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From the Blue Planet to Google Earth

1. Vaster Than Empires

In her short story "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow," science fiction novelist Ursula K. Le Guin describes the encounter of a group of humans with an ecosystem that cannot be understood as encompassing anything less than an entire planet. When a team of scientific explorers arrives on the planet called only World 4470, after a journey that has taken just a few hours in their personal time but 250 years in Earth time, they find all its continents inhabited exclusively by plants, from grass-like to tree-like species. Their scientific study of this world is from the beginning impaired by the peculiarities of their life as a group: since only psychologically or socially alienated individuals volunteer for a mission that will take them 500 years into the future (returning to Earth will take another 250), conflicts continuously erupt between the team members. One of the scientists, Osden, proves particularly problematic, as his "wide-range bioempathic receptivity," a psychological condition that enables him to "share lust with a white rat, pain with a squashed cockroach, phototropy with a moth," also leads him blindly to reflect back any human emotions he senses in his surroundings.[1] Since most of his colleagues approach him with suspicion or latent hostility, he cannot help but respond with scorn and hatred, which ends up estranging even the most patient and compassionate among them. To minimize the disruptive effects of this condition, he moves away from the team to take on the biological exploration of a nearby forest.

But the tension that Osden's presence had caused is soon replaced by a vague feeling of unease that most members of the group experience in and around this forest. Lingering apprehension erupts into crisis when Osden misses his radio transmissions, and is found bleeding and unconscious on the forest soil by two scientists who go out to search for him. As they pick him up, they are seized by an overwhelming and irrational fear that they hardly know how to control. When they discuss their experiences as Osden regains consciousness, it becomes clear that the plant life in the forest has some kind of sentience that he was able to identify mostly by its fear: "'I suppose I could feel the roots. Below me in the ground, down under the ground … I felt the fear. It kept growing. As if they'd finally *known* I was there, lying on them there, under them, among them, the thing they feared, and yet part of their fear itself. I couldn't stop sending the fear back, and it kept growing, and I couldn't move, I couldn't get away.'"[2] Several of the scientists contradict him by pointing out that the tree-like plants have no nervous system that would enable them to react to their surroundings in such a way. But others

David A. Hardy, *Fairyland of Fungi* from the illustration series "Galactic Tours," 1981. Gouache on illustration board. Image courtesy of the author. This illustration originally prompted a short story by science-fiction writer Bob Shaw.

observe that all the plants are linked by an intricate root system and a network of epiphytes so as to create what might be a far-reaching web of connections. One of them argues, "'sentience or intelligence isn't a thing, you can't find it in, or analyze it out from, the cells of a brain. It's a function of the connected cells. It is, in a sense, the connection: the connectedness.'" Osden sums up his experience of this utterly alien form of intelligence by characterizing it as "'sentience without senses. Blind, deaf, nerveless, moveless. Some irritability, response to touch. Response to sun, to light, to water, and chemicals in the earth around the roots. Nothing comprehensible to an animal mind. Presence without mind. Awareness of being, without object or subject. Nirvana.'"[3]

In such an ecosystem, the only agent that could have attacked Osden is another human, and one of the scientists finally admits that he mistook the psychological effect of the forest for Osden's influence and wanted to rid the mission of his interference. To break the impact of the alien forest, the crew decides to relocate their camp to another continent. But the same unease as before revisits them on a vast prairie covered with grass-like plants, forcing them to realize, as the team's biologist points out, that the entire planet's vegetation constitutes one large "'network of processes ... There are no individual plants, then, properly speaking. Even the pollen is part of the linkage, no doubt, a sort of windborne sentience, connecting overseas. But it is not conceivable. That all the biosphere of a planet should be one network of communications, sensitive, irrational, immortal, isolated.'"[4] Le Guin's title allusion to Andrew Marvell's well-known poem "To His Coy Mistress," with its reference to "vegetable love," is translated into "vegetable fear" as Osden infers that the planet's apprehension must have been triggered by its dawning awareness of other beings where there had never been anything but itself. As Osden and the other humans perceive and retransmit this fear to the alien intelligence, they are locked into a self-reinforcing feedback loop with their environment.

Humans' interaction with a global environment is here articulated through a series of conceptual tensions: the forest's contemplative immobility versus the humans' movements; its indifference to them as against their investigation of it; its unconcern over space and time, which contrasts both with the humans' separation from their own world and history, and their longing to overcome the limitations of their biological form; its silence as against their language; its total unity (signaled here by the pollen, which connects the plants even across oceans) versus their plurality and individuality. At the same time, the lyrical quality of the passage,

which culminates in the quotation from Marvell's poem and echoes the story's title, also conveys the sense that the forest possesses a kind of being that humans have always aspired to: a collective experience of "world enough and time," where temporality and space are no longer issues of existential concern. Even as the scientists, like Marvell's lovers, cannot share this experience, they seem to participate in it temporarily by "walk[ing] under the trees"[5]: rootedness in its original, botanical sense and indifference to space coexist in the same experience.

Published in 1971, this short story articulates a vision of global ecology that had gained great popularity at the time. The idea that all the planet's life forms are linked in such a way that they come to form one world-encompassing, sentient superorganism echoes James Lovelock's well-known Gaia hypothesis, according to which Planet Earth constitutes a single overarching feedback system that sustains itself.[6] At the same time, the scientists' taxonomic approach to World 4470's biology – surveying the land, counting and identifying species, analyzing chemical processes – is complemented and in the end superseded by what the narrator calls Osden's "love," his willingness to merge physically and psychologically with the environment so as to communicate with it, in a transparent allusion to the holistic, synthetic modes of thought that were being advocated as superior to conventional, analytic science in the 1960s and 1970s. "Vaster than empires," this biosphere cannot be grasped in any of its parts unless their underlying planetary connectedness is understood first.

In asking how humans might be able to relate to such a planet-wide organic "network of communications," Le Guin responds to powerful allegorizations of the global in the 1960s, from the "global village" to "Spaceship Earth," and to some extent participates in their romanticizations of global connectedness as mergers with a technological or ecological sublime. Yet it is impossible to overlook that her short story also complicates such romanticizations, in that the global organism presents itself to the human observers as thoroughly alien, a world far from their own in both space and time. Osden's merger with it – enabled, it is worth noting, by psychopathology – comes at the price of his individual identity, while the other explorers remain just visitors who return to their own planets after a few months. Far from idyllic or utopian, the biosphere's total connectedness is what makes it even more strange than its remoteness or its unfamiliar species. Humans have no "natural" way of relating to such sentient connectivity, in whose

context they themselves appear as alien Others. All the terms – cognitive, affective, and linguistic – by means of which they approach the planet have to be questioned as to whether they do not unduly project the terms of a quite different biological frame of reference, as one of the scientists implies when he refers to the tree-like plants of this "'totally alien environment, for which the archetypical connotations of the word 'forest' provide an inevitable metaphor.'"[7] Rather than describing awareness of the global biosphere as a reassuring (re)turn to Mother Earth, Le Guin's story portrays it as a difficult and thoroughly mediated step for the human imagination.

2. Sense of Planet

In spite of their conceptual differences, what all of these ecological allegories share in common is a sense that the Earth's inhabitants, regardless of their national and cultural differences, are bound together by a global ecosystem whose functioning transcends humanmade borders. It is easy to see how such a conception of ecology, derived from an attempt to practice science in a more synthetic and holistic fashion, lent itself to extrapolation into the political and social sphere. Countercultural aspirations toward global peace and the "brotherhood of man" could effortlessly be associated with the image of the Blue Planet

and indeed be understood to derive directly from the planet's ecological functioning. Ecological systems, in this understanding, are naturally balanced, harmonious, and self-regenerating, and much of the utopian energy of the 1960s derived implicitly or explicitly from the inference that sociocultural systems might also return to such a state if they were freed from artificial constraints and distortions. Whatever the critiques one might want to formulate vis-à-vis this understanding of ecology and its sociocultural ramifications from the perspective of current cultural theory – justifiably much more suspicious of such notions of the natural – one cannot underestimate the galvanizing influence such thinking exerted on the burgeoning environmentalist movement, as well as on other new social movements in the 1960s.

But as Garrett Hardin's 1963 warning about the possible "tragedy" of the global commons already indicates, visions of global connectedness did not always entail utopian sociocultural projects. Paul R. Ehrlich's *Population Bomb,* Donella and Dennis Meadows's *Limits to Growth,* and Lester Brown's *Twenty-Ninth Day,* on the contrary, emphasized the possibility of catastrophic collapse on a planetary scale if contemporary trends in demographic growth, resource use, and pollution continued. The widespread use of apocalyptic

A geodesic greenhouse dome is featured in the environmentally themed sci-fi movie *Silent Runner,* 1972. In the film, all plant life on Earth has become extinct and the remaining species have to be grown in outer space.

narrative in environmentalist rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s is well documented,[8] as is the transfer of Cold War language to environmentalist scenarios in Ehrlich's metaphorization of population growth as a "bomb" or Rachel Carson's description of chemical pollution as a "grim specter stalk[ing] the land."[9] Environmentally oriented science fiction stories, by both scientists like Paul Ehrlich himself and literary authors, similarly portrayed global agricultural landscapes gone so toxic they could only be worked by robots (as in Brian Aldiss's 1967 *Earthworks),* nightmarish urban crowding, food riots, and famine (in a multitude of texts and films), or the entire planet laid to waste in misery, pollution, and disease (as in John Brunner's 1972 novel *The Sheep Look Up).* As Killingsworth and Palmer have pointed out, the horror of such millennial scenarios was in many cases intended less as a probable assessment of things to come than as a means of driving home the urgency of the environmentalist call for social change [10]; the presentation of collapse as global rather than local or national functioned as one important way of conveying the deadly seriousness of the crisis.

If nuclear fear and environmental concern shared such narrative patterns, derived in the last instance from biblical apocalypse, a more subtle but no less terrifying vision of global connectedness emerged from fears of corporate conspiracy that had circulated since the 1950s and made themselves explicit in the countercultural resistance to "the Man" or "the System." While social critics in earlier decades had emphasized the dangers of totalitarian states that might expand to worldwide rule, from the 1950s on, transnational corporations became the prime suspects of aspirations to global hegemony. Anticipated in novels such as Cyril Kornbluth and Frederik Pohl's *Space Merchants* (1953), this fear found its most influential cultural expression in the indictments of the corporate "moloch" and characters' persistently paranoid states of mind in the poetry and fiction of Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and above all, Thomas Pynchon. As a form of resistance to capitalism and specifically to the mass consumerism that escalated in scale and scope after 1945, this paranoid vision of a global corporate conspiracy aiming to control the lives of individuals, communities, and nations, up to and including the triggering of world wars, was not in its original formulations specifically environmentalist. But it made its way into environmental rhetoric in the 1970s, when it surfaced in, for example, Edward Abbey's ecoclassic *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), whose protagonists struggle against what they

perceive as a "megalomaniacal megamachine":

> U.S. Steel intertwined in incestuous embrace with the Pentagon, TVA, Standard Oil, General Dynamics, Dutch Shell, I.G. Farben-industrie [sic]; the whole conglomerated cartel spread out upon half the planet Earth like a global kraken, pan-tentacled, wall-eyed and parrot-beaked, its brain a bank of computer data centers, its blood the flow of money, its heart a radioactive dynamo.[11]

Part of today's antiglobalization rhetoric, with its allegorization of villainous transnational corporations, descends directly from this corporate conspiracy discourse of the 1960s and 1970s. This intensely ambivalent legacy of global visions may help explain why the environmentalist movement today is uneasily extended from organizations that operate internationally and regularly make their voices heard in global political affairs using the diplomatic, economic, legal, and social languages of international institutions, all the way to a fervently antiglobalist wing of activists who demonstrate in the streets against the actions of precisely such institutions. The current political influence of international environmental nongovernmental organizations depends on their willingness to engage in and shape global processes in view of environmentalist goals, while the running battles of activists against the police at the Seattle World Summit in 1999 and the G8 Summit in Genoa in 2001 reflect a different assessment of globalization as dominated by corporate interests and therefore in need of being vigorously resisted. While the term "antiglobalization movement" has become popular in the media, many activists prefer the terms "anti–global capitalism movement" or "global justice movement," as they seek to foreground their opposition to the way politics has been dominated by transnational corporations.

But while this ambivalence of engagement in and resistance to the global, as I have shown, has a history that is several decades old, both the apocalyptic and the utopian dimensions of environmentalist visions of the planet have substantially weakened. Frederick Buell has persuasively demonstrated how the expectation of future collapse, prevalent in the 1960s, has transmuted into an awareness of ongoing crisis in the present.[12] Instead of anticipating disaster, he argues, most populations have learned to live with, and sometimes to accommodate to, a multitude of daily ecological risk scenarios. Utopian hopes have diminished along with all-
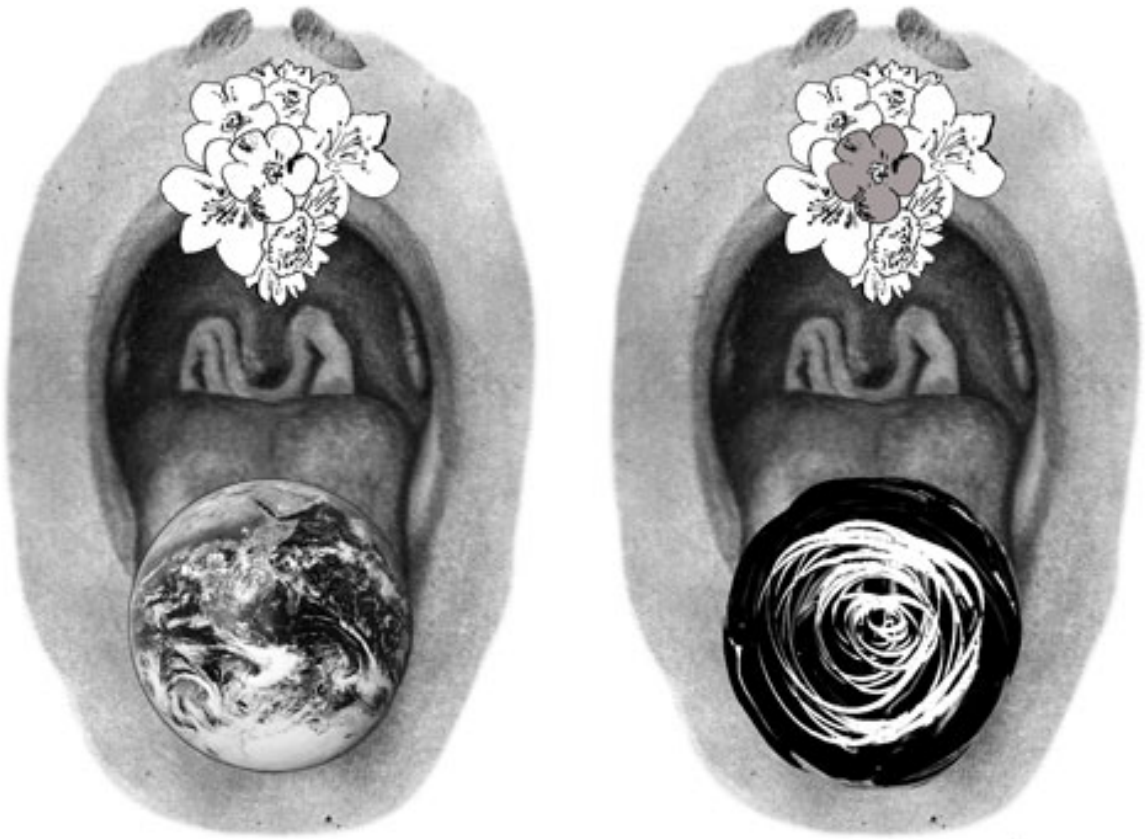
Robert Sandler, *Presque Vu,* 2012.

encompassing millennial visions. Attempts to project a future course for the planet under the label "sustainable development," widely discussed since the 1987 Brundtland Report, and more recent revisions of the development philosophy that undergirded this notion in the context of "environmental justice," are themselves contested and have not to date generated the kind of powerful images that dominated the debates of the 1960s and 1970s.[13] To the extent that most environmentalists see the world as unified today, it is either as a world dominated by corporate capitalism or as a world at risk.

Ad campaign against pollution evoking American Indians as environmentally conscious. This campaign was notorious for featuring "Iron Eyes" Cody, a Hollywood actor of Italian origin who was frequently cast as an American Indian.

3. Localism and Modernity: The Ethic of Proximity

Environmental justice activists have often taken issue with the underlying assumptions of race, class, and gender that tend to be taken for granted in the environmental ethics of white, male, middle-class writers, including Wendell Berry and Scott Russell Sanders. They have rightly emphasized not only that the privileges of encounters with nature as well as the risks associated with some branches of agribusiness and industry are unevenly distributed but that in fact this uneven distribution has in some instances helped to perpetuate environmentally unsound practices whose consequences have often not been suffered or even noticed by the middle class.[14] Given the environmental justice movement's leftist, antihegemonic, and radical political rhetoric, it comes as somewhat of a surprise to find one environmental justice ecocritic deploring how "globalization ... alters traditional values of place, life, and meaning" and "trigger[s] ... chaos,"[15] as if tradition and order were self-evidently worth perpetuating, and to see others relying on conceptions of place-based identity that do not differ from those of the white, male, middle-class environmentalists they criticize as much as one

might expect. [...]

I would argue, then, that in spite of significant differences in social outlook, certain features recur across a wide variety of environmentalist perspectives that emphasize a sense of place as a basic prerequisite for environmental awareness and activism. Many of them, as I have attempted to show, associate spatial closeness, cognitive understanding, emotional attachment, and an ethic of responsibility and "care." Put somewhat more abstractly, they share what philosophers Hans Jonas and Zygmunt Bauman, as well as the sociologist John Tomlinson, have in a broader context called an "ethic of proximity." As Bauman puts it,

> the morality which we have inherited from pre-modern times – the only morality we have – is a morality of proximity, and as such is woefully inadequate in a society in which all important action is an action on distance ... Moral responsibility prompts us to care that our children are fed, clad and shod; it cannot offer us much practical advice, however, when faced with numbing images of a depleted, desiccated and overheated planet which our children, and the children of our children will inherit and have to inhabit in the direct or oblique result of our collective unconcern.[16]

Bauman sums up the dilemma that this approach to ethics raises in an increasingly global context by claiming that

> the cancelling of spatial distance as measured by the reach of human action – that sometimes applauded, but ever more often bewailed feat of modern technology – has not been matched by the cancellation of moral distance, measured by the reach of moral responsibility; but it should be so matched. The question is, how this can be done, if at all.[17]

This skepticism as to whether an ethical code based on what is geographically or socially nearby will be able to cope with larger contexts such as the nation or the transnational realm is echoed by many environmentalist thinkers. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, for example, a highly influential figure for American environmentalism, declares categorically that "the nearer has priority over the more remote – in space, time, culture, species."[18] His call for "a coherent, local, logical, and natural community"[19] assumes, as do many other celebrations of the sense of place, that sociocultural, ethical, and affective allegiances

arise spontaneously and "naturally" at the local level, whereas any attachments to larger entities such as the nation or beyond require complex processes of mediation.

Frequently, the assumption that there can be no compelling ethical interpellation other than that of proximity becomes the foundation for a more general critique of modern sociopolitical structures in environmentalist thought, a deep-seated skepticism vis-à-vis the long-distance, mediated, and abstract structures and institutions that shape modern societies. Naess himself is quite explicit about his rejection of social modernity: "Locality and togetherness in the sense of community are central key terms in the deep ecological movement. There is, so to say, an 'instinctive' reaction against being absorbed in something that is big but not great – something like our modern society."[20] For this reason, the bioregionalist movement, which is heavily indebted to Naess, has consistently advocated a geographical, political, and economic reorganization of nations into bioregions whose boundaries would follow ecological dividing lines like climate zones, species distribution, watersheds, or mountain ranges. Such a reorganization, according to prominent bioregionalist Kirkpatrick Sale, would liberate people from the large-scale social structures that interpose themselves between people's actions and the visibility of their consequences:

> The only way people will apply "right behavior" and behave in responsible ways is if they have been persuaded to see the problem concretely and to understand their own connections to it directly – and this can be done only at a limited scale … People will do the environmentally "correct" thing not because it is thought to be the *moral,* but rather the *practical,* thing to do. That cannot be done on a global scale, nor a continental, nor even a national one, because the human animal, being small and limited, has only a small view of the world and a limited comprehension of how to act within it.[21]

Sale's central idea, that the ecologically right course of action will impose itself as the obvious one at the local but not at larger levels of scale, may seem something short of compelling to anyone who has ever engaged in local politics (a point I will return to later). What persuasive power it has surely derives from its widely shared mistrust of the large-scale, abstract, and often invisible networks of authority, expertise, and exchange that structure modern societies.[22]

4. Sense of Place

The idea of the "cultural construction" of place similarly revolves around the assumption that places are not simply given in advance of human understanding, but its emphasis lies more on the cultural practices of particular communities in creating them than on the mechanisms of capitalist economies. Both the characters of particular places and the modes of belonging to them are defined by human intervention and cultural history more than by natural processes, cultural constructionists argue; local citizenship, far from coming naturally, is painstakingly established and safeguarded through a multiplicity of political, social, and cultural practices and procedures. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has argued, this is even and especially the case in premodern tribal communities: against a view of such communities as more spontaneously and directly bonded to place than modern societies, Appadurai insists that on the contrary, elaborate rituals of home building, gardening, or initiation can all be read as strategies to define an always uncertain and embattled local citizenship rather than as signs of its self-evidence and stability.[23] More broadly, the basic goal of work in cultural studies for the last twenty years has been to analyze and, in most cases, to dismantle appeals to "the natural" or "the biological" by showing their groundedness in cultural practices rather than facts of nature. The thrust of this work, therefore, invariably leads to skepticism about the possibility of returning to nature as such, or of the possibility of places defined in terms of their natural characteristics that humans should relate to.

A somewhat different, but related, set of criticisms has emphasized not so much the difficulties of defining the local as the ambivalent ethical and political consequences that might follow from encouraging attachments to place. In the passage quoted earlier, for example, Kirkpatrick Sale assumes that at the local and regional level, environmentalist considerations will simply impose themselves as the most "practical" course of action because people will be directly aware of and affected by the consequences of their decisions. But it remains unclear why this would be the case. Surely in a local or regional context, decision-makers have to weigh different kinds of "practicalities" against each other just as those in national or transnational contexts do: the interests of different social groups, short-term versus long-term practicalities, the interests of present versus future generations, diverging predictions of what consequences a particular course of action might entail, competition between different interests the community holds

Earth Day is celebrated with a rock concert in Times Square, 1990.

in common (e.g. the need for access to transportation vs. the interest in preserving natural areas), and so on. Since many such decisions depend on value judgments about the kind of community and environment that are considered most desirable, and on courses of action whose outcome cannot be predicted with complete certainty, "practical" reason of the kind Sale postulates cannot function as an unambiguous guide for how communities should reconnect to nature. A change in scale from large to small entities, therefore, does not in and of itself guarantee anything in the way of more ecologically sustainable modes of living. The history of environmental politics includes many examples of local communities voting in favor of their own economic interest and against environmental preservation, decisions that have sometimes been overruled by a national community with fewer direct gains to hope for from development or exploitation of local resources. Similarly, supranational entities such as the European Union have in some cases passed environmental laws whose stringency exceeds national and local ones.

As quite a few critics of deep ecology have pointed out, in addition, one of the risks in attempting to derive political and ethical norms and imperatives directly from nature is that of underestimating the diversity of political projects at whose service such derivations can be put. The most extreme and frequently quoted example is no doubt the National Socialist rhetoric of Germans' natural connectedness to "blood and soil" (Blut und Boden), which helped legitimate fascist political structures, military expansion of the "life space" (Lebensraum), and unprecedented violence both within and outside what was claimed to be Germans' legitimate space of domination in the 1930s and 1940s.[24] But there is no need to rely only on this in many ways extraordinary case to argue that a sense of place can lend equal support to both conservative and progressive politics. […] The political consequences of encouraging people to develop a sense of place, therefore, are far from straightforward and predictable, and environmentalists need to be aware that place awareness can be deployed in the service of political ideals they may not judge desirable. There is nothing in the idea of localism itself that guarantees its connection with the grassroots-democratic and egalitarian politics that many environmentalists envision when they advocate place-based communities.

5. Deterritorialization and Eco-Cosmopolitanism

In the later 1990s, as discussions of globalization spread from the social sciences to the humanities, studies of the relationship of identity to various kinds of space also shifted in emphasis to concepts such as "transnationalism" or "critical internationalism." Theorists from a variety of fields, at the same time, began to recuperate the term "cosmopolitanism" as a way of imagining forms of belonging beyond the local and the national. Philosophers Anthony Appiah and Martha Nussbaum, anthropologists James Clifford and Aihwa Ong, sociologists Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Ulf Hannerz, and John Tomlinson, political scientists Patrick Hayden, David Held, and Anthony McGrew, as well as literary critics such as Homi Bhabha, Pheng Cheah, Walter Mignolo, and Bruce Robbins, among others, have all engaged with this notion in the attempt to free it from the connotations of social privilege and leisure travel that accompanied it in earlier periods. While there are considerable differences in the way these theorists rethink cosmopolitanism, they share with earlier theorists of hybridity and diaspora the assumption that there is nothing natural or self-evident about attachments to the nation, which are on the contrary established, legitimized, and maintained by complex cultural practices and institutions. But rather than seeking the grounds of resistance to nationalisms and nation-based identities in local communities or groups whose mobility places them at the borders of national identity, these theorists strive to model forms of cultural imagination and understanding that reach beyond the nation and around the globe. In one way or another, all of them are concerned with the question of how we might be able to develop cultural forms of identity and belonging that are commensurate with the rapid growth in political, economic, and social interconnectedness that has characterized the last few decades.

Cogent as this reasoning is in its search for new forms of transnational cultural identity, it has not gone unchallenged. Historian Arif Dirlik, literary critic Timothy Brennan, and other theorists have recently reemphasized the value of local and national identities as forms of resistance to some dimensions of globalization. Critiques of the "essentialism" of local identities and of national belonging, Dirlik and Brennan argue, omit consideration of the ways localism and nationalism can serve progressive political objectives and legitimate emancipatory projects, especially in the developing world and in a context of rapid economic globalization.[25] Several recent anthologies – Prazniak and Dirlik's *Places and Politics in the Age of Globalization,* Mirsepassi, Basu, and Weaver's *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World,* or Jasanoff and Martello's *Earthly Politics,* for

example – all seek to revalidate local and national foundations of identity as a means of resisting the imperialist dimensions of globalization.

With this wave of counter-critiques, the theoretical debate has arrived at a conceptual impasse: while some theorists criticize nationally based forms of identity and hold out cosmopolitan identifications as a plausible and politically preferable alternative, other scholars emphasize the importance of holding on to national and local modes of belonging as a way of resisting the imperialism of some forms of globalization. Fredric Jameson sums up this quandary when he highlights how local and regional identities used to be pitched against the homogenizing force of the nation, only to point out that

> when one positions the threats of Identity at a higher level globally, then everything changes: at this upper range, it is not national state power that is the enemy of difference, but rather the transnational system itself, Americanization and the standardized products of a henceforth uniform and standardized ideology and practice of consumption. At this point, nation-states and their national cultures are suddenly called upon to play the positive role hitherto assigned – against them – to regions and local practices … And as opposed to the multiplicity of local and regional markets, minority arts and languages, whose vitality can certainly be acknowledged all over the world uneasily coexisting with the vision … of their universal extinction, it is striking to witness the resurgence – in an atmosphere in which the nation-state as such, let alone "nationalism," is a much maligned entity and value – of defenses of national culture on the part of those who affirm the powers of resistance of a national literature and a national art.[26]

This conflict between a conceptualization of national identity as either an oppressive hegemonic discourse or a tool for resistance to global imperialism, and of local identity as either an essentialist myth or a promising site of struggle against both national and global domination, leads Arif Dirlik even more pointedly to declare a theoretical stalemate. He acknowledges the

> intractability of the problem … with existing discussions of place/space in which the defense and the repudiation of place both carry considerable theoretical plausibility

and for that same reason seem in their opposition to be confined within a theoretical world of their own out of which there is no exit that is to be revealed by theory.[27]

If Dirlik falls prey to a rather comical non sequitur by following up this categorical rejection of a theoretical solution with a sustained theoretical defense of place – against his own suggestion that the entire discussion should be shifted to the level of specific case studies – he and Jameson nevertheless accurately pinpoint the conceptual contradictions in many current discourses about place. It might be more useful to think of such contradictions as a starting point for reflecting on the kinds of categories and abstractions that are commonly used in cultural theory than to reject them wholesale, since such rejection would presumably lead back to the theory resistance and hyper-specific analyses of detail that were already rehearsed (and later abandoned) in cultural studies in the early 1990s. But Dirlik is surely right that no obvious theoretical solution presents itself to the conceptual dilemmas in current theories regarding the relationship of identity and place.

Such problems in rethinking the relation of local inhabitation to global citizenship are by no means limited to environmentalist rhetoric but have surfaced in a variety of fields from identity politics to globalization theories. Several waves of debate about notions involving rootedness in the local or the nation on the one hand and concepts such as diaspora, nomadism, hybridity, *mestizaje,* borderlands, and exile on the other have led to an impasse, where advocacies of local and of global consciousness have achieved equal plausibility when they are formulated at an abstract theoretical level. It no longer makes sense to rely mechanically on a particular set of terms with the assumption that it always describes the ideologically preferable perspective: for example, the frequent assumption that hybridity is inherently preferable to claims to cultural authenticity, that an emphasis on migration and diaspora is superior to one on rootedness or, conversely, that nomadism is destructive while place attachments are not. But acknowledging this impasse does not imply that such arguments no longer make sense or that they have become superfluous in specific political and discursive contexts.

In Le Guin's "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow," Osden, after becoming enveloped by World 4470's "vegetable fear," realizes the only way to break the humans' self-sustaining feedback loop with their new environment is either to leave the

planet and thereby abort the mission or self-sacrifice. He chooses the latter, venturing into the forest on his own with a conscious effort to absorb rather than reflect back its fear, and to transmit the humans' absence of hostility. Doing so implies that he has to disrupt the psychic mechanisms that have allowed him to survive in human company, and he therefore remains in the forest when the rest of the expedition returns to Earth, merging with an intelligence that, in his perception, "'know[s] the whole daylight … and the whole night. All the winds and lulls together. The winter stars and the summer stars at the same time. To have roots, and no enemies. To be entire … No invasion. No others. To be whole.'"[28] The team members, for the rest of their stay, live immersed in this sentient environment whose planet-encompassing existence is unimaginably alien to their own:

> The people of the Survey team walked under the trees, through the vast colonies of life, surrounded by a dreaming silence, a brooding calm that was half aware of them and wholly indifferent to them. There were no hours. Distance was no matter. Had we but world enough and time … The planet turned between the sunlight and the great dark; winds of winter and summer blew fine, pale pollen across the quiet seas.[29]

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This text is an edited excerpt from the chapter "From the Blue Planet to Google Earth: Environmentalism, Ecocriticism, and the Imagination of the Global" in Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). © the author and Oxford University Press.

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Ursula K. Le Guin, "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow," in *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (New York: Plume, 1987), 97.

2
Ibid., 113.

3
Ibid., 118.

4
Ibid., 122.

5
Ibid., 127.

6
In the 1987 introduction to the story, Le Guin does not mention Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis explicitly but does refer to "Deo, Demeter, the grain-mother, and her daughter/self Kore the Maiden called Persephone" as ancient mythological paradigms for envisioning humans' relationship to the plant world. See ibid, 83.

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Ibid., 115.

8
For detailed analyses of this rhetoric, see Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 85–107; Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 280–308; Jimmie M. Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer, "Millennial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from Silent Spring to Global Warming," in *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America*, eds. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); and Frederick Buell, From *Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 177–208.

9
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 3.

10
Killingsworth and Palmer, "Millennial Ecology," 41.

11
Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (New York: Perennial, 2000), 167, 172. Shell and IG Farben also figured prominently in Pynchon's vision of corporate conspiracy in *Gravity's Rainbow*, published only two years before *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

12
Buell, From *Apocalypse to Way of Life*, 177–208.

13
For a more detailed summary of the debates about the notion of human and/or economic development that surround these terms, see Patrick Hayden, *Cosmopolitan Global Politics* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 121–51.

14
See T. V. Reed, "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism," in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, eds. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 151.

15
Julie Sze, "From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice," in *The Environmental Justice Reader*, 168.

16
Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, 217–18.

17
Ibid., 219.

18
Arne Naess, "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological NAttitudes," in *Deep Ecology*, ed. Michael Tobias (San Diego: Avant Books, 1985), 268.

19
Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 144.

20
Ibid.

21
Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 53.

22
This opposition to modernity as a general sociopolitical structure is also clearly articulated by some environmentalist thinkers who draw on more leftist traditions of thought. British philosopher Mick Smith argues that "radical environmentalism is engaged in a fundamental critique of modernism; its alternative culture challenges modern life to its very core." (Smith, *An Ethics of Place: Radical Ecology, Postmodernity, and Social Theory* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001,] 164–65). Yet in Smith's thought, "place" is quite deliberately used as an ambiguous concept that sometimes refers to actual localities (as in his discussion of the British antiroads movement) and sometimes to a more general reliance on the concrete rather than on abstract categories.

23
Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 183–86.

24
Janet Biehl, "'Ecology' and the Modernization of Fascism in the German UltraRight," in *Society and Nature* 1 (1993): 131–33; Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, Ecofascism: *Lessons from the German Experience* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995); Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's "Green Party"* (Bourne End, Buckinghamshire, England: Kensal Press, 1985).

25
Arif Dirlik, "Place-Based Imagination: Globalism and the Politics of Place," in *Places and Politics in an Age of Globalization*, eds. Roxann Prazniak and Arif Dirlik (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 35–42; Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44–65.

26
Fredric Jameson, "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 74–75.

27
Dirlik, "Place-Based Imagination," 23–24.

28
Le Guin, "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow," 123.

29
Ibid., 127.