

Environmental Rhetoric in the Age of Hegemonic Politics

Earth First! and the Nature Conservancy

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In the broadest sense, the question that drives the environmental movement is *how to resolve the contradiction between the lifestyle of modern industrial society and the continued existence of life on earth, or, further, the existence of a diversity of life, something beyond humans, seagulls, and cockroaches, for example.* As Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer put it, "how can the standard of living attained through technological progress in the developed nations be maintained (and extended to developing and undeveloped nations) if the ecological consequences of development are prohibitive?" (3). Although the question of the environment is most often represented in popular media as a stark choice between economic prosperity and an Edenic vision of nature (jobs versus owls, for example),¹ the question is really much more complex. How much and how fast do we have to change the way we live? How much biodiversity do we need in order to have a "healthy" environment? Is a healthy environment one that sustains human life, or must it also sustain as many other life forms as possible? Can economic prosperity for all and biodiversity be compatible, or do we have to sacrifice our living standard (and reduce our population dramatically) if we wish to avoid ecocatastrophe? Among environmental organizations, the fundamental question under debate is, *how much change is necessary in our society to preserve the environment?*

Not surprisingly, the diverse groups that make up the environmental movement have developed significantly different answers to this question, and they employ a variety of different rhetorical strategies in their joint effort to realign public opinion and policy on environmental issues—and

to renovate, as well, the fabric of our everyday lives. In this chapter, I want to examine the complexities of how two national environmental groups position themselves and are positioned by others in the debate over the environment. Although my focus is on the rhetoric of the environmental movement, I find it useful to place my analysis within a broader framework of political theory, for the environmental movement is a political movement. In particular, I will be looking at the rhetorical strategies of these two groups through the lens of radical democratic theory, which emphasizes the role that rhetoric plays in changing or maintaining the structure of our society.

Radical democratic theory focuses on how the various groups in a society struggle to gain acceptance for their views in the arena of public discourse. This struggle is especially important in contemporary society because what is accepted common sense about what people value and how they live and behave strongly influences not only the practices of our everyday lives but also policy decisions in government and in industry at all levels. Accepted common sense, sometimes called a society's ideology or belief system, evolves in public discourse, and in radically democratic societies, where everyone is free to participate in public discourse, what is accepted as common sense evolves and changes rapidly in response to changing conditions and to the ebb and flow of the struggle between different points of view. When participation is more limited, accepted common sense may lag behind changing situations and impede a society's ability to adapt its practices to new situations. Radical democratic theory is especially interested in how adaptation does occur when participation is not completely free, which is the more usual situation in mass society.

Using radical democratic theory to look at the rhetorical strategies employed by Earth First! and The Nature Conservancy in the public debate about the environment enables me to describe the causes and the effects of these different strategies and to begin to assess how effective these strategies are, both separately and jointly, in bringing about changes in how our society thinks about the environment and in environmental policies and practices. Each group's strategies are linked to the particular history and experiences of the group and to their particular beliefs about how and how much the practices of modern industrial society must change if we are to preserve biodiversity in our environment. As a consequence of these different beliefs and strategies, each group plays a different role in the effort to reorient our society's relationship to the environment. Although it is difficult, in the midst of the ongoing debate, to accurately assess how effective each group is in this effort, I conclude that each makes important contributions and that the effect of their different strategies is synergistic, that is, that the success of the environmental movement will in large part depend

on different groups employing different strategies and playing different roles in the debate.

Dave Foreman, founder of Earth First! recognizes the value of these differences: "We need many paths; we need to ask many questions. . . . there are countless tools suitable for tackling different aspects of each problem" (*Confessions* 172). As an example, he notes, "even though The Nature Conservancy and Earth First! have similar goals of saving native diversity, our techniques are . . . different, our styles . . . divergent" (173). The mission of The Nature Conservancy, as stated on the masthead of their magazine, is "to preserve plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive." Although Earth First! does not speak with nearly so unified a voice, the group is considered to be the action arm of the deep ecology movement,² a biocentric movement committed to the principles that "the well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves," that "these values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes," and that "richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves" (Devall and Sessions 70). The mission of the most recent offshoot project from Earth First!—the North American Wilderness Recovery, or "Wildlands" Project—is even more explicitly parallel with that of The Nature Conservancy. In announcing the project, Foreman and his colleagues write: "The mission of The Wildlands Project is to help protect and restore the ecological richness and native biodiversity of North America through the establishment of a connected system of reserves" (Foreman et al. 3).

Despite these similar goals, these two groups are radically divergent in structure, strategies, politics, and rhetoric. With a membership of 10,000 and an annual budget of \$100,000, Earth First! looks every inch of its marginal status in contrast to the mainstream Nature Conservancy with its 588,000 members and annual budget of \$100,500,000.³ Earth First! prides itself on its "disorganization" (Kane 100): Foreman argues that "the nature of the Earth First! movement made it . . . important that . . . a centralized administration never be established" ("Foreword" 10). The Nature Conservancy, in contrast, is an efficiently managed corporate enterprise. *National Geographic* comments: "The business-like approach to environmental matters can strike an air of incongruity, as though one were watching Wall Street make preparations for the second Earth Day" (Grove 831–32). Earth First! is famed for its dramatic and sometimes violent defense of nature. Although officially the group disclaims responsibility for acts of ecological sabotage such as spiking trees marked for logging, as Foreman explains, the group specializes in "confrontational civil disobedi-

ence, monkeywrenching, and uncompromising advocacy" (*Confessions* 172). The Nature Conservancy, in contrast, concentrates on buying land of environmental value and in building alliances among individual landowners, environmental groups, governmental agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management and the National Forest Service, and corporations; its current president, John Sawhill, remarks that such activities "make the point that there are environmental groups such as ours that have chosen to work cooperatively, rather than confrontationally. . . . and . . . illustrate ways in which business and environmental groups can work together for the common good of society" ("How to Think" 576).

The Nature Conservancy was founded in 1951, when the scientists who formed the Ecologist's Union (which had split off from the Ecological Society of America in 1946) joined with Dick Pough, an engineer by training and an entrepreneur with a reputation as a manager who had "acquired a deep love and broad knowledge of the environment" (Grove 837).⁴ Thus, the Conservancy was marked from the beginning as an alliance between scientists and business, and its first project demonstrates how the group would continue to use economic power to protect significant ecosystems: purchasing a "two and one-half mile stretch of [Hudson River] riverfront untouched since the arrival of the first white settlers in 1640, [which] was home to an old growth hemlock forest which was being threatened by construction of a new reservoir" (Lavine 24).

In response to the United States Forest Services decision to open over 90 percent of federally protected wilderness to development, Earth First! was founded in 1980 by Dave Foreman, a lobbyist for the Wilderness Society, and several of his friends who were also staff members of mainstream environmental organizations. Inspired by Edward Abbey's novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), the strategies and projects of Earth First! are strongly marked by the personal vision of Foreman, its most articulate member.⁵ One of the first actions of the new, radical group was to unroll a banner depicting a giant crack down the side of the Glen Canyon Dam, symbolically enacting the group's proposed solution to the ecological destructiveness of modern industrial society, but Foreman and co-founder Howie Wolke also compiled and published an exhaustive inventory of wilderness (*The Big Outside*, 1989), and the group has had from the beginning a close association with scientists developing the notion of deep ecology, an association that was strengthened in 1990 when Foreman left Earth First! to found Wild Earth.

In politics, Earth First! is one of what Michael McCloskey calls the new radical groups that emerged in the mid-1980s: "some of the new radicals were radical in their demands, and others were radical in the means they used. . . . The deep ecologists . . . wanted sweeping changes in society and

living patterns but were largely apolitical. . . . groups such as Earth First! and the Sea Shepherd Society actually used radical means, resorting to sabotage and other illegal techniques, although their demands for changes in public policy were not always radical" (78–79). Believing that the current socio-economic system is incompatible with a healthy earth—as Christopher Manes puts it, "that our culture is lethal to the ecology that it depends on and has been so for a long time" (22)—and thus that this system must be overturned, the radicals are often criticized by more moderate environmentalists for polarizing the issues and for tainting the whole movement with the image of lawless hooliganism.

At the center of the political spectrum lie most of the large, mainstream environmental groups (e.g., the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society), which McCloskey calls the pragmatic reformers, those groups who believe "that progress toward environmental protection could be achieved best through government action" (78). Although The Nature Conservancy is one of the "Big Ten" environmental groups who often collaborate in endorsing or opposing governmental policies, the Conservancy differs from the pragmatic reformers in focus: its emphasis on buying land of ecological significance places it among the groups McCloskey calls accommodators, who believe that "a new era was beginning in which industry and environmentalists would work together harmoniously" and who "look less to the heavy-handed governmental regulation favored by the reformers and more to market-like mechanisms to achieve their ends" (79). The Nature Conservancy is often accused by radical environmentalists of being overly accommodating to industry and developers and of needlessly compromising important environmental principles. *Outside* magazine's guide to environmental groups notes, "The most salient criticism of the Conservancy's approach is that its cozy ways with big business (it cashes huge annual checks from Mobil, Weyerhaeuser, and other industrial patrons) buy its silence during regulatory squabbles" (Martel et al. 70).

Both Earth First! and The Nature Conservancy are explicitly aware of their strategies as distinct and not necessarily exclusively the best. Foreman says: "We did not form Earth First! with the thought that we had the only proper methods: confrontational civil disobedience, monkeywrenching, and uncompromising advocacy. We founded Earth First! because these particular tools were not otherwise being used in defense of native diversity" (*Confessions* 172). Pat Noonan, the president of The Nature Conservancy from 1973 to 1980, says, "Corporations and environmentalists were butting heads, but we knew the free-enterprise system was a fantastic motivator. So the Conservancy decided to reach out to corporate America. No other environmental group was doing it" (quoted in Grove 837). To demonstrate how these different strategies are embodied in the rhetoric of

the two groups, and to demonstrate more clearly the differences between the strategies, I will in a moment look closely at a pair of articles that argue the positions of the two groups on land management in the western United States. But in order to characterize the rhetorical strategies I see at work in these articles, I need first to introduce some more specific concepts from radical democratic theory.

Formulated most articulately by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, radical democratic theory derives from the writings of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci. Laclau and Mouffe argue that beginning with the French Revolution it has become increasingly difficult to see political struggle as based on a confrontation between predefined groups or classes, the lords versus the peasants, for example. Instead, they argue, political struggle is a matter of the construction of opposing positions wherein groups attempt to define a place for themselves in the political structure by linking together their positions (and those of their allies) into a coherent vision, or common sense. After the French Revolution, Laclau and Mouffe say, "there was no politics without hegemony" (151). For them, as for Gramsci, hegemony refers to this general process of building alliances among groups in order to gain a consensus that will enable a group to lead the society through intellectual and moral principles as well as rule it by force; it is the process I earlier referred to as the establishment of accepted common sense.⁶

In introducing his notion of political power, Gramsci distinguishes between "domination" and "leadership" (57). Domination is the naked exercise of power, the use of the law or armed forces to "liquidate" or "subjugate" opposing groups; leadership is the winning of power through building an intellectual and moral consensus, the establishment of hegemony. Both are necessary, he argues, for a group to gain and maintain power in a society. And while hegemony definitely sets up a hierarchical relationship between groups in which the dominant group attempts to subordinate the interests of other groups to its own interests, at the same time, "the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed—in other words, that the leading group should [also] make sacrifices" (Gramsci 161). Furthermore, along with Marx, Gramsci asserts the possibility—and the necessity—of alternate or counterhegemonies, "new popular beliefs, that is to say a new common sense and with it a new culture and a new philosophy which will be rooted in the popular consciousness with the same solidity and imperative quality as traditional beliefs" (424). Although the possibility of revolution lies in the potential building of a counterhegemony, wherein the common interests of a new

group are forged into a coherent philosophy, a principled intellectual and moral awareness, hegemonic politics recognizes the immense capacity of modern states to avert revolution through redefining the interests of potentially opposing groups in terms of its own interests and principles. Gramsci believed that military revolution was outmoded as a process of changing social structure and had been replaced by a rhetorical struggle for hegemony in which the nature and extent of change were a great deal more problematic.

I will return to a more detailed discussion of radical democratic theory and how it can explain the differences in strategies between *Earth First!* and The Nature Conservancy later. At this point, I will simply suggest that the rhetorical strategies operating in the article published by *Earth First!* might be thought of as an attempt to establish a counterhegemony, a new common sense, while the strategies operating in the article published by The Nature Conservancy might be seen as extending the power of the established hegemony.

"Livestock Grazing on the National Parks: A National Disgrace," by Dale Turner and Lynn Jacobs, appeared in the *Earth First! Journal* in December 1990. Turner and Jacobs detail the history and extent of livestock grazing in the national parks, monuments, and recreation areas in the West, and comment in caustic terms on the cost of this practice to taxpayers and on the damage it does to "fragile natural environments." The villains of the piece are greedy ranchers and western politicians (who are also often ranchers), and the National Park Service is depicted as complicitous in the process of degrading these public lands.

The piece begins with a characteristically blunt and unqualified statement of the problem:

America's National Parks are world-famous for their beauty and grandeur. Since the late 1800s Congress has been setting aside these lands as the most impressive examples of untrammelled Nature in this country. Today they comprise the most extraordinary system of natural preserves on Earth.

Naturally most Americans think their National Parks and Monuments are protected from commercial exploitation. And generally they are, outside certain heavily visited locations, where concessionaires are permitted to operate stores, gas stations, lodges, and other services deemed necessary for tourists. However, ranching is a glaring exception. (118)

Turner and Jacobs go on to explain that since most of the lands now included in the park system in the West were originally open to ranching, ranchers have had a strong influence in the fate of these lands, and, for the most part, the goal of the ranchers has been simply to make the most money they can out of the situation. In contrast to Congress's desire to

preserve the "grandeur and beauty" of the western lands, ranchers are depicted as interested in preventing the establishment of parks, limiting the size of parks, insisting on retaining grazing rights in parks for as long as possible and at the lowest fees possible, selling grazing rights at high profits, threatening to despoil the scenic beauty of inholdings in park lands in order to extort high prices for scenic easements, and allowing or encouraging their cattle to trespass on park lands.

Language used in describing the ranchers is consistently negative: ranchers "refused to relinquish 'their' grazing permits" (118); they "forced the government into special agreements" (118); they "convinced the government to allow them to maintain ranching operations in new Park units under guise of 'preserving the historic Old West'" (119). Members of Congress from the West are characterized as completely supporting the ranchers in these activities, are called "politicos," and are accused of "political string pulling." The National Park Service receives little better treatment. In Grand Teton National Park, where grazing is permitted, "Park visitors are encouraged to view the overgrazing cattle, fences, and other range developments as part of the natural scenery" (121), and in Great Basin National Park, "a Park brochure assures tourists that 'cattle grazing [is] an integral part of the Great Basin scene'" (122). Turner and Jacobs comment, "It fails to say that visitors will see thousands of cattle en route to the Park and will hardly wish to see more, especially in the campgrounds, where they now graze" (122). Even the cattle are characterized negatively, as "huge bovines." The ecosystems of the parks are depicted as fragile and vulnerable to the effects of overgrazing and trespassing cattle, which also upset and disgust park visitors. In Zion, trespassing cattle are accused of "upsetting fragile riparian corridors and desert ecology" (122); in Big Bend, trespassing cattle "so heavily degrade the Rio Grande canyon that in many riparian areas cottonwood regeneration is virtually nonexistent" (122); in Lake Mead National Recreation Area, cattle "trample and erode the fragile desert soil, crush the cryptogams, and consume the scant greenery. They congregate around the area's few water sources and along 'Lake' Mead and Colorado River shorelines where they invade campgrounds and foul beaches" (124). The solution Turner and Jacobs propose to these problems is equally blunt: "Nearly every NPS unit where ranching has been banned shows significant recovery. . . . So the solution to the overgrazing problems on National Park Service lands is obvious: Remove all livestock and ranching developments from all Park Service lands" (125-26).

In this article the lines of opposition are clearly drawn: Congress (with the exception of western senators and representatives) and park visitors value pristine nature, untrammelled by cattle; cattle ranchers, supported by

their congresspeople and by the National Park Service, value the land only in terms of profits. Ranchers, who are seen as being motivated only by economic considerations, and the National Park Service represent the established hegemony which considers the natural environment primarily as a resource to be managed for human economic prosperity. Turner and Jacobs attempt to promote instead their biocentric belief in the spiritual value of "untrammelled Nature" by linking it to a value already embedded within (yet at the same time potentially contradictory to) the established hegemony inasmuch as the beauty of wilderness areas was enacted in the setting aside of national park lands. They attempt to construct a new position, a counterhegemony that takes into account some of the values of the larger society yet is founded on a biocentric rather than on an economic principle. In order to shift the ground this radically, they must separate the valuing of the beauty of nature from the valuing of nature as a resource, and they do so by sharply distinguishing the actors in the drama of land management: Congress and park visitors versus ranchers and the National Park Service.

Consequently, we hear nothing of ranchers who also appreciate the beauty of nature, of park visitors who are undisturbed by the presence of a few cows, of park rangers who work to resist overgrazing practices; our attention is not drawn to how representatives from western states resolve the conflict between their support for ranching and serving in a Congress that has agreed to set aside national parks as preserves of natural beauty. The solution proposed by Turner and Jacobs grants no ground to the ranchers, and no credence to any suggestion that natural beauty and economic benefit could be reconciled: national parks are not to be used as a resource for ranchers. This rhetoric delineates clear alternatives in order to create a mandate for a significant redirection of policy; it deals in absolutes in order to emphasize the fundamental difference of the position being recommended from existing positions; it refuses to be coopted by the established hegemony.

In contrast, ranchers and other landowners are given more hospitable treatment in Hugh Zackheim's "The Blackfoot Valley and the River that Runs through It," from *The Montana Nature Conservancy Newsletter*, where they appear as knowledgeable managers of land opposed to the inroads of developers. The purpose of the newsletter is to report to members on the progress of Nature Conservancy projects and to increase support for them; thus this discourse is characteristically optimistic and rather self-congratulatory. At the same time, the intent of The Nature Conservancy to cast its net as broadly as possible, to include in their consensus as many perspectives as possible, is also clearly evident.

After a brief evocation of the beauty and biological diversity of the Black-

foot river valley, the article opens with a statement of The Nature Conservancy's commitment: "Protecting the natural environment of the Big Blackfoot has been a priority for the Montana Nature Conservancy for nearly two decades. And the Conservancy's projects have by design gone the extra mile to accommodate the land's traditional, economically compatible land uses, such as ranching, farming, small-scale logging, dude ranching, hunting, and river recreation" (1). In contrast to the depiction of the land by Earth First! as pristine, here the land is seen to have a history of uses. But, although practically every economic interest imaginable is included in their project (a highly significant and, from the perspective of more radical environmental groups, dangerously accommodating inclusion), there is, as in the Earth First! article, a villain who is threatening the land: developers.

Interestingly, however, these villains—and the ranchers who are briefly cast as villains later in the article—are never named and never appear as agents of any villainous actions. Zackheim laments "skyrocketing public use of the river [that] was virtually unmanaged," and "development pressures [that] jeopardized the continued existence of agricultural operations in the corridor" (1). He points out that the Conservancy's actions have prevented "the subdivisions and 20-acre ranchettes rapidly becoming the rule in many other Montana river valleys," and he notes that easements donated by landowners, including ranchers, ensure that "subdivision and other developments not compatible with agriculture and the natural values are forever prohibited" (1). He notes that the degradation that has occurred is the result of "present trends in land use," and he describes it in passive voice: "Sections of native prairie are being plowed; floodplain cultivation and locally unmanaged grazing are damaging the fragile riparian zone and adding silt to the river; and some potholes are being dewatered" (2). In short, he characterizes the actions as undesirable but avoids blaming the agents of the actions, and the only motive implied for these unnamed actors is a lack of forethought and planning, deficiencies The Nature Conservancy stands willing to help rectify.

This is a rhetoric of inclusion aimed at winning consent; readers are not offered any position except as willing, wise, and wonderful collaborators with The Nature Conservancy's project "to promote land and river management that would conserve environmental values, protect private rights, ensure agricultural continuity, and provide compatible public recreational opportunities" (1). Everyone is assumed to be involved in or invited to participate in this endeavor, and all are characterized positively, praised for their "cooperation, creativity and . . . generosity" (1). Volunteers have been "tireless in efforts to restore the Blackfoot's fabled fishery" (1-2). "Private and governmental groups" are also lauded for "play-

ing key roles" in the collaborative project (1). The Conservancy "strongly supports" the acquisition of land on the river by the Bureau of Land Management, which "has pledged to manage [it] for recreation and habitat protection" (2).

Management is the key term in this discourse, and it signals the difference in attitude toward the land that separates The Nature Conservancy from Earth First! and enables the Conservancy to align itself with the established hegemony. Alan Holt, director of stewardship and science for the Pacific region of The Nature Conservancy, notes, "In Hawaii and in many other areas of the world, if you just set aside a natural area without a commitment to active, long-term management, you may be sending it to its biological grave" (27). The Nature Conservancy's belief in the possible coexistence, through careful management, of "traditional, economically compatible land uses" and natural biodiversity contrasts with the belief of Earth First! in the spiritual value of untrammelled nature, and this concept of proper management of natural areas allows the Conservancy to argue that natural beauty and diversity can coexist with economic prosperity. The concept of management also allows Zackheim to avoid creating villains in his story: developers are not inherently evil and misguided; rather, they simply must learn to be better managers, to avoid unrestrained development or development that is inappropriate to particular areas.

In the conclusion to the article, Zackheim asserts the value of this strategy of inclusiveness and grounds it in the deep connection between Westerners and the land they live on: "Decades of strong, broad-based support for conservation efforts in the Blackfoot testify to the depth of Montanans' attachment to this river and its valley. Private and public partnerships have been key to the project's success, providing the nation with a Montana model of how to achieve on-the-land conservation" (2). Also notable is the way The Nature Conservancy, despite its status as a national organization, manages to adopt a grassroots stance on their projects: each of the state chapters includes the state name in the name of the group, and here the *Montana* Nature Conservancy is seen as providing a model to the nation.

As in the Earth First! article, however, much is being left out. We hear nothing of the inevitable conflicts between the interests which are being drawn into this coalition: nothing about how cattle trampling riverbanks cloud the water and disturb trout reproduction, nothing about the runoff of agricultural fertilizers and pesticides that deplete the biodiversity of the valley, nothing about how river rafters disturb nesting bald eagles and ospreys, nothing about how protections for endangered species restrict individual landowners' uses of their land. If recognized and examined, such conflicts potentially could result in the formulation of a counterhegemony

(as does with Earth First! the conflict between the use of nature as a resource and the valuing of the beauty of nature), but whenever such issues are mentioned in Nature Conservancy discussions, it is always in the context of successful solutions to these conflicts, win-win solutions in which all interests are satisfied within the established system.

These two rhetorical strategies could not be more different: while Earth First! polarizes the issues and provides a compelling critique of the effects of capitalism on the land, The Nature Conservancy constructs a broad area of common ground and argues, equally compellingly, for the benefits that can accrue to ecological values from the wise application of capital. This difference is compatible with, and partly motivated by, the difference in these two groups' fundamental beliefs—Earth First!'s adherence to biocentrism and The Nature Conservancy's belief in management—beliefs that affect the groups' conceptions of how natural biodiversity can best be preserved or enhanced. For Earth First! putting human concerns first will always restrict biodiversity, and they doubt, with some reason, that human management, dependent upon very limited knowledge of the intricacies of ecosystem dynamics, can achieve the same results that unrestricted natural forces do. Thus, they call for a fundamental reorientation of priorities and the overthrow of the established hegemony. Foreman, speaking of the Wildlands Project, says, "Our goal is to create a new political reality based on the needs of other species" (quoted in Pennisi 168).

For The Nature Conservancy, in contrast, saving biodiversity does not require an overthrow of the current system: lands can be purchased and ecosystems can be restored by proper management. The Conservancy recognizes that ecosystems do not have any essential state they revert to if left alone but are always changing in response to the changing forces within them, which can and necessarily must include humans. Thus The Nature Conservancy works to integrate the value of biodiversity as completely as possible into the established hegemony. Greg Watson, director of the eastern regional office of The Nature Conservancy, argues, "In practical terms, we can no longer afford to consider humans as externalities. Indeed, the continued success of our efforts to preserve biodiversity in the face of mounting threats will depend on our ability to integrate socioeconomic factors into our conservation equations" (33).

From this perspective, these two groups might be seen as working against each other: to the extent that The Nature Conservancy succeeds in integrating the interest in saving biodiversity into the established hegemony, Earth First! will fail in bringing about any real change in priorities. Hegemonic politics is dialectical: because situations are always changing, the established hegemony must adjust or be vulnerable to revolution, but,

at the same time, to the extent that the establishment can redefine potentially disruptive interests in line with its own imperative, it can postpone revolution indefinitely. Walter Adamson argues that Gramsci

saw what later Western Marxists would increasingly ignore, namely that the incumbent regime's increasing need for hegemony could also decisively increase its vulnerability. When a regime recognized this need and was generally successful in meeting it, the proletariat was pushed to the defensive and forced to engage in a protracted war of position in which the prospects for victory were indeed discouraging. When, however, the incumbent powers failed to forge their own hegemony or to recognize fully the imperative for it, their vulnerability to an alternative hegemony was very great. (228)

It is here that the question of how much change is necessary in our society to preserve the environment becomes relevant. It could be argued that *The Nature Conservancy (along with other mainstream groups) has successfully met the establishment's need for hegemony and thus strengthened its resistance to an alternative hegemony and that this failure to reorient our society's priorities will lead to the destruction of the environment.* Gramsci characterizes this situation as a "passive revolution" (59), a revolution that contains rather than liberates progressive forces. Adamson explains that a passive revolution does not necessarily prevent change, but it does limit the extent of change. The Nature Conservancy has promoted greater awareness of the environment and the value of biodiversity without any radical demands for reorientation of the socio-economic system, or for any very great changes in lifestyle. And, despite the optimistic tone of their promotional materials, the Conservancy's rhetoric belies some awareness of the limited success of their efforts on behalf of the environment. The name of their recent initiative, "Last Great Places," which is "aimed at preserving the planet's remaining intact ecosystems" (Watson 33), tacitly recognizes the rearguard actions the environmental movement finds itself resorting to. In the opening chapter of their collection of essays on the recent history of American environmentalism, Dunlap and Mertig argue that the success of the movement has been ambiguous:

Many leading environmentalists, including McCloskey in this volume, have acknowledged that the movement has largely failed in its goal of protecting the quality of the environment. As Denis Hayes, key organizer for both the first and twentieth Earth Days, stated, "The world is in worse shape today than it was twenty years ago." Of course, others are quick to point out that the situation would be far worse had the movement not been around. Although the primary purpose of this volume has been to examine environmentalism's success as a social movement, history will judge it in terms of its success in halting environmental deterioration rather than in simply avoiding its own demise. (8)

Furthermore, the relatively moderate stance of The Nature Conservancy also allows those who resist changes in our society's attitude toward the environment to call on the Conservancy to curb the more progressive force of the radical environmentalists. An article published by the Heritage Foundation demonstrates how the work done by groups like The Nature Conservancy can be used as the basis of an effort to discredit more progressive efforts. After detailing the "extreme" views of deep ecology and the monetary and physical damage done by Earth First! ecoterrorists, the article concludes:

Americans want to preserve a clean world—to conserve their environment. Americans too want an economy that offers them increasing economic opportunities. How to balance these two goals all too often splits Washington between myopic conservationists and equally myopic developers. Out of this split comes [*sic*] the ecoterrorists, who believe that anything short of complete victory for "the environment" is a moral as well as a practical disaster. . . . The environmental movement has a special responsibility. It must no longer tolerate, let alone encourage the ecoteurs. In particular, environmental groups should publicize the fact that the ecoteurs' violence sabotages legitimate environmental groups. These mainstream groups thus should speak out forcefully to encourage their members to distance themselves from violent and destructive activities.

If Deep Ecology is not challenged at the philosophical level, the number of environmentalists committed to ecotage is likely to grow. And as more people put the "rights" of nature before those of humans, the more likely it is that innocent people are going to be killed. (Bandow 10)

Although the position staked out here is quite different from that of The Nature Conservancy,⁷ the Heritage Foundation, which is actively working to contain and resist the interests of the radical environmentalists in shifting the basis of society from humanism to biocentrism, can align themselves superficially with the more moderate demands of groups like The Nature Conservancy and can then call on the Conservancy to reject the strategies and principles of the radical groups. For the most part, this strategy has not succeeded, for the diverse environmental groups generally avoid criticizing one another or commenting on differences in goals.⁸ Furthermore, in this context, even the accommodationist strategies of The Nature Conservancy seem progressive,⁹ for, although they insist that economic and environmental values can both be served through careful management, they do not see the environment solely as a human resource as does the Heritage Foundation. Current president of the Conservancy John Sawhill explains, "What does protecting biodiversity really mean? It doesn't mean any one thing—it means working with government, business, farmers, ranchers and people like you and me to protect all living things" ("Nature Conservancy" 9).

Radical democratic theory helps us see that assessing how much change is necessary for the success of a progressive cause is not simple. The environmental movement is not faced with an either/or choice between the Earth First! attempt to overthrow the current system and The Nature Conservancy's attempt to support and strengthen it. For Gramsci, the ideal successful counterhegemony was the Jacobin revolution, which brought about a radical reorientation of the society, while the prime example of passive revolution was the Risorgimento in Italy, which "involved the gradual but continuous absorption . . . of the active elements produced by allied groups—even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile" (58–59). But Adamson argues that Gramsci also saw in the Risorgimento "certain new factors which had at least raised the possibility" of change, and Chantal Mouffe's interpretation of Gramsci's complex discussion of hegemony suggests that the success of a counterhegemony has less to do with the fact that it opposes and overthrows an established hegemony and more to do with how hegemony is attained:

if hegemony is defined as the ability of one class to articulate the interests of other social groups to its own, it is now possible to see that this can be done in two very different ways: the interests of these groups can either be articulated so as to neutralise them and hence to prevent the development of their own specific demands, or else they can be articulated in such a way as to promote their full development leading to the final resolution of the contradictions which they express. (182–83)

Thus, we might account for the difference in the positions of the Heritage Foundation and The Nature Conservancy by noting that the article published in the Heritage Foundation series attempts to neutralize the interests of Earth First! and the deep ecologists, while The Nature Conservancy's initiatives can be seen as attempting to include the Earth First! demand that the rights of nature also be taken into consideration in the established hegemony in such a way that the contradiction between modern industrial society and biodiversity will be resolved through careful management.

From this perspective, then, the efforts of Earth First! and of The Nature Conservancy can be seen as building on one another to create a new attitude toward the environment, rather than working against one another. Mouffe argues that

The objective of ideological struggle is not to reject the system and all its elements but to rearticulate it, to break it down to its basic elements and then to sift through past conceptions to see which ones, with some changes of content, can serve to express the new situation. Once this is done the chosen elements are finally rearticulated into another system. . . . Ideological struggle in fact consists of a process of *disarticulation-rearticulation* of given ideological elements in a struggle be-

tween two hegemonic principles to appropriate these elements: it does not consist of the confrontation of two already elaborated, closed world-views. Ideological ensembles existing at a given moment are, therefore, the result of the relations of forces between the rival hegemonic principles and they undergo a perpetual process of transformation. (192–94)

Revolution in the age of hegemonic politics is a matter of struggle over priorities, not of wholesale change. Any successful counterhegemony will contain transformed elements of the established hegemony. Radical groups like Earth First! struggle to disarticulate positions and principles from the established hegemony and transform them in line with their own priorities; thus, the "traditional" American love of wilderness is disarticulated from the notion of nature as an economic resource and transformed into a respect for the diversity of life (a spiritual value that was also present in the established belief system but suppressed in favor of the economic agenda) that will serve as a basis for a sustainable way of life for human beings and for the planet as a whole. The more ambiguous status of accommodationist groups like The Nature Conservancy results from the difficulty of ascertaining, in the midst of this process, whether their efforts to rearticulate positions prevent or bring about some significant change (if not as much change as radical groups demand); more particularly, whether in their efforts to articulate the principle of biodiversity to the principle of economic prosperity the Conservancy has simply been coopted by the position that nature is valuable primarily as an economic resource or whether they have created a new hegemony that resolves the contradictions between protecting all living things and achieving economic prosperity.¹⁰

While this question may be impossible to answer definitively, what seems more clear is that radical groups like Earth First! and accommodationists like The Nature Conservancy seem to have divided up between them the disarticulation-rearticulation process that Mouffe describes. Gramsci described a similar two-step process in the development of a new ruling class: "1. autonomy *vis-à-vis* the enemies they had to defeat, and 2. support from the groups which actively or passively assisted them" (53). Earth First! specializes in emphasizing the autonomy of their positions: Foreman argues, "I think the greatest strength and accomplishment of Earth First! has been our ability to redefine the parameters of the national environmental debate" (*Confessions* 30). Insisting single-mindedly on such notions that live redwood trees are not to be sacrificed to redwood decks, the group strives to break down the links that hold the established hegemony together. These links, or articulations, are strong, held in place not only by "tradition" but by the strength of the interests they serve (e.g., the timber industry), and, thus, because we often do not even perceive these

links, they can be difficult to break. Herbert Marcuse describes how possibly disruptive contradictions within the established hegemony are systematically neutralized by "harmonizing" realizations; for example:

I take a walk in the country. Everything is as it should be: Nature at its best. Birds, sun, soft grass, a view through the trees of the mountains, nobody around, no radio, no smell of gasoline. Then the path turns and ends on the highway. I am back among the billboards, service stations, motels, and roadhouses. I was in a National Park, and I now know that this was not reality. It was a "reservation," something that is being preserved like a species dying out. If it were not for the government, the billboards, hot dog stands, and motels would long since have invaded that piece of Nature. I am grateful to the government; we have it much better than before. . . . (226)

Our gratitude to the government for protecting the park keeps us from seeing how "unnatural" a park is and how bad the environmental crisis is. The "realization" that government protection has solved the environmental problem harmonizes the contradiction between nature and industrial civilization and draws attention away from the question of how governmental protection allows and encourages environmental degradation to take place everywhere else and how setting aside a park makes the irruption of billboards, hot dog stands, and motels seem to be an unavoidable process. In short, governmental protection of national parks keeps us from facing the question of the extent to which decisions about land use are made democratically in our society. The Turner and Jacobs article I analyzed earlier works against such harmonization of contradiction by drawing attention to just this question through their attack on cattle grazing in national parks.

Scott Elliott refers to the theories of Robert Cathcart concerning the rhetoric of social movements to explain the contribution radical groups like Earth First! make to the success of the environmental movement: "The radical provides the audience with clear cut lines of decision. Does the audience accept or reject the position of the revolutionary? Cathcart notes that confrontation is an essential element of a movement's success. It is the confrontational form that produces 'dialectical enjoinment in the moral arena' " (7-8). But what Earth First! does not do much, or do well, is to seek support from other groups, especially those that might not agree with them on all concerns. As Killingsworth and Palmer observe, although "Foreman has occasionally appealed to other groups or social radicals. . . . This interest in hegemonic links . . . along with his pride over the ability of Earth First! to influence the public, has always been subordinated to his nonconformist, antinomian passion for the individually motivated and fur-

tive righteousness of the radical acting alone or in small gangs of fellow seekers" (218).

Killingsworth and Palmer trace Foreman's attitude to the influence of Edward Abbey, author of the novel that introduced the notion of environmental monkeywrenching, and, further back, to the influence of neoromantic wilderness preservationists like Thoreau: "For Abbey, as for other existentialists and romantic individualists in the mold of Thoreau, Whitman, and the beat poets of the 1950s, radicalism arises most directly from personal experience, not from ideology. . . . Abbey's writing thus coincides with that of the deep ecologists, who suggest that their work is more a form of personal seeking than a systematic philosophy" (223). The stance of the romantic individual, however useful it may be in disarticulating radical positions from the established hegemony (and, I would argue, it is not a stance necessary to this effort), is not conducive to building a new hegemony, for it refuses to consider how the radical group may share interests with other groups and to educate people about these possible links. This failing is well illustrated by a confrontation between two smaller environmental groups in Montana. Louise Bruce, a representative of the moderate, consensus-building Montana Wilderness Association, takes issue with the radical and "exclusionary" strategies of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies (a group that is associated with the Wildlands Project). She quotes a statement by Steve Kelley, the president of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, "When people get in the way, we ask them to move. When they don't move, you've got to go around them," and comments: "That's the language of exclusion and proscription, the antithesis of grass-roots activism. Wilderness will endure only with popular support; people won't change their environmental attitudes simply because someone who professes to know better has told them to do so. At MWA, when people get in the way and don't move, we strive to listen, to inform and—if we're good at our work—to build new support for preservation of the wild" (15).

This lack of interest on the part of Earth First! in reaching out to a broader range of people is particularly troublesome in light of the potential of the deep-ecology-inspired Wildlands Project to serve as the basis of a new hegemony. Killingsworth and Palmer note that the established hegemony has promoted attitudes toward nature that combine the attitude of traditional science (nature as object) with the attitude of business/industry and agriculture (nature as resource), and they suggest that "we may now, however, be witnessing an attitudinal shift and a corresponding power shift that would cause the continuum to 'roll,' leaving a new alliance of deep ecology, science, and government—the environmentalist

alliance" in the dominant position (15). This new alliance would need to develop a new attitude toward nature that somehow adjudicates between the deep ecologists' notion of nature as spirit and the scientific notion of nature as object—"for science to form a hegemonic link with deep ecology . . . it would have to be a transformed science, not the positivistic science that formed the model for scientific management and that provided the impetus for large-scale technological development" (15)—but Killingsworth and Palmer argue that "the connection between science and the environmental reform movements . . . has become the most problematical and the most important link in the evolution of environmental politics in America" (48).

In fact, the Wildlands Project, which proposes to set aside a system of wildlife reserves that would dwarf the largest national parks in extent, has attracted a surprising amount of support from scientists. As reported in *Science News*, "the plan drew strong applause from participants at the annual meeting of the Society for Conservation Biology in June [1993] when it was presented by Foreman, Soulé, and Noss" (Pennisi 169). Pennisi concludes: "At first glance, the Wildlands project seems too wild to warrant consideration by practical people, environmentalists included. But actually, research that is reshaping conservation science justifies some of Wildlands' underlying premises. Consequently, a growing group of scientists and activists, though critical of the details, find merit in this very radical plan. Already they have begun to focus on large-scale preservation" (168). The question for Earth First! is whether they should (or can) modify their oppositional stance and begin to work more actively on consensus building with other groups to broaden the base of their support. If they do so, they risk losing the advantage of representing a clear alternative; if they do not, they risk having their positions excluded from the newly developing hegemony.

The work of rearticulating positions into a broad-based hegemony, of seeking the support of a broad range of groups in society and combining their interests into a new common sense (whether genuinely new or merely a transformed consensus) is the specialty of The Nature Conservancy. As demonstrated by Zackheim's article about the Blackfoot River project, the Conservancy seeks to build broadly based support for projects to preserve local ecosystems that contain significant biodiversity. Because of its efforts to include everyone in its projects, it is difficult, as I mentioned earlier, to precisely characterize the Conservancy's attitude toward nature or where it would fall on the continuum described by Killingsworth and Palmer; instead, the notion of management allows the Conservancy to include the perspectives and the interests of all groups—scientists, government, business/industry, farmers, social ecologists, and deep ecologists—in its

agenda. Characteristically, official statements from Conservancy personnel use the terms "preserve" and "conserve" interchangeably, terms that are precisely discriminated by other environmental groups (cf. Killingsworth and Palmer 23–48).

Notorious for their efforts to align the policies of corporate America with environmentally friendly principles, the Conservancy now also reaches out more formally to farmers, loggers, fishermen, and underemployed minorities under the rubric of sustainable development. This initiative, along with the increasing commitment of The Nature Conservancy to projects in all parts of the world, aligns the Conservancy with another group of environmentalists that Killingsworth and Palmer call the globals, who "argue for positive, sustainable development" while at the same time contributing to "the ecologically based critique of standard economics" (240). Greg Watson defines the Conservancy's vision of sustainable development "as the successful integration of compatible human activities into our biodiversity preservation strategies" (33). He notes that recent environmental conflicts have created "an impression that healthy economies and environmental quality are not compatible" and lists several Conservancy projects that attempt to refute this impression:

At Ohio's Big Darby Creek watershed, we are working with local farmers and other residents to reduce soil erosion and chemical runoff that threaten aquatic biodiversity. The project seeks to implement land-use practices that allow economic progress while protecting the creek's water quality. . . . Our flagship effort in sustainable development is the Virginia Coast Reserve. In 1991, the Conservancy joined with the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore to form the Northampton Economic Forum. The forum's mission is to create good jobs for local citizens and protect the area's natural resources. (33)

The Virginia Coast Reserve project, in addressing the needs of minorities, reaches out even further to include groups involved in the recent environmental justice movement. Benjamin Chavis, one of the leaders of a protest against the siting of a hazardous waste landfill in a black community in North Carolina, reports, "I said to The Nature Conservancy a little while ago: if you really want to conserve the earth, then join the environmental justice movement, because this is the movement that is going to constrain the destroyers of our neighborhoods and our communities" ("Place at the Table" 50).¹¹

How The Nature Conservancy responds to such challenges will serve as a measure of their commitment to the creation of a truly progressive hegemony that serves the whole of society. Nevertheless, their achievements in obtaining big business support for environmental projects have been im-

pressive. Douglas Hall, director of communications for the Conservancy, explains that as well as working with local farmers and residents on the project at Big Darby Creek, the Conservancy has also enlisted the aid of Honda of America: "Honda not only is making cash donations to our ecosystem preservation model on the Big Darby Creek in Ohio, but it is also independently mobilizing its workers to participate in tree planting along the Darby. And Honda management is continuing to talk with us about other long-term ways to aid the economy of the region in a manner that also benefits conservation of the watershed" (25). Hall echoes Foreman's assessment of how the strategies of radical and accommodationist groups can combine to produce changes in our society's attitudes and behaviors toward the environment:

The Nature Conservancy thinks that change requires both protesters and accommodators; corporate support need not undermine the process. A number of recent efforts underscores the importance of environmental groups playing this dual role—good cop/bad cap, if you will.

McDonald's may not have chosen to evaluate its practices without protest from grassroots environmentalists. But it was the Environmental Defense Fund that aided the fast food giant in analyzing and planning dramatic reductions in packaging waste. Dow Chemical may continue to raise the ire of Greenpeace, yet Dow has begun working with Ducks Unlimited, the Conservancy, and others to protect significant wetlands throughout North America and has made great strides in voluntarily reducing pollutants from its facilities.

... Just as we continue to need advocacy groups to push agendas of both industry and the environment, we increasingly need groups who can act strategically as catalysts for a truer greening of business. (25)

Whether The Nature Conservancy is contributing to a progressive hegemony remains an open question, as does the effectiveness of Earth First! and its associated projects in creating a counterhegemony. I would agree with McCloskey that the problem within the environmental movement lies not in the lack of agreement over how to pursue the goal of protecting biodiversity but rather "in the absence of healthy interaction between the more radical groups and the mainstream groups, or even between the pragmatic reformers and the accommodators. Increasingly, the radical groups embody the passion over the issues and articulate the visions of what the future should hold, whereas the mainstream organizations have far more resources and strong management. The dilemma is how to get these two ingredients into a productive relationship. Apart, the radical groups may expend their energy with little tangible results, whereas the mainstream groups may lose their way with no clear vision to pursue" (85). If such healthy interaction is to occur, it is important for environmental activists to recognize the importance and value of all the rhetorical strategies being

employed by the different groups, and especially to recognize that in the struggle to develop a new accepted common sense about the the environment, positions must be clearly separated from traditional practices and redefined in line with the priorities of the new situation as well as being related in a new way with the concerns of a broad range of interests in our society.

NOTES

1. Killingsworth and Palmer see this reduction of the issue as a conservative strategy, and name this kind of discourse "ecospeak."
2. On the connection between Earth First! and deep ecology, see Elliott.
3. Membership and budget figures are from the *Encyclopedia of Associations* 1994.
4. Pough suggested modeling the new organization on the British government's Nature Conservancy, with the exception that the American group would remain private in its funding.
5. In fact, I am using the name Earth First! as a shorthand way of referring to the organizations associated with Dave Foreman, who in the early 1990s left Earth First! to form Wild Earth and the Wildlands Project.
6. Hegemony is more commonly used to refer to an established and oppressive regime, that which progressive forces are always striving to disrupt, and these negative connotations linger in Laclau and Mouffe's and Gramsci's use of the term. Nevertheless, as I will discuss further below, radical democratic theory sees the hegemonic process not only as that which impedes change but also as that which enables change in a society.
7. Bandow argues that environmentally committed Americans aim to strike a balance between commitment to the environment and commitment to the economy, and the commitment to the environment is cast in terms of a clean—that is, safe for humans—environment rather than of biodiversity. Drawing attention to the conflict between human rights and the "rights" of nature and implying that nature has no rights is also a move The Nature Conservancy would not make.
8. There are exceptions, and one instance of criticism cited by Killingsworth and Palmer illustrates how the strategies of radical groups enable mainstream groups (whom Killingsworth and Palmer call reform environmentalists) to position themselves more advantageously: "The argument that Earth First! muddies the face of environmentalism may be necessary, for reformers like Jay Hair [of the National Wildlife Federation] need to maintain their foothold in the Washington establishment; for them to condone violence—against either private property or people—would be the equivalent of negotiating with terrorists. But in many ways, ecotage helps the reform environmentalists both by stalling and frustrating developmentalist progress and by making liberals seem all the more moderate and appealing" (227).

9. As Gramsci's analysis of fascism shows, a passive revolution can play "an historically progressive role": "like many, though not all, passive revolutions, fascism was progressive in a defensive fashion, since it was designed to curb a still more progressive political force. Its peculiar feat was to have promoted the development of industrialism without the radical cataclysm of a proletarian revolution" (Adamson 201).

10. The conclusion to the *National Geographic's* 1988 profile of The Nature Conservancy demonstrates the ambiguity of the Conservancy's attitude toward nature:

Practicality is not the only reason for preventing extinctions, according to Larry Morse, who manages the Conservancy's national data center at the Virginia headquarters. "You can also argue that we have no right to wipe out species that have existed for millions of years or you could say that with every species lost in the chain of life, we humans are that much closer to extinction.

"Practicality just happens to be the argument that most people can accept."

Perhaps the point was best made by botanist Peter Lesica to a rancher in Montana on whose land grew a threatened prairie carnation. The Conservancy wanted to protect it with a conservation easement that would restrict some use of the flower's surroundings but allow the rancher a tax deduction.

"This flower you want to save," asked the rancher testily, "is it good for anything?"

"We don't know yet. But if you see a bolt on the ground, do you throw it away?"

"Course not. I might need it some day."

"We feel the same way," said the botanist, "about the prairie carnation." (844)

11. The Nature Conservancy was also one of the eight groups accused in a letter from "several organizations of color . . . not only of lack of diversity in their staffs, but also of isolation from communities of color and of the poor, who are the chief victims of pollution" (Hahn-Baker 41).

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CHAPTER 10

Thomas Cole's Vision of "Nature" and the Conquest Theme in American Culture

GREGORY CLARK, S. MICHAEL HALLORAN, and
ALLISON WOODFORD

Thomas Cole is the acknowledged founder of what art historian Matthew Baigell calls "the first coherent school of American art, the Hudson River School of landscape painters" (107). Like many American intellectuals of the antebellum period, Cole and the other Hudson River School painters celebrated "nature," in the sense of a landscape touched only lightly if at all by human works. Their canvases represented an America of rolling hills, pristine lakes, and dense forests, of occasional farms and villages surrounded by a vast, Edenic, and often intimidating wilderness. Another art historian, Barbara Novak, uses the term "rhetoric" in connection with their work, referring in a general way to its affective power and its connection with the nationalistic pride that motivated much literary and artistic work of the 1820s and 1830s (*Nature and Culture* 19 and passim). Their imagery is familiar to us today, not only through the widespread reproduction and conscious imitation of their work for popular consumption, but also through unconscious imitation by countless amateur painters and photographers. A recent effort to identify by survey what the American public prefers in art produced a general description of a Hudson River-style landscape (Melamid and Woodward). The Hudson River-style landscape surrounds us—in advertisements for everything from environmental activism to instant coffee, in the photo albums and slide shows in which we memorialize our vacations. It seems to have instantiated in the visual discourse of the developing national culture a rhetorical aesthetic that enabled citizens to articulate the indeterminate