

ANTHROPOGENIC REDRESS: AN IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR  
CONFRONTATION AND PRAXIS

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of  
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English  
(Composition and Rhetoric)

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April 2017

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank my committee members, Dr. Beth Huber, Dr. Laura Wright, and Dr. Catherine Carter for their willingness to be a part of this process and their guidance. Their unique perspectives and suggestions greatly furthered my thinking and have inspired me to continue re-visioning my work. I especially want to thank Beth Huber, who goes far above and beyond the call of duty as a professor and mentor. She exposed me to the most mind-blowing ideas I've encountered in my academic career, and my world has been expanded because of it. Her commitment, compassion, and friendship provided me the support I needed to complete this thesis and grad school alike. I'm better for knowing her.

A special thanks to Joshua Taylor for his type-A assistance and constant encouragement. And, as always, I thank my parents for their love and support, and for being the very first to teach me how to understand the empire of force and how not to respect it.

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## ABSTRACT

### ANTHROPOGENIC REDRESS: AN IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CONFRONTATION AND PRAXIS

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This thesis claims that because the present anthropocene (human caused mass extinction) is a human-incurred phenomenon, it is inescapably ideological. A critical approach to problem solving necessitates a deep analysis of underlying causes and their potential relation to solutions. The following shapes a theoretical framework for understanding, interpreting, and working with ideology, and draws from the work of prominent theorists Mikhail Bakhtin, Kenneth Burke, Frederick Nietzsche, Steven Yarbrough, Simone Weil, Jean Baudrillard, and Felix Guattari. Ideology is framed as a complex and ultimately inherent aspect of not only discourse, but consciousness itself. That framework then facilitates an analysis of consumer culture, the direct perpetrator of environmental destruction. Consumer culture is explicated in terms of a coalescent metaphor that illustrates the nature of force itself, a particular iteration of which operates through the western hegemonic paradigm. The perfidious influence of this destructive force interweaves with our external practices of production and consumption and with our internal experience of self, and often leaves the individual with an illusory sense of powerlessness and reality. The nature of dichotomy is explored as an integral structure of our conceptualization that both perpetuates the status quo and that is fundamentally misunderstood. A praxis for re-orientation

then suggests means for creating ideological shifts that can potentially challenge the conditioning of consumer culture and incur transformative change in the lives of individuals and, by extension, the institutional practices that are causing biospheric devastation. An analysis of the function of social roles, agency, the integration of responsibility, and metaphors highlight potential tools available to us in the endeavor of ideological reconstruction. Finally, personal interviews with alternative spiritualists are included that provide counter-hegemonic perspectives and advice that augment the praxis put forth. This thesis addresses a problem that requires our immediate and persistent attention—human-caused biospheric destruction incurred by our deleterious consumer culture— both by incorporating essential theory for understanding and challenging that insidious ideology and by incorporating specific tactics that confer immediate individual benefit and change: namely present moment awareness and a cultivation of intentional relationality with the earth.



## INTRODUCTION

*“We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost’s familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road — the one less traveled by — offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth.”*

— Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (277)

The present global historic/political moment is one fraught with instability, uncertainty, corruption, and entirely too many problems to keep track of, let alone solve. Technology has propelled us into an era unimaginable to our predecessors. We can be around the globe in a day’s time, send signals to space and back, see the faces of our friends hundreds of miles away on our smartphones, *go to space*, and send sensitive, multi-purpose equipment to monitor galaxies far, far away. We can treat more physical ailments than ever before, and have the capacity to extend life (though not always the quality of life) for many years. We enjoy the speed and efficiency, albeit perpetual danger, of horseless carriages. We tear through goods manufactured thousands of miles away. We devour mass-produced foods, many altered genetically. We buy things. We buy *a lot* of things: the necessities for our survival, the luxuries of life, entertainment, and in key ways, our very identity and our very understandings of the world we live in.

The scale of our global production, trade, and consumption is greater than at any point in human history, and it follows that it is also at its most destructive. The rate and magnitude of the production process—the extraction of natural resources, the processing

of said resources into the various consumer goods we inhale—and the very practices intrinsic to life in industrialized nations (driving, flying, using electricity, enjoying perpetually climate controlled environments, flagrant meat consumption, deleterious industrial agricultural procedures, constant purchases of clothes, plastics, and products constructed of non-disposable materials, production processes that manufacture and expel toxic chemicals, maintaining Starbucks addictions, etc.) has had insurmountably detrimental effects on the planet. The capitalist mindset has been one of utter objectification of the earth. There has been no global implementation of practices that prioritize and directly promote ecological balance and integrity in the processes of human/environmental interface. The very perception industrialized nations (particularly those wielding great political and financial power) have collectively assumed is that the earth exists purely for human use, that there need be no *limit* to our use, and that the planet is, paradoxically, a fundamentally nonliving thing, itself a giant, amorphous commodity to be manipulated, extracted from, clear-cut, injected with pollutants, and infested with the most dangerous invasive species of all time.

While human life has never been utopian, and our recent and distant predecessors suffered mightily in innumerable ways, it is indisputable that we at one time lived better—that is, we lived in a way that did not bring ourselves to the brink of annihilation—simply because we did not have the technology to do so. Today, we do have the technology to do so and what’s more, we lack ideological incentive to *not* do so at the level of our policy-making and implementing institutions. Many individuals and communities, past and present, do have such an incentives, as they foster a belief in intrinsic earth-valuation. I assert that this belief is central for moving toward ethical

alignment and biospheric restoration. Yet it's safe to say that at present, a "burn it down, use it up, disregard and trash this world" mentality is winning out. Ideologies of stewardship and the intrinsic valuation of the planet beyond its monetary potential is not conducive to the expansion of the powerful's power and the wealthy's wealth, and so such values are compartmentalized into organizations with limited funding and influence. The larger, powerful political and economic structures that have evolved out of the marriage of capitalism and industrialization do not operate with these environmentally compassionate values, and in fact actively work to suppress and erase such values culturally. It could be asserted that since we have a democratic republic, our institutions, laws, and policies, and by extension institutions, must reflect the people's will. But in practice this is not always so, and far more often our political leaders reflect the will of corporations; as an example, consider lobbying, gerrymandering, and campaign finance reform. It is not in the system's interest to assume the perspective of intrinsic earth-valuation. For one, it was never a part of the system to begin with. At the dawn of industrialization, no one could have known that emerging practices would put the biosphere in a state of dangerous imbalance in about a hundred years' time. Yet even then, when the air of London was yellow with smog and rivers ran black, the practices that created these conditions were not seriously questioned nor threatened, as they were lucrative beyond powerful business owners' wildest dreams. The very fact that industrialization began and evolved as it did is evidence of a culture that had been divorced from the concept of intrinsic earth-valuation for some time. Again, this is not to say that plenty of individuals and communities from all times have not understood and held this value prominent in their worldview and practices. It is to say that those in *power*

did not have it, or rapidly did away with it, or firmly implanted Orwell's "doublethink" so that they could capitalize upon the most expedient means necessary to incur their desired end: profit. This phenomenon has only expanded, fed institutions that have grown to seemingly impenetrable size, and is now the cause of the single greatest threat to the health and longevity of the biosphere, which of course includes the human species.<sup>2</sup>

And so here we are, entering the sixth mass extinction—and this one is human-caused ("The Extinction Crisis"). Last October, we exceeded 400 parts per million of Co2 in the ozone (Kahn). Scientists agree that this number is utterly unsustainable for life as we know it on earth, and we must get it back down to 350 ppm. How this will be accomplished is unclear, considering our continued engagement in activities like the rampant burning of fossil fuels<sup>3</sup> and the maintenance of 1.5 billion cattle worldwide for consumption<sup>4</sup> is unclear. And yet, we have the Paris Agreement. Government leaders discuss the carbon tax primarily amongst themselves. Although green energy industries are growing, their polluting counterparts are growing right along with them (Rapier), and frankly their continued development under our current administration is tenuous. So while there are many potential solutions, they all involve *change* and are therefore threatening to the powerful's absurdly lucrative status quo (and are not implemented as a result). Solutions for change aren't being implemented rigorously as they are trumped by competing megasystems that have been in place for over a hundred years, (and ideologically far longer). And there are also many faux solutions that are in fact still a

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<sup>2</sup> If we even remember we *are* a species, and not a race completely other than and apart from nature, which we often appear to believe based upon our practices and lifestyle.

<sup>3</sup> Co2 emissions hit 35.6 billion metric tons in 2012 (Morello) and that number has been increasing since that date (Rapier).

<sup>4</sup> Contributes to roughly 18% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions that directly cause global warming (Lean).

part of those status quo megasystems, namely capitalism, that merely pay lip service to environmentalism purely for profit. Legitimate alternatives to deleterious production are often restricted from putting forth tenable solutions, and those faux businesses/systems incur no substantial change.

At present, individuals and communities are left at the mercy of the systems they've created, helped to create, or inherited. Even those in high-ranking positions with the best of intentions struggle to make meaningful impact, as the complex network of economic and political relations that run on and benefit from destructive practice is, truly, a force to be reckoned with. If even those in the highest-ranking positions of government and business seem to achieve only slivers of progress, if any, what hope is there for individuals and communities to enact the change that is so needed? The onus of our human-created problems is on all of us, as it will affect all of us at some point if it hasn't already. Thousands have had to evacuate from their homes, and this is only the beginning. 400,000 human beings—1,000 children per day— died last year from adverse climate events caused by human activity (Hiertsgaard). If sea levels continue to rise, as they undoubtedly will as the greenhouse effect is exacerbated by our mammoth Co2 output, more habitable land will be compromised, leaving millions more refugees. According to Bangladeshi ambassador Tariq A. Karim, around 50 million Bangladeshis will flee their country by 2050 if sea levels rise as expected (Harris). And will the industrialized nations that directly caused their crises willingly open their doors? By 2050, scientists predict that we will have fished out the oceans if current practices continue. There's a plastic garbage patch the size of Texas floating around in the Pacific. We've known for years that the bee population is under severe threat, and if they go, the

rest goes. Deforestation is destroying wildlife habitats and human communities, which is only contributing to those runaway Co2 levels. Last year was the hottest on record, and the weather patterns are increasingly erratic, symptomatic of increased atmospheric warming globally (*NASA*). The polar bears are starving as the ice caps melt. The oceans rise as the ice caps melt. Livable land is flooded and consumed by the ocean as ice caps melt – and we know that they’re melting *because of us*. There are so many pieces to this one puzzle that it’s disorienting to even know where to begin and how to face the exigency that has been seemingly thrust upon us: that of finding a new way to live on and with the planet. The danger is that individually and institutionally we may continue to close our eyes, block our ears, and hum a tune, refusing to face the need because the need is inconvenient to us in the present.

Undertaking the sweeping changes necessary personally, politically, institutionally, and globally to preserve the natural processes of the planet (and thus, the continuance of our own species) requires a shared language and focus. Ultimately, human beings cannot separate themselves from the ideological, and for this reason I assert the obvious: that man<sup>5</sup>-made climate change is essentially, inherently ideological, and so if we are to incur change it will necessarily be ideological as well. To implement inventive change, which we understand is ideological, we need to have a nuanced understanding of the sense and working of ideology itself. Now that we’ve established the exigency to which the following work responds (imminent environmental destruction and extinction caused by human practices of consumption and production), we will lay a theoretical

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<sup>5</sup> I typically use the word “human” or “humankind” in lieu of “man”/“mankind” to mitigate the tradition of androcentrism in writing and thought. In this instance, however, I *do* mean “man” made climate change, as the structures in place and the practices therein that directly caused and perpetuate environmental destruction were erected by the social cast with the power and the means: wealthy men, initially western and white.

framework for ideological conceptualization. In the first chapter, I examine what ideology is; that is, what theorists Bakhtin, Burke, Nietzsche, and Yarbrough have to say about it, and where my understanding coalesces with their influence. To best confront an ideological challenge, we need to have an understanding of what we're facing and what we're working with— and what we *are*, for that matter. From there, I take a marked turn and attempt to face what I consider the root of this problem: consumer culture under modern capitalism. I situate the idea metaphorically, as metaphors implant visions before the eyes: Paul Ricoeur reminds us in *The Rule of Metaphor* that Aristotle said “To metaphorize well is to see—to contemplate, to have the right eye for—the similar” (qtd. in Ricoeur 231). It's also simply easier to face what we can see. I use Nietzsche's “will to power” and Simone Weil's “empire of force” in crafting this metaphor, and from there I highlight particulars of consumer culture that we can both become aware of and actively resist. In the final chapter, I offer potentially change-facilitating metaphors and then explore ideological territory left uncharted by the theorists of Chapter One, suggesting a means of counter-hegemonic resistance by way of the individual agency inherent in the practice of ecoconsciousness.

## CHAPTER ONE: AN IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

I've claimed that the phenomenon of human-caused climate change is ideological in nature. We are where we are because of culturally embedded ideology, and the change required for a redress of the situation is ideological. Because the concept is essential to the ensuing illustration and claim, this chapter diverges from the specifics of environmental destruction and explicates a nuanced working definition of ideology that lays the groundwork for my proceeding argument.

In part, I'll be working with the term "ideology" as it appears in the vernacular sense. Ideology is frequently understood as a particular worldview, a conglomerate of terms and beliefs that function together to form an established institution of thought. Individuals are assumed to subscribe to ideologies, to carry them, to espouse them. People become spokespersons for ideologies such as political parties and orientations, religions and branches thereof, activist movements, and all manner of identity politics. So conceptualized, ideologies are extrinsic entities with which people may become associated and of which they may become proponents. Such ideologies can become subsumed into identity through a process of continued engagement and exposure. And while ideologies are frequently neatly compartmentalized in discourse, they may overlap and interweave, forming systems of relations to which communities ascribe. For example, a community that adheres to a Southern Baptist ideology will more than likely also align with a politically conservative one. Ideologies affect each other, challenge each other, rise and fall like empires. According to this vernacular understanding, common in the media and many discursive situations, ideology is metaphorically conceptualized as a

great entity, a macrocosmic being, or a structural edifice. Ideology is therefore typically understood to exist independently from individuals who at some point subsume ideologies into their own identity at will or via inheritance. Also present is the idea that there are some aspects of individual conceptualization, personality, and rhetoric that *are* ideological and somehow other aspects that are not. And so while it can be easily ascertained that ideologies do not exist without the people who subscribe to and practice them, there's a sense that ideologies take on lives of their own.

In Kenneth Burke's book *A Rhetoric of Motives*, he lists seven frequently understood denotative and connotative aspects of the term which are useful in understanding the following chapters. Burke points out that the multiplicity of meanings are "not necessarily antagonistic to one another," but are still "quite different in insight and emphasis." He describes the seven aspects of ideology in this way:

1. The study, development, criticism of ideas, considered in themselves.
2. A system of ideas, aiming at social or political action.
3. Any set of interrelated terms, having practical civic consequences, directly or indirectly.
4. "Myth" designed for purposes of governmental control.
5. A partial, hence to a degree deceptive, view of reality, particularly when the limitations can be attributed to 'interest-begotten prejudice.'
6. Purposefully manipulated overemphasis or underemphasis in the discussion of controversial political and social issues...
7. And inverted genealogy of culture, that makes for 'illusion' and

‘mystification’ by treating ideas as *primary* where they should have been treated as *derivative*. (Burke 104)

The first sense of the term applies to this thesis itself which engages in meta-ideology by examining ideology while *using* ideology to do so. I’ll return to these aspects going forward, drawing particularly from the second, fourth, fifth, and seventh definitions. In Chapter Two, I critically analyze a specific ideology with the help of a metaphoric construction, and in Chapter Three I work on the development of an alternate ideology that fosters an understanding of intrinsic earth valuation. Burke’s definitions depict ideology as systems of ideas related by terminology and convention. The idea of ideology as myth and a manipulated means of distortion is particularly applicable to the following chapter, which in part examines the manipulative aspects of consumer culture.

Additionally, all seven aspects of the term apply to the ideology examined in Chapter Two. The first two aspects involving the development of ideas and “a system of ideas aiming at social or political action” (Burke 104) apply to my work in Chapter Three.

Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin elucidates a further understanding of ideology in his work, and I’m adopting a working definition of “ideology” largely from his philosophical perspective. For Bakhtin, ideology is pervasive, subtle, and ubiquitous. There are no boundaries between that which is ideological and that which is not. The typical assumed dichotomy between the ideological and the “not” is false under Bakhtin’s paradigm: *there is nothing that is not ideological*. He lays the groundwork for this claim in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, in which he says, “Everything ideological possesses meaning: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a sign. Without signs, there is no ideology” and “The domain of ideology

coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another” (1210). We typically think of signs as micro-representational elements of communication that are the building blocks of ideology itself. Bakhtin says that rather, signs themselves are ideological. The building blocks and the structure itself are one and the same material. Signs—be they words, images, musical sounds, etc.—both point to a reality outside of themselves (as signs are directional markers) and at the same time they inhabit a material existence in and of themselves. A word, for example, points toward the thing it represents, and at the same time embodies just as actual an existence itself: it is either a visual symbol etched out on a page, a particular sound pattern, or both. And that visual symbol and/or sound pattern reflect an idea and/or a thing. The word “orange” points to the *thing* orange in front of me, but first my brain has to interpret the signal “orange” through the visual reception of the eyes. The visual signal of the external orange to the internal *idea* of orange and then out into a sound pattern that points to the object in the world *via* the idea in my brain is all tied up in the work of a word. The word is a thing in itself: sound patterns, for instance. It reflects a reality (realities) outside of itself as a sound: an external tangible object, as well as our internal conceptualization of it. Importantly, the external and the internal are inseparable for the formation, expression, communication, and comprehension of the word. And the world of signs exists in the same way that the things they point to outside of themselves exist.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin turns semiotics on its head. “Sign” has several potential meanings, depending on discipline. In *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, Foss, Foss, and Trapp differentiate symbol and sign thusly: “Symbols are distinguished from signs by the degree of direct connection to the object represented...” (2). They give the example of smoke being a sign of fire, but say that more complex human constructions, like the *word* fire, are symbols. Bakhtin is not making this distinction; rather, he uses the word “sign” as a *symbol* for “symbol.” Because everything is ideological for Bakhtin, human interpretation of signs—like the recognition of smoke—is only interpretable ideologically, and hence symbolically.

Bakhtin goes on to say that “A sign does not simply exist as a part of reality—it reflects and refracts another reality” (1211). And so not only does the sign possess its own world of material existence, and not only does it point to a reality beyond itself (the thing to which it refers), it reflects and refracts that reality. I find it useful to adopt the image of a crystalline rock as a metaphor for considering the world of signs (and therefore, the ideological). The rock exists as an object in the material world, and at the same time, depending upon its makeup, it may reflect light that hits it like a mirror, or it may split the light into prisms. Certain aspects of the light are revealed via its contact with the particular crystal, the particular sign. And as signs reflect and refract, they can easily distort, and like all symbolic action and metaphor, certain elements of the reality to which they direct attention are highlighted and certain aspects hidden. We cannot know a thing in its entirety through the lens of something other than ourselves. We are bound by our sensory abilities as we are our constructed ideological confines. Language is the lens of communication we possess, and while it is a unique and largely effective tool, it cannot give us the full experience of the realities to which it points. You can tell me all about the mechanics of back flipping into a swimming pool, describe the adrenaline and the physical sensations, but I will never truly know it in a direct sense unless I have the experience. And even then, my experience will never encompass the entirety of the world of back flipping into swimming pools, since I can only know my experience with it *in the confines of how I know*, and I can know your experience far less.

We experience language through engaging with it, and we cannot experience language in terms of anything besides itself. We cannot experience anything, under the framework provided here, without language, especially when we extend our definition of

language. Using a metaphor to understand language/ideology is still *using* language/ideology. We may come up with all manner of helpful images that confer new ways of seeing to us, but according to Bakhtin we can never step away from our language—just as we can never separate ourselves from our ideology when we engage in thought or communication. Though we may make great theoretical and practice strides, we will always be rather like a cat chasing its own tail, grasping for something just beyond our reach that is an intrinsic part of ourselves. We will continue, in this vein, to attempt to split ourselves to see ourselves, never quite believing we have the whole picture.

Bakhtin makes it clear that material reality in itself is not ideological, but the moment it is coopted by a human consciousness it becomes so. Because our consciousness is ideological, we are ideological manufacturers. What we come in contact with in the world we must associate with material in our conceptual structure; we name the thing, order it, place it in our network of relations. In his book *Inventive Intercourse*, Steven Yarbrough discusses the value in dispensing with the working theorem of multiple dichotomous worlds (language/reality, heaven/earth, etc.) as we assume that certain rules apply to one world and others to another. He asserts that language is not a medium of reality—rather, it *is* reality as much as *reality* is reality, and in this way aligns with Bakhtin. He claims that adopting a one-world stance frees us from the limitations that are implied when we designate dichotomies where none need exist for the purposes of rhetorical problem solving. Yarbrough uses the term ‘discourse’ in place of both language and reality, and posits: “Discourse is a process, precisely that process of human interaction” (16).

An essential aspect of Bakhtin's work is his portrayal of consciousness. For him, human consciousness is nothing until it is embodied with ideological content *from without*. Thus the typical understanding of the relationship between the two concepts—that consciousness exists as an internal reality and then manifests itself externally in the form of ideology—is reversed. Bakhtin offers a conception of pre-ideological consciousness as a field of pure potential, a sort of tabula rasa which the ideological material of the external world fills and shapes. He explains:

Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws. The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group. If we deprive consciousness of its semiotic, ideological content, it would have absolutely nothing left. (1213)

And so according to Bakhtin, what we consider our 'inner voices' are in reality the voices and semiotic content of other people, texts, situations, and institutions to which we've been exposed and then internalized. We may have a biological structure in place at birth that prepares us for the uniquely human experience of language acquisition, as Noam Chomsky's work in biolinguistics suggests, but it is the particulars of the content of the symbolic language to which we are exposed that confers to us the fabric of our inner life, our consciousness.

In addition to explicating traditional uses of the term, Burke was very much on Bakhtin's page regarding ideology's nature and scope. He said in *Language as Symbolic*

*Action* that “An ‘ideology’ is like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence. An ‘ideology’ is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it” (6). Here, Burke is using Bakhtin’s understanding exactly, and uses his particular imagistic style to illustrate. Ideology fills a person like a spirit and causes an individual to move in the world in particular ways—to make certain choices, to hold certain beliefs, to construct a particular personality—and an alternate ideology would cause quite different effects. This is the power of ideology: it shapes us into who we believe we are.

Bakhtin illustrates the ways in which the ideological imbues what seems like even our most primal experiences: “Not even the simplest, dimmest apprehension of a feeling – say, the feeling of hunger not outwardly expressed- can dispense with some kind of ideological form. Any apprehension... must have inner speech... one can apprehend one’s hunger apologetically, irritably, angrily, indignantly, etc.” (1216). It is important to understand that ideology—consciousness embodied—exists on the most basic, immediate, continuous levels of personal experience, branches out to our immediate socio-cultural groups, and then expands outward into institutions and what are traditionally understood as formal “ideologies.” Bakhtin describes the level of interpersonal communication as “behavioral ideology,” and says that these micro interactions are informed by greater ideological structures. Bakhtin asserts that “The established ideological systems of social ethics, science, art, and religion are crystallizations of behavioral ideology, and these crystallizations, in turn, exert a powerful influence back upon behavioral ideology, normally setting its tone” (1219). It is

behavioral ideology that coalesces over time and repetition to form these crystallizations of human meaning, and these ideological superstructures trickle down to inform behavioral ideological interaction in a feedback loop. Bakhtin reminds us that in this “constant stream of utterances,” which are essentially units of meaning that allow communication, “nowhere is there a break in the chain, nowhere does the chain plunge into inner being, nonmaterial in nature and unembodied in signs” (1212). He is saying, then, that to know and to communicate we have no other recourse besides the ideological. Through and through, our communicative process and our very consciousness is of semiotic material. The ideological is semiotic; the semiotic is of meaning; meaning is ideological.

It is important, too, to consider that there exists great diversity in individual and cultural ideologies. Bakhtin uses the term “heteroglossia” to describe the reality of numerous languages operating within one. Different dialects reflect different environmental interactions, which implies larger ideological structures. Social and environmental positioning shapes the particular substance of individual consciousness. Because of heteroglossia, human ideology as a whole is widely diversified, and it is within this diversity that potential for transformation exists. It is important to find the ideological interstices that permeate multiple group consciousnesses, irrespective of heteroglossia, to examine wider and more socially entrenched patterns of knowing and power.

We were born into particular manifestations of signs and, like any organism accustomed to its environment, we’ve generally become unconscious of our reality. Yarbrough aligns his discussion of discourse (an ideological matter through and through)

with the same metaphor: “Discourse is part of the world in the same way that an organism is part of its environment. Remove an organism from an environment or add an organism to an environment and you alter the environment” (14). This stresses our entrenchment in an environment that is inexorably ideological and points to the fact that change occurs within environmental manipulation. Our very consciousnesses are what they are because they have been filled with the ideologies of our times and individual circumstances. The range of experience manifests in ideological diversity, as stated, but still *there remain particular undercurrents shared relatively universally by our industrialized world*. Catching us uncritical and unawares, the “voice” of consumer culture rushed in to fill our mind’s early void.

Since we think and express only by means of ideological exposure, does this mean we’re enslaved by our socio-cultural imprinting? Are we the passive recipients of a force that acts upon us? If so, undertaking the work of ideological revision would be fruitless, and you can stop reading. As long as we remain unconscious of ideological reality, that answer is: yes. But since I’m still writing, I must have some reason to think that it is possible to act as agents and effect ideological change. After all, it is evolutionarily advantageous for us to adapt to changing circumstances. And because our material world is changing and has changed with such lightning speed, our ideological systems have expanded as rapidly, copartners in our evolution: we need new symbols to communicate new goods and the ideas thereof. While this dynamic exemplifies ideological change, it comes to be purely via causation: i.e., I learned how to tie this vine because I know what a vine is; I know what a vine is because my father handed me this vine; he knew vines because a swinging vine once whopped him in the face. Even the

manipulation of our physical reality may only imply an evolutionary chain of successive actions. I.A. Richards explicates our deep ties of meaning to the past in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* when he proposed:

Do we ever respond to a stimulus in a way which is not influenced by the other things that happened to us when more or less similar stimuli struck up in the past? Probably never. A new kind of stimulus might perhaps give rise to a new kind of sensation, a new kind of pain, say. But even so we should probably recognize it as a pain of some sort. Effects from more or less similar happenings in the past would come in to give our response its character and this as far as it went would be meaning... It is important... to realize how far back into the past all our meanings go, how they grow out of one another much as an organism grows, and how inseparable they are from one another. (1283)

Even a previously unexperienced physical sensation, he says, would be interpreted based upon past experience and categorized in accordance with the memory. To expand the sense of the passage, because a socio-cultural memory is bestowed upon us early on in the form of ideology, we too interpret new experiences in terms of the framework with which we're currently working. Our very first pain as infants is not an isolated pain; it is a pain in a chain of utterances of pain that precede us as far back as our ancestors go. (And what then? What origin of pain? I cannot say, but I think the dichotomous process has something to do with it.) Our inherited framework is the most efficient means we have to quickly perceive and act. It becomes problematic, however, when one imagines one's framework finite, cemented, absolute, or universal. In Richard's passage, too, we again have an example of an environmental conceptual framework shedding light on the

nature of ideology, which serves to trigger our understanding of our creation of meaning as tied to and a part of our environment. Richards and Ogden, here, are illustrating a chain of meaning that parallels Bakhtin's chain of utterances. Meaning is depicted as a living thing that is propagated by preceding meaning. We are born into an already richly matured environment comprised of eons of socially negotiated meaning, and we contribute to the growth with our own actions that experientially compound and grow that meaning.

It should be noted here that meaning is not something that we find, hidden surreptitiously under a rock, nor is it something we discover within our breast. It is the spark plug meeting of our interaction with our environment (Bakhtin). We make meaning in communion with that with which we interact— our surroundings, each other, the dialogue we engage in with ourselves. In his bold essay "Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," Nietzsche offers a unique and invaluable perspective that furthers our already nuanced understanding of ideology. Nietzsche discusses metaphors in the piece, and asserts that, much like spiders spin webs and bees build honeycombs, humans manufacture metaphor. He discusses metaphors in a way that transcends the trope and instead reflects human consciousness itself. He speaks of the metaphor the way Bakhtin speaks of ideology. He posits: "The drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself" (1177). Therefore, we cannot think without metaphors, nor can we know. Nietzsche goes so far as to label our every experience as metaphoric, as we can only experience in terms of ourselves: "To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is

imitated in a sound: second metaphor” (1173). What we see, even, is metaphoric, as we process the information before us physically in terms of neural reactions. When we conjure an image, it is created because of that synaptic reaction (and the image we have, in the first place, is as it is because of externally implanted ideology). And when we speak a word, it is yet another copy; the word itself is a metaphor, is one thing expressing another in terms of itself.<sup>7</sup> In this case the mental image is expressed in terms of the word, which itself is the second metaphor, as the image exists *in terms of* the formation created by signals from the optic nerve and the brain’s immediate interpretation thereof, and not the thing itself. His central claim is that we think we understand universal truths, when really we are confined by our own understanding, and in fact our own understanding is something manufactured entirely by ourselves. We name things, categorize them according to our own invented standards, and then pat ourselves on the back for being very smart<sup>8</sup>. It’s a rigged system of intellect, as we’ve written the test. His depiction of metaphoric manufacture is Bakhtin’s semiotic reality.

We get into trouble when we forget the primary, most innate production of human beings: stories. And because we forget what we make, we forget what we are: storytellers. Forgetting who we are means we’ve forgotten an essential agency. Stories are to humankind what the silk is to the worm, the migration is to the salmon, the ink is to the octopus, the web is to the spider<sup>9</sup>. It’s our way of being in the world, but we’ve forgotten it, which explains our collective disorientation, various forms of dis-ease, and

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<sup>7</sup> See Lakoff and Johnson page 20.

<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche gives a helpful illustration: he says it’s just like inventing the term mammal and then pointing out a camel, smugly mentioning that it’s a mammal. (1175)

<sup>9</sup> Our primary material manufacture/our cocoons (our homes), our created destinies, our defense mechanisms, and our traps. (Traps can either attract to us that which we need, or the inverse: our traps can trap *us*.)

continued disempowerment (we have forgotten a key tenet of our agency). A story, whether fact or fiction, is an invention of the moment. It is a recounting of events (or imaginative conjuring of events) in new terms (metaphoric) of language, space, and time. A metaphor is a recounting of an event—or a thing, an idea, an existence—in new terms which, among the chosen inventive aspect, include language, space, and time. A symbol, too, is a story. (It is metaphoric both because it expresses an aspect of a reality outside of itself, in terms of itself, and because our perception of its very existence is metaphoric: if we hear or see a symbol, we translate it in terms of ourselves, as our interpretation is, under Nietzsche's definition, metaphoric, just as is our communication.) A symbol is the story of itself, of its material existence in the moment and the historicity by which it came to be, and it is the story of that which it reflects and refracts. We tell stories with symbols; we animate symbols with our consciousness (our ideology) and have, in the process, produced countless worlds, over the course of human existence.

The trouble comes from the forgetting. Of man, Nietzsche says, "He forgets that the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors and takes them to be the things themselves" (1176). We believe that what we have named, our perceptions and negotiated meaning, is real, permanent, cemented, when in fact it is illusory, and but one of limitless metaphoric/ideologic constructions. He writes,

Here one may certainly admire man as a mighty genius of construction, who succeeds in piling up an infinitely complicated dome of concepts upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water. Of course, in order to be supported by such a foundation, his construction must be like one constructed of spiders'

webs: delicate enough to be carried along by the waves, strong enough not to be blown apart by every wind. (1175)

Our perception of our “dome of concepts” is that it is real, impenetrable, and finite. We may know that we had a role, at some point in the distant history, in forming the institutions we navigate, but we have so accepted the conditions of our material present that we now believe it is an external force beyond our control and certainly outside of our realm of creative revision. Our ideology/metaphoric conceptual structure, flowing from the micro-interactions of behavioral ideology to the formal crystallizations thereof, has caught us in our own web. The same ideological institutions are perpetuated day after day, generation after generation, largely because we believe them fixed, impenetrable, a force of nature beyond our influence. We’ve forgotten our stories are stories. They continue because our very consciousness is embodied with the blue prints of their maintenance. It is what we know how to do.

I want to turn Yarbrough’s understanding of ideology, which he refers to consistently as *discourse*, as well as an aspect of his work regarding belief and change into this multi-scholar framework for ideological conceptualization. He illustrates his definition of discourse thusly:

Understanding an environment is to understand the organisms and other elements that comprise it. Understanding an organism is to understand its interactions with its environment...Discourse *is* the human mode of interacting with an environment, and environment *includes* things and people and the marks and noises they make to affect one another. (14)

This definition meshes with Bakhtin's in terms of its recognition of inter-relational conditioning. While Yarbrough intended this ecological metaphor to apply to any environment in which a person might interact, as the principle is universal, it's particularly fitting for this piece, in which literal ecology and the human relationship therein is the primary concern and ideological springboard. In a literal way, the earth has conditioned us and we have and are conditioning the world, and the loop is unbreakable and perpetuating. Understanding the literal environment, the actual totality of the present geochemical climate necessitates an understanding of human impact, and therefore human action, and therefore human motivation. The environment and humankind, however, cannot be dichotomized in this way, as we know that humans are just as much a part of "the environment" as the environment is. Yarbrough painstakingly impresses upon his readers the importance of transcending dichotomies in the interest of creating novel invention. Maintaining those boundaries, he says, limits our understanding of the possible:

...We must avoid accepting any theory of discourse that resorts to positing dichotomies between language and reality, culture and nature, or any variations of these oppositions. Such theories presuppose the necessity of an epistemology that distinguishes one set of objects functioning according to one set of laws (for example, linguistic signs, cultural artifacts) from another set of objects obeying another set of laws (for example, physical entities, mechanical forces). For such theories, the possibility of deliberately creating novel truth is ruled out in advance....The problem with such theories is not simply that they are incorrect descriptions of discourse: the problem is that when we believe in such theories,

we cease to attempt to accomplish what the theories will not allow us to imagine we can do...” (23-24)

And so if we were fully ensnared by the laws of social construction, or by glacial ideological structures, we could only ever perceive through those lenses: we would not believe that we could assume a new understanding or live in a way previously unimagined simply because the current paradigm didn't possess the code. Yarbrough asserts that it is not that the theories themselves are not sound, but rather they are pragmatically inefficient if our intent is novel invention. We can understand discourse, or ideology, as a tool to help us progress on our desired paths instead of blocks that keep us going round a maze. Perhaps the most essential diffusion of dichotomy Yarbrough puts forth is that, in accepting there is only one world operating with universal rules (a premise that, he suggests, liberates us from adherence to contingency or fate that precludes our inventive agency) “...we must abandon the notion that the mind is one thing, reality another, and language yet another that mediates between mind and world” (27). He collapses these disparate terms into the one: discourse. In positing that language is not a mediating entity, and not a thing unto itself at all, I do not think that he departs from Bakhtin when he asserts that signs possess a reality of their own. The mind and the world, for Bakhtin, are micro and macrocosmic ends of the same spectrum, and it is the reality of language through which we are able to engage in this process, this human construction of symbolic exchange. But language itself, a human construction, is ideological, and so though it is our meta-tool for navigation, it is still a part of the same discursive process and reality as the interpretive “conscious” (semantically supplanted) mind and the “world” (all ideological iterations). My reading of Bakhtin leads me to

understand that his distinctions are for reader clarity, but the unity of the process and the illusion of disparateness that Yarbrough espouses aligns with Bakhtin's philosophy.

When we understand these principles, we can see how our understanding of language—verbal, gestural, visual, what have you—is not a mediating force that traverses between a mind and larger institutions. Yarbrough boils it down: language *is* interaction. When we begin to see that our own language is not distinct from the ideological structures that we consciously or unconsciously adhere to nor the larger world, our beliefs about our own agency shifts.

I want to point out that dichotomy is a running theme in this thesis, and it's amazingly difficult to contend with because our perceptual systems, and therefore our language, are constructed around, with, and on dichotomies. Importantly, this phenomenon is beneficial to the empire of force, discussed in Chapter Two, as dichotomy confers an illusion of complete opposition without connectivity or unity—and empires tend to heed the saying *divide and conquer* as we are so much easier to conquer when we are weakened by our divides. Here are the main dichotomies presented in this text: human and nature; civilization (literal “inside” spaces) and nature (literal “outside” spaces—which I ultimately assert is the very essence of our *literal* “insides,” so the dichotomy dissolves at that point); the empire of force and force of humanity; and the oldie but goodie, life and death. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers several definitions for dichotomy that build a framework for us. Dichotomy is: “Division into two sharply defined or contrasting parts; (*Logic*) division into two mutually exclusive categories or genera” (“Dichotomy”). A second definition based in botany and zoology is also illuminating for our purposes: “The process by which a stem, root, vein, etc., divides into

two branches, esp. when occurring repeatedly and successively. Also: an instance of this; the point at which such branching occurs” (“Dichotomy”). The latter is the literal, biological denotation of the term: the division necessary for life. The work of understanding dichotomy involves recognizing and knowing *difference* while remaining in perceptual contact with the understanding that these divisions share an originating source. Dichotomies may look extremely different, black and white opposites, but if they are a product of division, they divided from a shared beginning. And that beginning is unifying, and therefore a point of identification. Keep dichotomy’s denotation of division in mind and consider how Kenneth Burke frames division (hence, dichotomy) as ultimately essential for identification in *A Rhetoric of Motives*:

Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division.

Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence. It would not be an ideal, as it now is, partly embodied in material conditions and partly frustrated by these same conditions; rather, it would be as natural, spontaneous, and total as with those ideal prototypes of communication, the theologian's angels, or “messengers.” (22)

Identification can exist because there is dichotomy, and the only way to transcend dichotomy is through identification. Dichotomy is a reality in that stark categorizations of difference do exist. And yet those divisions allow us to know one another and to seek threads of unity. According to Burke, if we were truly all one substance, there would be no need for communication whatsoever. Yet because we do divide (our cells and our

bodies), we are necessarily and fundamentally communicative. I've come to the conclusion that we can keep to a one-world theory while acknowledging dichotomies and the understanding that true dichotomy, utter separation, is illusory; we can use dichotomies for the purposeful ends of identification so long as we keep a footing in their source(s) of origin. Dichotomies allow us to see and name difference and, as Burke says, provide the exigence for us to proclaim unity. We can be conscious of the dichotomies we use. Instead of seeing black and white, see the yin yang: the seed of one in the other (and, of course, ultimately no *other* – just one unified whole). Dichotomies may facilitate identification, but it is important to remember that identification itself is a two-sided coin. On one, unification is possible. From divided vantage points, we become able to both recognize unities existent along with difference, and potentially appreciate the diversity of difference. On the other side of the coin, identification can be othering when our identifications are disconnected from that conceptualization of unifying origin (e.g., the intrinsic connectivity of all life and essential underlying humanity). When we become enmeshed in identity politics, for instance, we easily *other* those with whom we would have to work harder to identify, or with whom we have had little contact and so have never tried to identify. Burke quotes W.C. Bloom: “In identification lies the source of dedications and enslavements, in fact of cooperation” (qtd. in *Motives* xiv). Identification can be liberatory or trapping. It is a means of liberation as it can foster compassion and unity. It is a trap when it instead highlights division for othering ends, and when we privilege the divisions to the exclusion of the unity, we become easily conquered—and that is certainly advantageous to conquering forces. Remembering that dichotomy occurs in one shared world, that there are no true dichotomies, as seeds of the “opposite” are

always within the one, and that dichotomies are unified by their source may be a way to resist the empire's tactic of ideological manipulation via dichotomous thought. Going forward, dichotomies pepper the way, but keep in mind that my purpose is revealing underlying unities, the recognition of which I believe can help us see through the illusion that dichotomies are definite and closed worlds unto themselves.

Yarbrough suggests that "We need to 'accept a theory of discourse that will allow us to learn from others truths not implied by our current set of beliefs'" (24). Such a theory necessitates Krista Radcliffe's rhetorical listening, the ability to absorb the text of another instead of listening with ideological filters and fists raised, as well as a consciousness around the rhetorical workings and structure of belief, our own and generally. Yarbrough quotes theorist Doug Brent, who composed this in his work

*Reading as Rhetorical Invention:*

Considered as a whole... a system of beliefs cannot be changed by an incoming argument any more than a person can pull himself up by his own bootstraps. But if the beliefs are considered as separable doxai<sup>10</sup> rather than an unbreakable structure, it then becomes possible for certain of them to be used as premises for an argument the conclusion of which involves the changing of *other* doxai." (57)

This is very important: ideology can be dismantled and rearranged, rather like a toy magnetic connector kit. Premises can be detached from their enthymemes and connected artfully, and logically, to others. Yarbrough's claim is that while this is a step in the inventive process, it does not facilitate *novel* invention, which cannot have pre-existed in the structure if it is to be truly novel.

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<sup>10</sup> "Belief"

The kind of invention I'm working with here, namely in the final chapter, may not be novel in Yarbrough's sense as the underlying philosophy is fortunately already present in our kairotic environment. In this way, any ideological steps I take or suggest are in the vein of doxa rearrangement, but because the purpose of ecoconsciousness as I frame it is a fundamental shift in human action (that is, human discourse itself), the ideal end point would be truly novel not only because it would be new, but because considering our present doxai networks of belief, we cannot know it yet. This kind of novel invention is necessarily cooperative, and because I am ultimately discussing an ideological transformation which individuals must actively create, the contributions of individuals are implicitly unique and hence, presently unknowable. We are rearranging the immediate to procure the individually and theoretically novel. Until we recognize the crucial necessity of the endeavor of radical discursive transformation, we are doomed to remain in the "eternally repeating dream" of the same old constructions that Nietzsche described, and this time the same old dream becomes increasingly nightmarish as we speed full throttle ahead to our own destruction.

Fortunately, there's a trick to breaking the cycle of an unwanted repeating dream.

It's to train yourself, in the midst of dreaming, to wake up.

In the following chapters the term "ideology" will at times be understood as a network of interrelated beliefs and practices, but all the while it will also hold the pervasive definition of the material of our consciousness itself. That material, the very substance of humanity, is itself metaphoric, as all symbols must be. Burke said that we are "symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing" creatures (*Language* 6). This section has explicated the nature of humans as symbol-using creatures, at our core. The

following section examines a fundamental aspect of an undermining ideology: the toxic manipulation of symbols that is propelling us to our own destruction. In the final chapter, we will turn our attention to matters of antidotal symbol-making.

## CHAPTER TWO: A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH: KNOWING THE EMPIRE

Now that I've laid a definitive framework for a working definition of ideology, I'm turning to an explication of the problem itself. I'm using Nietzsche's overarching vision of the nature of the world as a foundational premise, and then incorporating Simone Weil's phrase "empire of force" into Nietzsche's paradigm to name the ideological problem we're dealing with: the decimation of the biosphere incurred by the particular context of our modern industrialized, globalized, neoliberal consumer culture. To begin, I closely examine Nietzsche's closing passage from *The Will to Power*:

And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror?

This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by "nothingness" as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be "empty" here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms striving toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to

the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself—do you want a name for this world? A solution for all of its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?—This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides! (549-550)

Nietzsche puts forth his conceptualization of the essential nature of the world in this excerpt from his 1885 journal, which I’m accepting as a premise in full. He expresses that the world is purely a conglomerate of timeless forces (a single timeless force) that never increases or decreases in quantity but simply changes in form. The physical principle of his theory is manifested in the planet itself, as the earth is of the exact same material as it was when it first coalesced. The earth, just like Nietzsche’s forces, is a vast recycling system. He claims that the forces are finite and contained “by a boundary: nothingness.” At the same time, they are timeless, as they are “without beginning, without end.”

Simone Weil used the term “empire of force” in her cornerstone piece, “*The Iliad, or The Poem of Force*,” in which she claimed that the central player of the epic was force itself—violent, quintessentially dehumanizing force—from which no person, Greek,

Trojan, hero or usurped, was left untouched<sup>11</sup>. She defined force in this way: “To define force— it is that *X* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him... Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all” (Weil 2). It is this force, this *X*, that I’m analyzing. James Boyd White used Weil’s phrase in his inspiring book *Living Speech: Resisting the Empire of Force* and further deconstructed its meaning. I’m enlisting his discerning perspective on the empire of force to illuminate the intricate metaphor I’ve constructed (that may well have more literality than I can substantiate here). I’m assembling an ideological marriage of Weil’s empire of force, Nietzsche’s force, and my assessment of consumer culture (informed namely by the philosophy of Jean Baudrillard) as a conceptual framework for comprehending the ideological crisis at hand.

Nietzsche’s language tells us that this timeless, finite force (of “unalterable size”) “does not grow bigger or smaller” and that there is ultimately one force, singular (a “monster” of force, not “monsters”; an “iron magnitude of force,” not “forces”). Yet because this singular force transforms itself in many ways, there is diversity within the essential unity: it is “at the same time one and many.” If this is so, that there is ultimately only one force that is finite, how can Weil’s conception align with Nietzsche’s, when empires, by nature and connotation, are in the business of expansion via conquest? The explanation lies in the fact that this force “does not expend itself but only transforms itself” (Nietzsche 550). The empire is explained by the fact that this ultimate force “increase[s] here and at the same time decrease[s] there.” The empire’s tsunami-increase

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<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, ultimately no one can be left untouched by the effects of climate change if its present evolution continues unchecked, as evidence suggests it will.

must come at the expense of another aspect of the force's decrease, considering the finite nature of this reality. That is, the empire of force must *consume* other forces for its own increase. The empire is inherently a force of destruction, and it is consuming the force of humanity.

We've considered force, but where does this "will" come in? Nietzsche says first that the world is "a monster of energy... force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces." And yet he then declares: "*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!" (550). It's an absolutist assertion. How is the world *both* a conglomerate force *and* this abstract "will to power"? Is he merely using a different phrase for the same concept? I interpret it in this way: the world is this ocean of energetic force(s), and the will to power is the *propulsion* of these forces. In this metaphor, the moon is the vehicle for its subject, the will, as it is the magnetic force that sets seas in motion; it is why the sea (the force[s]) rages and quells instead of remaining inert. Force is not one thing and will another—there is no dichotomy. In this metaphor, even the moon and the seas are dichotomous but not an ultimate dichotomy, as they share an originating source (the planet earth).<sup>12</sup> They are two aspects of the unity. Put another way: the force is the body. The will is the breath.

What do we do with breath, as human beings, as "will[s] to power, and nothing besides"? We use it to live—we are put into motion because of it. And we speak.

Speaking is an exhaled breath imbued with *intention*, expressed in particular sound patterns. We speak with intention to move the forces of this world; it's the primary

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<sup>12</sup> In accordance with both co-formation theory (in which the earth and the moon coalesced from the same solar nebula at the same time) and the giant-impact hypothesis, in which the material that is now the moon was ejected from the earth as a result of a mars-sized object. Either way, Nietzsche's forces theory can, I believe, be extended to encompass the entirety of the universe, as separating the planet earth from the rest of the universe is absurdly dichotomizing, as the earth divided from the source of the universe itself.

purview of rhetoric. In verbal language, the will is expressed in the propulsion of breath shaped into various forms (words) by intention. Our minds, sparking with invention and the motivation to influence (to move) the world by means of all our crafty rhetorical tools, is a second iteration of the will to power—impossible without the first.

The empire of force is moved by a will to power and *is* a will to power. How is it both? Well, don't we consider the body and the breath one, or of one system? And we are wills to power ("you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!"). This may be news to many people, excluding those in a certain kind of power, political, physical, or otherwise, who are aware of at least their particular expression of that will. But if we know it, and know what that can mean, we can choose the tenor of the will with which we align, and hence the forces we want to increase. Going forward, we're going to look closer at the empire of force and how it manifests in this context of consumer culture. We have to first *know* the empire before we can know how not to respect it, as Weil says. When we know, we can not respect it by refusing our own decrease, our dehumanization, and our submersion into the particular force of the empire.

### **The Empire of Force**

*"No one can love and be just who does not understand the empire of force and know how not to respect it."* -Simone Weil<sup>13</sup>

As a force, we experience the empire in different ways. We see it in its most extreme iteration in immediate war, as Weil illustrates. It exists in the form of total war, in drone strikes and roadside bombs alike. It is one act of racism targeted against one

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<sup>13</sup> This is James Boyd White's translation of her French "*Il n'est possible d'aimer et d'être juste que si l'on connaît l'empire de la force et si l'on sait ne pas le respecter,*" which literally translates to "It is impossible to love and be just unless one understands the empire of force and knows how not to respect it." I believe White's words better capture the poetry of Weil's sentiment in English. (See *Living Speech* 1)

single person. It's the transperson ostracized or killed. It's human trafficking and rape and opioid addiction and genocide. It's clear-cutting the Amazon. It's enslaving yet another indigenous population. It's sweatshop labor. It's child armies. It's shutting down Standing Rock. It's the Trump administration legalizing the killing of bears and wolf cubs in their dens<sup>14</sup>. It prevents women from moving in the world and pushes them down a caste.

The empire of force wears so many masks, how can we spot it? How can we approach something that's diversified to this extreme? We certainly can't tackle all these problems at once. Or any of these problems. There are too many; it's too big.

I can imagine this retort: aren't you being a bit dramatic? You mentioned genocide, for goodness' sake—how could you possibly put consumer culture in the same boat? Sure, it might have its drawbacks, but it can't be that bad...

But it's at the forefront of this biospheric genocide and human exploitation. This is war, and a stealthy one. Americans can easily put Iraq and Afghanistan out of their minds, so imagine how easy it is to gloss over the more inconspicuous ones. This war doesn't just fly under the radar—it was never on the map to begin with.

Here's the key: anywhere there's oppression, there's the empire of force. Anywhere there's dehumanization, there's the empire of force.

It's truly as simple as that. All those horrific problems above, along with all the rest, are not isolated realities. They are the results of systems that are socially and economically connected and interdependent, and they are unified by their shared ideological core: the empire. The atrocities have different faces and exist at different

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<sup>14</sup> I.e., the recent passing of H.J. resolution 69 which legalized practices such as killing hibernating bears and denning wolf cubs under the guise of state's rights. In reality, the legislation effectively reflects the successful bribery of The Safari Club and the NRA.

frequencies of extremes, but they are on the same wavelength, part of that same growing force. In war, the killing is immediate. In war that is subversive and does not look like traditional war, the killing may be obscured. We must be able to recognize the empire of force regardless of the disguises it wears and the arena in which it appears. In this case, we're dealing with the seductive appeal of consumer culture. We can always spot the empire by looking for signs of its *motivation*—always the increase of itself, the expansion of its territory; its *means*—immediate or gradual annihilation and—and its effects—dehumanization and death.

We don't have to go too far in tracing our culture's practices until we come face to face with flagrant abuse, dehumanization, and annihilation. In her piece "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory," Carolyn Merchant succinctly illustrates the direct connection between consumer culture and the horror inflicted by the empire of force. She discusses ecofeminist perspectives that highlight the confluence of the subjugation of the earth and women and children:

Women argue that male-designed and -produced technologies neglect the effects of nuclear radiation, pesticides, hazardous wastes, and household chemicals on women's reproductive organs and on the ecosystem. They argue that radioactivity from nuclear wastes, power plants, and bombs is a potential cause of birth defects, cancers, and the elimination of life on earth. They expose hazardous waste sites near schools and homes as permeating soil and drinking water and contributing to miscarriage, birth defects, and leukemia. They object to pesticides and herbicides being sprayed on crops and forests as potentially affecting children and the childbearing women living near them. (102)

That such practices began in the first place and continue are evidence of the empire's work. They never would have been undertaken in the first place in a society with an ethical orientation to the planet and each other in which the life of the earth and its inhabitants were revered. And that they continue proves the power of the oppressors (those who have "force on loan" [Weil 14]<sup>16</sup>), the definitive subjugation of the oppressed (namely people, the earth, and nonhuman beings), and a total, but unsurprising, oppressor disregard of the plight of the oppressed or the reality thereof (and hence, the oppressors' dehumanization<sup>17</sup>). The work of dehumanization is literal here: human beings are literally dying, literally suffering from preventable ailments, and the earth, like women's bodies, is literally stripped of its fertility and sustainability; hence, living ecosystems die. The products of consumer culture, from pesticides to hormone injected meat to paraben-infused body washes, and the practices therein—from toxic dumping of fracking water and the chemicals of production to wars in the interest of conquest—are conducted by people, by human beings who have aligned themselves with this empire of force for their own transitory power. They are all acts of war on the force of humanity, a counter-force to the empire via its inherent *humanization*.

It's ironic that this literal war so often goes completely unnoticed and accepted, but it makes sense considering how very easy consumer culture has made it for so many of us. Consumer Culture has so pervaded our reality that we often barely see it; we're like oblivious fish in water, unaware anything else is possible. And it's difficult to recognize the empire's submergence into our reality in part because *it has disguised itself in the veil*

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<sup>16</sup> "Thus it happens that those who have force on loan from fate count on it too much and are destroyed" (Weil 14). Her words can be applied in this circumstance to the reality that no one, the powerful nor the powerless nor anyone in between, will be free from the effects of a future planet stripped of sustenance.

<sup>17</sup> See Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* pp. 125-183.

*of progress*. Though my stance in this thesis is intentionally highly critical of a culture that I see as woefully off the tracks, I am highlighting and resisting *an* ideology. I'm not asserting that all inventions, all economic exchanges are inherently of a death force's will to power. Einstein put it poetically: "A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving..." (Einstein). Thanks to innovations born of and for humanity, we have enjoyed life-elevating progress. I am not diminishing that reality; rather, I am advocating for its preservation and increase in sustainable ways. Einstein also said "Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth" (Highfield and Carter 79).

Oversimplification spirals us into ignorance. We must know what the empire is and we must know what the humanizing is; in that way we align our wills with one and resist the other. And so: we have this humanizing propulsion of progress, of the cessation of suffering, of artistic and technological invention that makes our lives more ease-ful, healthier, frees our time, potentially connects us. The empire eked its way in and made of itself a simulacrum of this humanizing will.

Philosopher Jean Baudrillard explored the ways reality is uniquely manipulated and repackaged in our modern western context and put forth a theory of the simulacrum. Essentially, it is a copy. It may have had a basis in reality at one time, no longer has that basis, or may never have had a "real" basis at all; it could have been a reproduction of a fabrication, of a sign with no referent. Baudrillard condenses the principles of the simulacra into four "successive phases of the image":

- 1 It is the reflection of a basic reality

2 It masks and perverts a basic reality

3 It masks the *absence* of a basic reality)

4 It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it's its own pure simulacrum. (170)

In our age of mass production, the simulacrum has become a commonplace material occurrence. I assert that the empire of force, in our context of consumer culture, copied the reality of humanizing progress in its ever-pursuant will to power. The empire masquerades in simulacra as the humanizing progress of consumer culture, and so its will to power increases, unchecked, and the human actors possessed of power can espouse the benefits of their products and practices when the means of their production and their actual effects are devastation. The basic reality of humanizing progress has emphatically been masked and perverted—under whose authority is progress legitimate and humanizing? Whom could we believe? What practices can we accept? There are good people doing good work within the paradigm of consumer culture: designing green technology, running for office to get more funding for schools, starting businesses with legitimately ethical manufacturing procedures. The problem is that the simulacrum of progress has infiltrated our society like an invasive species and is attempting to choke out the good. Ultimately, the empire of force as the simulacra of progressive, humanizing consumer culture most closely falls under the fourth successive phase, but not entirely. It is essentially in no way *like* a humanizing ideology, but it does bear relation to it in terms of direct competition of will. It must consume to increase. Thanks to this cloaking tactic—the guise of humanizing progress—the empire of force's war goes largely unnoticed.

There is another important aspect directly related to environmental destruction in

which the empire acts as simulacra. Consumer culture, brought to us on the ideology of industrialization (an earlier iteration of this humanizing and dehumanizing competition of wills), lets us live very different lives from our predecessors. Indoor lives. Air-conditioned lives. Comfortable, lovely lives, golden age lives in many ways (as chlorofluorocarbons decimate the ozone). We are not outside nearly as consistently as we once were, and we amble from home to car to parking garage to work and back. The most recent *Oxford Jr. Dictionary*, published in 2015, eliminated several dozen words related to nature and replaced them with technological terms. An article in *The Guardian* covered the story: "...instead of catkin, cauliflower, chestnut and clover, today's edition of the dictionary, which is aimed at seven-year-olds starting Key Stage Two, features cut and paste, broadband and analogue" (Flood). It's not extreme to say that the products and practices of our consumer culture have allowed us to live a simulacrum of the human existence that once existed in close relation with nature, and we're even constructing a version of Newspeak in which children will be more comfortable mentioning broadband in conversation than identifying an acorn (one of the words omitted from the *Jr. Dictionary*). This is not to say that we're living in a simulacrum of life itself (though Baudrillard did posit that we're increasingly living in a hyperreality courtesy of the media) as there is not one exact right, or natural, way for people to live—there are many possibilities. There is no essential dichotomy between broadband and acorn, as broadband is as much nature as acorn. But the privileging of one over the other is telling, and in the next chapter I tease apart why the reduction is problematic.

In the interest of knowing the empire of force, here are some of the messages of consumer culture that serve its increase: "You are what you have" (identification); "You

have a place: here it is, stay in it” (hierarchy, fixed roles); contradictorily, “You can be anything you want to be!” (distraction); “Put yourself first” (individualism); “You want it? Get it!” (gratification of needs); “Things have never been better!” (Huxlean appeal) “You don’t need to worry about it, and there’s nothing you could do anyway – so and so will take care of it!” (passivity and disempowerment). When the empire isn’t directly killing, it’s manipulating others for the sake of its own power, its will to force. It may not cause the kind of immediate, agonizing soul-death of the *Iliad*’s warriors and civilians; rather, we experience it as a perfidious coma-inducement, or generational systemic oppression, and the effect is a slow and silent sluicing away of the self. Knowing the empire necessitates developing keen instincts for the sake of vigilance. There are numerous facets of the empire we could examine, but here I want to look at a few that directly prompt the continuance of the empire through the work of pervasive and inconspicuous ideological manipulation, and that target the individual—and hence, communities (or what would be communities if alienation hadn’t seemingly pried the ties apart).

The ideological principle of the level of behavioral ideology directly affecting and reflecting the most complex crystallizations is certainly at play here. White said this about the integral aspect of the individual in actively or passively facilitating the empire’s perpetuity:

What looks like external and physical force thus always depends upon—is really a manifestation of—forces at work within the mind and imagination. These forces are as real, and in their own way can be ultimately as destructive, as physical power. This means that the empire of force has presence and power in the minds

of each of its agents and servants and supporters—in each of us who does not oppose it, who does not understand it and know how not to respect it. This is in fact where it really lives, in the mind; without that life it would have no force at all. (5)

Consumer culture does the work of conditioning the mind, and so recreating the ideological, by: enforcing Burke's concept of identification with material products; persistently encouraging that individuals gratify their desires (Baudrillard, White); and by in fact structuring the system of needs itself. Baudrillard spells this out when he claims "*the system of needs is the product of the system of production*"(42). Consumer culture, then, supplies its own demand. White posits that "our collective acceptance of the values of a consumer economy...systematically reduces life to the stimulation and gratification of desires without any attention to their larger meaning for the individual or the community" (6). We do this because it's easy, inherited, we've been conditioned to do it, and most are so consumed by the labor of living that it doesn't seem feasible to consider another way besides that which works in the moment, unsustainable as it may be. In this process, people often become passive and conform to their roles as consumers; hence, they unwittingly hand over their agency. And, as stated, fundamental disconnect occurs as a result of a rigid ideological edifice that sequesters not only producers from consumers, but people from each other, themselves, and the natural world.<sup>18</sup>

Consumer culture has inculcated us with the precept of identifying with material objects and has conditioned us through immersion to act in its interest. We subsume our own identity, our understanding of ourselves, into the processes and products of consumption. Those objects, ideologically imbued, confer constructed meaning to us. We

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<sup>18</sup> The dichotomies presented here will be further addressed in Chapter Three.

glean personality, status, and security from them. We act in ways that bolster the system, and as such are supporting—individually, collectively, politically and economically—practices that have caused and continue the anthropocenic and the corresponding radical biospheric imbalance. As Graham Peebles explained in his article “Rapacious Consumerism and Climate Change,” “Commercialisation has poisoned all areas of contemporary life, and together with its partner in crime, consumerism, is the principle cause of man-made climate change” (Peebles). Fortunately, I’m working within an ideological structure that is already strong, as is evidenced by Peebles’ thinking. The understanding is that commercialization, this inculcating conditioning, *literally* tracks our movements to determine how best to trap us into purchases, what feel-good treats to produce to keep us spending (and so working, and so spending), to keep the machine going, to keep those in power in place.

Regarding distraction and conditioning, philosopher Felix Guattari wrote in his essay “Remaking Social Practices”: “Certainly, machinism tends to liberate more and more ‘freetime.’ But free for what? To devote oneself to prefabricated leisure activities? To remain glued to the television?” (6). Essentially, we don’t know what to do with ourselves outside of consuming, which encompasses our idea of leisure. Machines may have gotten us to a point where we have free time and can enjoy a few hours off on Saturdays, but they can’t help us remember what we could be doing with ourselves recreatively. That’s humanizing work that we have to do for ourselves, but are too distracted and disinterested and energetically dispersed to do. Consumer culture has an interest in our submersion with it, as it is benefited by our total engagement. In this way, it propagates itself.

Here's an example of how consumer culture, originating as entertainment, activates identification, conditions further consumptive practices, and is thoroughly absorbing. If you have an iPhone and your life has been transformed for the better by having it, navigating infinitely better with satellite maps, accessing immediate information on the web, even bolstering your social identity with a barrage of selfies and quippy tweets, then you have an impetus to buy the next model of the iPhone. It will have something else that you didn't know you needed, but that, you now realize, you do. And besides that, isn't one's identity in some way, even subtly, bound up in having that new iPhone? A young professional, a person who wants people to know they're making it in the world, or to give the illusion that they are, has an interest in having such goods, as they are *symbols* we use to confer this social information. Certainly this practice isn't new. Humans have pretty much always used material objects to demonstrate wealth and social status. We are no different, but the trouble is that with our particular breed of consumerism, the objects of demonstration we use are produced on such a massive and ceaseless scale and through such resource stripping and compromising processes that we're sacrificing our planet for our identifications and the gratification of our constructed needs because we have the technology to do so. Peebles confirms: "Whilst anthropogenic (man-made) climate change, resulting from the burning of fossil fuels is due to various factors, a lifestyle based on rapacious desire for all things material is the key underlying cause." It is this consuming lifestyle, that of consumer culture itself, that is directly not only producing, but *demanding* biospheric degradation.

Peebles and Baudrillard alike sum up the essential operation of consumer culture thusly: there is no capitalism without the driving force of consumerism, and consumerism

itself has been engineered— that implies purposely, consciously designed— to constantly activate the desire for physical, mental, emotional, immediate pleasure. And because pleasure is fleeting, and so must be constantly sought, consumption is self-sustaining. Our language creates our reality. For example, our language expresses our understandings and reproductions of the ideas of pleasure, wellbeing, and being itself. It manifests in the words we speak, the way we speak about things, the way speech is directed towards us and the implicit motivations therein. It manifests in the way we *use*, and that language that we have claimed, the language of our identification, is expressed by our very way of acting in the world. It confers our very understanding of ourselves. Baudrillard wrote in “Consumer Culture” that “Through advertising, mass society and consumer society continuously ratify themselves” (10). We are bombarded by advertisements from all directions, and are more subtly targeted, whether or not we’re conscious of it, by our media sources themselves. We learn what our culture *is* through our news, for example, that persistent ideological instructor (in some extreme cases, “indoctrinator” is not too harsh) implants reality into our consciousness. Oh, what Bakhtin would think of 24-hour news! Hegemony advertises itself to us in all public spaces simply by means of its omnipresence. When we move in public spaces, we are subsumed by it.

Consumer culture is striking at deep aspects of our characters—it in fact appeals to them intrinsically, wherein lies its success. It obscures and manipulates our understanding of choice, and therefore agency, through indoctrination and submersion. We choose differently when we know differently, and as it is, we know consumer culture—period. Baudrillard mentions that even core principles like acceptance and the

drive for self-fulfillment are defined by consumer culture itself. He goes on to say that the “Ideology of competition gives way to “philosophy” of self-fulfillment” and that we “actualize... in consumption, each on his own” (12). And we do this work of actualizing through identity structuring and need gratification. He says the consumer is conditioned to “Pursue his own happiness without the slightest hesitation [and]... Prefer objects which provide him with the maximum satisfaction” (35). This illuminates an alignment with oneself over responsibility to others, and that includes responsibility to environmental stewardship. Coached from childhood that happiness is the ultimate state to “achieve,” that if you haven’t achieved happiness something is wrong with you (48) that the way to happiness is by fulfilling needs that were constructed, and that those needs are met through consumption, the focus is selfishly driven and expressed. Satisfaction is even measured in a quantitative system in which the qualitative is devalued, and so how can one ever be sure, ill-versed in qualitative evaluation, if their own satisfaction is actually ever achieved?

We cannot find ultimate fulfillment or actualization in consumption for several reasons. First, we understand self-fulfillment and actualization as an achieved, permanent state of being. It doesn’t mean we stop living and interacting with the world, and that includes the economy, but it involves the cessation of chasing, of needing ever more to sustain oneself. Consumption runs on lack, on promoting the illusion of lack and the need for ever more. Real self-fulfillment involves the realization that lack is usually illusory, especially when immediate physical needs for survival are met, and the need for more shifts to an appreciation for the now. Baudrillard goes on to say that this paradigm “ascends from pure and simple abundance to a complete conditioning of action and time”

(33). His words echo Guattari's frustration with our confused freetime, itself conditioned and consumed. How we move in the world, the actions we take, the work we engage ourselves with, our relationship to material goods, our spending habits, our perception of self and other, the way we spend our time, leisure and labor— it is all within the system, and it all keeps the simulacra of human life itself alive.

Both a reason for this massive increase in the empire of force and a critical concept to consider in aligning with that of humanization is *balance*, which, simply, we've gotten out of. When the systems of a body get out of balance, all kinds of illnesses appear. Think of cancer: the codes go awry. There's no communication of systems, and messages are lost in translation. With severed communication, the wills to power of severed systems rage, the equilibrium of the holistic being is compromised, and the person dies. We're seeing a similar chaotic imbalance wreaking havoc upon our life systems on the macrocosm of our planet. Weil noticed this important ideological aspect of the Greeks, evident through their stories, that the west seems to use only in a particular way and completely miss its essence. She speaks of the phenomenon of rigidly just retribution expressed:

This retribution, which has a geometrical rigor, which operates automatically to penalize the abuse of force, was the main subject of Greek thought. It is the soul of the epic... To Pythagoreans, to Socrates and Plato, it was the jumping-off point of speculation upon the nature of man and the universe. In Oriental countries which are steeped in Buddhism, it is perhaps this Greek idea that has lived on under the name of Karma. The Occident, however, has lost it, and no longer even has a word to express it in any of its languages: conceptions of limit,

measure, equilibrium, which ought to determine the conduct of life are, in the West, restricted to a service function in the vocabulary of technics. We are only geometricians of matter ; the Greeks were, first of all, geometricians in their apprenticeship to virtue. (14-15)

Our living out of balance has gotten us where we are. It would be difficult to provide an exhaustive list of exemplary metonyms: the imbalance of our diets prompting sickness, our relationships causing all manner of dysfunction, our alienation from each other, the natural world, and internal aspects of ourselves causing mental, spiritual, emotional imbalances that call for drugs, escapism, the constant search for fulfillment in a world of plastic. In the following section, I suggest a few methods for a restoration of balance.

Life—the will to life—cannot be without equilibrium of forces.

We resist the empire by knowing it and knowing how not to respect it: first, we find the oppressions nearest us and confront them. Paulo Freire's timeless advice for liberation hits home for anyone who encounters the empire of force, which is all of us in some form:

The oppressed, who have been shaped by the death-affirming climate of oppression, must find through their struggle the way to life-affirming humanization, which does not lie simply in having more to eat (although it does involve having more to eat and cannot fail to include this aspect). The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings. The struggle begins with men's

recognition that they have been destroyed. Propaganda, management, manipulation—all arms of domination—cannot be the instruments of their rehumanization. The only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed. (68)

He's calling for a radical reclamation of agency achieved through revolutionary education, one that requires waking up to surrounding and internal conditions and conjuring the will to resist. Humanizing, he suggests, is an activity of relating. It is creative work that cannot utilize the tools of oppression. We must use language creatively, in new contexts, and make meaning—that fundamentally human activity. We have been shaped by what Freire calls a “death-affirming climate,” and we become objectified as we objectify.

I don't presume that life and death are dichotomous and in fact do not attribute negativity to death, though the concept is drenched with fear and loathing in our culture that engages in dog and pony shows of life. Life and death are really of one unified experience; one is not good and the other bad. They simply *are*, like Nietzsche's forces, in whatever iteration of expansion or diminishment, and are beyond the qualitative judgments that we experience in the immediate. I am describing the empire of force as a death force, however, because that's the language we have for it regardless of connotation: it's a force of destruction. And there can be many forces of destruction, just as there are many kinds of deaths – and many kinds of life. The empire of force is a particular extreme on the spectrum of forces. The humanizing force to which I refer is one of life, and it, too, is not intrinsically good or bad. One particular iteration of the

“life” force is in fact extremely detrimental, as it manifests in severe overpopulation that, in turn, feeds the empire. We are in a time of extremes. Maybe we have always been in times of extremes, and though it seems wildly unbalanced to us, macrocosmically it is and has always been in perfect harmony, impossible of being otherwise. And though there are a diversity of forces within the one, these two principle forces require our attention now.

We have hoards of external ideological material that have implanted our consciousness with new identifications, desires, and meaning, but the ideology of consumerism is shallow and designed for consumption and addiction. The existence of the empire of force has its own language and its own vibrational expression. And with our unique ability to perceive the signals of signs, we have the ability to perceive and interpret it in many forms: through our literal language, through action, all of which is symbolic, through our instinctual selves. We have to become vigilant in our perception. We have to immerse ourselves in the language of silence, that potentially de-filtering translator, to more adroitly watch what comes before us. Knowing the languages of forces allows us to speak so that we enact our particular wills to power in alignment with the forces we wish to increase. We are conductors for the orchestras of this world of forces, and as we extend our will as the conductor does her wand the forces rise and fall in accordance with our attunement. We are the forces *themselves* with a consciousness of will. If we so choose to engage ourselves in the task of humanization, which I expand to mean the liberation of all beings, for the sake of its fundamental alignment with a will that resonates with that aspect of ourselves – that of grace, wellbeing, and life, rather than destruction – we have a chance to quell the will to power of the empire of force, and

perhaps even channel it into the business of “good death.” I’m talking about a consciousness around creation and learning how to play the instrument of ourselves.

### CHAPTER THREE: BEYOND IDEOLOGY

*“Language is filled  
with words for deprivation  
images so familiar  
it is hard to crack language open  
into that other country  
the country of being.”  
-Susan Griffin (97)*

#### **Doubt**

The assimilation and implementation of new principles is nothing short of

essential to our survival as a species. And we know that in the last 50 years or so, certainly since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, new ideologies have formed and influenced others, if not as thoroughly as they ultimately must. The fact that there *is* environmentalism, that it has become an "ism," is proof that new ideologies do form in response to human action. Its existence is also proof of *doubt*. When Carson first exposed the rampant use of DDT in pesticides and its poisonous effect on wildlife, water, and people, the American public was faced with proof that perhaps their trusted systems, in this case the agricultural industry, were not perfect nor a shining example of American preeminence, and were in fact engaged in practices that caused immediate and severe harm. This new knowledge sprouted doubt in the minds of some Americans and gave rise to environmentalist beliefs. No longer could we be sure that our institutions were safe, and after decades of research and compounding detriment, the doubt has expanded. Fortunately, doubt is an agent for potential. Yarbrough asserts: "We may speak of 'conversions,' 'paradigm shifts,' and 'revolutions' as if they were instantaneous. In fact, however, a rapid reconfiguration of topical relationships cannot occur without substantial preparation, that is, unless numerous individual topics and beliefs are already under revision or doubt" (177). We have inherited a certain momentum from doubt that is gaining speed in our kariotic moment. The movement has been gradual, but preparation is picking up courtesy of certain recent catalysts: i.e., the election and reign of Donald Trump.

So what do we *do* with doubt, this psychic irritant? Our brains, basically flawed computers with an obsessive penchant for problem solving, don't easily leave doubt alone. According to Yarbrough, the answer is simple: we establish belief. He says, "belief

is a response to doubt as a solution is a response to a problem, or an answer is a response to a question” (38). What beliefs have formed to address our doubts regarding systems that aren’t working for us, but against us? Or our doubts about the very future of the planet? The answers vary, and range from abandoning doubt and choosing faith in the systems/the powers that be, to believing that corruption and greed are the players of the day and that we need to do something differently (but what that something *is* is nebulous), to the nihilistic notion that it’s all over, so long and thanks for all the fish. Winnowing this exploration of doubt down to meet our purposes, an analysis of consumer culture confers a serious doubt regarding the paradigm’s sustainability and morality, and directly caused our doubt regarding our future’s viability. The very basis of this thesis is a response to said doubt.

Since there *is* doubt, we know that the flagrant inefficiency of the status quo has been revealed, to an extent, and has caught at least some attention. But I do not believe that adequate belief/beliefs, an established ideological structure, has sufficiently come together to address our doubts nor to effect change. Our lack of stabilizing belief has stymied our ability to act. Yarbrough quotes Charles Peirce, who concludes that “The essence of belief is the establishment of habit” (qtd. in Yarbrough 38). Belief, an ideological coalescence, necessitates our movement in the world (remember Burke’s metaphor of the body hopping around in particular ways depending upon the directing will of its inhabiting spirit). It’s the premise of this section that we must become firmer in advantageous beliefs so that our habits, our action, can be directed and effective. I do not think, however, that the belief→habit relationship is linear, but cyclical. Choosing to alter our habits on the good faith of another’s persuasion (what Yarbrough calls “charity”) has

the potential to change our beliefs, and our beliefs change the ways we act. Going forward, I'm exploring changing beliefs. First, I look at points of disempowerment and agency for the individual in consumer culture. While it is impossible to generalize individuals, there are points of connectivity directly related to kairotic elements, like media, technological relationship, and hierarchy, which influence the very definition of and potential for the individual in society. Once placed, we can turn to possibilities for replacement. Addressing the individual in doubt and the necessity of belief formation, I offer possibilities for the metaphor in re-education. I then shift into praxis, and analyze a particular belief-shaping metaphor, the *role*, to explore avenues for change. Finally, I put forth and illustrate what I consider to be a particularly powerful belief—that of *ecoconsciousness*—and name specific habits that individuals can engage in to both shift their beliefs and effect change. I enlisted the wisdom of two alternative spirituality experts local to the Asheville, NC area for practical advice regarding paradigmatic re-orientation. I spoke personally with Byron Ballard, pagan high priestess, and Bloom Post, shamanic priestess. Additionally, I drew from a publically accessible interview with Kedar Brown, indigenously trained intuitive healer. These three individuals embody ideologies that run counter to the hegemonic mainstream and that exemplify fundamentally healthier ways of being than the latter can ever give us.

### **The Individual**

At present, the systemic overhaul that is required to restore the biosphere to viable balance is not happening. And it can be a disheartening exercise to read the literature on environmental destruction and what we can do about it. For example, the United Nations Climate Agreement falls flat on readers who have too often been inspired by the high

ideals of that institution but have rarely seen their implementation. We know that vast practices must change and that policies must be overhauled. We know that that level of macrocosmic change is fundamental and we're done for without it. We're also offered plenty of advice as individuals. We are encouraged to recycle, to drive less, to use less water and electricity, to eliminate or reduce our meat and dairy intake, to buy fair trade and to research the journeys our goods took on their way to us. This advice is at least something: it's something for the panicked citizen to do. On one hand, it seems delusional to think that these individual actions make any real dent in the monstrosity of a problem. It's true that we need to be realistic about the colossus of consumer culture and know that our free trade purchases, for example, are *not* creating adequate change. Yes, we should be recycling, taking canvas bags to the supermarket, canning our own food! Yes, we should be reducing our meat and dairy intake, becoming informed consumers, supporting our local farms, driving less. Because even though these small actions are no match for global environmental destruction, still they are ripples in the pond, and we have more influence over others than we think. Grassroots ideology has the potential to spread like wildfire; encouraging a few to join the cause encourages a few more, and best case scenario the next generation will take the lessons from this one and make something great of them. And so why are these practices not enough, in and of themselves?

We must always return to the problem of immediacy. How many generations do we really have to transform as radically as we must? Considering our plight from this perspective, the small movements, though noble and influential in the momentary interpersonal sense, are simply not enough to overturn the paradigm immediately—and immediately is when it has to happen if we're hoping to give ourselves, and the

biosphere, a fighting chance. If radical change is to come, it will come via our radical engagement with policies and politics, which are particularly tenuous, corrupt, and destructive, as well as with our individual re-orientation of lifestyle and ideology. We can hold fast to the pendulum metaphor and increase the tension on the political system with all our might so that it snaps as soon as possible and swings far from the conditions of the present. We must advocate for the policies and the political leaders that have an interest in preservation and a return to vitality. Now is the time to be politically involved, use language creatively and widely, and use the level of micro ideological action en masse to inform those monstrous crystallizations and build them anew, without the assistance of the eager consumer culture brand of the empire of force – or any iteration thereof.

Simultaneously, we must no longer hold any illusion that anything will be done *for* us, that the government will magically become uncorrupt and benevolent, or that there is some institution or thing “out there” that will save us. Ballard iterated this point when she claimed: “The E.P.A hasn’t protected the planet in a decade. *We* have to be the E.P.A. *We* have to be willing to do what it takes to protect the environment.” I’m suggesting that, on one hand, we face all fronts by engaging with political institutions, and on the other acting as if they do not work nor ever will, since they haven’t for so long. Ballard warns that we must rid ourselves of the illusion that something besides us will fix this mess for us, as ascribing to such is irresponsible and passively destructive. We have to rid ourselves of the idea that things will change without us and that we can rely on the systems themselves, vested as they are in their own maintenance. And we must remember that, particularly when we’re talking about coercive forces interested in maintaining their own power, ideas are sold to us as a means of manipulation, in this case to assuage doubt.

If we can be sold on the fact that our isolated actions are really making a substantial difference, we can be goaded into considering it no further.

I mentioned that our present means of resistance are inadequate, and I believe that a remedy will be an ideological shift. First, I want to address the status-issue that is filling people with a sense of powerlessness, a sense that translates to the particulars of action (or non-action). Philosopher Felix Guattari spoke to the media's contribution to cultural passivity:

The routines of daily life, and the banality of the world represented to us by the media, surround us with a reassuring atmosphere in which nothing is of real consequence any more. We cover our eyes; we forbid ourselves to think about the turbulent passage of our times, which swiftly thrusts our familiar past far behind us, effacing ways of being and living that are still fresh in our minds and slapping our future up against an opaque horizon, heavy with thick clouds and noxious vapors. (1)

It's an interesting combination of experience that the media and the codes of our culture provide. We are lulled into a kind of routine-based sleep, as Guattari says, and we inhabit a "reassuring atmosphere." In such a space, our engagement is not required. We see that things are running without us (though we now know that they are in fact running *because* of us). The irony is the extreme tautness of the reality presented to us, the onslaught of wars and suffering and famine and economic drops and rises. In that sense, we are not lulled to sleep: we are stretched neurotically thin, to vulnerable breaking points, and we are not especially grounded in our sensibilities at such times. But that state is not sustainable, and so at some time or another, we surrender. Things become

inconsequential for us because they are in perpetual motion regardless, we imagine, of our own input. Lulled to sleep or adrenally exhausted both work for the perpetuation of our culture; the former extreme is Huxley's vision, the latter, Orwell's. Either way we are removed, disenchanted, "hopeful,"<sup>19</sup> and thus place our confidence outside of ourselves. We forget our past by erasure and refuse to look forward to the future, which Guattari presciently paints metaphorically as ecologically ominous.

We are bombarded with information without getting relevant context from the news and are constantly invited into the media of entertainment. Escapism is at our fingertips and is difficult to moderate, particularly considering consumer culture's doctrine of self-serving pleasure. Westerners established in consumer culture are overwhelmingly consumers of a excess of mediums and are all too rarely producers of outward change. The individual's ethical relationship with media of all sorts implants in them a sense of passivity. If anything, we as agents have merged into the scenery of Burke's pentad<sup>20</sup>. The people out *there* are doing things, the powers that be are making decisions. It could be argued that our media is increasingly interactive, in the form of video games, for example, but I'd posit that the escapism element trumps any benefit from the interaction. We are not interacting with consensual reality, after all, in our video games. We are encouraged into passivity and escapism by our interaction with the media and consumer culture as a whole, and those traits surface also in our individual and community lives.

In *Will to Power*, Nietzsche wrote: "*Basic Error*: to place the goal in the herd and not in single individuals! The herd is a means, no more! But now one is attempting to

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<sup>19</sup> See Derrek Jenson's article, "Beyond Hope."

<sup>20</sup> See Burke's *Grammar of Motives* Part Two.

understand the herd as an individual and to ascribe to it a higher rank than to the individual – profound misunderstanding! ! !” (403). This quote directs our attention to the fact that to diminish individual power is erroneous, and that it is through individual work that the “goal” can be actualized. I think it is important, when faced with phantom cynicism taking out the recycling, to remember that our very understanding of “individual” was culturally conferred, and that although our recycling will not stop the landfills from overflowing, we possess greater agency than we know. The cultivation of that agency is essential if we are to effect the change we want and to live lives that are far more authentic than consumer culture will ever give us. Assuming new responsibly and understanding ourselves in relation with the world in a new way is “being the change;” it is shifting the greater ideology from within the center of one’s self. It is advantageous to the empire that we remain steadfast in the belief that the individual is separate and small. Nietzsche would say that there is great advantage in the separateness of the individual, for it is here that great personal leaps are made, but I would add that we are not as sequestered as we imagine ourselves to be and that our journey to becoming an *ubermensch* is not for us alone. It is for our people. As we shift our understanding of our ethical relationships socially, and the meaning of roles themselves, we also require an ethical reorientation with the earth itself— what we can do to it, and what our relationship with it is. And this new orientation is needed on a global scale. Individuals are powerless when they adhere to and believe in the constructs of society that keep them in a particular place, playing certain differentiated roles, believing this code is the only code, and that recycling is all they can do. In this way, individuals have ceded their power to the state and have therefore disconnected from themselves fundamentally. Yet

when we remember that the world is a place of wildly expansive possibility, as we are ourselves, we step into a powerful agency that we realize we do not have to give away and we can play the instruments of ourselves in each moment in the ways we perceive necessary. As Guattari offers, “Social and moral progress is inseparable from the collective and individual practices that advance it (2).” The individual and the community absolutely matter, as do their practices. It is essential that we remember our places, our power, and the particular gifts we have to bring forth.<sup>21</sup> I’m aware of the paradox I’m putting forth: individual environmentalist practices are too small to matter in the grand scheme of things, *and* they are important, potentially catching, certainly in alignment with environmentalist morality. I propose that we do the small things we can because they matter if only in the merit of themselves, *and* that we make deeper ideological shifts to propel more fundamental discursive shifts.

### **Metaphors**

Remember that all our beliefs, our doxa, are connected like magnetic connector toys that we can dismantle and reconnect to form entirely new structures. As stated, a key method for addressing and changing belief is the metaphor, which places a vision before our eyes, as Aristotle conferred in *The Rhetoric*. In their groundbreaking study of the metaphor, *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson found that they are not merely tropes, but rather entire cognitive schema (for our purposes, they reveal aspects of the ideological structures of which they are a part) that highlight certain

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<sup>21</sup> In an interview, Brown said, “The place where your passion intersects with the needs of your people is where you’re gonna thrive, and its where you’re needed,” and that the individual gifts, the unique “genius” we come into the world with can set us on our respective paths of engagement. He offered this: “It’s not only a gift, it’s a responsibility. And if you don’t deliver it, it’s not gonna happen. Because no one else can be you.” Here, individual gifts and growth is attached to community responsibility, and relationship is highlighted. Brown stresses the importance of paying attention to many new age spiritualities that are feel-good but ultimately “bypass” legitimate work and glosses over responsibility to community.

aspects of a reality and hide others, which is the exact case Bakhtin made for the sign. As previously discussed, metaphors and signs cannot reveal the thing in its entirety, as they would have to *be* the thing, instead of the thing in terms of themselves: as Lakoff and Johnson stress, “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5).

In the previous chapter, we used the metaphor “empire of force” to highlight the will to power that expands and works through consumer culture. We’ve said that the empire of force is not a sentient, calculating, anthropomorphized and maniacal being. Rather, it is a concentration of dull momentum only. It has gained speed throughout the ages of human movement in the direction of *more* and *fear*. It should be likened to an electric storm more than a person, and it electrifies herds like lightening does cattle.

Let’s take a moment to critique the above. Lakoff and Johnson discuss new metaphor creation in their text and assert that because metaphor is the very means by which we understand the world, when we intentionally invent and espouse new metaphors, we are changing the way we experience the world and our lives as we are changing our very conceptual schema. The rhetorical choices we make in new metaphor creation matter, reality-shaping as they potentially are, and we must attend to what is said and what is not said. The “empire of force” may not be concrete like a mechanistic metaphor, and so does not confer a definite image to the audience. That abstraction may be a weakness, as it does not summon an image with crisp immediacy. However, the word “empire” carries a wealth of connotations, including power, life, and a will of its own. “Force,” in its negative aspect, summons a sense of violence and oppression. In its more neutral connotation, it suggests natural forces, the more overwhelming of which

human actors are tiny and defenseless against It's an alarming phrase, and summons a feeling-state in the body or subtle alarms in the mind instead of the metaphor's traditional mental picture. The metaphor is a warning: it may be frightening, it may make the hearer feel small and defenseless against such an entity. Any yet my sense is that there may even be a call to action embedded in these words. In our individualistic culture, we were reared on *Star Wars*, after all. The heroic thing to do, we've been instructed, is to rebel as individuals against the "empire." Who knew George Lucas could have such a psychic influence on the revolution?

Let me return for a moment to the positioning of the empire as a storm – we're going meta-metaphoric. First, we know that we do not stop storms. This metaphor reminds us of the human/nature dichotomous illusion that says humans are apart from storms entirely, just like nature entirely. But this is not so. In literal storms, our electricity is heightened and we are reactive; we are a part of our environment. But this is a unique storm, the empire-of-force-as-storm, as it is carried on Great Plains of human beings. It will cease only when conditions change. Individuals breaking from herds change conditions, lessen the space of occupation, and therefore weaken the storm's propulsion. It cannot go forward when the individual breaks from the herd, becomes *with* a will to power instead of used *by* a will to power.

"Will to power" here can be interpreted ideologically: we can eschew one deleterious ideological structure and assume another one of our choosing that we help consciously construct. Going forward, I suggest that there is perhaps a place beyond ideology (I hope it doesn't make Bakhtin roll over in his grave) and I believe that this final bit could also be interpreted in a more literal sense. Our bodies react to electrical

storms with hair on ends and goose bumps; we are responding to the energetic stimulus of our environments. The very presence of the empire of force and our correspondence with it elicits literal, physical stimulus responses from us all the time, often in terms of severe depression, anxiety, addiction, and numerous other conditions. To choose another will implicate choosing another energetic expression, one that elicits other stimulus responses in our very bodies. What I am really talking about here is the field of potential that ideology fills. The ideology is the intellect, the field of potential is of the body. The will with which we merge and which we actively shape can be of ease, for example, wellbeing, or peace. This does not mean that we will be swept away and permanently reside in these positive feeling states, but rather that we are aligning with them to promote their impacts upon the world and our communities. This is highly abstract, and likely not a metaphor that can quickly sway the populous in a tweet or 30 second commercial. For now, it helps segue us into the idea of ecoconsciousness and stresses the agency of the individual that must be highlighted if we are to assume novelty-creating roles.

I came across a second metaphor, another “rhetorical answer” as Yarbrough calls it, for addressing our geo-cultural crisis that comes up against our American ethos. We live in a particular time and culture that not only fears death, but absurdly denies it. We make elders invisible. We prize, parade, and highlight youth until it floods the media and our awareness. We feign immortality. But if we could accept that the human species might just be a macrocosm for an individual human life, we could understand that the human species, like the individual human, will die. How do individuals change when they begin to truly consider their own mortality? A fundamental ethical shift is involved. What

was important becomes utterly insignificant, and what was overlooked or brushed aside becomes paramount. We begin to consider ourselves differently, others differently, and to act very differently. Discussing human's potential endpoint and a means for coping, Kedar Brown gave this illustration in an interview:

There's sometimes talk now of: have we crossed the threshold where we may not make it? Maybe the earth will make it, but have we crossed the threshold as humans where we're heading down this road that doesn't look good? Some say yes, some say no, some say grace can happen. But I would pose this question: if you and I are walking down a road and at the end of that road, we knew that our life would end, how then would we live in relationship to each other *now*? And can that awareness and consciousness help us navigate forward in a good way rather than a fearful way?

If we truly considered own and our collective mortality, let it sink in and become an embedded aspect of our ideology, how would we change in the present? Just like the "role" itself can be understood metaphorically, the human species can be comprehended through the metonym of the individual. And the individual dies. In order to assimilate this understanding, one must first have some concept of mortality and of the realities of life, which one does not easily glean through entrapment in consumer culture, but does with a practice of ecoconsciousness.

## **Roles**

Now that we've sampled potential metaphors for prompting ethical behavior, we need to look at how to move beyond intellectual conceptualization and reach embodiment. Yarbrough makes his position clear: metaphors do *not* facilitate novel

invention, the prime directive of his book. They merely present old material in new ways, and do the work of detaching and re-attaching doxai. According to his theory, novel invention occurs when our ethical apperception changes. Our ethical relationship, he explains, is quite simply our understanding of what we can do *to* and *with* things, and we have an ethical relationship with everything with which we come in contact (Yarbrough 144). Every discursive moment is intrinsically informed by our respective ethical understandings, which are themselves relationally and socially constructed. Our ethical relationships change, he posits, when we change social roles. He asserts:

By changing our social relations with something, we change what we can do with or to it – for changing how we relate to it socially reconfigures how we may relate it technologically to other things – and, thus, we change what it *is* to us. What it can do (the effects it can cause) and what we can do with it (our ethical posture toward it) defines it. (149)

He makes the key claim that our roles confer to us our purviews of responsibility, the problems we believe are ours to solve—the arenas in which we believe we are entitled and required to enact our agency. I would posit, though, that he overlooks the fact that the role shift that he claims is indispensable for novel creation is itself metaphorical, and so metaphor is therefore indispensable for novel invention. This thesis is concerned first with doxai rearrangement and draws upon ideological facets that are already in existence, but offers suggestions for effective implementation. The novel comes from individuals in discourse and in this case, the novel looks like humans discoursing fundamentally differently in and with the world. Beliefs and habits are incurred by role shifts, which first requires a metaphorical conceptualization.

Yarbrough says this regarding roles: “Usually, some social group confers upon us our roles, and usually we accept them, but we *can* assume different roles, and even novel roles, roles that can project novel social relations among the objects of inquiry, relations that enable us to notice novel possible causal relations and create novel concepts” (170). He tells us that it’s possible to assume a different role, but doesn’t go into how we go about that, exactly. Frankly, it isn’t easy for someone who never even considered that they’re *in* a role or many roles to begin with to go about the task of assuming a new role. Let’s look at this metaphor, briefly, to understand the concept of the role in order to conceptualize how we may change it. First, the telling language: we get *into* a role; a role is something one finds themselves *in*, or embodying. It is an external thing that we step into. We provide the animation for an external construct. The word “role” itself delineates the theatrical, as an actor steps into a role, and steps *literally* into a costume that is a metonym for the role itself. *Most so strongly identify with their roles that they forget that they’re roles to begin with, and mistake it for the thing itself.* This is not to say that we are intrinsically *not* our various roles, a contestable premise for another text; it is to say that we collectively have little consciousness around the concept of the role. We simply *are* mothers, husbands, construction workers, bankers, teachers, potters. Not only have these relational markers been solidified into our identity, they have so completely submerged us that we forget that we have other roles, at times, and we forget that we can step away from some roles at some times and certainly that we could ever inhabit another. (Rather like Burke’s ideology is a spirit inhabiting a body—we are that spirit inhabiting our various roles. The ideology of the individual embodies the roles that they then fill.) How do we encourage an awareness around roles, around their fluidity,

transience, and space for rhetorical agency—to make roles mean and do new things? I think that part of this process is espousing the metaphor of the role itself, and we do this through the education of our various platforms—teaching, writing, converging in circles—the typical grassroots discursive situation. And we can begin with ourselves by analyzing our own roles, seeing how we’re sticking to the script of our programs and where we’d like to revise.<sup>22</sup> And at that point, we may choose which roles we accept. And this role change is fundamentally a relational change; interconnectivity is intrinsic to all beings, all things. Stepping into a new role means stepping into a new physical space on the discursive plane— and from here, there are new forms of relationships, new perspectives, and new ethical apperceptions. You can do different things here because of social and environmental contextual placement. What role do we need to embody to see the earth in the sentient way that I’m proposing will fundamentally change our action?

First, I’ll start by proposing what we need from this role/roles shift: fundamentally, a revised understanding of responsibility. Agency is the life-blood of the role, and too many of our current roles are anemic. In our consumer culture, it is often *other* people who are in charge, and it’s all too big for us to act upon. But what if the scope of our responsibility broadened? I can feel the shudders from overburdened readers; however, the following section on praxis will provide suggestions for implementation seem manageable. Perceptual shift occurs with concerted rhetorical effort (collective and individual analysis and revision) and it begins with implementation on the individual level. When we do this, we expand the territory of our own agency. And when

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<sup>22</sup> Revise: re-vision. Intentionally adjusting the vision before the eyes, that metaphoric construct, for a desired result.

our territory expands, we can do what we can to hold those spaces and prevent the empire of force from seizing our “lands.”

It is important to note, too, that the hierarchically-bound American is accustomed to systems comprised of powers that be, of their own small and well-defined realms of influence and then vast worlds of their own exclusion. Yarbrough discusses the fact that the kind of work we do informs the way we solve problems, and our delineated roles confer what problems we believe are ours to solve. He says “...how we order our beliefs depends upon the questions we have had to ask and the problems we have had to solve” (116). What kind of problems do Americans solve? The response could incorporate a whole new thesis. We do know from the previous section that consumer culture seeks to eliminate most problems, or cover up problems, even as it directly causes the very real problem of survival for thousands and strips problem-solving agency via various oppressions (i.e., the empire of force). To narrow this question – what kinds of *work* do Americans do? All kinds, but several aspects are shared that are of importance here. We are in a hierarchical system, which means that certain things are not our problem— they are the confined classes’: the manager, the CEO, the president. Not ours. Also, our work is specialized and segregated. The matter is only problematized by our social alienation: what responsibility do we imagine we have to a community to which we feel no connection?

We currently perceive roles as conferred and fixed, rather like our general conceptions of the status quo. Certainly there’s a connection between the two, the same worldview with a different focus. In his essay “Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” Nietzsche speaks first about the columbarium of concepts that keep us trapped and that

we believe are fixed. These are our institutions, our way of doing and believing that we conceptualize as steadfast, permanent, and unchangeable, though they are all entirely of human creation and thus subject to human redesign. At the closing of this piece, he mentions the ancient Greeks, one of his academic specialties, and the fact that their mythology allowed for a flexibility and spontaneity of reality that we don't know today. The immortal could walk about the mortal, and so life – and therefore, ideology – was not understood as fixed iterations. He also speculated that their pottery depicts images that suggest, time and again, a “playing with seriousness.” Playing with the serious connotes a particular kind of self-consciousness and the understanding that seriousness, like institutions, reality, and the understanding of the self, is impermanent and unfixed, will change, and that there are other ways of *being* besides serious—there are other ways of *being* entirely. We might do well to incorporate such a view. I mention Nietzsche here to juxtapose our absolutist view of our constructed reality with an alternate possibility and also to illustrate that our roles, like our columbarium of concepts, are a facet of human invention. They are not fixed. Their very nature was of human manufacture, as we manufacture meaning first and foremost. Getting the individual to understand that their roles are fluid is an important aspect of strengthening agency, and it is bolstered agency that sweeping social change necessitates. I believe an applicable metaphor to shift understanding here is the idea that a “role” itself is a metaphor. We believe, generally, that our various roles are literal, and identify with them whole-heartedly. This goes off of the Buddhist's egoic identification, but by virtue of using the word “role” the understanding becomes theatrical, and suggests a much needed element of play. It suggests that on one level, we are playing a part – it was in Shakespeare's *As you Like It*

that he wrote, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” – and at another, it means that we can take agency in our roles, bring creativity to them that was perhaps overlooked when we simply inherited them, just as we inherited our ideology, with acquiescence. If we can *define* for ourselves what it means to be a consumer, a producer, a community member, we can also make a conscious decision around what our responsibilities are, exactly. What is ours to address? What is the role we are playing, and how would we like to play it? What is our place? There is great power in definition.

Finally, Yarbrough gave this example of ethical orientation prompting action that is too fitting to omit:

A nomadic tribe that reverently relates to the earth as its mother can never imagine inventing the plow – not because the tribes’ members do not have the technological *topoi* necessary to combine into the concept of the plow, but because its ethical *topoi* negate those necessary for them to *want* to plow the earth. Similarly, certain ethical conditions first had to be in place before societies could invent certain technologies. (142)

The concept is completely foreign to and unfitting for our western industrial ideology, but proves the variance in ideological reality conferred by ethical positioning. How can we assume roles of increased responsibility while shifting our ethical stance towards, particularly, the planet? It is unlikely that we will suddenly abhor the idea of the plow. But how can we adopt even a measure of the reverence of Yarbrough’s invented tribe?

### **Praxis for Re-Orienting**

*“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.”—Rachel Carson<sup>23</sup>*

The most crucial aspect of this section, which is concerned with “not respecting” the empire of force, is that the key ideology that we must embody is an acceptance, awareness, and internalization of ecoconsciousness. I define ecoconsciousness not merely as an awareness of or concern for environmental issues, but as a *consciousness of the consciousness of the biosphere itself*—a meta-consciousness. By this I mean that we must know that the earth is living, that life that does not resemble human life is *still* life, and we must undergo the same ethical re-orientation I’ve been talking about with life itself. Under our current paradigm, rife with not only hierarchies but models of valuation, we see ourselves as masters of the land or perhaps stewards. The latter model is more sustainable, but still implicit in it is humans’ dominion over nature. That particularly Judeo-Christian ideology will not be easily contended with in our society, as deeply entrenched as it is. But it is my belief that when ecoconsciousness is increasingly understood and embodied, certain crystallizations will fall away—not necessarily Christianity, but rather iterations of hierarchy, domination, and oppression. Instead of staying caught up in the same tired old human power dynamics, we must reimagine and redefine our relationship with the planet. Implicit in this ethical alignment is the consideration of our own complete sustenance as a species and our very being existent *because* of the earth, and gratitude is interwoven with that understanding. At the same time, we must acknowledge the earth’s capacity to destroy us at any time, and so accept

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<sup>23</sup> Page number unavailable.

that we're dealing with the force of forces. When we remember that just like the earth impacts *us* powerfully (impacts us *entirely*) and that we impact the *world* in ways our ancestors never could have, we may find the impetus to take responsibility for our actions in the form of new practices.

If we are to continue living with our high standards and bring others into an egalitarian fold of wellbeing and material security, there must be ingenious technological replacements for the present systems. We must replace our present means of production with radically new and improved ones, means that are not just environmentally friendly, but environmentally saving. The empire has no interest in this, as radical change threatens its entire stability of rule, physically and ideologically (and because it is really not a being *with* an interest, as noted in the previous section, but a force with great momentum that will not stop on its own). If there is an answer, it lies in technology that restores ecosystems and lessens the damage we've already caused. The ability to live differently, in a way that does not degrade our planet and our humanity, could be possible were technological advances to accompany sweeping social change. Guattari claims:

...Science and technology have evolved with extreme rapidity, supplying man with virtually all the necessary means to solve his material problems. But humanity has not seized upon these; it remains stupefied, powerless before the challenges that confront it. It passively contributes to the pollution of the water and the air, to the destruction of forests, to the disturbance of climates, to the disappearance of a multitude of living species, to the impoverishment of the genetic capital of the biosphere, to the destruction of natural landscapes, to the suffocation of its own cities, and to the progressive abandonment of cultural

values and moral references in the realms of human solidarity and fraternity... Guattari and I are on the same page. He posits that we possess technological potential, and that the deleterious ways of our present industrial paradigm can be rectified with intentional technological invention and use. Human and machine can coevolve in a mutually beneficial, life-supporting way, and if we are to continue this is an absolutely fundamental element of ecoconscious praxis. But, as has become our sinful *modus operandi*, we bury our heads in the sand and by not *demanding* and enacting change, continue passively down the road of destruction.

Guattari offers important insight into our predicament: “Humanity seems to have lost its head, or more precisely, its head is no longer functioning with its body. How can it find a compass by which to reorient itself within a modernity whose complexity overwhelms it?” (1). He presents humanity as a body that has lost its head; losing a head suggests a complete severance, a disconnection, and a split between mind and body. The head is the ideological and the body is the field of potential in which Bakhtin suggests ideology implants itself, the primordial aspect of being that is continuously marginalized from discourse. It is within the purview of “nature” and not mankind, and so has been, like the natural world generally, ignored and considered lesser or simply a nonentity. Such a disconnection from our holistic selves is what catapulted us into the apocalyptic mess we’re in, and Guattari gets to the heart of the matter when he asks the right question: “How can [we] find a compass by which to reorient...?” My suggestion for a compass is an awareness of and engagement with ecoconsciousness.

I’m using Bakhtin’s theory as a jumping-off point. Bakhtin believed there was no consciousness without inner speech, which is ideological, and that consciousness is

nothing until embodied with ideology. I'm curious about silence. Is it ideological? Is inner silence conferred from external silence? Silence is universal; the silence of the internal *is* the silence of the external. I would posit here that silence helps us both understand and go *beyond* the ideological. What we *say* about silence is ideological, as is what we think about silence—just like whatever we say or think about anything is ideological. But the thing itself exists *in* itself, apart from our human interpretation. We can directly experience silence, as we can directly experience music. Both are teachers. By silence, I do not mean merely the absence of sound: there is a quality to silence, a peaceful presence of being. When we abide in this kind of silence, do we go beyond ideology and embody a sort of unity with the being-ness of existence writ large? Are we existing as vibrational beings, and in the moments when we are not engaging in speech or naming or understanding, but only *being*, receiving signals as all living beings do, do we go beyond ideology? If consciousness is filled with ideology, that means that consciousness is not nothing. Bakhtin and Burke's metaphor is that ideology is a substance and it fills a *container*—our consciousness. The inside of a container is not nothing; it is negative space. The nothingness is of silence, potential, and space. It is rather like a masculine/feminine dichotomy: the ideology is the external that fills the internal, the internal womb is the place of inhabitation, and the denial of the one has led to imbalance and dysfunction. Consciousness may not become uniquely human until imbued with ideology, but it is still consciousness if we understand consciousness as a particular placement on a vibrational spectrum. Perhaps the way to truly transform our ideological structures is to at times abide beyond ideology and return from this creative space of pure potential with a new perspective, a new alignment with being, and make

adjustments that are informed by that experience. White discusses a Quaker practice wherein congregants sit in long silences before engaging in speech, waiting until someone is able to get in touch with what they believe is a bit of “God in every person” (White 207). He suggests that their practice could be widely and beneficently practiced: “What one says should come from the center of the self, not the surface where our clichés and formulas cluster” (207). A habit that incurs ecoconsciousness is just that center-abiding, listening presence. By embodying the awareness of ecoconsciousness, we bring that awareness into the “external” world with our discourse. Such a way of being in no way supports or contributes to the empire of force, and in fact does not perpetuate its motion.

To not respect the empire, we must respect life. To respect life, we must conceptualize it and hold it in our awareness. We also must understand life itself in a different way. We know, for example, that trees and plants are alive, but because of our confined definition of sentience we simultaneously do not accept that life. In formal empirical terms, we denote them as alive but do not culturally believe it. It is vital to accept that organisms that do not mirror our own capacities are still living and that our understanding of the ethics of highest humanity entail that we respect life. But in our definitions of life, we have drawn for ourselves a new dichotomy: life and nonlife. This is not to say death, though our culture draws a firm line between those two as well. But nonlife does not die, as far as we’re concerned. It simply *is*, and is somehow apart from “life,” and that conceptualized separation is a contributing factor of the social agreements we’ve made that allow practices such as the rape and plunder of the earth’s resources. We know that there can be no life without these elements. We’re living in a united system,

and every ecosystem, part of the entirety of the planet, is a life support system. It's painfully obvious that destroying the life support system destroys life. Developing ecoconsciousness means considering facets of reality that are considered givens in intentional ways.

In revising our definitions of life we need to pay attention to unifiers, which are the basis for identification. For example: everything is in motion, even the atoms that comprise the desk at which I'm sitting. Everything is comprised of the same material—the carbon in our bodies is the same that comprises every body, and the atoms of our bodies are the same as the atoms of all things. And importantly, everything exists in a state of vibration and, to use what's becoming my catchphrase, a “spectrum” of vibration. It has become a sort of trite spiritual saying that “we're all one,” but it's true, and the embodiment of that truth—the feeling-state of that truth, not solely its conceptualization—is essential. We are all one in a literal, physical sense. We are all one in that we are all of one loop of a system. And we are all one in that we are all expressions of a literal vibration. The ancient yogis called this an aum, the sound of the underlying vibration of everything in existence. May indigenous cultures around the globe understand and respect a spirit in all things: trees, rocks, rivers, animals, ancestors. Such a perspective seems foreign to our empirical culture, whose infallible god is science. Without dismissing the phenomenal breakthroughs of that discipline, we must consider the power we have placed in all our institutions, the influence those institutions have in shaping our very thoughts, and that we have great power in our social and individual practices of defining. We define the way we do because of the way we are, and would define differently if we were different. Our ideology has infiltrated the translation

of scientific discovery and so has affected how we understand life itself. If we understand that existence is a vibrational experience and we are no more than a part of that experience, we may understand our place in the world and the actions we may take in very different ways.

Going forward, I maintain that an integral aspect of facilitating ecoconscious awareness involves going “outside,” which implies an inside, which tangles us back up in dichotomy. And haven’t I just said that in this one world, everything shares a place on the vibrational spectrum? If that’s the case, why do I think we need to go outside all? If the world inside my apartment is the same world as the one outside my door, why don’t I just sit in my pajamas in front of my computer—shouldn’t that confer the same awareness? I contend that it is the same world, and that the difference it makes is simply that there *is* a difference. The “in” and the “out” are not fundamental opposites; the two exemplify a diversity of expression, and the experience thereof promotes our wellbeing and our education, ethical and otherwise. We have countless studies that show that spending time outdoors *is* good, healthy, and beneficial. But why? If my laptop is vibrating with atoms the same as the rock outside, what matter if I forgo the rock? For any of us who have a lick of experience actually living on the planet earth, we can justify the benefits of going “outside” with our lived experience. When we go outside, take deep breaths, watch the sunset, walk our dog, we feel better. Period. (That’s the only criteria for it “working,” by the way: a change in being.) The boxes we make for ourselves—of the same material of the one world itself—are enclosed, small, and we imagine that we’re isolated in them. Going “outside” is a shift in perspective. And it’s that shift in perspective that allows us to shift roles, as Yarbrough said. We can see and feel our own situatedness on a precise

place on the planet in relation to other things—to trees, grasses, plants, sky, rivers. It provides us with a re-orientation of physical and immediate perspective. Enclosed in our boxes, we're shielded from the elements. We breathe our own recycled air and walk about in houses without wind. If we're so fortunate, we feel water come out of spigots as if by magic, controlling the flow and temperature. We see a lot of two dimensional pictures. It is one perspective, one way of being. When we leave these boxes for a while, we become like goldfish plopped from a bowl to an ocean. We're in essentially the same substances but also in a very new scene. And we know from Burke that the scene directly influences the agent. Instead of the still air of our apartment, we are pushed about by gales or tickled with breezes. We might experience a greater expanse of air to breathe, three-dimensional images to dwell on, a place to stretch ourselves physically and existentially.

We've been discussing the ideology we have because our human species, along with all species, is under imminent threat of disease, suffering, famine, displacement, and eventual extinction. Our practices are changing the planet's sustaining systems. We are in a relational crisis with our environment. We have lived in a construction of externalization and objectification to the point where our connectivity has largely been lost on us. Consider again Burke's identification: a recognition of unity across difference. What commonalty do we have with the planet? If we spend time with it, in the direct sense our dense selves require, we can cultivate identification with the earth. A thought experiment: it would be very difficult for a white person to maintain a hostile and conscious racism were they to be invited to and (somehow) persuaded to attend services at a black church weekly, go to a family dinner after, and then gradually become friends

with people within the community. All their internalized fragments of racism may not fall away, but active hatred cannot continue in the context of genuine, healthy friendships. The white individual will *identify* with their new friends of color through the process of engaging in relationship. When individuals cultivate a relationship of any sort, they share experiences, and can then identify on the basis of those experiences. In the same way, if a child grows up romping around in the woods, in the park, by the river, and is encouraged in the endeavors of identifying with the land on which they live on the basis of a relationship of shared experiences, it seems less likely that they will uphold practices that destroy this aspect of their identification. This is assuming that there is still some citizen agency in informing policy, and it is also presupposing that the child's relationship is fostered and guided by the practices and values of their families: the identification will be strengthened by a context in which earth-valuation is an inherent ideological tenet.

We are of course still *alive* in our windowless cubicle boxes. But there is a difference between the experience of the way of life conferred by our modern practices and those demanded from a lifestyle of either drastically simplified technology or a consciously maintained direct relationality with nature. Quite simply, *metaphors help us see*; they confer a new education to us, or an old education in a new way. And the world of "nature" is the most powerful, diverse metaphorical playground we could ask for. When we fetch our water from a stream, what lessons are there for us to learn? We may have to walk a mile or miles: the will to power requires stamina. A place in the earth surprisingly bubbles up with fresh, freezing water: life is a surprising place, and we have resources for which to quench our thirsts. This water is good, pleasurable, delicious: life can be good, pleasurable, delicious. We grow a garden: food is hard work, only possible

because of soil, sun, rain, and air. Food is a gift to consume, and we too are only possible because of soil, sun, rain, and air. And we too are gifts. We are dependent upon the land, just as we are dependent upon our friends and family: we cannot go it alone. Consider, too, the metaphors implicit in death rituals. What does it mean for us to send a body away for embalming, and what does it mean for those digging the hole and laying the washed body within it? It is death either way; it is not that one experience is real and the other somehow unreal. They are different, and I maintain that the difference provided by the direct immersion paradigm with the “outside” world, with “nature”— as in feet on soil skin under sun lungs imbibing the exhalation of a tree three feet away nature—provides us with a richer education than we are getting in our enclosed and sterile consumer culture. It is an education that faces emotion instead of shirks from it, that takes responsibility for what needs to be done instead of paying for it to go away, and that turns individuals to directly face and engage with the processes of their own survival, be they hunting, planting, gathering, building, etc., instead of receiving indirectly, passively, and ignorantly. It is a radical education that Freire would approve of. Metaphors for our education are always present to a seeking mind, but they are far easier for a mind to seek when that mind is, let us say, immersed in the ocean instead of the fishbowl. “Nature”— the sun and trees and desert and wetland— is colorful, harsh, painful, refreshing, unruly, sweet, and terrifying. I simply believe that it is the best space for our education as human beings in the *practice of being* because of its potential wealth of experiential metaphors and because submersion into ecosystems teeming with life (in the ways we have been taught to understand life) aligns individuals with a sense of networked relations, place, and cyclic reality. If there is one world and the internal and external mutually condition

each other, what we are exposed to conditions our ideological structures. If we submerge ourselves in the woods, for example, we amass more ideological material of that vein for ourselves. And when we cultivate that ideological material, we foster identification. And when we foster identification? Well, we aren't as likely to want to destroy things we perceive as part of ourselves. What happens, then, when our Jr. Dictionaries begin providing fewer "nature" words and hence less material for our ideological structures that delineate "nature" to us? We will have fewer tools to help us identify, and so we will inevitably have far less investment in encouraging ethical and sustainable ecological practices.

In order to facilitate ecoconsciousness, it is essential that we learn to become quiet, listen, and apply Ratcliffe's technique of rhetorical listening as an experience of laying another's ideas before us and simply *being with* them (Ratcliffe 202); it is this practice of being with that facilitates ecoconsciousness. The work begins with present moment awareness. Ecoconsciousness is especially augmented when we take ourselves outside, wherever we are, for the reasons explored above. Shamanic priestess Bloom Post suggests that even if we're in a city and cannot get to the countryside, we can still appreciate the air, our houseplants, the expansive sky. If we're fortunate to live closer to land in which to immerse ourselves, we must go in it, be in it, make time for our own immersion. It is this that facilitates consciousness of the presence of living beings, from songbirds to moss, and that facilitates an appreciation for the elemental, the "nonliving," and a gradual awareness of that *presence*, as well. As we develop ecoconsciousness, an awareness of the being-ness of all things that is the very same being-ness of ourselves, we can experience ecoconsciousness anywhere. Indoors, one can notice the presence of the

forgotten air. One can slow down and notice a wood grain table. As you can see, this slowing down and the cultivation of calmness is indispensable to this practice. It is no coincidence that our consumer culture has sped us up and revved us up. We are addicted to at least caffeine and nicotine, and it is no wonder, considering our demanding days. We have cars that go fast and faster, companies that boast speedy delivery time and twenty-four hour service. We put our children on amphetamines to quell their hyperactivity, as we don't know what to do with their hyperactivity otherwise, or how to manage keeping them in boxes. People pop pills and guzzle energy drinks to get themselves into warp drive. As White says, we are bombarded by the ceaseless noise of consumer culture selling us ideas and products, an onslaught that serves the empire of force and makes retreat into our own silence increasingly difficult, though that much more essential (White 26). We are compulsive thinkers, what teacher Eckhart Tolle describes as a disease, proof that the "external" noise has invasively wormed its way "in." How can we let anything lay before us and simply *be* with it for a time when we are constantly distracted and agitated by our very selves? The work of ecoconsciousness involves a deep quieting so that a deep re-attunement can take place. Our practices are informed by our states of being, and our states of being are informed by the systems of our culture. It is my fervent hope that by intentionally shifting our states of being, we will shift our culture.

You might protest, and say that this centered appreciation is all well and good, but how does this help anything? How does noticing the air we breathe make that air any less polluted, any less carbon-saturated? As far as we know, it doesn't. And yet if we are involved in an ideological engagement, our approach needs to stem from the ideological.

The ideology that has led to our polluted air is not in ideological alignment with the practice of this kind of deep sensing, consideration, and appreciation. This practice itself is the ideological antidote to the empire of force. It's a conscious embodiment of chosen understanding that was not conferred to us by our culture in our earliest days. It does not attempt to violently wrestle the empire to submission, which would never work—that method is of the empire in the first place. The practice exists independent of the empire, despite it and regardless of it. Just as the empire seizes its turf of minds and spreads like a hoard, in these moments and these minds, the empire cannot take hold. It cannot *both* be that the earth is a lifeless, limitless depository of resources for our plunder, that our economic practices have no effect on a planet that reproduces resources in assembly-line fashion (one ideological stance), *and* at the same time that the earth is, at every level, a vibrational being like ourselves, filled with connected and finite resources existing in equilibrium, and that we absolutely have an effect—a huge one—on the vitality of this planet and therefore, ourselves (another). This mindset shows up the empire by exposing it, by demonstrating that there is another way, and, in fact, by proving the empire wrong. This way of being is the real counter to the empire of force. It is Hinduism's ahimsa, espoused by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. It is nonviolent resistance. It is a matter of redirecting wills to power with our own precise intention.

I think it is important to add a piece of warning advice here that helps to partially explain why we're in the destructive paradigm in which we are. Back to foundational Guattari: "...recall that danger can itself exert a power of fascination. The presentiment of catastrophe can release an unconscious desire for catastrophe, a longing for nothingness, a drive to destruction" (2). If that's not where we are, I don't know what is.

At some point, the pull of destruction becomes powerful—the empire of force—and as a presence develops its own gravity, the weakly planted are easily pulled. It is in this way that we can become absorbed further into destructive paradigms and into our own existentially bleak *l'appel du vides*. It signifies a surrender of agency and hope.

Guattari said, “Without a change in mentalities, without entry into a post-media era, there can be no enduring hold over the environment. Yet, without modifications to the social and material environment, there can be no change in mentalities” (2). This is the ideological principle: the outside confers the in as the in creates the out. As we practice the kind of ecoconsciousness I’ve put forth here, which is a zen-style present moment meditative awareness that begins with the intention of experiencing literal earth-consciousness, our internal world changes. And as that world changes, we make modifications to our social and material environment. Going forward, whatever forward means, we must “negotiate the present in the name of the future” (Guattari 7). To do this, we have to have an eye on the future, a sense of how our present actions will affect it, and how that potential future must inform a perspective of the present that values relationally. Kedar Brown suggests that we ask ourselves:

How do we navigate forward by drawing on the wisdom of the past? What can we draw on from indigenous cultures that will help us navigate forward in a clear and conscious way, in good relationship with each other? And not just human each others, but all creation. These standing tall ones around us, the health of that river over there. What is my relationship to all of these things as a reflection of wellness?

When we consider our interdependence with the life forms around us and recognize their

existence, we are activating our ecoconsciousness as well as our remembrance of responsibility. Additionally, our relationship with the natural world can reveal a wealth of information about our internal state, like how disconnected we are from ourselves, how absorbed we are in hegemony and how removed from natural cycles, and how and in what ways our physical, emotional, and spiritual health is suffering, as it will mirror the environment phenomena.

The extrinsic work that nourishes our intrinsic experience, which propels our extrinsic action, can begin small. Byron Ballard suggests that people leave their houses five minutes early in the morning so that they can stand still, take a few deep breaths, and listen to the birds. “Instead of racing to your car in the morning because you are five minutes late, consciously leave five minutes early and walk *slowly* to your car and look all around you, and listen, and stand there next to a tree and see how that’s different.” She says to do this for seven days, and after that period of time ask:

How’s my life different because I was not late for where I was going, work usually, and how was my life different because I actually spent one whole minute, 60 fucking seconds, looking at a squirrel? How is my life different? Because if at the end of that your life is not any different, then you are in big trouble. Not only is the planet in big trouble, you *personally* are in big trouble.

Such small daily practices change our lives. The outcomes of practices vary for individuals, but the underlying effects include a cultivation of calmness, a pause of stillness in a warp-speed world, an appreciation and a being-with the world around you, and that sense of connectivity. Actually going outside, sans iPhone, for five minutes activates our internal awareness of interconnectivity and the ubiquitous presence of life

on this planet. Practices of slowing down and appreciating can be totally unique to each individual, she says, but the importance is in the continuity of practice. Bakhtin claimed that all utterances are linked in a chain of utterances, and these small moments are utterances, as they are units of meaning, and they connect to other utterances. The morning ritual of observance leads to a safer drive to work. These small acts lead to other small acts, like recycling or adopting sustainable in home practices. And when incorporated into a whole way of being, and not only an isolated “should” on the to-do list, the chain of utterances becomes a new ideology, communicated intellectually and embodied with a shift in inner experience. The small shift in the being of an individual spreads to communal shifts, which translate into modes of relating that promote holistic health and restoration of balance. Ballard stressed the importance of these daily individual practices, and I think that the creativity afforded the individual in stepping into ecoconsciousness is important in that it safeguards this “ideology” (the experience of which goes beyond ideology) from dogmatism. Ballard also suggested that a daily practice could involve sitting down with a prayer book while maintaining intentionality “about what you’re praying for and frankly who you’re praying to” (Ballard). To foster ecoconsciousness, Bloom Post suggests this:

Grow a houseplant... you need to have something living and alive. Talk to that houseplant. Be willing to appear foolish to wake up. Be willing to not worry about what anybody else thinks and start connecting with living, sentient things...connect with the trees. Create spaces to be intentional so you start living in an intentional way, and work with those practices to help keep you there—because the collective doesn’t support in that.

Ballard, like Brown, emphasizes the importance of putting our bodies “outside” and simply being there: “I invite people to engage with the natural world in whatever way they can do that... the observation of nature is the first step to actually returning to nature.” Observation augments the world of signs for us, strengthens identification, and leads to the embodiment of ecoconscious connectivity.

A critical point that emerged from my interviews with both Ballard and Post was that of intentionality. Post said:

When we are intentional, we feel connected even if we’re by ourselves. And a lot of people are looking for connection outside of themselves which has an aspect of force because it’s not internal. So that, to me, is the beginning of the empire of force... it begins with each of us individually. It begins as soon as we start to look outside of ourselves for anything.

This makes sense considering that it is in externality that the ideologies of our culture are conferred to us. Her premise involves an acceptance of an aspect of self that is apart from culture and that cannot be socially constructed, rather like a unique spirit or a soul, and supposes that everything we need in a spiritual, existential sense is already within and must be uncovered/remembered instead of seized from the external world and consumed. You do not need to consume what you already have. Consumer culture has zero interest in the expansion of this idea. When I asked Post what she meant by intentionality, which she said was key, she offered this:

For me personally, it’s about being present and focusing internally instead of outside myself...ceremony is a way to help myself get connected internally. It’s really very much about being present. If I eat food with intention I feel present.

When I feel present I feel connected. I feel connected to the food, I feel connected to the people who made the food, I feel connected to the people who grew the food. When I go and sit at my mesa on my own, I do that because I step away from the to do list and what we consider the ‘mundane’ and now I’m in an intentional space, and it’s a place where I can check in with myself. I do that through checking in with guides and working with plant medicines. But all of those are just tools ultimately for me to feel once again fully embodied and present and in my full experience starting from the inside of from the outside. Post mentioned that even ceremonies that exist to facilitate or mark internal work have become increasingly externalized. The inner world is being neglected by the practices that originated for its enrichment. Post said:

A lot of the ceremonies that you see happening, whether they’re shamanic or a birthday ceremony or a bat mitzvah or whatever, it’s supposed to be an inward shift and an inward experience but it’s become a whole big outward thing. We have big parades and people wear their special outfits and their big headdresses... there’s nothing wrong with that, but is that really helping us go internal and be fully connected so that we *do* have that same group-remembering that we’re one with the planet, so when I dig out of the planet I’m digging out of my body, too? Even the ceremonies that we have that are about creating intention... whether it’s in shamanic or other lineages...have also become incredibly external, so they’re still missing that piece.

The external focus of our ceremonies is certainly an offspring of the fundamental externality of consumer culture; the purpose of the ceremony, according to Bloom, has

been largely perverted. Internal awareness means a focus on the body from within, the sensations and experiences therein, a clearing of the mind and an attention on the deep silence that James Boyd White says is so central for the cultivation of genuine living speech. The reason that internal attention is so central is because internal awareness *is* ecoconscious awareness. Beyond thought, and therefore ideology, the presence, silence, and awareness of one's own being is the same presence, silence, and being of the earth. The internal is a direct route to ecoconscious awareness, as is direct contact with the natural world. Ecoconsciousness is an omnipresence, and so there are potentially infinite points of entry into this experience (which we already intrinsically *are*). Yet practices of intentional internality specifically helps us see through consumer culture, hear beyond it, and experience living in ourselves in a deeper, fuller way that we forget—or never learn—is possible when we are always absorbed in an external reality (that obscures the experience of the other half of itself—the internal) demanding our addiction.

The concept of responsibly as a key component in incorporating habits that ideologically align us with ecoconsciousness resurfaced in my conversation with Ballard. She offered critical advice for stepping into the necessary role of agency: “We need to be doing the work ourselves. If you have land, you should be growing food. You need to know where your water comes from, and you need to be responsible for that.” And so along with our small practices of attention, intention, awareness, and internalization, we re-orient ourselves to ecoconsciousness in a literal way. We simply learn where we are and what's around us. Instead of placing ourselves apart from the world outside our walls, we place ourselves within it; we re-contextualize ourselves. The species of trees within a mile radius, the location of the nearest stream, methods for water filtration, and

edible mushrooms nearby all become part of our ethical purview. And, she says, we need to be growing our own food if we have land of our own. Taking on that responsibility shifts us ethically; we engage in new relationships with the land around us and with the agricultural industry itself. It withdraws a measure of dependence upon a system bound for failure and reclaims for us roles as agents invested in our own independence and ethical relationality (and this time I mean “ethical” as in “in alignment with moral principle”).

Steps to ecoconsciousness include intentionally around a daily practice, internal work like meditation and inner awareness, being in nature, accepting new roles of ethical responsibility, and accepting earth-sentience. Bloom Post suggests that if we’re truly going to stop living the way we are and adopt a new way of living, this recognition of sentience is key:

More people [need to become] aware and awake and realize the earth is sentient. The trees are sentient. The animals are sentient. Everything is sentient just like us, and we are actually just one big vibration which means we are literally all one, not just facebook (meme) or Buddhist concept all one. ... not just the earth is alive, the earth is *sentient*, not just those plants you’re putting in your belly are alive—they are sentient. They respond to music. They respond to stimulus. They respond to voices...And then we eat them, and there’s nothing wrong with that, but what’s not flowing is we forget this is a sentient being I’m putting in my body.

It’s my contention that practicing the habits of ecoconsciousness confers this understanding of sentience. As previously stated, it may be that we need a revised definition of sentience to incorporate existence that scientists currently delineate as non-

sentient into a fold of essentially conscious vibratory beings. But the understanding of being comes from the experience of relationship, and relationship is cultivated through practices of the kind expressed here.

Post brought everything back to ideology when she stressed the importance of checking what she calls our “programming.” She says we’ve all inherited these “stories” and typically accept them as completely true; we accept *reality* as completely true. She engages in a sort of Socratic self-questioning to stay vigilant to the culture’s conditioning and to retain her own agency in the shaping of her ideological structures. She said the biggest thing helping her wake up is:

Checking myself, [checking the] regular running programs. Why do I believe what I believe? Even if someone said ‘you shouldn’t hit people’ I’ll be like, okay, so: what if it was ok to hit people? That’s a program we’re running, that we don’t like to hit people. What if we *did* hit people? What if that was okay? I’ll explore everything—even if I don’t want to hit people when I’m done, I still want to explore those programs.

This intellectual work keeps us as agents deciding what we want to accept and what is old programming contributing to the dis-eases of the planet. She added that we have been raised in a culture of “resistance and fear, so no wonder we feel disconnected” (Post). This culture comes from being told what not to do, over and over, and what isn’t possible—it comes from the idea of a cemented reality, and it shapes us into easily herd-able people. This is not to say not to take precaution but rather to question our resistance and fear and see where it is unnecessary. When we become critically reflective in the way for which she advocates, we are vigilant to our environment and we can make choices in

alignment with what serves the highest good—for ourselves, our communities, and the earth.

I asked Ballard about how she saw our immediate kairotic placement affecting the trajectory of events, curious about our present moment in a story that has particularly ominous foreshadowing. Namely, I asked about the recent election of Donald Trump. She had these prescient words:

This is our last, best hope... I think Trump is a catalyst for the rest of us. If we rise to the occasion that is Trump, we might forestall this (mass extinction/biospheric ruin)...But if we continue to wallow around in this kind of ennui of the Kardashians and ‘Dancing with the Stars’ and ‘I don’t want to have to go the bathroom with someone who began life as a man and is now a woman’...if we keep wallowing in this b.s., ...in [this] *detritus* of a dying culture... if we can keep doing that and hiding and going ‘there’s nothing I can do about it,’ then the species dies and half the biosphere with it.

I clearly didn’t need to write this thesis: Byron Ballard summed it all up in an artful paragraph. The passivity and absence of responsibility bred into us by consumer culture (that we choose to either maintain or eschew), along with listless ennui and an expanse of political boxing matches that *purposefully*, she says, keep us “at each other’s throats,” distract us and prevent our unification and effective action.

We don’t typically look at what’s happening because we have no idea what to do with it, and it’s frightening. Ballard said that she wished that her “nagging like an old fishwife” would make people snap awake, recognize the imminent biospheric disaster that’s upon us, and then do the work that our brilliant human brains can do to try to

rectify this mess, such as radical political action and technological overall. Yet she said, disheartened, “It’s not like we’re about to be hit by an asteroid and we don’t have any choice. It’s that we’re just stupid. And I lament sometimes the fact that I’m pretty sure our species seems to have chosen itself for extinction.” It is stupid; it’s tragic and unnecessary, and it’s even potentially avoidable.

The conclusion I have come to over the course of this research is that while the future is uncertain, we have a responsibility to do what we can to save our species and the biosphere, regardless of its possibility or futility, and that by stepping into our lives fearlessly and fully, by recognizing the earth’s sentience and celebrating it, we liberate ourselves from the empire of force. The dehumanization stops here. Whether it’s our own or our collective mortality, we can accept it and let our relations be informed by the appreciation of impermanence and the very real gift of being. We can make the most of our lives. And importantly, no one is excluded from this work. Anyone in any context can become aware, in this moment, of their environment, which includes the internal and the external. Anyone can summon a sensory perception, become quiet and focus, and channel their will into the experience of that sense and the communication inherent in the practice. Anyone can cultivate some sort of free daily practice that may be as elaborate as setting up a prayer alter or as simple as quieting internally at the workplace. It is of course not the case that everyone is in a place where they can grow their own food, for example, when they struggle to even have access to food and to clean water at all. Our world is one of gross inequity, which is an inherent aspect of the empire of force. And that is why these practices are so powerful and inherently unifying. They are free. They are not bound to the restraints of time and context. They very simply involve a person

choosing to become calm and present, intent upon noticing the environment—which includes the simultaneous internal and external—and being. The praxis begins and is completed there.

This thesis offers a re-framing of the issues through living metaphors. The idea that the problem is ideological first and foremost must be surfaced. Ideology confers widespread consciousness and a network of accepted understanding and principles. In this way, fragments of issues are conglomerated into a focal point—a giant focal point, but one nevertheless. I do not intend ecoconsciousness to be read metaphorically. The earth is alive as a unified system, and any nonliving elements or forces are simultaneously indispensable for life on this planet, physical compounds of life, and are on the same vibrational spectrum of existence as the living. Considering these principles as givens, we can conceptualize the integrity of the planet, our entwinement with it, and we can cultivate physiologically necessary states of gratitude and awe. We are one with the earth: that, too, is literal. The starvation and alienation of ourselves from our internal experience does not only parallel the suffocation and alienation of ourselves with the earth, it *is* the suffocation and alienation of the earth. In the same vein, our increasingly acidic bodes do not merely parallel or correlate with the rising acidity of the oceans; they *are* the acidity of the oceans. Just as marine life are physically, literally deafened by the assault of perpetual man-made noise reverberating in the seas, and as a result are unable to communicate effectively with each other (making hunting, mating, and social relations difficult) and suffer from severe stress, so too are we deafened by our own noise, literal and psychic, and so are unable to hear the signals from others, ourselves, and the planet, are unable to communicate material essential for our survival (certainly the survival of

our soul-life) and are suffering greatly from the stress of hyper stimulation. An easeful flow of communication between individuals and all their relations, human and otherwise, has been confounded by our overlays of every kind of noise – literal and physic – from our culture. Our ears are blocked: external signs that confer the ideology of ecoconsciousness cannot come through, and because what ought to be a swinging door between our internal reality and the external is blocked, we do not experience ecoconsciousness until we make ourselves be quiet. Our listening opens the doors.

I want to end with a few more pearls of wisdom gleaned from the extraordinary women I interviewed. Bloom Post certainly picked up on the insistence in my voice. I use a lot of words like “must” and “should” and “immediately” and “revolution.” These are important words that I believe we need right now. The words reveal an attachment to a particular outcome, and I admit, at this juncture I’m personally attached to the idea of human beings overhauling the systems that have and are destroying our species and this remarkable planet. I’m attached to making immediate and beneficial change. What can I say, I love this blue green sky-marble. Post offered this advice: “Keep holding space for the collective to wake up. And...stop running the program of ‘*the collective has to wake up.*’ Maybe it’s all meant to blow itself up, because then we start again. That’s not necessarily what I’m asking for, but I can’t be attached. When I don’t feel attached to it, then I can be authentically connected.” Casting off our ideas of the way things must be allows us to be more attuned to the way things *are* and to the possibilities of the present. It was especially important for me to hear that “the collective has to wake up” is also a program. Of course it is! It’s an ideology like anything else. When we become too attached to ideologies, we forget they’re ideologies at all and instead think they’re

absolute realities. They're illusions we've forgotten are illusions, as Nietzsche said. This thesis is intentionally aligned with that program, but I hope that I've also made the point that regardless of that program's fruition, we can succeed in liberation *now* by simply living well. That's the stuff of revolution. Here are with a few more words of Ballard's wisdom:

What do we do? I plant gardens and I plant trees and I live in nature. And love the people that I love. And sometimes I even love some of the people I don't love, just because it annoys them. We make music and we make love and we just enjoy the time that we have.... you counter a culture of death by living as deeply and fully as you can, by embracing *more life more life more life*. (Ballard)

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