10 Environmental relations: political economies

Much anthropological thinking, in different academic settings, representing a wide range of theoretical "schools" or paradigms, assumes a fundamental distinction between nature and society. Hollingshead, whose ideas influenced the cultural ecology of Julian Steward, expressed one formulation of such a dualism in clear and simple terms, speaking of "the ecological and sociological orders":

> The former is primarily an extension of the order found everywhere in nature, whereas the latter is exclusively, or at least almost, a distinctly human phenomenon ... The ecological order is primarily rooted in competition, whereas social organization has evolved out of communication. (Hollingshead 1940: 358)

Dualist theory, it was generally assumed, was on the right tracks: "[N]ow that the problem is recognized and a beginning made," Hollingshead (1940: 358) suggested, "we may expect a solution." Such a theoretical beginning was reinforced by a rigid academic divison of labor and massive institutional structures. The sociological order remained the subject of anthropologists and sociologists while the ecological one belonged more properly to professional ecologists.

Having established a fundamental dichotomy, Hollingshead, and many of those who followed him, usually qualified the dualistic thesis, emphasizing that nature and society were not to be seen as *totally* separate spheres but dialectically interlinked; each order "complements and supplements the other in many ways" (Hollingshead 1940: 359). Modern-day ecologists continue to "compare" the orders of nature and society as if they were separate, autonomous systems, exploring the links between them (Holling, Gunderson, and Peterson 1994). Despite the dialectic, interactive language, then, the boundary between society and nature remains a contested interface. During much of the twentieth century social theorists intensely debated the relative merits of two kinds of determinisms, the "prison houses" of language and naturalism. In the 1970s, Sahlins quite suitably characterized anthropology, a discipline continually trapped between idealism and materialism, as a "prisoner pacing between the farthest walls of his cell" (1976: 55), reinventing the allegory of the cave

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from Plato's *Republic*. In recent years, however, the weary debate of materialist and cultural reason has rather unexpectedly been replaced by a more fundamental one: The distinction between nature and society, one of the key constructs of modernist discourse, has itself increasingly been subject to critical discussion in several fields, including anthropology and environmental history. This development, partly a response to the postmodern, linguistic turn, global environmental problems, modern information technology, the greening of public discourse, and the redrawing of disciplinary boundaries, poses new challenges for social theory and ethnographic practice, setting the stage for a novel kind of environmental anthropology.

One possible avenue in that direction is to extend the Marxian approach, an approach usually restricted to *human* relations, to the analysis of human–environmental relations. Tapper (1988: 52) has argued that in hunting and gathering societies humans and animals engage in the "mutual production of each others' existence" and Brightman (1993: 188) similarly alludes to an "Algonquian labor process" in the case of the Canadian Cree, a process "in which humans and animals successively participate as producers of the other, the animals willingly surrendering the 'product' of their own bodies and the hunters returning it to them as cooked food, all figured in the idiom of 'love.'"

Drawing upon such perspectives, my aim is partly to show that similar discourses are applied to rather different theoretical contexts. Discourses on nature, ethnography, and translation, I suggest, extending arguments developed by Donham (1990), Bird-David (1993), and some others, often have much in common, notably the metaphors of personal relatedness and classic rhetorics. More generally, this chapter argues for the integration of human ecology and social theory, drawing upon perspectives often associated with Marx and Dewey, seeing humans in nature, engaged in situated, practical acts. I distinguish between three kinds of paradigms – orientalism, paternalism, and communalism – each of which represents a particular stance with respect to human–environmental relations. The paradigm of communalism differs from both orientalism and paternalism in that it rejects the radical separation of nature and society, object and subject, emphasizing the notion of dialogue. While ethical approaches to the environment and human–environmental relations are highly interconnected, I am less concerned with the former than the latter. Merchant (1990) has applied a taxonomy, similar to the one I am suggesting for human–environmental relations, to environmental ethics, distinguishing between egocentric, homocentric, and ecocentric approaches.

10.1 The political economy of the environment

The modern nature–society dichotomy is often taken for granted. It is necessary, therefore, to situate it in a wider historical and ethnographic perspective.

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In medieval Europe, there was no radical separation of nature and society; if the dichotomy existed it must have been very different from that typical for the modernist project. As Gurevich (1992: 297) argues, in medieval times "man thought of himself as an integral part of the world . . . His interrelation with nature was so intensive and thorough that he could not look at it from without; he was inside it." Significantly, the medieval term "individual" originally meant "indivisible" – that which cannot be divided, like the unity of the Trinity. The change in the meaning of the concept, the adoption of the modern connotation emphasizing distinctions and discontinuities, "is a record in language of an extraordinary social and political history" (Williams 1976: 133). The systematic fragmenting of the medieval world and the "othering" of nature it entailed first took shape in the Renaissance period, during which the whole Western attitude to the environment, knowledge, and learning was transformed.

The three-dimensional space established by Italian painters, including Sandro Botticelli, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is one of the key elements of the epistemological revolution of the Renaissance. For early Renaissance painters, trained in the holistic world of Aristotelian philosophy and the medieval church, the canvas was primarily decorative space for the glorification of godly designs. By the end of the Renaissance, in contrast, the art of painting consistently focused on cognitive and spatial research, the representation of human activities and their place in nature and history. Renaissance painters were rewarded for their efforts with spectacular artistic success, the laws of perspective (*perspectiva*, or "seeing through"). In a brief period, nature became a quantifiable, three-dimensional universe appropriated by humans. This "anthropocracy," to use Panofsky's (1991) term, represented a radical departure from the enclosed universe of the Aristotelians constituted by the Earth and its seven surrounding spheres. The Cartesian anxiety of estrangement and uncertainty, however, of the separation from the mother-world of the Middle Ages and the nursing Earth, was compensated for by the rational ego, the obsession with objectivity, and a "masculine" theory of natural knowledge: "'She' [nature] becomes 'it' – and 'it' can be understood and controlled. Not through 'sympathy' . . . but by virtue of the very *objectivity* of the 'it.' The 'otherness' of nature is now what allows it to be known" (Bordo 1987: 108).

If nature is an "Other," it has to be "translated"; much like the noise in the ruins of the Tower of Babel it demands close attention and effort at understanding. Such efforts, however, can take different forms. Students of literary translation emphasize that although translation may be seen as a perfect marriage between two different contexts, an important element in translation proper concerns the relations of power between "source" and "receptor" (Lefevere and Bassnett 1990). A translation indicates the relative

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submissiveness or superiority of the translator and the authority of the receptor vis-à-vis the source. Such a perspective may be applied to the ethnographic enterprise. How ethnographers, as visitors or guests, meet their hosts (and how they are met by them), how they manage their lives among them, and how they report what they experience, varies from case to case. Thus, one may speak of different relations of ethnographic production.

Similarly, emphasizing the contrast between domination and protection with respect to the environment, we may distinguish between two radically different kinds of human–environmental relations, environmental orientalism and paternalism. The key difference between them is that while the former "exploits," the latter "protects." Environmental orientalism suggests negative reciprocity in human–environmental relations, whereas paternalism implies balanced reciprocity, presupposing human responsibility. In the case of both environmental orientalism and paternalism, humans are masters of nature. Rejecting the radical separation of nature and society, object and subject, and the modernist assumptions of othering, certainty, and monologue, adding the dimension of continuity and discontinuity yields a third paradigm which may be referred to as communalism. This paradigm suggests generalized reciprocity in human–environmental relations, invoking the notions of contingency, participation, and dialogue.

Analogies of the human world and the natural environment need not be surprising. Humans often treat other human beings and the environment in a similar manner. Indeed, discourses on nature, ethnography, and textual translation have much in common. Thus the metaphoric language of classic rhetoric – of irony, tragedy, comedy, and romance – has appeared in a wide range of fields and contexts at different points in time. Donham (1990: 192) argues that even though the attempt to construct typologies with the "dramatic" metaphors of rhetoric "is bound to result in a certain crudeness, questions of rhetoric nevertheless appear to delineate . . . the manner in which all social theories proceed from particular moral assumptions." Another metaphoric association draws upon the language of personal relatedness, of kinship and sexual relationships; such metaphors, as we will see, have often been used to represent both textual translation and the nature/society interface.

10.2 Orientalist exploitation

The paradigm of environmental orientalism not only establishes a fundamental break between nature and society, it also suggests that people are masters of nature, in charge of the world. If humans are not quite godly beings, at least they compete with God; thus the arrogant statement reported for Carl von Linné, the arch classifier of natural species, that "while God created Nature, *he* put it in order." The vocabulary of orientalism is typically one

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of domestication, frontiers, and expansion – of exploring, conquering, and exploiting the environment – for the diverse purposes of production, consumption, sport, and display. To the extent that one can speak of environmental "management" in this context, management is simply a technical enterprise, the rational application of Baconian science and mathematical equations to the natural world. This typically suggests a lofty stance with respect to the "object" in question. In the orientalist context, scientists present themselves as analysts of the material world, unaffected by any ethical considerations. This implies a radical distinction between laypersons and experts, another theoretical construct rooted in the innovations of the Renaissance.

Given the persistent othering of the object of modernist scholarship, the Baconian imagery of sexual assault, of "entering and penetrating . . . holes and corners" (Francis Bacon, cited in Bordo 1987: 108), is a recurrent one. As Bordo (1987: 171) and Nelson (1992: 108), among others, have shown, the literature on modern science is replete with passages that describe human–environmental interactions by means of an aggressive, sexual idiom; nature appears as a seductive but troublesome female. Anthropology is not exempt from modernist, sexual jargon and predator–prey metaphors. Malinowski (1972: 8) argued, for instance, that

> the Ethnographer has not only to spread his nets in the right place, and wait for what will fall into them. He must be an active huntsman, and drive his quarry into them and follow it up to its most inaccessible lairs.

This is the rhetoric of the classic ethnography produced during the heyday of Western colonialism. Orientalist ethnographers colonize the reality they are studying in terms of a universalist discourse, asserting the superiority of their own society in relation to that of the natives. Given that anthropology was the offspring of colonialism, the predominance of the objectivist and orientalist extends over a long period in the history of the discipline. Textual translation has often been rendered in similar terms. Some leading students of translation talk about the relationships between translator and author not only in terms of a predator–prey relationship, they also tend to employ a violent sexual language. The content of the source-text is represented as a passive, female prey to be appropriated by a male translator.

Many examples of the industrial exploitation of "wild," undomesticated species illustrate the characteristics of environmental orientalism. The literature on fishing economies, for example, often attests to an aggressive stance; the expansive Icelandic fishing economy is one case in point. In the competitive fishing of most of the twentieth century, the chief criterion used for evaluating the social honor of a skipper was the relative size or the volume of catch, not the relative value of what was landed. The hero of fishing was the brave skipper who might risk the crew for extra tonnage. During this period,

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the sea represented a gigantic, continuous mass of energy to be worked upon actively and offensively by humans – more specifically, by daring males almost at war with the ecosystem (see Palsson 1991).

To capture the morality of evironmental orientalism and its impractical consequences, the rhetorical metaphor of irony may be a useful one. The producers naïvely expect to be in total control and yet by their own practices they seriously undermine their mastery, sometimes bringing the species they exploit to near depletion. To act in terms of concepts that have such unintended consequences is, indeed, rather ironic. Even more ironically, faced with the realities of resource depletion people sometimes adopt the fatalistic attitude that depletion is simply an inevitable ingredient of economic progress. The metaphor of irony, however, has probably enjoyed far less popularity, at least in academic circles, than the one of tragedy; witness the exponential growth in the literature on the "tragic" theory of the commons. Governmental authority or privatization, it is often assumed, are the only alternatives to individual greed and environmental abuse. In one sense, however, the orientalist regime has no drama at all; there is no environmental problem to solve, no need for corrective measures and scientific, ecological, or social expertise.

10.3 Paternalist protection

While the paternalistic paradigm shares some of the modernist assumptions of orientalism (it, too, implies human mastery and a distinction between laypersons and experts), it is characterized by relations of protection, not exploitation. This involves privileging scientific expertise, an inversion in the relative power of experts and laypersons. In the modern, environmentalist view, humans have a particular responsibility to meet, not only to other humans but also to members of other species, to fellow inhabitants of the animal kingdom, and the ecosystem of the globe. Precisely because of its radical stance, however, with respect to human–environmental relations, the environmentalist movement tends to fetishize nature, thereby setting it apart from the world of humans. Humans, it is argued, are acting on behalf of nature. The issue of animal rights among radical ecologists "becomes something akin to the activities of the left revolutionaries of the nineteenth century, only now Nature, not the oppressed proletariat, is the beneficiary" (Bennett 1993: 343). Moreover, trapped in objectivist, Western discourse on science and the Other, animal rights activists (oriental environmentalists, if you will) often make a fundamental distinction between "them" (indigenous producers) and "us" (Euro-Americans). In other words, only *some* segments of humanity properly belong to nature, those reported to love animals and take care of their environment, variously called "primitives," the "children of nature," or *Naturvölker*. "We," it is assumed, left "the state of nature" long ago. Similar notions, by

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the way, have often surfaced in anthropology; thus, deterministic, ecological models are sometimes presumed to apply only to some societies, notably hunting and gathering societies.

Again, an equivalent morality may be revealed in ethnographic practice. In some cases, ethnographers idealize and relativize the world of their hosts, representing their relations in terms of a protective contract. Despite the argument of protection, such a position only maintains the orientalist distinction between the observer and the native. Rosaldo (1986: 96) suggests that the protectionist invocation of "my people" in many ethnographic accounts simply represents an ideological denial of actual relations of hierarchy: "It seems fitting," he claims, with reference to Evans-Pritchard's work on the Nuer, "that a discourse that denies the domination that makes its knowledge possible idealizes, as alter egos, shepherds rather than peasants. Pastoralists, like individual tourists . . . exercise domination less readily than peasants, missionaries, or colonial officials." Similar themes emerge in the academic discourse on textual translation. The idea of the marital contract, as already indicated, is a persistent theme in the works of many literary scholars; thus, the frequent notions of the "fidelity" and "faithfulness" of translation; such constructs even manage to survive the most deconstructive onslaughts. Derrida (1985: 191) speaks of the "translation contract," defined as "hymen or marriage contract with the promise to produce a child whose seed will give rise to history and growth." Johnson (1985: 143) takes the analogy between translation and matrimony into a similar territory, arguing that the translator may be regarded "not as a duteous spouse but as a faithful bigamist, with loyalties split between a native language and a foreign tongue," adding that, perhaps, the project of translation is best described as incest.

Peasants often seem to think of human–environmental relations in terms of protection and reciprocity. Bourdieu gives the impression of a metaphorical extension from the domain of kinship to the sphere of human–environmental relations among Kabyle peasants in Algeria. Kabyle say that the land "settles its scores" and takes revenge for bad treatment and, by extension, the "accomplished peasant 'presents' himself to the land with the stance befitting one man meeting another, face to face, with the attitude of trusting familiarity he would show a respected kinsman" (Bourdieu 1990: 116). Significantly, the relationships between humans and their land are modeled on the social bonds among *distant* relatives characterized by respect and formality, by balanced, not generalized, reciprocity.

In the case of Icelandic fishing, the paradigm of paternalism is represented by the current application of scientific rationality to fisheries management. While fishermen continue to appropriate their prey, in the sense of removing it *from* the natural domain, a world separated from that of humans, with scientific management extraction has been subject to protective measures (*fiskvernd*)

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and stringent regulations. Consequently, fishermen have become increasingly dominated by techno-scientific knowledge and the agencies of the state. The chief architects of the paternalistic regime of protective fishing and the present system of individual transferable quotas (economists, biologists, and other policy makers) often remain firmly committed to a modernist, objectivist stance. One example is their suppression of the issue of inequality and social distribution, a distracting, ethical subject, an irrelevant externality in the study and management of "economic man," perhaps comparable to the category of "society" in structural linguistics.

Given that, within the moral framework of paternalism, people are aware of the ecological consequence of their actions and that they seek to organize themselves to redress the "balance," the metaphor of the comic plot may seem an appropriate one. The metaphor of comedy has, indeed, been used by several scholars to draw attention to the potential of collective action for corrective environmental purposes. McCay (1995) suggests, for instance, that such a metaphor captures the narrative style of economistic approaches to the question of the commons informed by game theory. She emphasizes, however, that while such approaches represent an important shift in economistic assumptions about human nature, the comic plot is still "squarely modernist" (McCay 1995: 109) in the sense that it fails seriously to address the larger contexts of history, power, and culture. Several anthropologists and economists have raised doubts with respect to the neoclassical and androcentric assumptions of economic theory and the general attempt to separate economics from politics, ethics, and culture (Gudeman 1992, England 1993).

10.4 Communalism

The paradigm of communalism differs from those of orientalism and paternalism in that it rejects the separation of nature and society and the notions of certainty and monologue, emphasizing instead contingency and dialogue. Unlike paternalism, communalism suggests generalized reciprocity, an exchange often metaphorically represented in terms of intimate, personal relationships. The need to develop an "ecological" theory along such lines, a theory that fully integrates human ecology and social theory, abandoning any radical distinction between nature and society, is often recognized nowadays. The outline, however, of such a theory was proposed early on in the writings of the young Marx, who insisted that humans could not be separated from nature, and, conversely, that nature could not be separated from humans. Nature, he argued, "taken abstractly, for itself – nature fixed in isolation from man – is *nothing* for man" (Marx 1959: 169; emphasis in the original).

The development of a theory of practice, including that of Dewey, informed by both the writings of Marx and the perspectives of pragmatism, draws upon these insights. Not only does such a theory provide a perspective that resonates

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with the paradigm of communalism, dismissing the dualism of experts and laypersons, it also offers a compelling view on how people acquire the skills necessary for managing their lives, starting, as Dewey (1958: 23) put it, "from knowing as a factor in action and undergoing." The theory of practice draws attention to whole persons, master–apprentice relations, and the wider community of practice to which they belong, decentering the study of human action. Such a perspective provides a useful antidote to methodological individualism. The proper unit of analysis is no longer the autonomous individual separated from the social world by the surface of the body, but rather the whole person in action, acting within the contexts of that activity. Similar perspectives have been developed with respect to the notion of the "separative" self in some other disciplines. England (1993) argues that the neoclassical idea of the self and subjective utility – an idea which logically excludes the possibility of interpersonal utility comparisons, of "translating one's own and another person's metric for utility" – must be replaced by the notions of empathy and connectedness.

Recognizing the importance of trust and communalism, anthropologists engage themselves in a serious ethnographic dialogue with the people they visit, forming an intimate rapport or communion. The communalism of fieldwork may be characterized as a project in which anthropologists and their hosts engage in meaningful, reciprocal enterprises, as the inhabitants of a single world. Such a notion has much in common with what Habermas (1990: 85) refers to as the discourse ethics of the "ideal speech situation," a general communicative strategy for recognizing differences and solving conflicts. Once again, there are obvious parallels in literary discourse. Neild (1989: 239) suggests a hermeneutic approach to translation which underlines the reciprocal nature of the enterprise; thus, if the process of translation is to be described as a love affair, an adequate theory of translation must recognize the role of empathy and seduction. The author "reaches out" to the translator, altering his or her consciousness just as the translator alters the text.

Judging from many ethnographies, hunting and gathering societies nicely represent the principles of communalism. In such societies, it is often pointed out, relations with wild animals are characterized by close co-operation. Bird-David (1993) shows how many groups of hunters and gatherers metaphorically extend the communalism of relations among humans to the realm of environmental relations, thereby projecting an image of the "giving environment." Just as a child may expect the care of its parents, the environment provides its *unconditional* support, irrespective of what happened in the past. In hunting and gathering societies, then, human–environmental relations may be described in terms of generalized reciprocity. As the Nayaka of South India say, "forest is as parent." Similarly, the Canadian Cree sometimes speak of themselves as being in communion with nature and animals (Brightman 1993). Hunting activities are frequently regarded as love affairs where hunters and

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their prey seduce each other; hunters must enter into relationships with game animals in order to have any success and vice versa. To kill an animal is to engage in a dialogue with an inhabitant of the *same* world; animals are social persons and humans are part of nature. In the hunter's view, there is no fundamental distinction between nature and society.

While the classic ethnographic examples, perhaps, of the paradigm of communalism are those of hunters and gatherers, others may be relevant as well. Consider the ancient Scandinavians and their relations to the land. Gurevich (1992: 178) points out that in ancient Scandinavia people were so indissolubly linked with the land they cultivated that they saw in the land an extension of their own nature: "[T]he fact that a man was thus personally linked with his possessions found reflection in a general awareness of the indivisibility of men and the world of nature." Social honor, then, was embodied in the land. Such views are echoed by some Western, academic economists (Nelson 1993: 33) who argue for a "provisioning" definition of economics that considers humans in relation to the world.

To return to the context of fishing, there may be good grounds for exploring, in the spirit of communalism, to what extent the practical knowledge of fishermen could be brought more systematically into the process of resource management and how this knowledge differs from the textual knowledge of professional biologists. I have argued (Chapter 9) that skippers' extensive knowledge of the ecosystem within which they operate, the collective product of apprenticeship, is the result of years of practical enskilment and that it may be wise for management purposes to pay closer attention to this knowledge, allowing for extreme fluctuations in the ecosystem, relaxing at the same time the modernist assumption of predictability associated with the ecological project of sustainability. Some scholars argue that multi-species fisheries are chaotic systems with too many uncertainties for any kind of long-term control (interestingly, in a critical commentary on the idea of "sustainability," focusing on the history of fisheries management, Ludwig, Hilborn, and Walters [1993: 17] make the observation that it may be "more appropriate to think of resources as managing humans than the converse"). But if marine ecosystems are deterministic and chaotic regimes, those who are directly involved in resource-use on a daily basis are likely to have the most reliable information as to what goes on in the system at any particular point in time. In the Icelandic management regime there are few attempts to utilize the knowledge that skippers have achieved during years of practical engagement. There have, however, been some interesting signs of change in this respect, one of which was the so-called "trawling rally," whereby a group of skippers regularly fished along the same, pre-given trawling paths (identified by skippers and biologists), in order to supply detailed ecological information.

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It is not quite clear, on the other hand, what the empowering of the practitioner's knowledge entails. While it is true that an extensive body of local knowledge has often been set aside, if not eliminated, in the course of Western expansion and domination and there are good grounds for attempting to recapture and preserve what remains of such knowledge, the reference to the "indigenous" and "traditional" in such contexts tends to reproduce and reinforce the boundaries of the colonial world, much like earlier notions of the "native" and the "primitive"; "natives" and "primitives" have a tendency to congregate in particular times and locations. Where does a particular skill or body of knowledge have to be located to be classified as "indigenous"? How old does it have to be to count as "traditional"? Another contested issue relates to the concept of knowledge itself. Practical knowledge is sometimes presented as a marketable commodity, similar to "cultural capital" – for instance, when encoding indigenous knowledge for the protection of intellectual property rights and defending legal claims about patents and royalties. Much of the practitioner's knowledge, however, is tacit – dispositions acquired in the process of direct engagement with everyday tasks. In reifying practical knowledge we fall into the trap of Cartesian dualism that we may be trying to avoid, separating body and mind.

Given the paradigm of communalism, and the contingent nature of human life, the overly pessimistic plot of tragedy is hardly the appropriate theatrical metaphor for capturing human–environmental relations. Nor is the overly optimistic plot of comedy a convincing one. The members of the human household are not simply greedy Robinsonades (to borrow a Marxian label) who inevitably destroy the ecosystems of which they are a part, nor are they necessarily able to work in harmony for a well-defined common good. The metaphor of romance may be more realistic, allowing for some degree of future hope, in a world with contesting perspectives, conflicting interests, and unexpected turns. In romance, as McCay suggests (following Donham 1990):

> conflict drives the narrative and is not overcome in the manner of neoclassical analyses . . . Romance implies . . . complex development of character, situation, and plot and hinges upon the tension of not knowing what the outcome will be, but hoping for the best. (McCay 1995: 110)

"As a literary metaphor," McCay (1995: 110) concludes, romance "comes closer to the anthropological endeavor."

10.5 Conclusions

I have distinguished three kinds of paradigms with respect to human–environmental relations: orientalism, paternalism, and communalism. Some of the modernist assumptions of orientalism (notably the conjecture of human

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mastery, the nature/society interface, and the distinction between laypersons and experts) are shared by the paternalistic paradigm – both paradigms are, indeed, the intellectual heirs of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and early positivist science (developed by, among others, Descartes and Francis Bacon), all of which instituted a series of decisive dualisms. But while relations of domination characterize the former, protective relations distinguish the latter. Moreover, whereas orientalism suggests the absence of reciprocity in human–environmental relations, the latter typically presupposes human responsibility and balanced reciprocity. Finally, the paradigm of communalism differs from both orientalism and paternalism in that it rejects the notions of certainty and monologue and the radical separation of nature and society. Unlike paternalism, it emphasizes the *generalized* reciprocity of human–environmental relations, an exchange frequently modeled on close, personal relationships. As we have seen, similar relations are evident in ethnographic practice and textual translation. Thus, discourses on environmental management, ethnography, and textual translation have much in common, including the metaphors of personal relatedness and sexual intercourse and the language of theater, the metaphors of irony, tragedy, comedy, and romance.

Social discourse is often, if not always, polyphonic. In modern Iceland, for instance, one can easily elicit evidence for the presence of *all* of the paradigms discussed. To take another example, speaking of Cree representations of human–animal relations Brightman (1993: 194) points out that some indigenous accounts, including the ones of seduction, attest to mutualism and communion in human–animal relations while others indicate hierarchy and domination; such accounts, he claims, can be placed along a "continuum between reciprocity and exploitation." This suggests that paradigms of management should not be regarded as bounded regimes or discursive islands in either time or space. "Operatively speaking," as Dewey (1958: 279) remarked, echoing the Malinowskian idea of the "long conversation," "the remote and the past are 'in' behavior making it what it is." But if Icelanders themselves, or the Cree for that matter, do not seem to be able to make up their minds individually or to agree collectively on crucial ethnographic points – nor, indeed, the ethnographers who have written about them (the issue of "whether Crees believe one or the other model to possess greater validity is exceptionally difficult to address" Brightman [1993: 200] concludes) – how are those with only second-hand ethnography at their disposal to issue a single, final verdict? To this question I can only offer a simple, pragmatic answer: If the problem of ethnographic disagreement needs to be resolved, it has to be approached, much like environmental problems, by means of some form of communicative ethics or a moral standard that allows for free and unrestricted dialogue.

In the early modernist project, with the discovery of the laws of perspective and the triumph of visualism, science became a passionate and aggressive search for truth and knowledge. Later, modernism was exposed as childish and

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vulgar scientism by critics of various kinds. The project of the Enlightenment was rendered as a metaphysical illusion. Panofsky, who generally emphasized the *successes* of the Renaissance project and its contribution to science, seems to have anticipated some of these developments, suggesting that one may reproach perspective, the "mathematization" of visual space, for "evaporating 'true being' into a mere manifestation of seen things" (Panofsky 1991: 71). Nowadays, Westerners increasingly think of themselves as an integral part of nature as modern environmental discourse seems characterized by a "postmodern condition," a discourse that emphasizes, much like pre-Renaissance thought, the interrelatedness of nature and society, the "individual" nature of human life, in the original, unified sense of the term.

The paradigm of communalism, with its emphasis on practice, reciprocity, and engagement, I suggest, provides an avenue out of the modernist project and current environmental dilemmas. It is true that critics of the modernist project often bask in nostalgia and utopia. The concepts of the perfect society and its antithesis, frequent themes in Western thought, have taken many forms, all of which assume, as Berlin (1989: 120) points out, a Golden Age when "men were innocent, happy, virtuous, peaceful, free, where everything was harmonious" followed by some kind of catastrophe, "the flood, man's first disobedience, original sin, the crime of Prometheus, the discovery of agriculture and metallurgy, primitive accumulation, and the like."

To adopt the dialogic perspective of communalism is not, however, simply to return to the pre-Renaissance medieval world and indulge in naïve romanticism, but rather to embrace a *more* realistic position, shunning the ethnocentric preconceptions of the modernist project. Treating nature, non-human animals, and "other" cultures as mere museum pieces for academic and theoretical consumption is both unrealistic and irresponsible, given the fact that our lives and activities are inevitably situated in larger ecological and historical contexts. Anthropology was led astray by the radical separation of nature and society, what Hollingshead (1940: 358) referred to, in highly modernist terms, as a proper theoretical "beginning."

In the age of postmodernity, Sahlins's (1976: 55) image, referred to above, of anthropology as a prisoner pacing between the "walls" of idealism and materialism, seems increasingly irrelevant. A more appropriate image of contemporary anthropology would be that of a former convict scratching his or her head in the open air, liberated from the Platonian cave, puzzled by the ruins of the prison house – its perceptual illusions, its strict codes of conduct, and its bizarre architectural design. Not only must such ex-prisoners wonder, in Kafkaesque fashion, why they were locked up in the first place and how they eventually got out, but more importantly, how they could possibly enjoy the new freedom in the apparent absence of any kind of idealist agenda but faced with unavoidable materialist constraints and an environmental crisis.

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