



The Importance of Apocalypse: The Value of End-Of-The-World Politics While Advancing Ecocriticism

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Abstract

This essay argues that successful ecocriticism must focus on the tangible political consequences of environmental policy that are undoubtedly destroying the planet. I begin with an overview of how some ecocritics use poststructuralist thought to minimize apocalyptic rhetoric and its subsequent call to arms. Afterwards I outline how ecocriticism can become effective in influencing people to abandon environmentally destructive practices in coalition with the thinkers I take issue with. They may do so by not giving up on images of collective omnicide. I conclude by showing how metaphors of apocalypse enable ecocriticism to forge a tethering principle of interconnectedness that overcomes the risk of co-optation. Embracing such interconnectedness goes beyond the idea of the individual self and awakens a sense of collective responsibility that can truly change our world.

Introduction

It is no longer a question that human interaction with the world is destroying the very ecosystems that sustain life¹. Nevertheless, within academic communities people are divided over which discursive tactic, ontological position, or strategy for activism should be adopted. I contend that regardless of an ecocritic's particular orientation that ecocriticism most effectively produces change when it doesn't neglect the tangible reality that surrounds any discussion of the environment. This demands including human-induced ecocidal violence within all our accounts. Retreating from images of ecological collapse to speak purely within inner-academic or policymaking circles isolates our conversations away from the rest of the world—as it dies before our eyes.

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This is not to argue that interrogating people's discourse, tactics, ontological orientation, or anything else lacks merit. Timothy Luke, Chair and Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, explains that

Because nothing in Nature simply is given within society, such terms must be assigned significance by every social group that mobilizes them[.] ... Many styles of ecologically grounded criticism circulate in present-day American mass culture, partisan debate, consumer society, academic discourse, and electoral politics as episodes of ecocritique, contesting our politics of nature, economy, and culture in the contemporary global system of capitalist production and consumption. (1997: xi)

Luke reminds us that regardless of how ecocritics advance their agenda they always impact our environmental awareness and therefore alter our surrounding ecology. In doing so he shows that both literal governmental policies and the symbolic universe they take place within reconstruct the discourses utilized to justify policy and criticism in the first place. This is why films like *The Day After Tomorrow* and *2012* can put forth realistic depictions of government response to environmental apocalypse. And despite being fictional, these films in turn can influence the reality of governmental policy. Even the science-fiction of weather-controlling weapons are now only steps away from becoming reality².

Oftentimes it takes images of planetary annihilation to motivate people into action after years of sitting idly by watching things slowly decay. In reality it takes awareness of impending disaster to compel policymakers to enact even piecemeal reform. On the screen it takes the actual appearance of ecological apocalypse to set the plot in motion. What is constant is that "as these debates unfold, visions of what is the good or bad life ... find many of their most compelling articulations as ecocritiques ... [that are] mobilized for and against various projects of power and economy in the organization of our everyday existence" (Luke 1997: xi). We cannot motivate people to change the ecological conditions that give rise to thoughts of theorization without reference to the concrete environmental destruction ongoing in reality. This means that, even when our images of apocalypse aren't fully accurate, our use of elements of scientifically-established reality reconstructs the surrounding power structures in beneficial ways. When we ignore either ecological metaphors or environmental reality we only get part of the picture.'

In recent years, many ecocritics have shied away from the very metaphors that compel a sense of urgency. They have largely done so out of the fear that its deployment will get co-opted by hegemonic institutions. Such critics ignore how what we advocate alters our understanding of ourselves to the surrounding ecology. In doing so, our advocacies render such co-optation meaningless because of the possibility to redeploy our metaphors in the future. In the upcoming sections, I will provide an overview of how poststructuralist thinkers like Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger influence some ecocritics to retreat from omniscient rhetoric. This retreat minimizes the main objectives of their ecocriticism. I argue that rather than withdrawing from images of apocalypse that we should utilize them in subversive ways to disrupt the current relationship people have to their ecology. Professor of Sociology at York University, Fuyuki Kurasawa argues that "instead of bemoaning the contemporary preeminence of a dystopian imaginary ... it can enable a novel form of transnational socio-political action ... that can be termed preventive foresight. ... [I]t is a mode of ethico-political practice enacted by participants in the

emerging realm of global civil society ... [by] putting into practice a sense of responsibility for the future by attempting to prevent global catastrophes" (454-455).

By understanding how metaphors around the environment operate we can better utilize discourse to steer us away from the brink of apocalypse. The alternative of abandoning apocalyptic deployments is far worse. Put simply, "by minimizing the urgency or gravity of potential threats, procrastination appears legitimate" (Kurasawa 462). In the final section of my essay, I outline how ecocritics can utilize images of omnicide to motivate the evolution of successful tactics that can slow the pace of environmental destruction.

The biopower of the pragmatic

Due to increasing amounts of environmental destruction, ecological activists such as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, the Earth Liberation Front, and many others have left their faith in electoral politics behind. Instead they utilize direct action to stop those who threaten animals and the ecosystem. One such example is Captain Paul Watson who was one of the original members of Greenpeace and the founder of Sea Shepherd. He was kicked out of Greenpeace because he was "possessed by too powerful a drive" that produced "divisiveness" through his refusal to work within traditional avenues for change (Greenpeace). This led Watson to establish the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society that actively prevents those that threaten oceanic life, most notably Japanese whaling. Watson justifies his offensive attacks on the logic of survival. He states that "if we wipe out the fish, the oceans are going to die. If the oceans die, we die. We can't live on this planet with a dead ocean. So it's really a question of self-preservation" (Zelman). Empirically, the Sea Shepherd's tactics have worked. Most recently they caused Japan to only catch half of their quota after ending their whaling season short in 2011 (Yamaguchi). At the same time, Watson doesn't limit his critique of oceanic destruction to merely the Antarctic or the oceans. He uses the platform of Japanese whaling to talk about what he calls "the economics of extinction." These connections serve as a stage to create larger political awareness about issues such as globalization, capitalism, and the war on terrorism. In turn, Watson's initial justification of survival sets in motion a larger discourse that gets at the complexities that compelled Watson to act out of self-preservation in the first place.

It is worth pausing here a moment since the way Watson is approached by various people around the world says a lot about how metaphors shape reality. For instance, while Japan considers the Sea Shepherd a terrorist organization, it should be remembered that "one man's [sic] terrorist is another man's [sic] freedom fighter, and it is a sentiment that certainly applies to Paul Watson" (Fox). For the Japanese, where whaling is acceptable and dolphin meat is commonplace, the Sea Shepherds come across as terrorists interfering with commerce and the national food supply. Many people in the United States, however, stand in solidarity with the Sea Shepherd because whaling is looked down upon from a Western perspective—despite it being entirely acceptable to slaughter countless other animals. In fact, United States policymakers are enacting legislation designed to crack down on animal rights activists who expose the horrors of factory farms and vivisection labs. US federal legislation has engaged in a "relentless expansion of 'terrorism' rhetoric and investigations over the last 30 years ... [that] was

initially confined to property crimes by the Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front[.] ... Now this already-broad terrorism classification has been expanded even further. The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) was drafted to target anyone who causes the 'loss of profits' of an animal enterprise" (Potter). Here we see how the "amorphousness of the war on terrorism carries with it a paranoid edge ... since such a war is limitless and ... engenders what we seek to destroy" because it risks jailing the very people who hold the key to saving the planet (Lifton 115-116). Fortunately "animal rights activists filed a federal lawsuit ... to challenge ... AETA ... [on the grounds that it] violated their First Amendment rights and allows the government to label peaceful protesters as 'terrorists'" (Ludwig). In large part the decision will come down to whether speaking the truth about corporate violence upon non-human animals is protected even if it interferes with commerce. The more that people are aware about how corporate violence destroys the ecosystem through wanton disregard for other sentient creatures the more ELF and ALF activists will be understood as freedom fighters and not as terrorists³. As Peter Singer famously said in his groundbreaking book *Animal Liberation*, "we are, quite literally, gambling with the future of our planet—for our hamburgers" (169).

Outside of charges of terrorism, direct activists face a host of criticism from academics on the left who should otherwise be their allies. For instance, Timothy Luke uses a Foucauldian analysis to explain how attempting to protect the environment is merely an acute form of biopower. He explains, "The application of enviro-discipline expresses the authority of eco-knowledgeable, geo-powered forces to police the fitness of all biological organisms[.] ... Master concepts, like 'survival' or 'sustainability' ... empower these masterful conceptualizers to inscribe the biological/cultural/economic order of the Earth's many ... environments, requiring continuous enviro-discipline to guarantee ecological fitness" (1999: 146). The implication is that "the ways in which the environment is constructed as in crisis ... and who then is authorized to save it become important for understanding the ways that the truth about the environment is made" (Rutherford 291). For biopower to operate effectively it must have the legitimacy to speak. Such legitimacy, however, pushes out divergent voices who otherwise refuse to subscribe to the letter of the law. This critique readily applies to activists like Watson who harness the language of international law, alongside apocalyptic threats, to escape prosecution for interfering with commerce.

The transfer of agency from individuals to international bodies such as the International Whaling Commission is criticized by theorists like Luke. Eric Darier, Research Associate at the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change at Lancaster University, points out how "current environmental concerns could be seen as an extension of 'biopolitics', broadened to all life-forms ... [through an] 'ecopolitics' ... [that] is the most recent attempt to extend control ... to the entire planet[.] ... In this context, the promotion of ecocentrism by deep ecology, for example, can be seen as not only a critique of prevalent, increasing instrumental control of the natural world, but as inserting itself very well into the new normalizing strategy of an ecopolitics" (Darier 23).

Anything is justified in the name of saving the environment because it is a question of our very survival. Here we find the logic of things like resource wars that strive to secure geo-political interests in order to get others to clean up their acts in the name of environmental security⁴. From this perspective the mobilizing potentials of apocalyptic imagery can influence populations for the purposes of war instead of positive ecological awareness. This fear causes such critics to refrain from utilizing descriptions of omnicide while simultaneously criticizing the most effective tactic activists on the frontlines have.

Luke and Darier's Foucauldian approach to ecocriticism is not without value. They demonstrate how "discourse delineate[s] ... the terms of intelligibility whereby a particular 'reality' can be known and acted upon. When we speak of a discourse we may be referring to a specific group of texts, but also importantly to the social practices to which those texts are inextricably linked" (Doty, 1996: 6). Power continuously operates in both hegemonic and resistant ways regardless if we are monkey-wrenching, speaking at a political press conference, or using the written language of the academic. No matter the form, the way we articulate our discourse must construct reality in a precise way in order to render it intelligible for others to understand. Judith Butler notes that "the media's evacuation of the human through the image has to be understood ... in terms of the broader problem that normative schemes of intelligibility establish what will and will not be human" (146)⁵. Once other animals and the environment are understood as less than human their lives become inconsequential compared to the short-term benefit of human civilization. To this ends—despite Luke and Darier's fear of being co-opted—apocalyptic imagery can help in two regards. First, it helps people recognize the interconnection of the global ecology in order to appreciate the similarity between humans and other species. Second, it provides a self-motivating reason for people to change their behavior to avert extinction even when confronting those who refuse to recognize the intrinsic value of non-human animals. In either case omnicidal images change both the mindset and the actions of those we encounter, thereby fostering new directions for humanity to evolve.

Any hesitancy to deploy images of apocalypse out of the risk of acting in a biopolitical manner ignores how any particular metaphor—apocalyptic or not—always risks getting co-opted. It does not excuse inaction. Clearly hegemonic forces have already assumed control of determining environmental practices when one looks at the debates surrounding off-shore drilling, climate change, and biodiversity within the halls of Congress. "As this ideological quagmire worsens, urgent problems ... will go unsolved ... only to fester more ominously into the future. ... [E]cological crisis ... cannot be understood outside the larger social and global context ... of internationalized markets, finance, and communications" (Boggs 774). If it weren't for people such as Watson connecting things like whaling to the end of the world it wouldn't get the needed coverage to enter into public discourse. It takes big news to make headlines and hold attention spans in the electronic age. Sometimes it even takes a reality TV show on Animal Planet. As Luke reminds us, "Those who dominate the world exploit their positions to their advantage by defining how the world is known. Unless they also face resistance, questioning, and challenge from those who are dominated, they certainly will remain the dominant forces" (2003: 413). Merely sitting back and theorizing over metaphorical deployments does a grave injustice to the gains activists are making on the ground. It also allows hegemonic institutions to continually define the debate over the environment by framing out any attempt for significant change, whether it be radical or reformist.

Only by jumping on every opportunity for resistance can ecocriticism have the hopes of combatting the current ecological reality. This means we must recognize that we cannot fully escape the master's house since the surrounding environment always shapes any form of resistance. Therefore, we ought to act even if we may get co-opted. As Foucault himself reminds us, "instead of radial ruptures more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about[.] ... And it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible, somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional

integration of power relationships. It is in this sphere of force relations that we must try to analyze the mechanisms of power” (96-97).

Here Foucault “asks us to think about resistance differently, as not anterior to power, but a component of it. If we take seriously these notions on the exercise and circulation of power, then we ... open ... up the field of possibility to talk about particular kinds of environmentalism” (Rutherford 296). This is not to say that all actions are resistant. Rather, the revolutionary actions that are truly resistant oftentimes appear mundane since it is more about altering the intelligibility that frames discussions around the environment than any specific policy change. Again, this is why people like Watson use one issue as a jumping off point to talk about wider politics of ecological awareness. Campaigns that look to the government or a single policy but for a moment, and then go on to challenge hegemonic interactions with the environment through other tactics, allows us to codify strategic points of resistance in numerous places at once. Again, this does not mean we must agree with every tactic. It does mean that even failed attempts are meaningful. For example, while PETA’s ad campaigns have drawn criticism for comparing factory farms to the Holocaust, and featuring naked women who’d rather go naked than wear fur, their importance extends beyond the ads alone⁶. By bringing the issues to the forefront they draw upon known metaphors and reframe the way people talk about animals despite their potentially anti-Semitic and misogynist underpinnings.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s theorization of the multitude serves as an excellent illustration of how utilizing the power of the master’s biopolitical tools can become powerful enough to deconstruct its house despite the risk of co-optation or backlash. For them, the multitude is defined by the growing global force of people around the world who are linked together by their common struggles without being formally organized in a hierarchical way. While Hardt and Negri mostly talk about the multitude in relation to global capitalism, their understanding of the commons and analysis of resistance is useful for any ecocritic. They explain,

[T]he multitude has matured to such an extent that it is becoming able, through its networks of communication and cooperation ... [and] its production of the common, to sustain an alternative democratic society on its own. ... Revolutionary politics must grasp, in the movement of the multitudes and through the accumulation of common and cooperative decisions, the moment of rupture ... that can create a new world. In the face of the destructive state of exception of biopower, then, there is also a constituent state of exception of democratic biopolitics[,] ... creating ... a new constitutive temporality. (357)

Once one understands the world as interconnected—instead of constructed by different nation-states and single environments—conditions in one area of the globe couldn’t be conceptually severed from any other. In short, we’d all have a stake in the global commons. Ecocritics can then utilize biopolitics to shape discourse and fight against governmental biopower by waking people up to the pressing need to inaugurate a new future for there to be any future. Influencing other people through argument and end-of-the-world tactics is not the same biopower of the state so long as it doesn’t singularize itself but for temporary moments. Therefore, “it is not unreasonable to hope that in a biopolitical future (after the defeat of biopower) war will no longer be possible, and the intensity of the cooperation and communication among singularities ... will destroy its [very] possibility” (Hardt & Negri 347). In the

context of capitalism, when wealth fails to trickle down it would be seen as a problem for the top since it would stand testament to their failure to equitably distribute wealth. In the context of environmentalism, not-in-my-backyard reasoning that displaces ecological destruction elsewhere would be exposed for the failure that it is. There is no backyard that is not one's own. Ultimately, images of planetary doom demonstrate how we are all interconnected and in doing so inaugurate a new world where multitudes, and not governments, guide the fate of the planet.

The ontological enframing of our environment

Beyond the question of discourse, some ecocritics place ontology at the forefront of their analysis. This approach criticizes those who call for action because of how the desire to fix the environment shapes one's Being in managerial ways⁷. Here the issue is not fixing certain environmental practices. Instead the focus is on the way people enframe their sense of self to claim the transcendental authority to regulate life. As Ladelle McWhorter, Professor of Philosophy at Northeast Missouri State University, points out,

We are inundated by predictions of ecological catastrophe and omnicidal doom. ... Our usual response to such prophecies of doom is to ... scramble to find some way to manage our problems[...] ... But over and over again new resource management techniques ... disrupt delicate systems even further, doing still more damage to a planet already dangerously out of ecological balance. Our ceaseless interventions seem only to make things worse[...] ... In fact, it would appear that our trying to do things, change things, fix things cannot be the solution, because it is part of the problem itself. (7-8)

The foundation behind ontological approaches such as McWhorter's is that we should refrain from acting even when we are met with the possibility of extinction. To clarify, it is not that current practices aren't destructive from this perspective. For such critics, acting to overcome such destruction participates in the same kind of violence because it causes us to forget our relationship with the environment as we become actors over it. "Heidegger speaks of what he sees as the danger of dangers ... [in this] kind of forgetfulness, a forgetfulness that Heidegger thought could result not only in nuclear disaster or environmental catastrophe, but in the loss of what makes us the kind of beings we are, beings who can think and who can stand in thoughtful relationship to things" (McWhorter 10). Once we forget that we are also part of the environment we empty our Being of any meaning and deprive ourselves of the very relationships that give us value in the first place.

The question arises, if we can't act then how can we prevent environmental destruction? The answer for thinkers that center their criticism on ontology is to rethink the very basis of how we think in the first place. For instance, William Spanos, one of the world's leading experts on Heideggerian thought, argues that

there is an urgency of retrieving the unfinished post-structuralist ontological project to rethink thinking itself. By this I mean the need to dis-close, to open up, to think that which the triumphant metaphysical/calculative-technological-disciplinary logic of the imperial West has closed off and accommodated or repressed. To rethink thinking means, in short, to liberate

precisely that relay of differential forces that the structuralizing and disciplinary imperatives of the ontotheological tradition has colonized in its final “anthropological” phase. (22)

Once again, even for people like Spanos, placing ontology prior to politics does not deny that present actions are unquestionably destructive. Such an approach also acknowledges that acting is always inevitable because one is already situated within an environment. In this context even thinking is action since engaging in ontological examination produces new forms of thought that alters our will to act. Spanos elaborates that this project is important “not simply ... for the sake of rethinking the question of being as such, but also to instigate a rethinking of the uneven relay of practical historical imperatives ... [and] to make visible ... the West’s perennial global imperial project” (29). He contends that, once we rethink the way we think, our actions will evolve because focusing on the way ontology grounds our representations alters the way we be-in-the-world.

However, for this strategy to work one’s rethinking of thinking must still thoughtfully envision a positive future for us to evolve toward. We will be powerless to do anything besides produce new enframings of the world if our discussions only exist at the level of abstraction.

For both Heidegger and revolutionary environmentalists, there exist possibilities for transformation despite the destructiveness of Enframing. In the midst of technological peril ... there emerges a sense of solidarity of human with nonhuman beings. ... It is precisely the experience of this solidarity which must be constantly rearticulated ... in order to provide a historically and ontologically authentic break with the metaphysics of technical control and capitalist exploitation. Action will only be truly revolutionary if it revolves around engagement in solidarity with nature, where liberation is always seen both as human liberation from the confines of Enframing and simultaneously as liberation of animal nations and eco-regions from human technics. Anything less will always lapse back into ... disciplinary control over humans, nonhumans, and the Earth. (Best and Nocella 82)

As a result, the problem lies in the way one enframes other creatures as a standing reserve when they relate to politics, and not in action itself. A deep ecological perspective that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life could enable the possibility of acting without enframing. People like Ric O’Barry, who was Flipper’s trainer, serve as excellent examples of how to act while inhabiting such a perspective. Ric used his popularity to make an award-winning documentary, titled *The Cove*, which brought awareness to the horrors of dolphin killing and the similarities we share with these sentient creatures. It was even powerful enough to stir up debate in Japan about the practice of eating dolphin meat (Becker). It is not that Ric doesn’t use his notoriety to push for legislative change at the national and international level. He certainly does. However, he does so without giving up his personal commitment to directly change things in the same way as Watson does. This willingness to act directly alters the ontological representations around which such debates take place by reframing the metaphors policymakers use to justify their legislative initiatives.

Despite the merits of ontological ecocriticism, using it to prohibit ecocritical appeals for concrete action fractures a movement that should work in coalition. We should not approach our choices as an either/or situation. Strategies of direct action can be compatible with Heideggerian thought so long as we understand such action as always already inevitable and not a way to enframe others. Deploying

apocalyptic threats can challenge hegemonic systems since they serve as a catalyst for evolving change instead of legislating it. In fact, “the pervasiveness of a dystopian imaginary can help notions of historical contingency and fallibilism gain traction against their determinist and absolutist counterparts. Once we recognize that the future is uncertain and that any course of action produces both unintended and unexpected consequences, the responsibility to face up to potential disasters ... can act as catalysts for public debate and socio-political action, spurring citizens’ involvement in the work of preventive foresight” (Kurasawa 458).

Put plainly, we must understand any action in both its social and political dimensions. As the way we confront environmental challenges change so too does the conditions surrounding ecocriticism. To alter conditions in the political or social realm is always already to impact the other. This allows us to redeploy even problematic deployments in order to reshape the public debates surrounding ecological awareness.

Just as discourse can serve governmental biopower or civic biopolitics, our ontological connections can at any moment serve both as an avenue for repression or a venue for resistance. It is not the ecocritics’ task to proscribe how other people should interact with the environment. Instead they should act within their environment in a way that makes the necessary actions to save our planet beneficial. Our eco-orientation to the world will evolve our Being’s very possibility to act in the same way language, technology, and species evolve based upon their interactions with living and social organisms. No doubt, “the power that is inherent in language is thus not something that is centralized, emanating from a pre-given subject. Rather, like the discursive practices in which it inheres, power is dispersed and, most important, is productive of subjects and their worlds” (Doty, 1993: 302-303). In large part the current environmental destruction exists because democratic capitalism has been able to wield its hegemonic influence to exploit the niche of technological production. Sadly, this niche rewards increased GDP over the planet’s ecological well-being. The belief that these conditions cannot be unthought is not merely misplaced but also serves to support the hegemonic myth of the inevitability of capitalism. It is up to each of us to directly act upon this world only after we approach the question of acting differently. Only then can we see past the current imperial enframing and inspire true collective action.

The call of the ecocritic

There are three things ecocriticism must keep in mind to retain its effectiveness in the poststructuralist era. First and foremost ecocritics must not allow their infighting over tactics and academic maneuvers to become debilitating. Ecocritics have enough on their plate fighting dominant political institutions. To never directly take up arms against ecologically destructive practices will merely cede potential avenues of resistance while we fight amongst ourselves. We must take from those ecocritics we partially disagree with what we can and then operate from a different platform so as to always be spectral in our resistance. Adopting varied tactics enables an ecological coalition centered on the connectedness that arises from the belief that we all have a shared stake in the planet. Awakening to our collective stake in the environment can overcome the illusionary boundaries of the nation-state, species, or even sentience. Every molecule of the Earth’s ecology is interconnected. When one part dies we all stand on the brink of extinction. For ecocriticism to embrace this interconnection it must not erect borders

between different approaches so long as the foundation of the struggle is premised upon the commons of our universe. Unfortunately, “what characterizes much campus left discourse is a substitution of moral rhetoric about evil policies[, leaving] ... absent ... a sober reckoning with the preoccupations and opinions of the vast majority of Americans ... who do not believe that the discourse of ‘anti-imperialism’ speaks to their lives” (Isaac). As a result, there is a need for ecocritics to not just speak to the choir that mostly already agrees with them. They must also speak to the populations who don’t intuitively see the link between imperialism, technology, and capitalism with environmental destruction. Apocalyptic rhetoric can do precisely that because of its underlying tenant of self-preservation.

The above point is absolutely crucial because ecocriticism cannot be effective if its focus never goes beyond the individual alone. No single person is the entire ecology so no individual can save it. While each individual undoubtedly impacts the environment and can cause change, no large scale transformation can take place if we never inspire collective action. In evolutionary terms, ideas, thoughts, and actions must be passed on in order to survive. For that to happen it takes a combined effort, even though it can start by a single mutation. Luke reminds us that

the typical consumer does not control the critical aspects of his or her existence[.] ... The absurd claim that average consumers only need to shop, bicycle, or garden their way to an ecological future merely moves most of the responsibility and much of the blame away from the institutional centers of power whose decisions actually maintain the wasteful, careless ways of material exchange[. It also] ... ignores how corporate capital, big government, and professional experts pushed the practices of ... affluent society ... as a political strategy to sustain economic growth, forestall mass discontent, and empower scientific authority. People did choose to live this way, but their choices were made from a very narrow array of alternatives presented to them as rigidly structured, prepackaged menus of very limited options. (Luke, 1997: 127-128)

In turn, ecocritics must not displace the blame away from current hegemonic structures by calling on individuals to act alone. Instead ecocriticism must articulate its arguments to influence change in both institutions of power and the very people whose mindsets make up the current collective. Many environmental groups have been able to do precisely that. For instance, “NGOs and social movements active in global civil society have ... introduce[ed] ... dystopian scenarios ... as rhetorical devices that act as ‘wake-up calls’... to jolt citizens out of their complacency and ... foster ... public deliberation about the potential cataclysms facing humankind” (Kurasawa 464). Ecocritics must not cut down such NGOs for adopting end-of-the-world tactics even though their rhetoric might get co-opted when specific policies get enacted.

Secondly, ecocriticism must never forget that what they do is politics. There are two implications to this. On the one hand it means that activists who directly lobby the government should not denounce the academically-oriented ecocritic for struggling within the academy. On the other hand it means that those who denounce the managerial tendencies that come along with governmental policies shouldn’t condemn activists who operate within the system. Instead of attacking one another, ecocritics should understand opposing discourses and ontologies as part of a spectral strategy that works against the environmental imperialism of the status-quo. We should take each opportunity for its fullest even in the face of failure. Once we acknowledge the virtual inevitability of co-optation the emphasis should be on creating successive struggles from a variety of standpoints. Captain Paul Watson, for instance, does not

merely pack up his flagship the Steve Irwin and head home after the Japanese whaling season ends. He goes on to fight for seals, dolphins, and a number of other animals all the while participating within a larger discourse surrounding planetary ecology. Not all of Watson's tactics have been successful. Neither has anyone else's. However, that doesn't mean we should give up. Quite the opposite. For example, just because revolutionaries like Che Guevara have been turned into trendy t-shirts, fueling the industries of capitalism, doesn't mean he shouldn't have fought against imperialism in the first place. In the same way, just because environmental activists are inevitably going to fall victim to constructing an image of the planet on the brink of extinction, it doesn't mean that we should discount their battles against such destruction. Their counter constructions enable a contestation over what it means to be human in relationship to the rest of the world. Absent these counter narratives only a singular construction of anthropocentric managerial domination would exist.

A consequence to this second point is that the willingness to continually deploy different tactics is more powerful for ecocriticism than coming up with the perfect strategy. That way even when we become co-opted in one place we are already struggling from somewhere else. In turn, ecocriticism should focus on the underlying motivations that compel others to act in order to determine which ecocritics to be allies with.

Through this way human beings can repair the willed manipulation inherent in calculative thinking and realize a patient equanimity toward Life. It is only in the context of this reawakened sense of the unity of life that revolutionary action gains an authentic basis. It is the engagement with "the Other" that shows the ELF actions are truly about defense of plant and animal life, and they demonstrate genuine liberation concerns that typically are trapped within Enframing. That is to say, ELF (and similar) actions, show themselves as part of a ... profound solidarity ... [that] serves as a general basis for a post-Enframing, post-capitalist order, an ecological, not a capitalist society. (Best and Nocella 83)

This shift allows ecocriticism to formulate ever-greater coalitions while at the same time preventing a descent into moral relativism. We can still utilize political action by eco-activists and NGOs such as PETA and Greenpeace productively, even if they result in reformist managerialism, so long as the sole focus doesn't fall upon a singular tactic. Only a profound orientation of solidarity will ever have the hopes of succeeding. Everything we do is deeply political and we must understand that in acting or in thinking we necessarily impact the world. Uniting behind images of planetary omnicide holds the potential to collectively bring us together by awakening humanity to its shared stake in the global environment.

Third, and most importantly, ecocritics must adopt tactics that can most effectively influence other people without proscribing end goals. By this I mean that ecocritics must use those tools that can appeal to the masses while simultaneously making their appeals in such a way as not to force a choice upon them. Apocalyptic imagery is ideal for this task. It appeals to notions of shared planetary concerns that serve as motivation for others to act, even without fully knowing how the apocalypse can truly be averted. By creating a compelling urge to do *something* that arises out of the image of planetary annihilation ecocriticism can influence a variety of people to take up arms through a multitude of techniques. Society as a whole will never mobilize to halt the very practices that threaten life without such compelling inspiration. When ecocriticism helps other people see how certain actions risk their very survival it will enable our planet to evolve differently. So long as ecocriticism never gives up on the

struggle, even if this different direction may bring new scenarios of apocalypse, humanity as a species can continually evolve its patterns and behaviors to avert extinction. This is not to say we will live forever. Rather it is to say that as a species we can continue to exist in harmony with the lives all around us and give our deaths meaning. Ultimately, it is through imagining the end of the world that we will be able to envision how to save it.

Endnotes

¹ It is beyond the scope of this essay to prove that current policies will destroy the environment. The truth is that they simply are. For now I will quote environmental activist Bill Henderson, "The scientific debate about human induced global warming is over but policy makers ... seem to not understand the scope of the impending tragedy. Global warming isn't just warmer temperatures, heat waves, melting ice and threatened polar bears. Scientific understanding increasingly points to runaway global warming leading to human extinction ... of most flora and fauna."

² For more information on the Defense Advance Research Project Agency's work developing weather-controlling weapons in conjunction with the US military see Katie Drummond's article "'Military Science: Hack Stormy Skies to Lord over Lightning.'"

³ At the time of putting the finishing touches on this essay, Watson has been held in a German jail for 60 days waiting extradition to Costa Rica. He is being held on a politically-motivated ten year-old warrant that INTERPOL has advised governments not to act upon. Despite Watson awaiting trial the Sea Shepherds remain active. Watson himself writes, "there is the positive side of all of this. We have managed to refocus the attention onto shark finning and onto Costa Rica's shady involvement with shark finning. ... Since my arrest much more publicity has been generated about shark finning and about Costa Rica. More illegally caught shark fins have been seized by the Costa Rican Coast Guard over the last 58 days than in the last two years."

⁴ Again, it is beyond the scope of this essay to prove how current environmental policies are fueling ecological violence both upon the world and other human beings. For an extended analysis on the militarism that arises from securitizing the environment see Daniel Deudney and Richard Matthew's *Contested Grounds: Security and Conflict in the New Environmental Politics*.

⁵ Judith Butler's notion of intelligibility is informed by her Foucauldian understanding of identity. She contends that the way human subjects are rendered intelligible marks them for different purposes like in the case of gender. Those people who are not intelligible as either male or female, for example, are then subsequently excluded. While Butler does not directly talk about ecocriticism, her understanding of intelligibility is useful because it demonstrates how what we take as fact is oftentimes nothing more than a construction. What becomes problematic is when these constructions are used to define people out of ecological debates to the detriment of the environment.

⁶ Blisstree contributor, Briana Rognlin, explains the tension between supporting and criticizing PETA. She states, "PETA isn't a female-positive organization ... [due to] their use of porn (essentially) to get attention for animal rights. ... Their use of fat-shaming and objectification of women get them attention (such as this), but ultimately, we think it's a pretty stupid way to promote animal rights. But bashing PETA isn't simple for those of us who agree with some of their ideas: PETA is one of the most outspoken and well-funded resources for people who are interested in animal rights or a vegan lifestyle. In fact, they're one of the only resources and organizations that are vocally pro-animal rights at all."

⁷ The notion of Being comes from Heidegger's understanding of the German word Dasein, which roughly translates to one's understanding of how they exist within the world. "This picture of Dasein's active and engaged being-in-the-world is obscured in modern times by technological thinking which treats everything as essentially an object of cognition, a simple matter of fact, including human beings themselves. Heidegger argues that this

objectivistic outlook is not innocent. ... This is what allows technology to destroy both man [sic] and nature.” (Feenberg 2).

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