
The Move to the Outside

As contested zones of meaning, Nature and the environment have moved to the fore in Western political and social thought in the past decades. Under the flag of Ecology, a politics of the environment has been activated. Throughout the development of the contemporary “environmental movement,” one can trace both widely divergent, and essentially similar tendencies.

For convenience, and therefore arguably, I shall place the inception of this movement on the occasion of the first Earth Day: April 22, 1970. Certainly one could do this differently. One could choose names rather than dates: Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac*, Gilbert White’s *The Natural History of Selborne*. However, what draws me to Earth Day is that it is a particular point in time, an event, in which various (and disparate) political and social forces became gathered together and organized around a common set of concepts to do with the Earth.

By isolating a point in time I attempt to raise certain questions concerning the radical environmentalism of deep ecology; questions that are essentially of a philosophical, epistemological, political, and theoretical character. My interest here is not to present a history. My intentions are far less expansive. What I seek to identify here are certain themes and discourses that came to prominence in and around the time of Earth Day that have persisted within radical environmental theory. By working through a discussion of certain important themes and theoretical orientations, I will move toward a more contextualized picture of deep ecology.

Earth Day I: The View from Space is Better

One can read certain important themes and tensions, as well as begin to trace the amorphous outline of the early environmental movement within statements made during the Earth Day, 1970 celebration. Many of the following pieces are culled from a hastily compiled volume (Earth Day was in April, the book was published in May) entitled *Earth Day—The Beginning*. Subtitled *A Guide for Survival*, the book proclaims itself as an inauguration of a movement “to reverse our rush to extinction.” The problems that it addresses include:

Pollution. Overpopulation. Overkill. Slums.
 Racism. Wasted Resources. Planned Obsolescence.
 A Widening War.

This brief text is exemplary for a number of reasons. First of all, as a cultural document the book brings to bear an astonishingly diverse range of perspectives upon the significance of a single point in time. Earth Day represents both a beginning and an end; a recognition of a condition, and an imperative for change. Secondly, the editors of the collection (the staff of Environmental Action) have clearly gone to lengths to construct a unity of voice from the fifty-odd contributions that are included. It is a book of its time; the overall picture that emerges is white, male, and middle-class. Women have not been accorded a collective voice; of the five women contributors, none speak explicitly from a feminist perspective on the environment. People of color are given a chapter—Black Survival—that includes a single entry: a transcript of a black street theater piece (but then there is also a chapter entitled “People”). Not a single piece either speaks to or was delivered by a North American aboriginal person. These observations are not about being “correct” in terms of a constituency, but about the kind of self-representation that the environmental movement undertook in 1970.

[We] are building a movement, a movement with a broad political base, a movement which transcends political boundaries. It is a movement that values people more than technology, people more than political boundaries and political ideologies, people more than profit. It will be a difficult fight. Earth Day is the beginning.¹

This statement captures well the grassroots humanism that was being articulated through the environmental movement. Ironically, the overtly anti- (capital P) Political orientation of this statement echoes the whole social movement *against* political disaffiliation that had been ongoing in the States and elsewhere since the early 1960s. It speaks to a political and social climate that senses a disconnection with itself and with its social and political aspirations.

One can also detect in this statement (and for that matter, within the very idea of an Earth Day as spectacle) the attempt to subsume difference at one level by shifting to a broader, more inclusive category: a totalizing move that I will call the *move to the outside*. This marks a spirit that we might identify as the “We” shift.

The We-shift attempts to ground a struggle in a common language; the common language in this case is the language of the “people.” But such a shift may end up creating a new and total position. Moving from profits, technology and political ideologies to the level of “all people,” ignores the fact that people *are* (in varying degrees and combinations) *about* profits, technology, and political ideologies. “Moving to the outside” can too easily erase the fact of tremendous inequities in the way profits, technology, and political ideologies mediate the lived experience of human subjects. And on another level, moving to the outside shifts attention away from humans as subjects existing in various relations of power, to humans as objects of administrative control.

Consider two other positions that demonstrate a centrifugal tendency toward the outside:

One view of the future is that no real future exists. Then there is another view of the future which is in a sense what Earth Day is all about. This view suggests calamity lies ahead if we don't stop some of the things we seem to be insistently doing, things like polluting the air, destroying our rivers, killing our oceans, and jamming our cities. Such a view of the future is circular like the whole Earth. A circular future means we cannot escape from whatever we do here and now. Life is not linear, it is round.²

We are nearly halfway through the first year of the last decade of life on Earth as we know it. In this decade of the '70s, Western Civilization will choose one of two paths: it will

*stumble onto the path of extinction, or it will find the way to live in peace with nature and with itself.*³

Thematically, these elliptical and apocalyptic assertions reflect several other dominant issues within the environmental movement of the early 1970s: pollution, population and, most importantly, the earth as a closed system.

Although often contested, there was a belief that pollution (never particularly well defined) as a byproduct of industrial and social development was *the* central focus of the environmental movement. This identification of pollution as both symptom and metaphor comes largely from the ground-breaking work of Rachel Carson.⁴ To a large extent the focus on pollution was reinforced politically because a claim against pollution managed to challenge nothing fundamental about Western life; it simply admonished Western society to be more aware of industrial and urban externalities. What these statements foreground has less to do with the political and social character of existence, than with its material conditions. The rhetoric of “let’s clean up America for the sake of its future,” offers litter-free sidewalks, clean rivers, and low-density cities as a prescriptive model for the renaturalizing of Western civilization. The focus on context over content is symptomatic of a conception of environment as being out there, external and material.

The population problem has been a perennial topic of social criticism since the time of Reverend Thomas Malthus (1766–1843) and his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). The xenophobic algebra of growth that was mapped out by Malthus was rekindled by Paul Ehrlich in 1968 (*The Population Bomb*).⁵ The “Zero Population Growth” movement constituted a significant voice throughout the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not surprisingly, the population stream of environmentalism has traditionally contained the most conservative elements within the movement.

One of the most long-standing heirs to the zero population growth program is undoubtedly Garrett Hardin.⁶ What Hardin accomplished, in a very influential paper published in 1968 (“The Tragedy of the Commons”), was to raise a fairly central problem: the growing population of the planet is apparently outstripping “our”—in its fullest irony and ambiguity—capacity to feed these numbers. Carrying capacity is given as a real constraint; a planetary structuring principle for produc-

tivity. The logic he points to at the root of this problem—the intrinsic self-interested rationality of individuals—marks the point at which he begins construction of an evolutionary and historical account that casts all manner of subjectively understood categories (e.g., conscience and denial) as sealed in a genetic and Darwinian necessity, and subject to what he sees as the precarious and fickle forces of natural selection. All of this seems to operate in the interest of protecting economic growth via the mechanism of removing consumers (i.e., the genetically undesirable, and [terminally] reproductive *Homo progenitivus*—read, underdeveloped nations). And all of this is in the interest of maintaining economic growth within the limits of carrying capacity. The solution, Hardin says, must be private property and free markets.

The move in this case, the structuring principle of carrying capacity, illustrates clearly a move to the outside. Hardin's conceptual use of carrying capacity accomplishes a shift outward to a planetary scale; the earth becomes a delicate and closed system. This transcendental operation simultaneously utters a death threat—transgression of carrying capacity—and offers a path to escape: privatization of the globe. The earth-as-closed-system image functions discursively as a kind of stamp of causal necessity together with equal amounts of *ye shall reap what you sow* fervor.

In the strong sense of this closed-system metaphor, there is no *out there*; the earth becomes a dangerously overloaded lifeboat containing everyone. The only practical means of exercising control over such a vessel is to fashion a platform on the outside, so to speak, a platform from which administrative control and technological interventions are possible; the move to the outside accomplishes precisely that.

Hardin's carrying capacity is given force by the character of the threat which humans pose. These threats are, properly speaking, ecological. Threats to carrying capacity are total since the concept of carrying capacity itself is an index of the possibility of continued (human) existence. Jonathan Bordo writes that threats of this type must be distinguished from ordinary threats because

they have the character of threatening or being perceived to threaten the very existence of groups and collectivities where the fate of an individual is inextricably linked to the fate of a larger group and the threat to its survival. They are not the kind that might be enunciated "I will die but I will live on in

my work, my children, through the community.” They have both an ontological and a transcendental quality, putting at risk the existence of living entities as wholes. Ecological threats are prototypical threats to standing since they attack the conditions and relations supporting life.⁷

Bordo captures well the manner in which ecological threat must be distinguished from other sorts of threat or risk. However, rather than a claim that such threats are “prototypical,” I would say that what distinguishes ecological threats is that they operate both above and below a threshold. Above, in the sense of the transnational and transpolitical character of, for example, Chernobyl. And below, in the sense of threats that operate at or below the level of biology. In the former sense the effect is direct, but simply too large to be dealt with in terms of models of risk and responsibility. And in the latter, the risk is insidious, and even though it may represent a threat to continued life, it is significantly nonlocalizable, and as such is displaced in relation to a victim/perpetrator model.⁸ In both movements of ecological threat, there is a convergence on a point that is subsumed by the ontic.

In his analysis of the modern and archaic responses to the prospect of ecological threat, Bordo points to the always “modernist” or foundationalist vision that underlies and constrains. Comparing Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* to the Brundtland Commission report (discussed below), he observes a similar usage of the oracular voice that is displaced from the scene of ecological threat in order to make pronouncements upon it. The only conceivable stance that can oversee the totality of ecological threat requires the construction of a site where such total vision can be secured.

The modern response to ecological threat summons the organization of the planet into a unitary techno-administrative system. The modern response is to create a unanimity by making an abstractive step to envelope the world into a larger system: worlds become the world, the world becomes the Earth, the Earth a planetary subsystem, and so on.⁹

The “modern” response, then, is the move to the outside. Or perhaps better put, the move to the outside is prominent amongst a repertoire of modern responses to ecological threat. The following illustrates this operation via the encompassing metaphor of the “spaceship.”

*We travel together, passengers on a little spaceship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and the love we give our fragile craft.*¹⁰

Advanced by theorists such as Kenneth Boulding and Buckminster Fuller, the spaceship metaphor evokes a concept of the world as finite, closed, and mechanical. Reiterated in this case by a Democratic senator, this metaphor demonstrates both its scope, and compatibility with popular political discourse of the time. With this trope, its advocates proposed a variety of spaceship/cybernetic revisions to the political, economic, and social orders. The blend of technological optimism and naturalism implicit in this statement and vision, became and remains an important theme in environmental discourses. The spaceship metaphor marks the total technological colonization of the earth.

This *Whole Earth* rhetorical move that we hear uttered by Mondale marks a curious outlook on technology that sees it, on the one hand, as a discourse of promise, and on the other, as something that if allowed to run its course uninterrupted, will realize its disastrous telos. To intervene in ecological threat by fashioning a techno-spaceship platform for a transcendental viewpoint, or by fixing concepts such as carrying capacity as totalized structuring principles, the intention may be the attempt to redirect the human/technological telos toward a more ecological unfolding. The result, however, is that

a sort of transcendental holism becomes the thought device for the constitution of a planetary Foucauldian administrative panopticon whose aim it is to integrate the human being into the world, creating a larger and more elaborate system to be orchestrated by the gaze from a transcendental point "from space," a point that is of logical, moral and administrative necessity beyond the world.¹¹

This figure of the panopticon which Foucault describes maps quite precisely onto the organizing efficiency of the spaceship metaphor. As Foucault makes clear, the panopticon accomplishes an efficient and efficacious intensification of power via an application of architecture and geometry. The spaceship move marks a panoptic schema transformed

into a universalized model of surveillance and control. The major effect of the panopticon is

to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. . . . [T]he Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building; it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology *that may and must* be detached from any particular use.¹²

What is it to assume this kind of position beyond the world, to undertake a move to the outside? From one perspective it is the attempt to structure an arrangement of agent and patient. The move to the outside allows the earth to be organized (as Bordo points out) as “Earth-as-patient.” So construed, the earth becomes an object “beneath the distant gaze of the extra-terrestrial observer.”¹³ Ecological threats can then be viewed and understood through the metaphors of disease. But equally I think the extraterrestrial gaze is a gaze turned everywhere inward, on itself; not just the Earth viewed in a total operation from space, but the Earth becomes simply a transparent point *in* space.

In another and perhaps more general sense, this move to the outside to obtain a position beyond the world reflects the urge to gain a perspective which theorist Donna Haraway describes as a self-fulfilling pretense at objective disengagement. The agent-object binarism

both guarantees and refreshes the power of the knower, but any status as agent in the productions of knowledge must be denied the object. It—the world—must, in short, be identified as thing, not as agent; it must be a matter for the self-formulation of the only social being in the productions of knowledge, the human knower.¹⁴

The patient, then, must always retain the status of *object* both in order to permit routine and directed interventions, and to secure for the agent the role of control. The view from space both objectifies, and provides a platform with total vision:

“From space” the agent can view the Earth as an organismic whole bound together through the inextricable systemic links

of ecological interdependence. The Earth's toxicity falls beneath the extraterrestrial gaze of the polluting agent, the human subject.¹⁵

Haraway describes this will to objective disengagement as the "God-trick"—the view from nowhere and everywhere; the ultimate objective position. It is the position that has no location; or what amounts to the same, one that has all locations at once. The God-trick, says Haraway, is the "standpoint of the master, the Man, the One God, whose eye produces, appropriates, and orders all difference."¹⁶ Haraway's political analysis tends to engage this problem from the point of view of the subjugated or marginalized. Accordingly, she seeks an account of knowledge production that avoids the distancing operation that constructs a privileged site from which to objectify.

Haraway would likely argue that the Whole Earth metaphor acts as an invitation to participate in the God-trick. But in an important sense it's more than an invitation; it is a promise of an omniscient vision, and a promise to deliver us from history. Both are promises of impossible operations, but both are backed up with an implicit threat of ecological peril. As Haraway points out in reference to such moves, it is a promise of "what they cannot, of course, deliver, or only pretend to deliver at the cost of deathly practices."¹⁷

The move to the outside can be characterized in yet another (more overtly political) sense; a sense that is implicit in my use of Bordo and Haraway, but worth making clear. In both senses of the move to the outside, through properties of site, stance and structuring, we have critical depictions from the outside in, so to speak. Another question that therefore presents itself is: what becomes of the heterogeneous *inside* when it is recast as an organic totality when under the structuring gaze from an imaginary position on the *outside*?

The question of exactly who is "we" is clearly problematic, and mostly rhetorical. Whether undertaken pragmatically, strategically, politically or ideologically, any conception of "we" is always a fiction constructed to create linkages of sameness. Establishing a "we," creating a community, is both the possibility for collective dissent, and a means for silencing it. The move to the outside is a means for establishing the guise of a community—Gaia, the ecosphere, spaceship Earth—that leaves no possible space for difference; paradoxical, because the only way to have a "we" is to have something that is not "we."

The question of who is constructing the “we,” and what differences are being overwritten in order to create a unified category becomes critically charged when faced with the move to the outside. Framing the question this way helps to identify more precisely the stakes that are involved in grounding a struggle on the homogeneous characteristics of a very large constituency. Diverse voices, represented here by Hardin and Mondale, orchestrate moves to the outside that tactically differ, but the outcome remains a central problematic both for the environmental agenda, and for attempts to articulate emancipatory politics (environmental or otherwise).

The “we” in the case of Earth Day was clearly operating from multiple registers:

*Yes, it's official—the conspiracy against pollution. And we have a simple program—arrest Agnew and smash capitalism. We make only one exception to our pollution stand—everyone should light up a joint and get stoned. . . .*¹⁸

*What we are saying is that we are going to pick up the shit in this country, but in a context of a movement to liberate ourselves. . . . We are saying that we will not be coopted for token changes in a system that plunders and rapes and destroys all over the world. We say to Agnew Country that Earth Day is for the sons and daughters of the American Revolution who are going to tear capitalism down and set us free.*¹⁹

These two statements, from a speech by Rennie Davis (member of the Chicago Seven) speak from the revolutionary edge of the movement at the time. There are two strong currents that one can quite clearly interpret. First, that the question of pollution must be understood in the larger contexts of social change (“black liberation,” women’s rights, free speech, anti-imperialism), and a critique of capitalism vis-à-vis freedom and the American Revolution. And secondly, the acknowledgment that the political embrace of the pollution issue itself must not be allowed to divert the course of revolutionary practice. This radical left, Yippie environmental discourse, if somewhat prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s, has all but disappeared in North America over the intervening years. Notable exceptions to this—to the heritage of the left, at least—would be Murray Bookchin’s social ecology (discussed

below), and the socialist ecological critiques of theorists such as William Leiss and Anthony Wilden.²⁰

*The Vietnam War and the ecological crisis have the same roots. Both are products of a highly technological, mechanistic, dehumanized society; in the one case ruthlessly expanding its interests in southeast Asia, in the other, ruthlessly expanding its interests at home; in the one case, economic imperialism; in the other, ecological imperialism. One can't fight one without the other.*²¹

Here is the explicit claim that exploits in Vietnam and the environmental situation in the United States were born of the same impulse. Through making the claim about imperialism as the foundational impulse, or at least the locus for the historical inertia, an attempt is made to make a critical politics *the* agenda for the environmental movement. This passage is perhaps the most interesting; at least insofar as it is the only example of an analysis that identifies a particular kind of relationship between technology and the ecological crisis. In the years following Earth Day, this point comes to mark a fulcrum that would separate radical from mainstream environmentalism; the radical side viewing technology as inextricably linked with domination and alienation, and the mainstream side seeing technology as a benign (if historically misused) tool.

*It is appropriate, as we meet on Earth Day, to remember that Man is a messy animal.*²²

*Ladies and Gentlemen, let me state at the outset that Ford Motor Company shares your concern over air pollution. We recognize that we have an obligation to help solve the problem and will continue to go all out in attacking the problem—from every practical standpoint—until it is solved.*²³

An apology dressed up as an alibi, and a corporate commitment to undertake *practical* measures. The first, from the secretary of the interior, and the second, from a Ford Motor Company executive. The first, in a sense, facilitating the second. The representative from Ford speaks from the point of view of *solutions*, and reduces the public outcry to “concern over air pollution.” Bracketing and reducing the ecological situation into technically solvable elements came to be the avenue by

which business and industry could become *ecological* citizens. A brilliant maneuver, really. And one that would allow industry to simultaneously manufacture and conquer a new market—the commodification of pollution.

Clearly, the Earth Day spectacle offered a little something for everyone—from trade unions to Republicans. The entirety of the political and social discursive terrain was open to articulating an environmental position. Environmentalism on Earth Day, 1970, was very much like a neutral platform that could authorize almost any perspective or orientation, while at the same time giving a vague appearance of unanimity; of course there was no discursive unity—what we witness is more on the order of a political maneuver to construct the appearance of agreement.

Reform and Radical

The fragmentary unity organized by Earth Day, poses certain problems if we wish to speak of North American environmentalism as a contemporary social field or phenomenon. We need, in other words, to construct a more precise taxonomy, to delimit the main environmental discourses that lay claim to the term, and to make clear the senses in which it is used.

The distinction that is commonly invoked to delimit trends within environmentalism is between reform and radical environmentalism. This distinction is often deepened on the radical side through the replacement of “environmentalism” by the term “ecologism”; note that ecologism tends not to be used synonymously with environmentalism. The distinction between environmentalism and ecologism was first set out by Murray Bookchin in the early 1960s.

“Environmentalism” tends increasingly to reflect an instrumentalist sensibility in which nature is viewed as a passive habitat, an agglomeration of external objects and forces, that must be made more serviceable for human use.²⁴

On Bookchin’s account, Ecologism differs fundamentally from environmentalism. Ecologism, which Bookchin claimed to be coterminous with scientific ecology, deals with a much broader conception of humanity and nature.²⁵ Ecologism operates with

the view that humanity must show conscious respect for the spontaneity of the natural world, a world that is much too complex and variegated to be reduced to simple Galilean physico-mechanical properties.²⁶

Bookchin's distinction was meant to delimit an environmental tendency that seeks to discover the roots of contemporary ecological dangers within the realm of the social (hierarchy, domination, oppression). He distinguishes this approach from the kind of environmentalism that

does not bring into question the underlying notion of the present [Western] society that man must dominate nature; rather it seeks to facilitate that domination by developing techniques for diminishing the hazards caused by domination. The very notion of domination is not brought into question.²⁷

For the purposes of this particular work I will accept Bookchin's point that there exists some sort of fault line between an overtly instrumentalist environmental position, and some other positions, not entirely instrumental, that we could call, in relational terms, radical. Although it is important to keep in mind that in the past decade or so the simplicity of Bookchin's topology has ceased to be entirely useful. The radical wing of North American environmentalism/ecologism has itself shattered into many lines of opposition. There is now an exceedingly large complex of interests that are not so easily categorized.

The reform stream of environmentalism is taken to operate within and through existing political and social structures in an attempt to effect change on the level of policy, social habits, and perceptions without significantly altering anything fundamental on the level of social, political, or economic relations.

Accordingly, reform environmentalism may be understood as an instrumental means by which to reduce or delay the ecological crisis through technological and administrative intervention. In this sense, ecological problems are problems of accounting. For example, whereas pollution has historically been thought of as an externality, as a component external to the flows of production and exchange, it now becomes an accounting entry such that an *economic* value is attached to it. Reform environmentalism attempts to enact through changes to policy and legislation an increase in the number and scope of environmental and ecological parameters that become internal to present political and

economic systems. Thus when air and water are acknowledged to have been damaged or threatened by the externalities of industrial or domestic processes, the problem becomes one of a more responsible, prudent form of management and administration for air and water resources. Reform projects are motivated exercises in an operative form of pragmatism that is founded on the belief that *every problem has a solution*.

An extreme and complex example of a global reform project is The Brundtland Commission report, *Our Common Future*. This report was the work of the World Commission on Environment and Development that was formed by the United Nations in 1983. Ostensibly a blueprint for a threatened planet, the report details (in a manner not unlike a user's guide) a framework for attaining a "sustainable" condition for global development.

The concept of sustainable development provides a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies—the term "development" being used here in its broadest sense. The word is often taken to refer to the process of economic and social change in the Third World. But the integration of environment and development is required in all countries, rich and poor. The pursuit of sustainable development requires changes in the domestic and international policies of every nation.²⁸

The report never challenged the notion or ethic of growth, but instead adopts a prudent position in the recognition that environment is a "real" constraint to efficient and continued growth and development. The Brundtland project entailed a planetary rationalization of the environment as a finite resource base:

we are serving notice—an urgent notice based on the latest and best scientific evidence—that the time has come to secure the resources to sustain this and coming generations.²⁹

In reading the Brundtland report, the figure of the panopticon as a mechanism describing the move to the outside gathers force. Foucault's point that the panopticon must be seen as a political technology, apart from any particular application is critical here. Enclosing the planet in a global development scheme (i.e., making the world a safe place for both capitalism and "nature") requires a kind of panoptic efficiency to achieve its result. The point is not that such grand panoptic strategies of

reform are simply about a global imposition of capitalism. It is much more subtle than this. Panopticism functions not through despotic control, but through diffusion and lightness, speed and disciplining—in a word, efficiency. It is not a single and focused mechanism of power, it does not organize into a single point of tyranny. Rather it marks a multiplication and diffusion of power such that “the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact.”³⁰

The diffusion of power, and the disciplining of social bodies that panopticism promised prompted Bentham to see in his newly discovered instrument a tremendous gift to the exercise of government. He proclaimed:

Morals reformed—health preserved—industry invigorated—
instruction diffused—public burdens lightened—Economy
seated, as it were, upon a rock—the gordian knot of the Poor
Laws not cut, but untied—all by a simple idea in architecture!³¹

It is interesting then to compare the claims made for the global structuring of sustainable development in the Brundtland report:

Revive growth. Change the quality of growth. Conserve and enhance the resource base. Ensure a sustainable level of population. Reorient technology and manage risks. Integrate environment and economics in decision-making. Reform international economic relations. Strengthen international cooperation.³²

Radical environmentalism is said to take a different view of the contemporary ecological situation. Its critical stance is in explicit opposition to panoptic reform maneuvers such as that exemplified by sustainable development. From the start there is an assumption that present political, social, and economic structures cannot sufficiently conceptualize—much less act upon—the ecological crisis, and, more importantly, that the ecological crisis is in some sense the inevitable result of the design of contemporary society. This position presupposes that in order for Western society to turn the tide of the ecological situation, radical and fundamental changes must take place; not just at the level of social, economic, and political policy, but at the very foundation of the social, economic, and political.

The Social

Within the field of radical environmentalism, both the etiology of the ecological crisis and the strategic interventions envisioned to enact changes in humankind's mode of living are highly contested. In terms of the political topography of radical environmentalism, the central axis—that is, fault line—along which the movement is (very much) divided, delimits two distinct approaches or orientations: deep ecology, and social ecology.

The central distinction between these two orientations is that social ecology (variously termed anarcho-communism, eco-anarchism, left libertarian communitarian green) is committed to the idea that the ecological crisis is a continuing result of the existence of hierarchy, domination, and exploitation (economic and otherwise) in all spheres of social life.

Social ecology, as articulated by Murray Bookchin, is a political, social, and philosophical program that seeks to address and resolve the ecological crisis by reharmonizing social relations in all spheres of social existence.

The exploitation of the natural world as a field of resources is deemed by social ecology to be the result of historically determined social relations within capitalism.

With roots in leftist, libertarian, and anarchist traditions, social ecology is an attempt at a left green perspective. It rejects orthodox Marxist interpretations of nature (and human nature), and opposes the idea that humanity

confronts a hostile “otherness” against which it must oppose its own powers of toil and guile before it can rise above the “realm of necessity” to a new “realm of freedom.”³³

Bookchin stresses his view that Marx failed to undertake a radical critique of capitalism. In failing to do so, Marx unwittingly constructed a scientific socialism that functioned as an anticipatory apologia for what emerged as state capitalism. By not questioning the Enlightenment conception of nature as a field of utility for human conquest, or the social relations of domination of man over woman, family over child, labor over freedom, Bookchin contends that Marx unwittingly turned many features of capitalism into technical features of production.³⁴ What Bookchin attempts with his ties to Marx is not a refurbishing, but rather, that the

simplification of the “social problem” into issues like the restoration of local power, the increasing hatred of bureaucratic control, the silent resistance to manipulation on the everyday level of life hold the only promise of a new “revolutionary subject” on which resistance and eventual revolution can be based.³⁵

The social ecology project amounts to mining leftist traditions in order to discover principles and ideals that can adequately construct a philosophy of freedom for the late twentieth century. Bookchin attempts a philosophy that seeks to avoid the reproduction and recapitulation of power relations (inter- and intraspecific) based on hierarchy, conceptions of rationality founded on instrumentalism, while at the same time not divesting itself of what Bookchin sees as the valid achievements of the Enlightenment. For Bookchin this means appeal to anarchist writers such as Peter Kropotkin, the revolutionary gender politics of Louise Michel and Emma Goldman, the communitarian visions of Paul Goodman and Lewis Mumford. What we end up with in social ecology is a left-based, politically libertarian, and communitarian, ecological environmentalism.

The Deep

Unlike social ecology, deep ecology is less concerned with social analysis than it is with defining a new *ethical* relationship between humans and the natural world. The fundamental difference in points of departure of these two streams of radical environmental thought—one based on the human domination of humans, the other based on human domination of nature—has made for a deep and often bitter division within the North American radical environmental scene.³⁶ The polarity of these two radical positions on environmental theory notwithstanding, deep ecology, perhaps not so oddly, seems to be gaining not losing ground. To simplify matters, from this point on my use of the term “radical environmentalism” will signify that body of thought and aspiration connected with deep ecology and its associated movements; I will for the most part leave aside Bookchin and social ecology (which as a political and natural philosophy is far less problematic).³⁷