims for a restoration of the original system – not a restructuring of it. The aim of conservation, under the guises of radicalism, is still a form of conservatism that, regardless of the result, fails to account for, just like New Criticism was accused, the social, historical, and cultural changes that might be relevant in a world structured around and by human discourse.

Deep ecology persists in our culture, in our news, and in our media despite its logical failure because it *works*, or rather it does important work. But the work that it is doing is neither deeply intellectual or logically based; that is, deep ecology works for activist ends, resulting in

real changes in human practices, in fewer trees being harvested for paper, in the preservation of wilderness for aesthetic purposes, and the salvation of innocent animals from savage slaughter. But it is based on a fundamentally flawed premise, for its theoretical and scientific underpinnings are outdated, as the academic current has washed us up on a shore of meta-reflexive postmodernity. Unfortunately, for Michael Bennett, author of “From Wide Open Spaces to Metropolitan Places: The Urban Challenge to Ecocriticism,” “the predominance of deep ecocriticism is connected to the fact that ecocritics have been disproportionately located in the West or in rural areas,” and ecocriticism will continue to be a “relatively pale and undertheorized field” unless deep ecology is taken critically, and ecocriticism “ventures into urban environments” where theory flourishes (302, 304).

Following the culture wars in the humanities, positivist science has given way to postpositivism in recent years, which, like postmodernism and poststructuralism, injects critical skepticism into their respective discursive modes. The discipline of history went through a similar transition, from its position as a social science, to a hybrid postmodern historiography that, despite postmodern skepticism, still offers, for all intents and purposes, narratives that are useful in understanding the past. Postpositivist science, likewise, has highlighted its self-discursive mode, based partly on the fact that Science, writ large, constantly changes and redacts theories previously held as accurate. For Larry Laudan, who promotes a type of inductive scientific reasoning that is skeptical of positivism, that fact alone proves scientific realism is only wishful thinking, yet for the most part we are not remiss to believe that science works, or that the scientific method is useful. (49)

Paul Feyerabend represents scientific skepticism to the extreme; with the same set of historical examples that Laudan uses, he concludes that there are no rules governing the progress

of science and knowledge, promoting what he calls “epistemological anarchy” (12). Laudan describes Feyerabend as certainly postpositivist, but perhaps more interesting for theoretical purposes than for actual scientific ones: “[a]s he sees it, the great breakthroughs in the history of science (he is especially keen on citing the work of Galileo, Newton, and Einstein) have been the products of bold pioneers prepared to ride roughshod over every sacred canon of careful and rigorous reasoning” (*Beyond Positivism* 100). Since scientists must, for the sake of producing generally accepted evidence in support or against hypotheses, consistently “utilize methods” that are irrational, “ignore contrary evidence, [...] lie, cheat, suppress information, propagandize, and resort to all manner of other trickery to persuade others to come around to their point of view” (Feyerabend 34), science is not based on objectivity or an ability to describe in any methodological way how the physical world functions, and actually should be understood in terms of its ability to “work” despite its lack of objectivity and overt discursive ideology.

It is with this argument that I finally dismiss deep ecology, excusing it from a meta-discourse that, as Glotfelty insists, should be “answering the call to understanding” – a process that would be better done by taking a Feyerabendian approach. Deep ecology works, it produces results, if even one tree is saved from being cut down, but in the face of mounting evidence of its shortcomings, we should cast it aside as a theory catalogued in the past, with successful-yet-proven wrong science, like humoral theory, the existence of aether, and a mother’s insistence that “if you keep making that face, John Green, it will get stuck that way.” Like my mother’s advice, deep ecology produces a much more socially acceptable audience, a morality, a paradoxically an anti-anthropocentric humaneness that behaves at the breakfast table, that, despite my domestic metaphors, captures, in spirit, its effectiveness in creating a more humane reconfiguration of the social, the ironic endgame to a philosophy that supposes a subversion of

the social. Deep ecology makes us better humans by forcing us to focus on a deeply rooted arrogance that, if addressed, can produce results.

But we must be careful not to use a deeply emotional, perceived genuine relationship to nature that deep ecology requires of us, to “use the aesthetic as an anesthetic,” as Timothy Morton describes in *Ecology Without Nature* (2007). He suggests it is actually detrimental to take a group of schoolchildren, for the sake of inviting them to “experience nature,” to a majestic stream, rather than explain how the world’s rainforests are being harvested at unsustainable rates (10). If excusing deep ecology from its control over the reigns of ecocriticism threatens to undermine the type of work that Greenpeace is doing internationally, by exposing the underlying hypocrisy of its ideological basis, then I suggest we not worry about losing the ethical underpinning of the discipline. If this were to push ecocriticism into dangerously amoral territory, then I take Derrida’s lead here, when he says

I don’t see why I should renounce or why anyone should renounce the radicality of a critical work under the pretext that it risks the sterilization of science, humanity, progress, the origin of meaning, etc. I believe that the risk of sterility and of sterilization has always been the price of lucidity. (“Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences” 271)

But perhaps I do not have to go so far as relinquishing ethical responsibility as I move away from deep ecology; as “theory” has evolved to incorporate the political in more recent years, I suggest that a theory-sensitive ecocriticism will as well. I hope to look, in the final chapter, at how social ecology might offer new directions for ecocriticism in a post-deep ecology field.

## Chapter 3

### New Directions in Ecocriticism

#### Ecosophy in Popular Culture Today

In my desire to conserve energy and recycle paper, habits I admittedly picked up almost by osmosis since moving to the West Coast from the generally much more consumptive Deep South, I read my daily news on a RSS Feed consolidator on either my MacBook or iPhone. Almost religiously, I do it at Wicked Café, where the barista, Tess, as I approached the counter for the first time, shot me a piercing look, beneath her pierced eyebrows, when I asked for my skinny latte in a to-go cup. Having already set up my computer and unpacked my backpack of the ecocriticism books that I was working with, she knew that I would finish my latte before leaving, and despite my muttering something about not wanting to break their fine IKEA mugs if I faced a sudden fall outside while having a smoke, she insisted that if I decided to leave, she would put it in one of their recycled-paper cups, with an equally recycled-paper java jacket. Aside from my life being a cliché, a Jetta-driving grad student, addicted to coffee and cigarettes, composing my thesis in a coffee shop employed with tattoo-bedecked hipsters, I was experiencing, in very material form, one type of ecological ideology that permeates Vancouver, an ideology deeply indebted to aesthetics as well as social and ethical responsibility. And I was experiencing a distinctly different set of environmental situations than would, say, those widely published ecocritics disproportionately entrenched in rural environments on what is left of the North American frontier. They are the SueEllen Campbells of ecocriticism, who begin *their* essays with narratives of hiking the Sierras alone, unlike my experience of forgetting that the North Shore Mountains loom large out the windows of the deliciously smelling, busy coffee

shop. I cannot place myself outside of the culture that I am embedded in, and I will not pretend that taking my computer on a mountain to write will make me more in tune with nature.

Today, out of the first five “New Items” that appeared via the wireless internet connection to my eReader application on my cell phone, three of the stories were on ecological topics. First, “Denver’s Queen Anne Bed and Breakfast is eco-chic,” a report from a travel blog that I subscribe to, Gadling: “At Denver’s Queen Anne [...], the mission statement is clear. Comfort, style and luxury can co-exist with sustainable, eco-friendly practices. And when it comes to green initiatives, Milan Doshi, the b&b’s owner, seems to have thought of everything. The bedding, the paint, the food, the labor – every aspect of the b&b was specifically chosen to be as green as possible.” The second, “350.org parodies JetBlue’s New Frequent Flyer Program,” which showed a JetBlue-inspired logo that, rather than stating All-You-Can-Fly for just \$599, reads “All You Can Emit for just \$599: Grab a Pass and pollute with JetBlue anywhere you like, as often as you like, from September 8 to October 8.” The entry, from the blog Treehugger, notes that this flies in the face of JetBlue’s green initiatives which received international praise last year – their “Reducing Our Footprint” plan that included eliminating in-flight magazines, and “using one engine to taxi to and from runways.” The final item, from movie blog Cinematic, reported on the soon-to-be-released 2009 documentary, *The Cove*, that exposes the practice in Taijin, Japan, following the outlawing of conventional whaling, of annually slaughtering thousands of dolphins and marketing the flesh to Japanese consumers as whale meat, a traditional food in some local Japanese cultures. I anticipated the content of that article, since the day before I had been prompted to pick up a copy of Vancouver’s free weekly newspaper, *The Georgia Straight*, after reading the headline “Japan’s Shame” that was, in huge font, emblazoned across the cover.

Taken together, these headlines are particularly revealing of the ecological mindset at work in popular culture today. While the pseudo-science of deep ecology pervades, for instance, the story told in *The Cove*, is narrated by a radical eco-activist adamant on stopping the selfish human practice of dolphin slaughter, for the sake of consumer market economics; it epitomizes the critique that deep ecology makes about human interaction in the biosphere. The other strain is eco-consumerist, as the travel article on the Denver establishment shows: that eco-friendly practices have a place in the luxury culture of the early twenty-first century. 350.org calls attention to the hypocrisy of that same commoditization of green industry.

My experience of nature comes through a matrix of wireless waves mediated through language, and it also comes through a bicycle ride around the sea wall of Stanley Park; given that deep ecology has all but exhausted its cache as *the* organizer of ecological philosophy, I am not convinced that the billions of people living in the global metropolitan centers are the disease of a planet accursed by humanity. In this brief chapter, I will offer a reprieve from the tedium of historiographic arguments and scientific jargon, mainly because the focus of this chapter is a discourse that is not a stranger to the post culture wars academy. If deep ecology is, beneath its surface, the conservation of the “natural” at the expense of the complex web of interrelations that we call human culture, then this other eco-philosophy is about the construction of the social that exists inside a complex web of interrelations that we call nature.

### **Social Ecology**

A species of the deep-sea anglerfish has a mating ritual that is unique to the animal kingdom. The males, equipped with highly sensitive scent organs, bite the females, releasing an enzyme that fuses the flesh of his mouth to the flesh of her body; gradually, the female soft leafvent angler incorporates the body of the male into her own, assimilating him down to the level of

blood vessels, leaving only the gonads. When she is ready to produce eggs, she has a ready mate, in the form of herself, carrying with her all the equipment necessary to generate her legacy.

Even though Christopher Manes would accuse me of “reiterat[ing] a discourse that by its very logocentrism marginalizes nature [...] against which the rational human subject struts upon the epistemological stage” (16), I take this curious ecological phenomenon as a metaphor for the evolution of social ecology out of that trend that Naess characterized as shallow ecology. My intention is not to silence nature by encapsulating it for human purposes in the fetters of metaphor; I, too, think that *Haplophryne mollis* should speak for itself. But I also do not speak fish. So, metaphorically speaking, in ecocriticism an evolution was taking place, obscured by the dark surface of a powerful and deep ecological movement; shallow ecology got deep – not in the sense that it incorporated the ideologies of deep ecology into its ontological epistemology – but shallow ecology’s insistence on a connection between ecological conservation and culture merged itself with another philosophy in the nineteen sixties: socialism.

More than just socialism gone green, however, social ecology, as imagined by its founder and primary theorist, sometimes-anarchist Murray Bookchin, locates the roots of the ecological crisis in conflict between humans, the ways that the social is founded on the exertion of dominance by and towards other human societies. As Bookchin describes how this works in terms of Marxist structures of alienation, his logic directly inverts deep ecology’s anti-anthropocentrism, while maintaining the same criticism that was the impetus of deep ecology, that the resource commodification of the natural world carries with it the weight of Western developed nations and ideologies of dominance:

The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man... But it was not until [an] organic community relation...

dissolved into market relationships that the planet itself was reduced to a resource for exploitation. This centuries-long tendency finds its most exacerbating development in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. Just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into a commodity, a resource to be manufactured and merchandised wantonly. [...] The plundering of the human spirit by the market place is paralleled by the plundering of the earth by capital.

*(Post Scarcity Anarchism 24-25)*

If Luc Ferry pushes deep ecology to its ideological limits – fascism – then social ecology’s extreme form as socialism responds, I think, in an inverse way to the same sets of data, the exponentially rapid process of technological progress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that threatened to cause quantifiable, negative effects on different ecosystems in different locations. As Bookchin begins *Our Synthetic Environment* (1962), the publication that began social ecology, as such, he draws attention to the radically different engagement to the natural world (for him, through science *and* technology) that humans experience: “Life in the United States has changed so radically over the past one hundred years that the most wearisome historians tend to become rhapsodic when they describe the new advances that have been made in technology, science, and medicine” (1). The increasingly rapid industrialization, for both Naess and Bookchin, is that symptom for which they diagnostically prescribe philosophies that Michael Bennett suggests represent a “profound disagreement” about the role that humanity and our built environments play in global ecology.

In *Our Synthetic Environment*, Bookchin argued that the market interests of late capitalism have not only alienated the working class from its products but they have also changed how people think about the environment: “[M]an is no longer working for himself. Many fields of knowledge and many practical endeavors that were once oriented toward the satisfaction of basic human wants have become ends in themselves, and to an ever-greater degree these new ends are conflicting with the requirements for human health” (4). The need for industrial plants, Bookchin argues, has taken over the need for clean air; the need to dispose of waste has been prioritized over a community’s need for clean water (8). Bookchin focused the discussion of massive environmental degradation on the organizational scheme of the social. He *effectively* radicalized ecology, at the same time that radical politics were inciting real change, instead of paying lip service to revolution through mechanisms of conservatism. Bookchin thrust responsibility for resolving environmental problems into the same arena as the social problems: for example, urban environmental issues are closely linked to urban populations along income boundaries, and the politics of water distribution are inextricably linked to big business. Bookchin understood, broadly, that ecological problems are the results of social inequities and social practices; the hierarchical organization of a capitalist society around roles gives rise to the social ideology that human dominance extends to nature.

Bookchin, it seems, is arguing for a type of ideological paradigm shift out of the same socio-historical milieu as Naess; where Naess combated ecological deterioration at the hands of capitalism by focusing on the (pseudo) biological, Bookchin focuses on the social. In *Remaking Society* (1980), Bookchin wrote of the distinction between ecology, which seeks to reform society, and environmentalism, which seeks to smooth over some of the worst byproducts of capitalism.

To speak of 'limits to growth' under a capitalistic market economy is as meaningless as to speak of limits of warfare under a warrior society. The moral pieties that are voiced today by many well-meaning environmentalists are as naive as the moral pieties of multinationals are manipulative. Capitalism can no more be 'persuaded' to limit growth than a human being can be 'persuaded' to stop breathing.

To address questions of degraded ecology requires not simply technological innovation or policy reform; it requires social reform. Flying directly in the face of deep ecology cultural critics like Lynn White Jr., he claims in *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982) that “the long-term solution to the ecological crises is a fundamental shift in how we organize society, a new politics based on face-to-face democracy, neighborhood assemblies and the dissolution of hierarchy” (143). Social ecology, in the four and a half decades since Bookchin wrote *Our Synthetic Environment*, has maintained a consistent, if not always self-evident, presence in environmental philosophy and, more to the point, cultural studies and critical theory.

But it has also experienced a clarifying evolution from its admittedly much more anarchist beginnings, a change that is articulated in its present praxis at the School of Social Ecology at the University of California – Irvine. There, it is “an interdisciplinary academic unit whose scholarly research and instruction is informed by and contributes to knowledge in the social, behavioral, legal and health sciences” (“About” Online). This interdisciplinarity is a signpost of the markedly similar development of deep ecology, the more mainstream of the two approaches, but it is also a defining characteristic of the University of California schools in general. In Irvine, “Social Ecology faculty apply scientific methods to the study of a wide array of recurring social, behavioral, and environmental problems and specialize in conducting

research ‘with considerations of use’ in society” (“About” Online). Social ecology does not attempt to displace traditional ecology as a science, with its focus on the relationships between organisms and ecosystems, at the expense of the human organism; rather, it is “concerned with the relationships between human populations and their environments,” so the foci of the curriculum at UC Irvine include crime and justice in society, social influences on human development over the life cycle, and the effects of the physical environment on health and human behavior (“About” Online). The type of work being done in the department is an inversion of the foci of deep ecology; conclusions are made about the structures that make up the social world, not the biological.

With its eye on the social, as refracted through the lens of nature – and vice versa – social ecology shares affinities with the postmodern academy that has emerged since the 1980s. Bennett suggests that the fundamental dissatisfaction that social ecocritics have with deep ecology is its biocentrism: “humans can only act on human values and make human choices, so it makes little sense to speak of moving beyond human issues and adopting a biocentric viewpoint” (299). Poststructuralist theory, he reminds us, shows how we “can never definitively know something outside of the language we use to describe it” (299). And Alexander Wilson, influenced as he was by the Disney representation of nature that Whitley also recognized, insists in *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to Exxon Valdez* (1991) a perennial point that poststructuralists return to in their skepticism of ecological formalism, that “our experience of the natural world... is always mediated” (12). This mediation comes from our experiences of nature – as culturally irrelevant as we may perceive them to be – which are always formed by the social: “rhetorical constructs like photography, industry, advertising, and aesthetics, as well as by institutions like religion, tourism, and education” (12). Wilson, in a

similar move as when Raymond Williams famously deconstructed the word “nature” as one of the most complex in our language, related to words like “culture” and “society,” claims that “there are many natures” that make up how we experience and describe a socially constructed external other (12).

Given its emergence from a socialist radicalism of the 1960s, Bookchin’s focus on the social, rather than the natural, is congruent with the terms through which he characterizes its philosophical basis, in an ostensibly biased, overtly polemical critique of deep ecology, “Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge to the Ecological Movement” (1987).

Philosophically, social ecology stems from a solid organismic tradition in Western philosophy, beginning with Heraclitus, the near-evolutionary dialectic of Aristotle and Hegel, and the superbly critical approach of the famous Frankfurt School---particularly its devastating critique of logical positivism and the primitivistic mysticism of Heidegger. (297)

Though Bookchin is not quite ready to make the full plunge into a completely poststructuralist view of nature that would lead Glen Love to insist that ecocriticism should avoid “theory” as “the queen of techniques for overturning common sense” (197), he indeed is gesturing towards it, by invoking the Frankfurt School, the Marxist germ that grew into postmodern cultural criticism. Though he does not say it, I am suggesting that social ecology is the first step towards a theory-sensitive ecocriticism, a conclusion garnered from both common sense, in spite of Glen Love, and Bookchin’s language of the decentralization of culture, a key tenet of theory; social ecology expectedly rejects biocentrism and rejects anthropocentrism as well: “[i]ndeed, it opposes ‘centrism’ of any kind as a new word for hierarchy and domination – be it that of nature by a mystical ‘man’ or the domination of people by an equally mystical ‘nature’.” And rather than the

near Spinozist pan-psychism that Naess uses in approaching nature, Bookchin's extreme realism recognizes that nature is

in the very real sense [...] composed of atoms, molecules that have evolved into amino acids, proteins, unicellular organisms, genetic codes, invertebrates and vertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, primates, and human beings [...] all in a cumulative thrust toward ever greater complexity, ever greater subjectivity, and finally ever-greater mind with a capacity for conceptual thought. (298)

His focus represents, paradoxically, an anti-humanist humanism that social ecology promotes; as in theory, a focus on the interrelation of parts and the deconstruction of hierarchies of knowledge and power emerge from the critic's insistence on his or her "ever-greater mind with a capacity for conceptual thought." As with theory, social ecology by 1987 saw the social as an interrelated web of subjectivities, based on perception, and constructed by language and conceptual thought. Moreover, the natural, by implication, exists in terms of the social – that the human mind as the pinnacle of evolution is not capable of separating nature from culture, and nor should it. Taken together, Bookchin claims that "all of these human traits" that we were "gifted by the creativity of natural evolution" can be "placed at the service of natural evolution" (299) to consciously effect change when facing the problems of ecology. The subjective social ecologist is both *in* the biosphere, and to an extent, the arbitrator of the natural world by virtue of the sentience that Bookchin ascribes humanity and humanity alone.

The logical leap, then, from social ecology to a poststructuralist ecology is not a huge one, and it is the leap that none of the deep ecologists that are sympathetic to theory were capable of taking to its logical end; SueEllen Campbell's desire for unity with the land can certainly motivate a kind of theory which will benefit our planet, but it will fail to move us

“beyond the human” – as she claims – and outside the “networks of language and culture” (135), since that network is, according to social ecology, a product of evolution. Michael Branch, in joining poststructuralism to deep ecology, stops short of completing a full assimilation, rejecting poststructuralism for sneaking anthropocentrism in through the back door by attempting “to use the ubiquity of language to *keep* humans at the center of our cosmological paradigm” (50). Social ecology, though, can offer a foothold for suggesting that the natural *only* exists in terms of the social – as mediated through language, the only avenue through which human knowledge can be obtained or conceptualized.

Reducing nature (or expanding it, depending on your perspective) by conceptualizing it in terms of a matrix of signs and symbols, much in the same way that the more overtly social environments have been, does not mean that nature does not exist, nor does it mean that the natural world would cease to exist after the extermination of the human race; the thing-ness of nature that transcends language is apparent, understood, and taken for granted even in Timothy Morton’s book with the provocative title, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Today, one would be hard pressed to find a theory-oriented, ecologically-minded ecocritic like Dana Phillips who would not duck if Edward Abbey threw a rock at him. Abbey famously used this sarcastic thought exercise to disprove the ability that theory has to add to the discourse of ecology: “To refute the solipsist or the metaphysical idealist all that you have to do is take him out and throw a rock at his head: if he ducks, he’s a liar” (97). Indeed, social ecocriticism (as an approach to the products of culture from a perspective of social ecology imbued with the gains of the culture wars of the 1980s) can add to the discourse – *should* add to the discourse – to finally counterbalance the overreliance on deep ecology that has produced an untheoretically grounded discipline.

## New Questions

In *Ecology Without Nature*, Timothy Morton takes, head on, ecocriticism and its basis in deep ecology; he systematically “attempts to *theorize* the complication... [of how] the narrative of nature appreciation is complicated by a growing awareness of ‘historical realities’” (2), realities that, as in Bennett’s critique, present the urban environment as, for example, important in conceptualizations of space and nature. Morton, too, is discouraged by the dominant ideology that “is too enmeshed [to] churn out [anything other than the] stereotypical ideas of nature to be of any use. Indeed, ecocriticism is barely distinguishable from the nature writing that is its object” (13). The ideology of a real nature, deep ecology, it seems, undermines the fact that ecocriticism is a cultural discourse, written with cultural tools, and useful for a human culture through human language and symbols. So he develops an ecologically salient way to think about nature in terms of the aesthetic, incorporating Adorno and Benjamin, for a theoretical basis that an ecology based on a constructivist view of nature is still capable of inciting political change.

Slavoj Žižek, in a speech given at the University of Athens, responded to Morton’s book, which he had previously lauded as “outstanding” in *Defense of Lost Causes* (121). The speech, in its wide scope, approaches the broad topic of late capitalism – and its failures – in terms of Žižek’s post-Marxist poststructuralism; in mentioning Fukiyami’s *The End of History*, he suggests that the failure of late capitalism circulates around, among other things, the failure of mainstream ecology to effectively politicize ecology because it functions as an “ecology of fear” (Žižek). This ecology of fear, that the smallest change may incite enormous changes in the biosphere, underlies the deep ecological ideology that SueEllen Campbell suggests (correctly, I think) is incompatible with theory’s celebration of “instability” to a nearly universal given. She says, “if we can’t know everything, if we can’t control the effects of our actions, if even the

smallest human interference can cause massive natural destruction, then the only way to keep something important is to *preserve* it” (131). Invoking Stephen J. Gould, Žižek contends that “[n]ature itself is not natural – it improvises with losses and catastrophes. Nature is not a continuous pattern; Nature is one big catastrophe that is time-to-time contained in moments of stasis where we exist” (Žižek). Therefore the idea that underlies deep ecology, what Žižek describes as “the ideology that we are preserving some pre-existing balance” is disproven from within science, theory, and, ultimately, logic: “We all know Lacan’s idea that the Big Other doesn’t exist. The first premise of a truly radical ecology should be that Nature doesn’t exist” (Žižek). Or, rather, it only exists in discrete moments where we, culturally, can define it, capture it, take a snapshot of it through ideological means such as deep ecology or social ecology.

In concluding his speech, Žižek suggests that our ideologies of what nature is are based on those “moments of stasis” where we map out nature, to the best of our ability, sometimes accurate, but always through applied human systems of explanation – ideology: “the very way we perceive ecological problematics, is determined by these spontaneous ideological notions of which we are not even aware” (Žižek). If nature is, as he describes it, a very real, pulsing, cycling, dynamic system – only perceivable through ideology – then our job is to lay bare those ideologies for what they are, the framework through which, at any given moment, we believe that we can understand nature. Unlike White and Manes, and in typical Žižek fashion, the solution to the ecological crisis requires shifts in ideology and critiques of ideology: “I can only make you see how the way we ask the question is part of the problem. There are not only wrong answers, there are wrong questions” (Žižek).

My goal was to demonstrate how the ideology of deep ecology is taken as a given in the majority of ecocritics, indeed as the ideology that serves as the foundation of the discipline,

through its implicit location on nearly every single page of *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Like Bennett, I think that deploying deep ecology has, for too long, been done uncritically, and like Žižek, I think that the questions ecocritics are asking come from ideologies that are not helpful in organizing a sustained critique of literature and the environment, both of which are manifestations of human culture.

To conclude, I go back to the very originator of ecocriticism, William Reuckert, who first used the word in his 1978 essay, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” The essay functions as a call to action from within the academy to begin to think about how scholars can incorporate nature into literary criticism. His premise is this: plants are like poems. Where poems catch and store the creative energy flowing from the collective consciousness of human creativity, plants catch and store the energy of the sun. Humans, in catching and storing the sun’s energy are part of a cyclical, self-perpetuating natural order. Therefore, our creative energy contains a certain eco-consciousness that, more or less, intentionally or unintentionally, gets transmitted to the containers of our creative energy, literature.

He works himself into a bind, unable to rectify how we “can move from the community of literature to the larger biospheric community which ecology tells us (correctly, I think) we belong to even as we are destroying it” (121). Unable to make the leap to answer his own question, he implores, “Let experimental criticism address itself to this dilemma” (121). Žižek’s suggestion that we are asking the wrong questions when approaching the ideological matrix of nature and culture applies here; the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, suggests that early ecological efforts in the 1960s (which include deep ecology) relied on “ecosystem ecology,” an analysis of the ecosystem, the formalist interrelation of the constituent parts to make up the functioning, cycling whole:

The trouble was that, at this level of analysis, very few general claims could be sustained. Those that could—for instance, that Sun is ultimately the source of all energy in biological systems or that primary producers have to contain chlorophyll or some other such molecule—were usually trivial and well-known long before the initiation of systematic large-scale ecosystem studies in the 1960s.

(Sarkar)

Unfortunately, the history of ecocriticism since Reuckert has seen ecological formalists address the dilemma, and scientific claims other than the obvious flow of energy that Reuckert – more or less poetically – structures his argument are not addressed, much less conceptualized, when using the ideology of deep ecology.

Perhaps I can forgive Reuckert for asking the wrong questions, given his radical impetus for the discipline that has begun to be incorporated into universities worldwide; he was, after all, deeply entrenched in the ecosystem ecology of the 1960s and 1970s. But I am not. And before I can move forward and begin to apply ecocriticism to the panoply of literary and cultural products in such a way that provides insight as to how culture functions, and its tenuous relationship to nature, I have to insist that, within the discipline, ecocritics re-approach Reuckert's call to arms. Ecocriticism has not gone off the deep end; it has always been there, in a utopic pool of feel-good ecology. We offer the "experimental criticism" that will not only re-shape his questions, but re-shape the types of answers that ecocriticism is seeking.

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